

## **Philanthropy and Civil Rights at the Local Level: The Case of Cleveland, Ohio, in the 1960s**

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The relationship between philanthropy and African-Americans in Cleveland during the 1960s is most often symbolized by the controversial grant by the Ford Foundation to the Congress of Racial Equality in 1967. The grant was partly intended to fund a voter registration drive in the black community at a time when Carl Stokes was making his ultimately successful bid to become the first black mayor of a major American city. But just as Stokes's electoral victory was due to many more factors than the CORE voter registration campaign, so too was philanthropy influential in other aspects of civil rights and race relations in Cleveland during the 1960s.

Organized philanthropy played an important role in the response of Cleveland's overwhelmingly white civic leaders to the issues raised by black activists and protesters. Drawing upon research conducted for my doctoral dissertation,<sup>1</sup> this essay argues that the Greater Cleveland Associated Foundation, an organization established by the city's civic leaders in 1961 with the assistance of the Ford Foundation, gave these civic leaders a significant tool for coordinating their response to the protests of the local civil rights movement. The Associated Foundation established major study groups to examine problems in education and housing, then turned these study groups into well-funded action groups to implement their proposals. It also provided the major funding for other groups of civic leaders, such as the Businessmen's Interracial Committee on Community Affairs and the Cleveland Inner-City Action Committee. Because of their standing within the city, the Associated Foundation and especially its director, Dr. James A. "Dolph" Norton, emerged as influential local voices for philanthropies outside of Cleveland, such as the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation.

Despite Cleveland's various moderate attempts to recognize and work with black leaders and to confer legitimacy upon the black community's concerns about the lack of equal opportunity in education,

employment, and housing, the major watershed in Cleveland race relations was the Hough riot. It raised the specter of future violence and prompted parties both black and white to seek ways to preserve stability. The city's tradition of moderate reform, running through the Associated Foundation, PACE, PATH, and the Businessmen's Committee, had failed to adequately deal with the problems at hand, prompting civic leaders to cast their net more widely in search of effective solutions. Support for Carl Stokes and such organizations as CORE were to be part of the solution.

The story of the Associated Foundation offers us an interesting perspective on the civic culture of Cleveland and how civic leaders use their resources to respond to problems and to act when they perceive a need for change. Here philanthropy becomes a tool of civic leaders, a means of creating, financing, and coordinating their own extrapolitical organizations to influence various aspects of community life. The major development in Cleveland's civic culture during this period was the gradual admission and acceptance of African-Americans into the ranks of the city's civic leaders.

<sup>1</sup>"The Politics of Social Reform in Cleveland, 1945-1967: Civil Rights, Welfare Rights, and the Response of Civic Leaders," Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1988.