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In 1950, Cleveland’s city council voted overwhelmingly to pass an enforceable fair employment practice (FEP) ordinance. This new law prohibited discrimination on account of race, religion, color, national origin or ancestry, covering not only private-sector jobs but municipal employment and contracting as well. For those who had yearned for the protection and symbolism that such a law would offer, it was “history-making” occasion. A large crowd had assembled at city hall on the January day that the ordinance passed, breaking into loud applause after the last vote was cast. Henry Jaffe (R-Ward 25) and Charles V. Carr (D-Ward 17), cosponsors of the bill, lauded the ordinance as “tremendous step forward” that represented a “victory for decency and justice.” The Cleveland Call and Post, the city’s largest black newspaper, announced that it was now time for Cleveland to “proudly take its accustomed position as one of the nation’s most liberal and progressive cities.” When the law took effect in March, more than 1,500 people attended a celebratory rally at Cory Methodist Church in Glenville, a neighborhood in northeastern Cleveland that was home to thousands of black and Jewish residents who had demanded the passage of a law.¹

The hullabaloo and fanfare were understandable, but there was nothing unprecedented at the time about a large, northern city passing a law billed as promoting “fair employment practices.” In the late 1940s, before the storied movement to dismantle racial apartheid in the South began to dominate the national headlines, it was arguably the issue of FEP legislation that was at the center of the struggle over civil rights in the United States. The major theater of conflict was not the South, as it would later become, but rather the states and localities of the

North and West. In fact, state legislatures and city halls outside the South had become the venues of choice for the liberally minded men and women who believed that government could and should regulate job discrimination—especially since it had become clear that the coalition of southern Democrats and conservative Republicans that was blocking the passage of a FEP law on Capitol Hill would not yield until greater political pressure was brought to bear. This interracial, interfaith collection of liberals believed that the passage of state and municipal laws could help to generate momentum for national legislation. By 1950, their strategy of exploiting the policy-making potential of the federal system had begun to bear tangible fruit. More than half a dozen states had enacted enforceable FEP legislation, and Cleveland’s new law made it the fifth major American city to pass some kind of FEP ordinance, following Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia.²

What distinguished Cleveland’s experience from that of other cities was the unexpected backing that the law publicly received from leaders of the local business community. Many

historians have highlighted the strong and widespread opposition that business groups expressed to fair employment practices discrimination legislation throughout the late 1940s and 1950s. Little else, it seemed, sparked the ire of company owners and management more readily than the prospect of having to run a competitive business under the burdensome yoke of “compulsory” FEP legislation. When invited to testify before legislative bodies, spokesmen for employer associations, chambers of commerce, and trade groups seldom hesitated to denounce “mandatory” laws at every level of government, often in the harshest terms. Government regulation of discrimination would only backfire; real and lasting change would only come through voluntary efforts.³

This, indeed, was one of the arguments advanced by Cleveland’s most powerful group of companies, the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce (CCC), shortly before it launched a year-long, voluntary program to incorporate African Americans and other minorities into Cleveland’s private-sector workforce. The CCC spent a substantial amount of money running the program, known as the Co-operative Employment Practices Program (CEPP). During the 1949-50 fiscal year, CEPP cost the chamber $24,000 to operate—roughly six times the cost of publishing the Clevelander, its monthly membership magazine, and roughly five times the budget of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. One of the most visible manifestations of the initiative was a massive, fifty-foot-wide sign posted in the outfield of Cleveland Municipal Stadium. The sign carried a

simple, striking declaration: “Cleveland Says: Ability Counts…Not Nationality, Creed, or Color.”

Yet the CCC joined with liberal groups in 1950 to request the passage of an enforceable ordinance. Reporters and editorialists at the local newspapers noted the significance of the move right away. Even the Cleveland Press sang the praises of the business community, which it had regarded skeptically until then. Instead of “blindly fighting” legislation like the “investment bankers fought securities legislation” and winding up with an “inflexible and hostile law,” Cleveland employers tried a more “intelligent” approach. They invested their resources in carrying out a skillful educational campaign and then “convinced their members of the soundness and apparent inevitability of such legislation.” The result was a FEP law that was passed “with” business rather than “in spite of” business; it was a fine example of business “helping to regulate itself.”

The reversal was also widely observed elsewhere around the country. It was featured in the widely circulated monthly newsletter of the American Council on Race Relations, and it was mentioned prominently in legislative battles from Harrisburg to Capitol Hill. The men who led Cleveland’s biggest and most successful companies had broken from the historic tendency of organized business to oppose enforceable FEP legislation, and nearly everyone who paid attention to civil rights at the time noticed. Compared to their intransigent peers elsewhere, Cleveland businessmen seemed almost virtuous.

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5 Excerpt from CP, February 7, 1950 in Folder 1, Box 40, ULCR, WHRS.
This episode deserves greater attention from historians than it has garnered. Cleveland was neither the first nor the biggest city to pass an FEP ordinance, but the nationwide struggle over FEPC peaked in intensity during the late-1940s, and Ohio was arguably at the center of the political maelstrom. U.S. Senator Robert A. Taft (R-OH) was a central player in the national politics of FEPC, where he set the pace for the conservative wing of the Grand Old Party, and he would be standing for reelection in 1950. In the meantime, there was a chance that Ohio—where the Democrats held the governor’s office and narrowly controlled the legislature in 1949—might actually pass a FEPC law, which would place Taft under enormous pressure. For its part, Cleveland was a decisive battleground where a liberal victory could conceivably set off a chain reaction resulting in the passage of state and federal legislation. The stakes were unusually heightened and the politics unusually contested in Cleveland and Ohio in the late-1940s.

How should the role of Cleveland business be interpreted at this clarifying moment? Was it a “source of social progress” in the struggle for the racial integration of the U.S. workplace?  

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7. Based on her research in the internal records of several large companies with varying reputations for racial inclusivity, Jennifer Delton makes the case that it is “time to recognize corporations as a source of social progress.” Chronicling the efforts of men and women such as
A close look at the historical record suggests that Cleveland business was far less exceptional than it might seem at first blush. While individual executives and even the chamber itself clearly endorsed the principle of racial equality—at times out of genuine conviction—there can be little doubt that the actions they took to realize fair employment practices were guided not just primarily but overwhelmingly by political considerations. More than anything else, organized business became involved in the question of fair employment practices out of a desire to stave off any legislation that threatened to encroach on their prerogative to hire, promote, or fire their employees. Few businessmen—and certainly not the chamber—expressed interest in or took voluntary action to promote fair employment practices until after the introduction of a FEPC bill that stood a serious chance of passing. Fewer still supported the bill. The voluntary program of the chamber did some good, but it was largely ineffective at breaking down deep-seated patterns of racial and religious exclusion, despite the considerable sums of money that were spent. When the chamber eventually decided to endorse the 1950 ordinance, it did so knowing full well that the recent election of a pro-FEPC majority to the city council made the passage of a mandatory bill nearly inevitable. Its stance was almost certainly a calculated attempt to turn a more or less unavoidable loss on policy into a potential gain on public relations. Even then, it tried as best it could to minimize the punitive and regulatory features of the law. Political considerations were always close at hand, even for Cleveland business, whose virtuous stance was largely a product of political necessity.

On the June day in 1947 when Republican councilman Harry Jaffe (Ward 25) introduced a bill prohibiting job discrimination, Cleveland was in the middle of a big comeback. Its economy had been laid low by the Great Depression, but a massive injection of wartime spending had begun to revive it. Industry and manufacturing were recovering their footing, and Clevelanders were finally starting to find jobs. By 1946, total employment in Cuyahoga County numbered 560,000, with 66,000 workers employed in machinery, 50,000 in iron and steel, 34,000 in transportation equipment, and 26,000 in electrical machinery. Four thousand workers manned the Cleveland Union Stockyards, and more than a thousand worked at one of the nine breweries in the area. The city was even growing again, albeit slowly. It was nowhere nearly as populous as Chicago or Detroit, but it was bigger than all of its competitors in the Midwest.

Things were beginning to look up, and city boosters minted a new catchphrase to attract yet more people and dollars. Cleveland was the “best location in the nation”: It was easy and cheap to ship raw materials there, and roughly half of the population of the United States and Canada lived within 500 miles. The economic resurgence would prove only momentary, but Clevelanders could be forgiven for their confidence and optimism.

The resumption of growth led to growing pains. Among the most visible of them were associated with the shifting demographic geography of the metropolis. In 1940, nearly nine hundred thousand people lived in center-city Cleveland, and roughly ten percent of them were African American. The number of African Americans in center-city Cleveland would nearly double over the next ten years, while the number of whites would fall slightly. White families

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8 “OK Terms for Browns’ Stadium Use,” CPD, June 10, 1947; Cleveland Community Relations Board, To Promote Amicable Relations (Cleveland, 1949), 23, CPL; Cleveland Jewish News, July 9, 1999, 46; Carol Poh Miller and Robert Wheeler, Cleveland: A Concise History, 1796-1990 (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 146-155, especially 149 and 150.
were choosing instead to live in Cleveland’s surrounding suburbs, whose population rose by well over a hundred thousand from 1940 to 1950. Many new residents of the suburbs were leaving the ethnic enclaves where they had initially settled or had been reared, and the “conveyor belts” of their exodus were major thoroughfares that ran out of the city in every direction save north. The white population was growing less centralized over time even as the black population grew more centralized.⁹

Of course, residential segregation was nothing new to Cleveland. It had been a prominent feature of life in the city since African Americans began moving to Cleveland in large numbers in search of work. By 1950, African Americans were concentrated along a belt of neighborhoods that ran southeastwardly from downtown, including Central-West, Central, Central-East, and Kinsman. Glenville, Mount Pleasant, and Lee-Miles were other neighborhoods with a substantial proportion of African Americans. Residential segregation was a burden and annoyance to black Clevelanders in obvious ways, but it also meant that they constituted a relatively powerful voting bloc in number of city wards (Figure 1). The two councilmen who would lend their names to Cleveland’s ordinance, Harry Jaffe (Ward 25) and Charles V. Carr (Ward 17), each represented districts with a significant black population. Jaffe’s ward overlapped partially with Glenville, which at the time was still home to many Jewish Clevelanders as well. Originally born in Russia, Jaffe himself was Jewish, as were Joseph Horwitz (Ward 10) and Herman Finkle (Ward 12), both of whom represented wards with numerous black and Jewish residents. Residential

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segregation excluded both blacks and Jews from the main currents of Cleveland life, but it also concentrated their electoral power.\textsuperscript{10}

The deepening residential segregation of African Americans was paralleled by a clear pattern of occupational segregation, which was partially (though not wholly) the consequence of job discrimination. Indeed, occupational segregation in Cleveland was just as severe as it was in other midwestern cities like Detroit. Job discrimination was perhaps most rampant in the aftermath of the Second World War, but it remained prevalent for years thereafter. In 1950, black Clevelanders would still remain heavily concentrated in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations, and they would continue to be severely underrepresented in professional, managerial, clerical, and sales positions (Table 1).

Jaffe’s bill addressed racial and religious exclusion head on by expressly prohibiting discrimination in public and private employment because of “race, creed, color, national origin or ancestry.” Enforcement of the law was made the responsibility of the Community Relations Board (CRB), which had been established during the war to promote racial and religious tolerance. The CRB’s most notable action to date was calling for the passage of a law prohibiting municipal amusement parks from discriminating in their admissions, in response to the exclusion of African Americans from Euclid Beach Park. Under Jaffe’s proposal, the board would be authorized to receive complaints of job discrimination, look into their merits, and recommend

valid complaints for prosecution in city court. The courts, in turn, could find defendants guilty of a misdemeanor, fine them as much as $50, order their imprisonment up to three months, and revoke any city licenses.\textsuperscript{11}

Jaffe explained his reasons for introducing the bill in August, when the Republican-leaning \textit{Cleveland News} featured the question of municipal FEPC in “Saturday Town Meeting,” its weekly debate on public issues. Jaffe argued that nothing was “closer to our hearts as Americans” than the principle that “all men are created equal” and that FEP laws took aim at a particularly insidious violation of this principle. Employment discrimination not only abridged the cherished principle of equal rights, but it also compromised the “right to work,” undermined the development of “individual initiative,” and interfered with “freedom of enterprise.”

Legislating tolerance was admittedly not possible, but Jaffe insisted that “you CAN legislate against discrimination.” The concerns raised by critics were exaggerated and misplaced. In jurisdictions where FEP laws had been passed, most cases had been “amicably adjusted. Indeed, some businessmen had become “staunch supporters” of the law, “just as [many of them] have in the case of health and welfare legislation which many of them opposed.” Of course, education, persuasion, and other voluntary methods were valuable and could do a “large part of the job,” but they could not get the whole job done without the backing of a law. Major cities like Chicago, Minneapolis, and Milwaukee had all recently recognized the need to pass a municipal FEPC, and Cleveland could not afford to “lag behind.”\textsuperscript{12}

Charles Hollman took the other side of the issue. President of Interstate Business Exchange and a major figure among private employment agencies, Hollman argued that it was not equality but “liberty and freedom” that were the most fundamental values of the Republic. Liberty and freedom were the basis of the free enterprise system and indeed the whole way of American life, which would be jeopardized by the passage of a municipal FEP ordinance. Hollman saw only unmitigated disaster in Cleveland’s future if it took legislative action. The law would discriminate “against” employers “in favor of” employees. It would reduce efficiency and sap morale. Employers would be tempted to “re-employ dismissed employees” or “employ rejected applicants who were incapable and unfit.” It was just as impossible and unwise to legislate against discrimination as it was to legislate against alcohol during prohibition. “Discrimination by one class of individuals against another class of individuals on account of race, color, religious creed, national origin or ancestry is a moral issue rather than a political problem to be cured by legislation.”

Jaffe’s opinions enjoyed more traction among the 140,000 readers of the News than Hollman’s. Seventy-three percent of those responding to an editorial poll indicated that they sided with the councilman. A resident of University Heights, Mrs. R. Glazer, said she endorsed the proposed law because she believed that employers discriminated in private even though they denied it in public. Writing from near Mount Pleasant in southeast Cleveland, Arnold M. Edelman argued that FEPC was simply the “modern application of the Bill of Rights.” A resident of the Fairfax neighborhood, Lloyd E. Squarer, reported his recent unsuccessful experience looking for a job. He had spent the entire morning answering job ads that he had clipped from the newspaper. No employers expressed any interest in him. It was infuriating because was left

13 Charles Hollman, ibid.
wondering why they rejected him, even though he could guess. “If I had been told politely and firmly by these several companies that they did not hire Negroes, I would not be so bitter,” he wrote. Another black resident of Fairfax, Joseph L. Boatner, explained that he was a veteran and then asked a pointed question about the meaning of the sacrifice that he and his brothers-in-arms had made. “I was a solider and served in this last war, hoping to prove myself and other members of my race worthy of full citizenship,” he wrote. “Tell me, gentlemen, did we sweat, shed our blood and die for democracy, in vain?” If these letters to the editor were any indication of public sentiment, Jaffe could count on more than a few allies if he decided to push the issue.14

Individual anecdotes of discrimination were plentiful. But stronger evidence emerged at a series of hearings convened by the CRB. Arnold Walker reported that the Cleveland Urban League (CUL) had contacted hundreds of employers in the hopes of working with them to integrate their workforce, but none responded favorably. Sidney Levine of the Jewish Vocational Service explained that the falloff in federal employment after the end of the war left many Jews unable to find work in the private sector, where employers refused to hire them. But perhaps the most systematic piece of evidence was reported by Paul C. Seiple, head of a local office of the Ohio State Employment Service, who had collected data indicating that 23 percent of the job orders placed by Ohio employers from February 1 to October 31 of 1946 were restricted to “white only.”15

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14 “Reader Response to Town Meeting,” CN, circa August 1947.
15 “Racial Body Asks FEPC Ordinance,” CPD, July 9, 1947; Cleveland Community Relations Board, To Promote Amicable Relations; “Initial FEPC Hearings Show Job Bias on Increase in City, CCP, August 2, 1947; “Against Job Discrimination,” CP, October 29, 1947; “Cleveland Editors Slated to Air Views on FEPC This Thursday,” CCP, August 23, 1947. Among those sitting on the law committee were Max Simon, a clothing retailer; Dr. Robert Bishop, a hospital executive; N.D. Nicola, a former magistrate; Ralph Findley, an insurer. See CCP, January 3, 1948.
When it came time for them to share their views, business groups refused to cede any ground. Chester Nikodym of the Associated Industries of Cleveland (AIC), an industrial relations organization with a membership of several hundred local companies, thought that Jaffe’s proposal was a terrible idea. A FEPC ordinance would put the “honest employer at the mercy of the shiftless and the incompetent,” who would use it to elbow their way into jobs they were not qualified to hold. A law could also make the labor movement vulnerable to Communist infiltration. Most of all, it would “cause and aggravate the evils its sponsors say its absence creates.” Race consciousness would become heightened rather than lessened. Not surprisingly, J. W. Vanden Bosch of the CCC expressed similar sentiments, albeit in more measured tones. The chamber had “grave misgivings about the legislative approach,” he said. Tolerance and understanding “cannot be effectively legislated.” The chamber had felt the same way in 1945, when it opposed the Norton bill in the U.S. House of Representatives and two other FEPC bills that were pending in the Ohio legislature. Its message could not have been any clearer: FEPC had no place in public policy at any level of government.\(^{16}\)

Editors at Press implored employers to abandon their “negative attitude” and reminded them that their failure to take significant action could perversely strengthen the case for legislation. What was needed was a \textit{bona fide} effort on the part of the private sector to “create a

job opportunity for a Negro wherever possible.’” Legislation was admittedly not the “best way” forward, but it would be necessary if “employers and employers’ organizations won’t get together and deal positively and constructively with the discrimination problem.”

But the warning fell on deaf ears. A serious threat had not yet materialized in 1947, and few, if any, Cleveland employers made a constructive effort to address job discrimination. Perhaps they hoped that further action would be unnecessary. How deep did support for the bill run? Were its backers organized and serious? Was a municipal ordinance merely a device for keeping interest in FEPC alive until prospects of national or state legislation improved? Would the bill fall prey to partisan wrangling?

Any hopes that the campaign for a municipal FEPC would go quietly into the night were dashed in 1948, when the CRB announced that it would endorse a slightly amended version of Jaffe’s bill. It was then that it became clear to all sides that “one of the most controversial issues in race relations today” (in the words of the Press) would receive a thorough look by city council. The 1947 hearings had merely been a dress rehearsal. Now the real fight would begin.

When scores of liberals showed up in Room 217 of City Hall on April 7 to demonstrate their support for Jaffe’s bill, it was a scene reminiscent of ones that had already played out in Albany and Boston. The massive turnout in Cleveland, as elsewhere, was far from spontaneous. A diverse collection of liberal groups—operating under the banner of the prosaically named Organization for a Cleveland FEPC (OCFEPC)—had been organizing for weeks. Dozens of liberal groups were affiliated with the OCFEPC, but the organizational nucleus of the operation

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during the late 1940s consisted of the Jewish Community Council (JCC), the NAACP, and the CRB. The “inner circle” of individual leadership included the JCC’s Sidney Vincent, the NAACP’s Charles Lucas, the CRB’s Roosevelt Dickey, and Dr. D.R. Sharpe of the Cleveland Baptist Association. The “grand strategy” and legislative tactics of the coalition were set by the leadership of the OCFEPC, while ordinary Clevelanders served as the footsoliders, bombarding council members with letters, mobilizing voter delegations, distributing educational literature (Figure 2), attending neighborhood meetings, participating in phone trees to get the word out about important events, staffing fundraising activities, and going to legislative hearings *en masse*. The room was certainly jam-packed with supporters when Sharpe, Lucas, and Arnold Walker of the CUL rose to make a case for a municipal FEPC before the legislation committee of city council. Hundreds of Clevelanders heard Sharpe argue that it was the responsibility of government to tackle discrimination through legislation and then highlight the surprising support that the FEPC idea had garnered from forward-looking businessmen like Charles E. Wilson of General Electric and Charles Luckman of Lever Brothers.19

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The first hearing was only the opening salvo. The next few months witnessed a remarkable burst of political energy on the part of liberal groups, who had formed the interracial, interfaith Organization for a Cleveland FEPC (OCFEPC) to coordinate their sprawling campaign. More than a thousand people gathered at Antioch Baptist Church to hear Elmer L. Carter of the New York State Commission against Discrimination to explain why “FEPC works.” Employers and unions tended to cooperate with the commission, he said, out of a desire to avoid bad publicity. Other speakers at the hearing included academics, Catholic and Protestant leaders, labor representatives, and individual businessmen such as Joseph Homchis of the Acme Pie Company, Joseph Newman of retailer Newman Stern Company, and Joseph McKenna of the insurer Truman Cummings. The most emotional moment of the day came when veteran John Price told the gathered audience that soldiers belonging to a segregated, black division saved his life decades earlier in Cuba. Anyone who put on the uniform to fight overseas deserved a fair shake on a job opportunity at home. “If they’re good enough to fight, they’re good enough to return home and get jobs.”

The momentum seemed irresistible. Jaffe was even featured in a Call and Post article predicting the passage of his bill without a single opposition vote. But liberal fantasies of a quick and decisive victory were rudely scotched by the results of a straw poll that taken in early May. Only twelve of the thirty-three councilmen pledged to vote for the bill. Five were undecided, and sixteen declined to take a public position. Seventeen votes were usually needed to form the

the American Jewish Congress, the Mount Pleasant Community Council, the Glenville Community Council, the Central Areas Community Council, and the Communist Party.

slimmest majority, so liberals were five votes shy of victory—precisely the number of councilmen who were undecided. What made the situation even more challenging was that many of the councilmen who remained silent or undecided had said that they were waiting to hear the testimony of opponents before speaking out or making up their minds. The passage of a bill was far from a foregone conclusion, and the views of employers would count.21

Organized business did not squander its opportunity. Chester Nikodym brazenly reprised many of his arguments from the previous year, arguing that a FEPC would put the “honest employer at the mercy of the shiftless and incompetent.” Nikodym went on to claim that evidence of discrimination against blacks and Jews was thin and unconvincing. “There is absolutely no need for an FEPC here.” FEPC backers were “stirring race feelings” and injecting racial questions into industrial relations. A law was a dreadful idea, but if the passage of a law was absolutely necessary, he concluded, then it should be done by popular vote. “If we are going to go about this in a truly democratic fashion,” he said, “the decision should be determined by the people of the City of Cleveland.”22

It could not have been lost on Nikodym that FEPC had already been plunged into the crucible of a plebiscite elsewhere in the country—and failed the test. At the same hearing, Charles Hollman, who insisted that it was “impossible to legislate brotherly love,” pointed out that the “great state of California defeated FEPC by an overwhelming majority in referendum.” Neither man mentioned the costly and intensive campaign that the California Chamber of

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Commerce had waged against Proposition 11, perhaps because it ran counter to their point, but it was true that Californians voting in the 1946 general election had rejected a ballot initiative that would have created a statewide FEPC by more than a 2-1 margin. The implication was hard to miss: Representative democracy was an imperfect form of government, and there were times that it failed to properly translate the will of the people. In this instance, city council could not be trusted to resist the concerted pleading of pressure groups, and a legitimate outcome could only be reached letting the people decide for themselves, as they had in the Golden State.²³

Nikodym and Hollman may have expressed the most extreme views, but similar points were made in more restrained language by others. The chamber representative, Spencer D. Corlett, conceded that the objective of the ordinance was laudable, but argued that a law was no way to achieve it. “The similarity between this legislation and the attempt to attain temperance by the national prohibition amendment is striking.” Just as others before him did, Corlett claimed that passage of the ordinance would actually lead to “greater race consciousness and greater discriminatory practices.” Indeed, it might stymie the “remarkable progress” that “minority groups” had been making in the way of “economic advancement” and “equal opportunity.” Things were getting better on their own. A compulsory law would make things worse.

Employers and their allies took a second, public crack at the bill at another overflow hearing a few weeks later, when, in the words of the Call and Post, they “splattered testimony with Communist scares and race baiting.” Max Gustin, a representative of a merchant group

based in southeast Cleveland, argued that the bill would “set Negroes back twenty-five years.” Opposition to the bill, he said, was actually widespread among African Americans themselves, but they were afraid to attack FEPC in public. Besides, there was nothing wrong with discrimination per se. If he wanted to exclude a Catholic or a Jew from his company—not that he did—it was his “inalienable right” to do so. “A gentleman has a right to prefer a blonde if he wants to.” Harry Vaughn of the Employers’ Counselors’ Association claimed that he was in possession of the “secret minutes” of a group that was pushing the bill to create racial discord. “Stalin backed the bill,” he reportedly said. 24

Employer broadsides took their toll. The heady optimism of the early spring had given way to genuine uncertainty by late June. To be sure, Jaffé’s bill managed to make it out of committee. A key break came when Democratic mayor Thomas A. Burke spoke out in favor of the bill. But it was difficult for vote counters on either side of the issue to discern how Jaffé’s bill would fare before the full council. Employers had raised worries with their aggressive testimony. At the same time, two more council members had apparently pledged to support FEPC. What was the state of play? Was there a majority behind the bill? 25

A roll-call vote on June 28 revealed a sharply divided city council, which, at 1am in the morning, decided to refer the bill back to committee by a razor-thin margin of 17-16. Employers had eked out a win, but the vote also gave them fresh reasons to doubt the long-term tenability of their position. It seemed increasingly clear that city council was dominated by a Democratic

majority that wanted to pass a municipal FEPC bill but was understandably loathe to see the
GOP receive credit for the issue. A faction of the Democratic leadership, moreover, had been
dissatisfied with the large role that Jaffe’s bill contemplated for the CRB. If the Democratic
majority could find a way to resolve both issues, it would have the votes to pass the bill. Worse
still for employers, Democrats had a strong electoral incentive to try. As one reporter warned,
“Negroes are going to flock to the GOP banner” unless Democrats passed a strong FEP bill.26

Employer fears were realized in early August, when Jaffe teamed up with a black
Democrat, Charles V. Carr (D-Ward 17) to introduce a new bill. The new bill retained the CRB
as the primary enforcement agency, but Carr’s participation meant bipartisan backing, and the
move injected “new enthusiasm” into the campaign. “Passage of the jointly sponsored legislation
is almost assured,” said one close observer. The prediction seemed overconfident, but a major
partisan obstacle had suddenly been swept out of the way.27

Leaders of the chamber were sufficiently concerned about the developing situation that
they convened a special meeting at the prestigious Union Club on E. 12th St and Euclid Avenue
in downtown Cleveland. The four-story, sandstone building that housed the Club had long served
as a stately and august setting in which city elders could deliberate privately on the major issues
that confronted the city and region. At noontime on August 11, it played host to a concerned
group of businessmen who were trying to work out a response to the unprecedented grassroots
demand for legislative protection from racial and religious discrimination. Among those in
attendance were William I. Ong of American Steel and Wire, E. J. Westerlund of General

26 “The Judicious Course,” CPD, June 27, 1948; “City FEPC Put on Shelf by 17-16 Vote,” CPD,
June 29, 1948; “Democrats Hold Key for FEPC,” CCP, July 10, 1948. See also “Backers of Two
Local FEPC Measures Split,” CCP, July 14, 1948.
CCP, August 7, 1948; “So We’re Gonna Get FEPC Law,” CCP, August 14, 1948.
Electric, Carl H. Metz, Jr. of Standard Oil, Stanley Kuhns of Aluminum Company of America, Edgar H. Gustafson of Ohio Bell Telephone, John Danforth of Higbee’s, W.A. Harmon of National City Bank, and several of the chamber’s top staff members. The surviving minutes of the meeting provide a revealing glimpse of what was discussed. The chamber’s executive vice president, Walter I. Beam, opened up the meeting by explaining that the gathering had been convened to “explore possible alternatives” to FEP legislation, since “it was not at all certain that it will be defeated.” In addition, there was now a second bill with a “softening in wording” on the table. Beam laid out the options for the chamber. In his view, it could “(1) simply oppose legislation; (2) propose modified legislation; or (3) propose a non-legislative approach to the problem.”

One of the men—left unidentified by name in the minutes—had a special interest in the topic, and he was invited to share his thoughts. He began by conceding that Cleveland had been doing more than other cities to give minorities a fair shake in the job market. But much more could and should be done, and the only problem was how to do it. Legislation was “highly objectionable,” but how was it possible to “whip ‘something’ with ‘nothing’”? A more “immediate problem at hand” was that “[b]usiness is faced with legislation unless something is done.” A referendum was tempting, but “bringing the subject to a head” in such a manner could lead to a “sharpening in the lines of conflict” and may yield “many lasting detrimental effects.” There was perhaps a better idea: “[I]f industry, through a representative group, proposed a voluntary, self-policing code of employment, supplemented by an appropriate education program, it might be possible to avert legislation.” It would take at least a year to see any results, but a voluntary code would benefit the community far more than a municipal ordinance. What was

28 Minutes, Special Meeting on Employment Problems of Minority Groups, August 11, 1948, Box 61, GCGA Records, WRHS.
more, business and industry stood to “gain a great deal of prestige in the eyes of the community and nation.”

The suggestion elicited a lengthy commentary from the men gathered. A year might not be long enough to yield favorable results. “Quotas” should be “scrupulously avoided,” and minorities should be hired “only where their qualifications are equal to or better than other applicants.” The public should hear more about stories of employers who already practicing merit employment. A voluntary program could not be a “one-shot affair.” Both employers and employees were responsible for discrimination. The severity of the problem varied from one area (e.g., office work) to another (e.g., mechanical). “[L]eft wing groups” could not be permitted to claim credit for pushing business to recognize and address the problem. Perhaps FEPC was better implemented on a statewide level.

The group concluded by considering a “two-pronged approach” in which the chamber made a “strong effort” to “defeat the ordinance” and simultaneously made a detailed, positive statement of what it was doing—“Here is our program.” It was agreed that a set of recommendations would be drafted and forwarded to the board of directors for approval.

Representatives of the Cleveland Urban League (CUL) picked up on the strategic shift almost right away. The CUL had arranged a September meeting with chamber in the hopes of launching a voluntary program to expand “job opportunities for qualified Negro workers,” and chamber officials proved a highly receptive audience. It was evident to the head of the CUL’s industrial relations department, Clifford E. Minton, that the “FEPC legislation pending before the City Council, which the C of C opposes, played a great part in stimulating more than passive

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
interest in ‘racial employment.’ The legislation situation had created a “very favorable climate for the conference and commitments made by C of C officials.” In fact, Minton felt that the “Chamber would like to take advantage of intensive voluntary action at this late date and the UL program to obstruct enactment of FEPC legislation.”

Minton’s intuitions were borne out in subsequent weeks. Shortly after Truman’s stunning upset of Dewey in November, which further strengthened pro-FEPC forces, the chamber dispatched two top officials to a meeting of the council’s legislation committee to set the two-track strategy into motion (Figure 3). The first official to speak, President Elmer L. Lindseth, reported to the committee that the chamber had decided after careful study to oppose FEPC legislation. A law would only would backfire and make employees more rather than less conscious of race. Lindseth’s argument was nothing new. But he also conceded that racial and religious discrimination was a problem in Cleveland. Something should be done.

Lindseth then turned over the floor to a chamber director, Clifford F. Hood, who made a surprise announcement. The chamber was establishing a new voluntary program to help Cleveland business fulfill the “principle of equivalent economic opportunity for all.” Under the “Co-operative Employment Practices Plan” (CEPP), as it was dubbed, all 4,400 chamber members would be advised to adopt concrete measures to extend equal job opportunity—educating employees on their “obligation to work harmoniously” with one another, declaring an

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32 Field Report made by Clifford E. Minton, Director, Department of Industrial Relations, September 27, 1948, Folder 7, Box 39, ULC Records, WHRS.
adherence to the principle of merit employment, and upgrading employees according to ability.
Judged by the outcome of the meeting, Lindseth and Hood turned in a virtuoso performance. The legislation committee declined to take action on either FEPC bill.34

The chamber proposal elicited a mixed reaction in the wider community. Newspapers opposed to an ordinance leapt to applaud it. “We believe this plan can work,” wrote the Plain Dealer. It signified “frank recognition by socially enlightened employers of the existence of unfair employment practices rooted in bigotry and ignorance,” and it deserved a chance before “compulsion.” The News praised the “non-compulsory, non-legislative” plan and offered that it deserved a “year’s trial.” Liberals were instantly wary. The CUL was forced to explain awkwardly that it had approached the chamber earlier but did not consider the voluntary program a substitute for legislation. D.R. Sharpe noted that business had made similar promises had been made earlier without any through. A spokesman for the OCFEPC condemned the chamber, which it accused of offering up an “eleventh hour scheme dreamed up as a further delaying device.” The timing was not coincidental. “Why hasn’t the Chamber done something to correct this evil before now?” Both the NAACP’s Charles P. Lucas and the Call and Post’s W.O. Walker suspected that the real goal of the chamber was to kill the ordinance.35

It would have been difficult for the chamber to dispute the charge that it was hoping to avert legislation. This possibility was indeed uppermost on the minds of the men who arranged the August meeting at the Union Club, and it was how chamber officials would subsequently

34 Ibid.
describe the program to their membership. The only real question, it seemed, was whether the chamber would operate CEPP in good faith, or if it the committee was solely a delaying device.\textsuperscript{36}

The council, amidst signs that the public preferred an educational approach, shelved Jaffe-Carr and agreed to a request by Mayor Burke to give the plan a trial run. Cleveland’s business community would get a chance to prove itself. “If the voluntary plan does not work,” said Burke, “we have no other choice [except to pass a law], but if a record of accomplishment can be achieved then it is preferable.” A steering committee known as the Cleveland Committee on Employment Practices (CCEP) was appointed. It adopted the can-do slogan, “Fair Employment through Voluntary Cooperation,” and William I. Ong of American Steel and Wire Company, (a local subsidiary of U.S. Steel) was elected chairman. After a year and a half of uncertainty, it now seemed that the fate of municipal FEPC in Cleveland rested with the performance of Ong’s committee. How well would it do?\textsuperscript{37}

The CCEP set an ambitious agenda for itself, and few would ultimately question whether it was serious about trying to educate employers, employees, and the public. Almost everyone was impressed with the scale of the resources it had put behind the campaign and how hard it had tried. A whirlwind of activity issued forth from its downtown headquarters in the massive, 21-story Union Commerce Building on Euclid Avenue. The committee asked Cleveland employers

\textsuperscript{36} Parker Hill to Chamber of Commerce Executives, February 15, 1950, Folder 1, Box 40, ULCR, WRHS.

\textsuperscript{37} “Survey on Discrimination,” \textit{CPD}, December 15, 1948; “Poll Data on Discrimination to Be Used in FEPC Hearing,” \textit{CPD}, December 15, 1948; Statement by Mayor Thomas Burke at FEPC Hearing before the Legislative Committee of City Council on December 15, 1948, Folder 61, Box 4, JCFCR, WRHS; Cleveland Committee on Employment Practices, “The Cooperative Employment Practices Plan...is working!” April 11, 1949, Folder 1, Box 40, ULCR, WRHS; Shelton B. Granger to Charles T. Steele, December 23, 1949, Folder 1, Box 40, ULCR, WRHS.  

See also CCEP, Report, April 11, 1949, 4-5, Folder 1, Box 40, ULCR, WHRS; Supplemental Report of the Cleveland Committee on Employment Practices, September 22, 1949, ibid.
to remove discriminatory references from their job ads. It encouraged the Cleveland Newspaper Publishers’ Association to ban discriminatory references from help-wanted ads. It launched a massive advertising blitz that included print, radio, and film. It held dozens of meetings in churches, companies, and college campuses. It compiled lengthy mailing lists of local employers and sent them a detailed array of original, educational materials, including a monthly news bulletin. It eventually distributed over 160,000 pieces of literature (Figure 4).\(^{38}\)

The most important item in CCEP’s educational arsenal was a three-piece kit that introduced employers to the program and provided specific advice about how to revise job application forms and help-wanted ads. The centerpiece of the kit was a manual entitled, “How to Apply Cooperative Employment Practices.” It offered twenty-seven specific “suggestions” to employers, and among other things, it stressed the importance of formulating a clear fair employment practices policy, taking the time to explain it to everyone at the company, placing non-white workers where they could be seen by the public, maintaining performance and behavior standards, avoiding any kind of segregation, and reminding everyone involved to have patience. The kit was distributed to 8,000 employers in metropolitan Cleveland, and 2,000 copies were circulated in Ohio and elsewhere throughout the country.\(^{39}\)

But the committee pursued an ambitious program to reach and educate the general public as well. Through the creative programming of its Public Relations Committee, led by powerhouse advertising executive, Allen L. Billingsly, CCEP made use of almost every conceivable means of communication available at the time. CCEP catchphrases were printed on

\(^{38}\) CCEP, “The Cooperative Employment Practices Plan…is working!”, April 11, 1949, Folder 1, Box 40, ULCR, WHRS.

the mailing envelopes of fourteen large companies. Cleveland-area libraries distributed 100,000 specially designed bookmarks. The committee developed an eight-week radio program that ran on seven AM stations in the area. The first four weeks involved airing “recorded musical jingles emphasizing the over-all importance of tolerance and understanding,” and the selection of tunes included “The Brown-Skinned Cow,” “It Could Be A Wonderful World,” and “I’m Proud To Be Me”—all of which had never before been aired in Cleveland. The next two weeks involved Cleveland radio personalities reading aloud announcements, while the final two weeks were rounded out by panel discussions and dramatizations.40

CCEP signs appeared in venues all over the city. Display boards measuring 4 x 6 feet were installed in a dozen downtown buildings. The boards featured a boosterish message: “Fair Employment Practices Through Voluntary Cooperation—A Heads Up Program for a Heads Up City!—Cleveland Committee on Employment Practices.” Streetcar signs were posted and rotated monthly in 1,000 vehicles that were operated by the Cleveland Transportation System and Shaker Rapid Transit (Figure 5).

Perhaps the most original CCEP production was a thirty-minute, sound-slide film entitled, “Challenge for Cleveland.” Frank Seidel, author of a popular local radio program was asked to write the script, and two well-known Cleveland announcers narrated the film. Dozens of groups screened the film, including audiences from Kent State University, Cleveland College, management groups from several local companies, Unitarian Church, Urban League, St. Paul’s

Episcopal Church, Shaker Heights Board of Education, and West Park Kiwanis. The film was divided into two parts. The first part described the nature of the challenge that Cleveland faced, while the second addressed “common objections” to the employment of black workers and presented a short history of CCEP. A writer in the *Plain Dealer* praised the film. “It is my hope,” he wrote, “that this film will be shown in our schools as well as in our business places because it is necessary for our young people to understand how contrary employment prejudices are to the practice of good Americanism.” A statistics-filled pamphlet with the title “Let’s Face It!” was developed to accompany the film and then subsequently repurposed for general distribution. The pamphlet asserted that “Clevelanders realize that minority group members are not getting even ‘breaks’ in employment opportunity,” and it went on to cite survey results showing that Clevelanders did not want job discrimination to remain a problem. The solution to discrimination, it maintained, was for employers, employment agencies, and labor unions to eliminate racial and religious requirements from help-wanted ads and employ people on the basis of merit. Everyone had a part to play. “It’s everybody’s job” to fight discrimination, exhorted the pamphlet. “It’s up to you too!”

The volume and quality of materials produced and distributed by the voluntary program over the course of the year were impressive by any standard. The only remaining doubt revolved around the question of effectiveness.

The CCEP, of course, knew that it would be judged on results. From the start it claimed success using a variety of yardsticks. Its first report to the mayor was completed in April and unabashedly titled “The Cooperative Employment Practices Plan…is working.” The report had

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argued that “results cannot be measured statistically” in a short period and submitted instead that a “real indication of progress is the amount of constructive interest” that the program generated. It noted that more than 150 companies had pledged to follow the program, and it related anecdotes of employers opening up jobs previously off limits to nonwhites. In a supplemental report filed in September, more concrete figures were offered to support the case that employers were changing their behavior. A summer survey of employers found that eighty-two percent of those responding had decided to adopt a formal policy of non-discrimination. Fifty-nine percent had eliminated discriminatory references from their job application forms, while sixty-nine percent had deleted discriminatory references from their help-wanted ads. Sixty-nine percent had reviewed their company policies and practices in light of the suggestions made by CCEP in its manual. One out of five reported hiring black job applicants. CCEP used the battery of statistics to argue that it had made significant progress in “cultivating proper attitudes in the community” as well as “obtaining employment consideration for minorities on merit.”

Critics disputed the CCEP’s claims of progress all along. The sharpest attacks had come in April, before the public outreach campaign had hit high gear. The NAACP’s Charles Lucas blasted CCEP, calling it “insincere” and “ineffectual.” A more evenhanded perspective came from Rey L. Gillespie in the Plain Dealer, who acknowledged that the committee had helped to cultivate a city-wide atmosphere of goodwill and cooperation. But credible evidence of meaningful results remained elusive. The educational campaign had “some merit” to the CUL’s Shelton B. Granger, but it was simply not making much of a difference in changing long-

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standing employment patterns. Many employers felt that if they simply participated in the educational campaign they did not have to do “anything constructive toward implementing fair practices.” Even the CCEP’s own survey was open to legitimate criticism. Only twelve percent of the surveys (540 out of 4500) had been filled out and returned to the committee, making the CCEP an easy target. As one critic said of the non-responders, “[t]he 88% who failed to answer did so because they were not interested or because they were opposed.”

By September, liberals decided to revive the legislative campaign. Carr and Jaffe announced that they would push for the release of their bill from the legislation committee. In their view, it was time for the city to take action, especially since state legislation had recently failed by single vote. A new umbrella organization was formed. Called the Citizens’ Committee for Cleveland Fair Employment Practices (CCCFEP), it replaced the now-moribund OCFEPC.

Its case against the CCEP was most fully expressed in a lengthy letter that it sent to members of city council. The voluntary program alone, argued the CCCFEP, could not eliminate discrimination; it needed the authority only a law could provide. CEPP was not properly equipped to address individual complaints of maltreatment. It could nothing to change the behavior of individual employers who decided not to cooperate. It had little, if any, power to eliminate patterns of discrimination that prevailed in entire industries. It had no ability to stop the continuing flow of discriminatory job orders to employment agencies. It was powerless to address discrimination that originated with labor unions, not employers. It was incapable of

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43 Cleveland Committee on Employment Practices, News Bulletin, October 1949, Folder 1, Box 40, ULCR, WRHS; “Community Relations,” CPD, April 17, 1949; “Voluntary FEP Extended 90 Days,” CPD, September 23, 1949; Shelton B. Granger to Charles T. Steele, December 23, 1949, Folder 1, Box 40, ULCR, WRHS; Statement for Chamber of Commerce Board, September 30, 1949, 10-13, Box 62, GCGA, WRHS.
44 Minutes of Organization Meeting for a Citizens Committee for Cleveland Fair Employment Practices Legislation, September 8, 1949, Folder 61, Box 4, JCFCR, WRHS; “Revives Fight for FEPC Ordinance in City Council,” CPD, September 13, 1949.
verifying whether employers were indeed placing new minority workers at their companies, and it had even been unable to present data that demonstrated the reduction of discrimination. What was more, legislation had few downsides. The educational campaign of the voluntary program would not be compromised with the passage of a law; it could actually be enhanced. And there was a strong chance that the opposition of business groups would melt away, as it had almost everywhere else in the country that legislation had been enacted. “It would therefore seem wise,” CCCFEP concluded, “to combine both approaches.”

Nothing exemplified CEPP’s limits as a force for social change as clearly as the employment practices of Cleveland department stores. Despite repeated efforts by the Cleveland Urban League since 1945, most stores continued to maintain a nearly all-white workforce. In 1948, the CUL had tried to arrange meetings with the heads of Cleveland’s nine department stores to discuss the issue. Executives were promised in advance that the meetings would be small and unpublicized, yet the committee met largely with silence. CCEP’s voluntary program fared no better. At the end of the year, the head of the CUL’s retail committee correctly observed that “no progress WHATSOEVER has been made in the retail stores’ field.” As he noted wryly, CCEP “failed in the retail stores’ field as completely as we did.”

The intransigence of the department stores proved a liability for the chamber, leading the mayor to promise Jaffe, Carr, and the CCCFEP that he would back a law if black workers were not hired before Christmas. But the mayoral ultimatum was the least of the chamber’s political problems. The results of the 1949 councilmanic elections in November posed a far bigger

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45 CCCFEP to Members of City Council, n.d. (probably January 1950), Folder 61, Box 4, JCFCR, WRHS
46 Minutes of the Industrial Committee Meeting, February 24, 1949, Folder 1, Box 40, ULCR, WRHS; Clifford E. Minton to Arnold B. Walker, March 16, 1949, ibid.; Statement, n.d. (circa late 1949), Folder 61, Box 4, JCFCR, WRHS.
problem. Thirty-eight of the sixty-six candidates who were running for office had indicated they would support Jaffe-Carr, and many of these candidates had won their races. In fact, anyone who had bothered to collect information from readily available public sources could have easily ascertained that a seven-vote, pro-FEPC majority would likely be sitting on the 1950 city council. Of the thirty-three members comprising the council, at least fifteen had publicly pledged to support FEP legislation during the 1949 election. Of the members who had declined to make a pledge when they were polled, five had been incumbents who had voted for the 1948 bill. The election had given liberals a majority. There could be little doubt that they had more than enough votes to win, and the only question was the size of their margin. The establishment of a strong Cleveland FEPC was probably only a matter of time, and the chamber could do little about it.\footnote{Memorandum on meeting with Mayor Thomas Burke, Wednesday, November 23 at 9:30am in the Tapestry Room of City Hall, Folder 61, Box 4, JCFCR, WRHS; \textit{CPD}, June 29, 1948; Citizens’ Committee for Cleveland Fair Employment Practices Legislation, Press Release, October 31, 1949, Folder 61, Box 4, JCFCR, WRHS; \textit{The City Record}, June 30, 1948; ibid., February 1, 1950.}

This eventuality was surely foremost in Ong’s mind, when he addressed a noontime gathering of the chamber board at the Union Club on January 30. Over the previous weekend, Ong had met for hours with Carr, Jaffé, and community leaders to hammer out a potentially acceptable compromise bill, and he was now appearing before the board to request its approval of the result. The board had declined to reverse its opposition to “compulsory” FEPC as recently as the previous September, so its approval was not exactly a foregone conclusion.\footnote{Minutes, Board of Directors Meeting, September 30, 1949, Box 62, GCGA Records, WRHS; Minutes, Board of Directors Meeting, January 30, 1950, ibid.; “Council Approves FEP Measure,” \textit{CPD}, January 31, 1950.}

The surviving minutes reveal a thoughtful, engaged board that was fully informed about the strategic context of the decision it was preparing to make. Lindseth had rotated out of the presidency, and the new president, John K. Thompson, asked Ong for a summary of the
situation. Ong noted first of all that the voluntary program was widely lauded as a success. Even
the “sharpest critics” of the chamber credited it with having done the “finest educational job in
the country” over the last year. But the political winds had shifted dramatically last November:
“quite a number of the members of the new City Council had been elected because they favored
an FEPC ordinance.” Ong said that he “did not like to compromise, but that it was sometimes
necessary.” To that end, he had been working closely with leaders of the CCCFEP to amend
Jaffe-Carr in ways that “would not harass industry.” The primary modifications involved the
enforcement procedure. While the CRB would be authorized to hear and adjust complaints, it
was required to refer insoluble cases to the mayor, who would make an attempt to resolve the
complaint in a non-punitive fashion. If the mayor failed, then there would be a public hearing—
after which the complaint would be referred to the city attorney for prosecution. The lengthy new
enforcement procedure met with the near-unanimous approval of the board. Only one member
cast a dissenting vote. The board had bowed to compromise out of necessity.49

The meeting ended at 2:05pm, and things moved quickly thereafter. Ong rushed over to
city hall. There, he joined with Lucas to present the amended proposal to city council, which
voted to approve it by a margin of 27-5. After more than two years, Cleveland finally had a
municipal FEPC.50

The chamber sought to claim a share of the credit for the victory. Thompson portrayed
the CCC as a long-time supporter of equal employment opportunity. It had initiated a voluntary
program that had cultivated a “proper atmosphere” for making progress, and the amended
legislation simply created a “workable means of carrying forward the educational program” that
it had started. The editorial board of the Cleveland Plain Dealer seemed only too happy to agree.

49 Ibid.
The 1950 law was a “vast improvement” over early versions of Jaffe-Carr, which had been overly punitive and insufficiently educational in emphasis. The passage of a “more enlightened law” could be credited to the “educational campaign” sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce.\textsuperscript{51}

Anyone with a clear memory of 1947 or 1948 might have wondered whether the chamber and its allies were exaggerating how interested it had been in promoting fair employment practices and whether it was the educational campaign or the councilmanic elections that had paved the way for legislation. But backers of municipal FEPC were happy to let the exaggerations slide, at least for the moment. In a celebratory photograph taken days after the law went into effect, Ong took his place alongside Jaffe, Carr, and the NAACP’s Lucas (Figure 6) as one of the four men responsible for “another Cleveland first.” The swift inclusion of the chamber’s representative in a photo-op would certainly send a signal to other chambers of commerce that credit would be shared if credit was due. But only time would tell whether what had happened in Cleveland was a fleeting aberration or harbinger of things to come.

Little time was needed. Nor was it necessary to look very far afield. Scarcely a year after backing a municipal law, chamber directors were once again meeting at the Union Club. The legislative committee had recently learned that a campaign for a state FEP law would soon get underway, and the committee had prepared a recommendation for consideration. It was short and unconflicted. The committee still supported “equal economy opportunity for all persons regardless of race, color, creed, national origin or ancestry,” but it reminded the board that statewide legislation had been opposed in 1945. The committee recommended that the chamber continue to “oppose all attempts to legislate on the subject.” Its recommendation was approved.

\textsuperscript{51} A Statement by John K. Thompson, President of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce, Upon Passage of Cleveland’s Fair Employment Practices Ordinance,” Folder 1, Box ULCR, WRHS; \textit{CPD}, January 31, 1950, 1, 5; “The FEP Ordinance,” \textit{CPD}, February 1, 1950.
by the board without any record of discussion. With one quick vote, Cleveland business had reverted to form. Though the example of chamber’s stance on the Cleveland ordinance would be brought up repeatedly thereafter, often by liberals hoping to win over skeptics, how the chamber voted to handle FEP legislation in the 1951 Ohio legislature made it clear that the volte-face from the year earlier did not represent the beginnings of a permanent change. No new leaves had been turned over. Its surprising position was a momentary reversal born out of political motivations.52

How organized business approached civil rights politics and civil rights policy-making in Cleveland was not exceptional. How it spoke and acted—and why it spoke and acted—reflected a common pattern in business politics, one that was evident as well during the struggle over Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the subsequent fight to strengthen the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The playbook involved a simple strategy: Oppose legislation from start to finish on the grounds that legislation was unnecessary, unworkable, and possibly even harmful. Express or demonstrate a willingness to take voluntary action against the problem for which legislation was proposed as a solution. However, if legislation of some kind seemed highly likely no matter what, then trade the promise of eventual acquiescence for influence over the particulars of regulatory design, working to minimize the cost and burden of the new regulations on business. Organized business followed this playbook faithfully several decades into the postwar period. It consistently and resolutely opposed anti-discrimination legislation, determined to remain as free from regulation as possible. Its deep core of pragmatism, its sense of realpolitik, was triggered only when it believed with a high degree of confidence that there was no realistic alternative to legislation. In the vast majority of instances, organized business was happy to do whatever it could to obstruct or delay the passage of anti-discrimination

52 Minutes, Board of Directors Meeting, February 5, 1951, Box 62, GCGA Records, WRHS.
legislation. In the rare instances when organized business participated openly and constructively in opening up postwar labor market—such as it did in Cleveland through a combination of voluntary and legislative action—it did not boldly lead from the front so much as involuntarily follow from behind, out of the conviction that it had no better options. There, as elsewhere, necessity proved not only the wellspring of invention but also a catalyst of virtue.
Table 1. Index of Relative Occupational Concentration for Black Males in Cleveland, 1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational category</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager, proprietor, or official</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical worker</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales worker</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Craftsman</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operative</td>
<td>121</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service worker</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scores on the index are calculated by dividing the percentage of blacks belonging to a given occupation by the percentage of whites belonging to the same occupation, and then multiplying the quotient by 100. A score of 100 indicates that the same percentage of blacks belong to a given occupation as whites. A score above 100 indicates black overrepresentation, while a score of lower than 100 indicates black underrepresentation.


Figure 1. The Distribution of Cleveland’s Black Population by City Wards, 1950.

Sources: National Historical Geographic Information System and the *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*.

Map credit: Chieko Maene, Government and Geographic Information and Data Services, Northwestern University.
Figure 2. Selected images from a political pamphlet *circa* 1948. This pamphlet was created and distributed by the Organization for a Cleveland Fair Employment Practices Ordinance in April and June, when its campaign for a municipal ordinance peaked in intensity. The pamphlet explained the need for a law, described how it would operate, and debunked popular myths about FEPC. It cited a figure on discrimination—“1 out of 4 Clevelanders Locked Out!”—based on an earlier study by the Community Relations Board, and it disabused readers of the popular myth that the FEPC would require employers to hire a “certain percentage” of minority employees.

Source: Folder 61, Box 4, Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland Records, WHRS.
Figure 3. Elmer L. Lindseth (left) and Clifford L. Hood (right) of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce speak at a meeting of Cleveland’s city council. The chamber of commerce opposed the passage of a municipal FEP law, proposing instead to finance a voluntary plan among employers to eliminate job discrimination. The plan was named the Co-operative Employment Practices Plan (CEPP), and it was operated by the Cleveland Committee on Employment Practices (CCEP).

Source: Cleveland Plain Dealer, December 2, 1948.
Figure 4. A selection of educational and promotional materials used in the Co-operative Employment Practices Plan (CEPP), 1949. More than 160,000 pieces of literature were prepared and distributed by the Cleveland Committee on Employment Practices as part of CEPP. Among the highlights include a lighted billboard on a busy downtown corner and a large sign placed on the outfield wall of Cleveland Municipal Stadium.

Figure 5. Placards posted on vehicles in the Cleveland Transit System in 1949. The placards featured various different anti-discrimination slogans, and they were rotated on a monthly basis on 1,000 vehicles. The CCEP claimed that a million Clevelanders saw them every day.

Figure 6. Charles P. Lucas of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, William I. Ong of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce, Democratic councilman Charles V. Carr (Ward 17), Republican councilman Harry Jaffe (Ward 25). All four men were instrumental in the passage of Cleveland’s fair employment practices law. Ong and the chamber received widespread credit for their support of the law, but the chamber opposed it when it was initially proposed in 1947 and then acquiesced to legislative action only when it was clear that a large, pro-FEPC majority on city council made the passage of a law all but inevitable. The chamber reiterated its opposition to state FEP legislation the very next year.

Source: Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 13, 1950.