During World War II, in cities across the nation, racial conflicts broke out because of job discrimination and changing patterns of employment. These changes stemmed from several factors. One was President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) which broke down some traditional barriers to equality, the very breaking of which led to racial conflicts. In addition, massive migrations of black and white workers to many northern cities not only strained housing, transit, and recreational facilities, but also intensified competition for jobs and employment advancement. In some places such as Detroit, these tensions led to race riots. In others such as Cincinnati, they produced strikes by white workers incensed by the prospect of having to work side by side with blacks.¹

Nonetheless, the Roosevelt administration maintained its commitment to fair employment practices, a commitment that led the FEPC to hold hearings in Cincinnati in 1945 which intended to expose and break down the racial barriers to employment at Cincinnati war production plants. The hearings failed to break down these barriers. But in exposing widespread unfair employment practices, the hearings lent impetus to the broader and more effective fair employment movement that took shape in the post-war period.²

Unfair employment practices against blacks in Cincinnati first became a municipal issue in 1925. In that year, the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce made an industrial survey of the city which stated that the demand for workers was outstripping the labor supply that local employers were willing to use. The authors of the survey suggested that Cincinnati industrialists utilize the largely untapped supply of black labor. However, this meant that the unfair employment practices that kept blacks from jobs at “an unfortunately large number of local industries” had to change. The city government took no action on this recommendation, but in 1930 the Chamber of Commerce and the Department of Public Welfare commissioned Theodore M. Berry⁴ to do a special survey concerning the economic status and occupational opportunities of blacks in Cincinnati. The guiding assumption in Berry’s survey which dealt almost exclusively with industry was that as the black population in Cincinnati increased, the numbers of blacks working in Cincinnati factories should also increase. Berry reported that this had not happened. The number of blacks living in Cincinnati had gone up, but increasingly they were underrepresented in the industrial work force.³

Andrew E. Kersten

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The return of prosperity in the early 1940s benefited mainly white workers and black civil rights leaders began to demand their fair share of the war jobs. (CHS Felix Koch Photograph Collection)
Berry based his findings on the 1910 and 1920 censuses which showed a marked rise in the black population of Cincinnati. In 1910, 19,639 blacks lived in the city. By 1920 that number had grown to 30,079, a fifty-three percent increase. Berry estimated that in 1930, 48,000 lived in Cincinnati, a fifty-nine percent increase. This meant that by 1930 blacks accounted for roughly ten percent of the entire population of Cincinnati.5

The percentage of blacks working in industry, especially in skilled occupations, had failed to rise accordingly. Berry drew this conclusion from the results of 475 questionnaires that he sent to Cincinnati employers “concerning the occupations engaged in by Negroes, their work performance, the opportunities available, the attitudes of employers and white employees, [and] the factors inhibiting the advance of Negro workers.”6 Berry received answers from 234 establishments. One hundred and seven businesses (46%) openly refused to hire black workers. Some of these employers explained in their questionnaires that they had no desire to mix black and white workers. Others claimed that union restrictions or lack of separate facilities kept blacks from their employ. Berry also found that the fear of violence and of bad public relations were frequent rationales for not hiring.7

The other 127 Cincinnati businesses utilized some black labor. The statistics compiled from the questionnaires “seemed to provide evidence of a low occupational status for Negro workers.”8 Over eighty percent of black women were engaged in domestic service and had “very little opportunity” to work in industry. Roughly seventy percent of black men worked as unskilled laborers, many of them as porters or janitors. A few found a place in some branch of industrial production, but these jobs were rarely skilled in nature.9

A majority of those employers who hired blacks indicated that they were good workers although some employers felt that the work performance of blacks was poor.10 In either case, Berry learned that almost all employers refused to upgrade blacks to skilled positions, because they believed that blacks lacked the proper training. Moreover, employers confined blacks to certain types of servile work, because they believed that this ensured a cooperative and congenial working relationship between whites and blacks. From this Berry concluded that the “evidence of a Negro achieving equality as worker and wage-earner, and not his presence alone seemed to be the cause for objections and animosity.”11

Aside from detailing the low economic status of black Cincinnatians, Berry’s survey allowed
DEFENSE AND NON-DEFENSE JOBS TO REQUIRE 2,000 NEGRO WORKERS

These workers must be intelligent and able to pass a common test. 75 of every 100 Negroes who have recently applied for defense jobs were not hired because:
- They could not read or write,
- They had less than a common school education.

Ballots of more than 4,000 Negro voters were thrown out in the Election because they were spoiled.

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him to make a “discouraging” — and accurate — forecast about the future occupational opportunities for black workers in the city. Eight-five percent of the surveyed Cincinnati employers responded negatively when asked if they would hire more blacks in the future. Furthermore only ten percent of the employers could suggest jobs for blacks. These businessmen indicated that blacks could find work as common laborers, janitors, and farm hands. Berry concluded that Cincinnati employers were “first, not interested in employment problems of the Negro; and second, that there was not much desire to have Negro workers advance above a certain low level of occupations.” Still Berry hoped that Cincinnati employers would offer more jobs, especially skilled ones, to blacks, and he called on the government, employers, and social organizations to band together and eradicate the unfair practices.

The end of employment discrimination did not happen during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Moreover, the return of prosperity in the early 1940s benefited mainly white workers. As a result, black civil rights leaders such as A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), began to organize blacks to demand their fair share of the war jobs. In January 1941, Randolph formed a new organization, the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) which called for 10,000 blacks to march on Washington, D.C. to protest discrimination in the defense industries and the military. Randolph set the march for July 1, 1941, which allowed time for negotiation with the Roosevelt administration. Although FDR sympathized with the MOWM’s goals, President Roosevelt sought to avoid the demonstration because he was not willing to take the political risks. In addition, he feared that the protest could spark violence in the capital which could be used, like the march itself, as Axis propaganda. Meetings between federal officials and other MOWM leaders ended without a compromise. Finally on June 24, 1941, FDR informed Randolph that he would issue an executive order banning discrimina-

Although black workers were urged to get training to prepare for better jobs, Cincinnati manufacturers refused to hire blacks. (CHS Manuscript Collection)
tion in the defense industries but not in the military if Randolph would call off the march.14

Randolph agreed to this, and on June 25, 1941, FDR issued Executive Order 8802 which declared “that there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or Government because of race, creed, color or national origin.” Executive Order 8802 also established the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) in the Office of Production Management to “receive and investigate complaints of discrimination in violation of the provision of [the] order and . . . take appropriate steps to redress grievances which it finds valid.”15 By late 1942, FDR had appointed the members of the committee: Mark Ethridge, a Southern liberal (chairman); Earl Dickerson, a black alderman from Chicago; William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL); Philip Murray, president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO); David Sarnoff of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA); and Milton P. Webster, the black trade unionist from Randolph’s own union.

From 1941 to 1946 when the FEPC disbanded, the committee went through many changes in organization and personnel, but two things remained constant during its life. First, the FEPC could only investigate complaints of discrimination against a defense contractor or a nonmilitary federal agency. Second, the FEPC could not issue subpoenas, use federal courts, or fine offending parties.16 Instead the committee carried out its function by holding public hearings and using moral suasion to convince employers to stop their discrimination. Public hearings could also place community peer pressure upon violators and send a message to other war industries not directly involved with the FEPC.

In July 1942, conservative elements in the federal government pressured President Roosevelt to curtail the FEPC’s anti-discrimination activities which he did by transferring the FEPC to the War Manpower Commission (WMC) headed by Paul V. McNutt17. The uncooperative McNutt blocked the FEPC’s hearings and activities and in late 1942, some committee members, including chairman Ethridge, resigned in disgust.

In September 1943, soon after the reassembling of the committee, William T. McKnight, head of the Cleveland office, sent FEPC investigator Ernest G. Trimble to Cincinnati on a fact-finding mission. During his interviews with Cincinnati businessmen and workers Trimble was struck by the racial tension within the city. He heard rumors that “Negroes had organized what were called ‘pusher’ clubs.” Supposedly, the members of these clubs set aside one evening a week to push whites off the trolleys and buses. These rumors had contributed to a sense of uneasiness in the city. After meeting with both the Cincinnati police department and black leaders, he concluded that the rumors were unfounded. Still, many of the employers with whom Trimble talked felt that “a race riot might easily develop.”18

Aside from the tense racial situation, Trimble’s investigation of Cincinnati businesses in 1943 also revealed patterns of employment discrimination similar to those Berry reported in 1930. Trimble, like Berry, focused on industry and found...
that many war plants refused to hire any black workers. For example, the Crosley Radio Corporation had a company policy that kept blacks out. The U.S Playing Card Company also employed no blacks. Trimble met with U.S. Playing Card supervisors, Robert K. Matlack and Charles J. Calahan, who told him that because their company recruited largely white Southerners from Kentucky and other southern states, they felt that the white workers would not accept black employees. Furthermore, Trimble reported that the plant was all white because it was not "equipped with separate toilet facilities, which [the supervisors] thought would be necessary." Regardless of worker composition and facilities, Matlack and Calahan told Trimble that no blacks had applied at their plant. In fact, Trimble knew that at least one black machine operator had been referred to the business, but he was not hired.  

Trimble, like Berry before him, recorded the view of some Cincinnati employers that blacks were less fit for skilled occupations. During Trimble's visit to the Formica Insulation Company which made various types of airplane parts, E. G. William, vice-president, and Walter T. Beinhardt, employment manager, explained to him that "the company desired applicants with mechanical aptitude" and that they had not hired blacks "because qualified ones had not applied." Likewise, Joseph A. Anderson of the American Can Company which produced machine gun shells said that "the company's mechanical aptitude test barred Negro workmen." Such requirements though did allow blacks to run the plant's elevator. Thus, American Can which employed 1,200 workers had one black worker, a woman who operated the plant elevator.  

Trimble found more complex racial discrimination at the Lodge and Shipley Company. Lodge and Shipley made automatic lathes for the navy. It had 1,074 employees in two plants. The company's vice-president Fred Albrecht told Trimble that they hired blacks for jobs in Plant 2. Supposedly, many white Southerners worked in Plant 1, and they were not willing to work with blacks. Trimble told Albrecht that this employment practice was not in line with the Executive Order 9346, a statement that "led to a rather lengthy discussion of the race ques-
tion” in which Albrecht “exhibited considerable prejudice against Negroes . . . and emphasized that colored men are not reliable workers.”

Such patterns of discrimination gave Trimble reason to conclude that “on the whole, it seems clear that the defense industries in the Cincinnati area have rather generally refused to employ colored people equally with whites.” Trimble suggested that the FEPC take “vigorous action” in Cincinnati to secure war jobs for the city’s blacks “not only because of the prevalence of discrimination but also for the sake of the prestige of the [newly resuscitated] committee.” He recommended that the committee “single out a few of the larger companies against whom good cases could be obtained.” Once the FEPC brought these local industrial leaders into compliance with Executive Order 9346, he “believed the smaller companies would then fall into line.” Without this “vigorous action,” Trimble predicted that at the very least black leaders in Cincinnati would lose confidence in the FEPC.

Soon after receiving the report on Cincinnati, Trimble’s boss, William T. McKnight, director of FEPC’s Cleveland-based Region V, visited Cincinnati. He met with many businessmen engaged in war production but was unable to convince them to give up their discriminatory practices. Following this meeting, in March 1944, a group of local businessmen met on their own to discuss “the matter of employing Negroes and reportedly agreed on at least two reasons why they could not.” The reasons were “that employees of the companies involved had an understanding with their former employees now in the armed forces not to alter the employment pattern of the plants” and “that to introduce Negro employees would bring other Negroes into the area and thereby up set [sic] the present social ratio and produce a ‘race problem’ for the community.”

Having failed twice to alter employment patterns in Cincinnati, McKnight wrote to the FEPC officials in Washington, D.C. explaining that the committee must take strong action in the city to change its employment practices. Chairman Malcolm Ross agreed and established a Cincinnati FEPC suboffice and authorized it to hold hearings against the most prominent violators of Executive Order 9346.

Immediately after the office opened on February 1, 1945, McKnight sent its chief, Harold
James, a list of offending companies: the Baldwin Company, the Cambridge Tile Company, the Crosley Radio Corporation, the Kirk and Blum Manufacturing Company, the F.H. Lawson Company, the Schaible Company, the Strietmann Biscuit Company, and the Victor Electronic Products Company. McKnight who had accumulated sixty-two cases charging discrimination sent James the files concerning the alleged violators and the names of the complainants. James organized these materials for the hearings and, with the help of Theodore M. Berry, persuaded the complainants to give new depositions against the eight companies. In late February, James contacted the businesses requesting their presence at the Cincinnati FEPC hearings which were to be held in the city council chambers on March 15-17, 1945. Committee members Malcolm Ross, Sara Southall, Milton Webster, John Brophy, and Boris Shishkin would preside over the hearings while FEPC trial attorneys Emanuel H. Bloch and Frank D. Reeves would present evidence and direct most of the FEPC’s questions.

Even though the cases of discrimination against these eight large war plants were well-documented, James knew that something more was needed to convince Queen City employers to “fall into line” with Executive Order 9346. The hearings, in a courtroom-like setting, had two goals: to expose discrimination publicly and to show how unfair employment practices hurt war production. If the hearings achieved these two goals, a change in employment patterns might take place. To give the hearings an added sense of patriotic urgency, James asked the War Manpower Commission to make a report on Cincinnati’s war-time economy stressing the plight of blacks and its negative effect on the war effort.

On the morning of March 15, FEPC Chairman Malcolm Ross called the Cincinnati hearings to order. The first witness whom FEPC attorney Emanuel Bloch called was Willard J. Schilling from the War Manpower Commission. Reading his report verbatim, Schilling laid out the basic wartime employment statistics for Cincinnati. In 1940 blacks made up 12.2 percent of the city’s population, 12.4 percent of the labor force (i.e. persons with jobs as well as those seeking work), and 29.2 percent of the unemployed. Schilling estimated that since 1940 more blacks than whites had settled in Cincinnati.25

In 1940 one out of every twenty industrial workers in Cincinnati was black. By 1945 with the growth in the production of war materials, this ratio had improved to one out of every nine. But this progress did not include black women who made up “only 3 percent of the female employees of war manufacturing establishments.” Furthermore, in general, black labor was underrepresented in the Cincinnati war industries. Schilling reported that eighty-five war plants in the Queen City employed 98,941 people, 10,734 of whom (10.8%) were black. Moreover, only one plant hired any substantial number of them: the Wright Aeronautical Company, which employed about 6,000 blacks. The remaining 5,000 worked in eighty-four plants. “The largest percentage,” Schilling added, worked in “unskilled and service positions.” In fact, many companies only hired blacks “for jobs of short duration, [that is] spot labor.”26

After testifying to the low economic position of black Cincinnatians, Schilling concluded that at the beginning of the war “the Cincinnati labor market [had] been a Group III area, i.e. one in which the supply of labor and demand for labor [was] substantially in balance.” Yet because more men were going off to war, “it [had] become increasingly difficult to meet labor demands in the area.” Schilling suggested that Cincinnati was becoming a Group II area, “one in which labor shortages exist, that may endanger essential production.” He stated that the threat to war production could be mitigated “through better utilization of the labor force including minority groups.”27

Following Schilling’s statement, the FEPC proceeded with the cases against Cincinnati companies beginning with Kirk and Blum Manufacturing and Cambridge Tile. Examiner Bloch told Chairman Ross that both companies had agreed to settle with the committee by signing documents stating that they would conform to Executive Order 9346. The companies promised to recruit and hire new workers regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin. They also agreed to give preference to the workers they had previously discriminated against
and to notify the United States Employment Service (USES) of their new employment practices and the FEPC of their progress.28

Next the committee proceeded with the case against the Crosley Radio Corporation. Bloch called Hubert J. Shank, the manager of the Cincinnati office of the U.S. Employment Service, to the stand. Shank knew intimately the employment policies of the local war plants to which he referred workers. He had been in contact with Crosley about its unfair employment practices since 1943. The USES often sent black applicants to Crosley which would return them jobless. Before contacting the FEPC Shank had tried to determine the position of both Crosley's management and union. Industrial relations director Carl T. Nearing told the USES that Crosley did not hire blacks because it feared that its union would strike. To corroborate this testimony, Fred Ross, president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local #1061 at Crosley, testified next. He confirmed the union's threat to walk out if blacks were employed and added that the purpose of the war was "to preserve the American way of life," which to Ross meant keeping "negroes [sic] in their place."29

Then Bloch called six more witnesses, five black women and one black man, to tell their stories about Crosley. The first four women — Lucille Charity Cooper, Louise Comer, Hazel Anderson, and Willie Webb — reported that Crosley refused to hire them because of their color. Cooper's testimony represented a typical experience.

Bloch: "And now will you tell the Committee what happened when you got out to the Crosley employment office at the plant out there?"

Cooper: "Well, I went to the employment office and I was interviewed by a lady and she said she wasn't hiring any colored girls at the present and that they hadn't hired any colored girls."30

Similarly, Comer's interviewer told her that Crosley was not "taking any colored girls." Hazel Anderson told the committee that she had asked her interviewer if "there were any available opening for colored and [the company official] said 'No, not at present'." Willie Webb, a victim of the same employment discrimination, was a definite loss for the production capabilities of Crosley, which made electronic equipment, because Webb had amassed 536 hours of training as a welder.31

The last two witnesses called against Crosley also detailed the company's unfair employment practices. Moreover their testimonies added a clear, patriotic message. Henry Harris had been recently discharged from the Army and went to Crosley for a molding job. He arrived at the plant with many others seeking war-related work. During the interview process, Crosley officials separated the white and black applicants. In a separate room, an interviewer talked with Harris for "two minutes" and told him that "he would keep [his] application on file and call" him if needed. A year later, Crosley had yet to call the war veteran. A patriotic theme also ran through the testimony of Ruby Chapman, who was refused a job at Crosley. She explained to the committee that she wanted a war job "because my husband is overseas and I figured I would be helping him."32

After Chapman's testimony, the committee let Crosley's attorney, Walter M. Shohl of the Cincinnati law firm Dinsmore, Shohl, Sawyer, and Dinsmore, present testimony. Gerald F. Gamber, Crosley's director of industrial relations, testified and defended employment discrimination because he believed that hiring blacks would disrupt production of war materials.

Shohl: "Did you reach conclusions as to what the situation [at Crosley] was?"

Gamber: "I reached the conclusion . . . that in my honest opinion, a work stoppage would surely result if we hired a single colored person."

Gamber maintained that such a strike would throw Crosley's production capabilities "into a tailspin," which would adversely affect the war effort.33

Following Shohl's questioning of Gamber, the FEPC cross-examined. Bloch asked Gamber if he had ever talked with the white employees about allowing blacks to work at Crosley. Gamber said that he had talked to some workers, all of whom said that they would strike if blacks were hired.

Bloch: "Now, when you talked to these sixty or seventy people, did you point out to them
that it is unpatriotic, that it is a stab in the back to our soldiers overseas if anybody would walk out and pull a strike?"

Gamber: "It isn't very good policy to point out to anybody today that they are unpatriotic."

Bloch: "I wanted to know whether you did?"

Gamber: "I didn't go out and do a negative sales job. I have other things to do. . . ."34

Committee member John Brophy also questioned Crosley's dedication to the war effort. He asked, "Doesn't it seem contradictory that a material that serves an armed force composed of whites and blacks . . . can only be made by whites?" Gamber chose not to answer that question but instead stated that "I may not personally feel that we are going about the thing in this instance in the right way. Personally, I have a feeling that education is one of the biggest things, not force or directives."
Committee member Milton P. Webster responded to this with a small lecture.

Publicly Exposing Discrimination

I judge you meant the processes the Committee uses, that is by directives and so forth was not the proper method, but probably an educational process would be a much better method. Don't you agree that the fact that Hitler and Hirohito started this war, that we have got to accentuate our educational facilities to meet the crisis much more than in normal times! In other words, we can't wait for the long drawn out process, by reading books, but some other drastic method of education has to take place in order to change these conditions.15

Gamber remained on the stand for some time after Webster's statement. The committee members' questions and comments directed to Gamber never strayed far from Webster's lecture. They made clear the FEPC's position that in this crisis fair employment was needed to fight Hitler and Hirohito and that gradual methods to achieve this threatened the war effort. The members continued to attack the idea that discrimination could be patriotic or aid the war effort. The end of Gamber's testimony marked the end of the first day of hearings.

The following morning Chairman Malcolm Ross reconvened the hearings to examine companies which hired blacks but refused to give them permanent or skilled jobs. All the same players were present, including Shohl, who now represented the F. H. Lawson Company, which refused to hire skilled black labor. Frank Reeves prosecuted this case which, like Crosley's, began with Hubert Shank, who had contacted both union and management about unfair employment practices. Shank told the committee that in conversations with union officials, he had learned that if blacks were hired on a permanent basis the union would strike. Shank also stated that Lawson's president, John A. Buhr, had supported the company's policy of employment discrimination but insisted "that the company's position was one caused solely by the union's stand and the fact that [the company was] situated so close to Kentucky, where many of our employees reside."36

Although the union contributed to Lawson's unfair employment policy, the company's treatment of black applicants was particularly dishonest. One applicant, Gertrude Barney, testified that the Cambridge Tile was one of two Cincinnati companies that agreed to hire new workers regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin in compliance with Executive Order 9346. (CHS Marsh Photograph Collection)
USES sent her and her sister to Lawson. Once they arrived, their interviewer told them that “he was sorry, [and that] he had called up [the USES] and said they didn’t need anymore help.” The Lawson official explained to the women that he would fill out their referral cards and return them to the USES office. Reeves entered into evidence the cards on which the Lawson official had written “Did Not Report.”

In rebuttal, attorney Walter Shohl asked company president Buhr why he discriminated in employment. Buhr blamed the unfair practices on the union employees who, he claimed, lived in the “hills back of Covington.” Buhr had asked union representatives if its members would work with blacks on the production line. The union officials responded “that our men would walk out if such a thing happened.”

As far as the position of management, Buhr told the FEPC that Lawson could only hire blacks as “spot labor from time to time . . . unloading cars and things of that kind, on the outside” of the plant. Buhr stated that to do more would harm the war effort.

Shohl: “What has been your primary consideration in connection with all of these questions of employment of personnel?”

Buhr: “Well, we have felt that our action should be such that every order that we had on our books should be gotten out on time, and according to the delivery schedules that have been given us. That’s been our prime idea and, of course, we have been expedited with very much high pressure by the armed services right from the first, and we didn’t think that we should interfere with that effort in any way.”

Shohl: “Is it your belief that if you were to have employed non-white persons, your production would be disrupted?”

Buhr: “I am firmly of that belief, from everything that has been said to us, even as late as yesterday and today.”

Keeping blacks in low-skilled jobs was the main charge in the case against the Baldwin Company. Forty blacks worked at the war plant which made airplane wings, but none were in skilled positions. Instead they operated elevators and worked as porters and maintenance men. Baldwin’s personnel manager James M.E. Mixter said that the company wanted to hire blacks, but “the sudden influx [of blacks into skilled positions] . . . might cause considerable troubles in our plant, so that we have gone on the slow, sure method of doing it gradually, getting the other employees used to seeing them around.” Thus, Baldwin refrained from employing blacks on the production line.

Philip J. Kennedy, attorney for Baldwin’s union, presented the official position of the workers. He argued that the “wholesale introduction of negroes [sic] into the production classifications” would cause a strike which would impede the war effort. Like Buhr, Kennedy blamed this stance on white workers who “had come more or less recently from southern Kentucky and Tennessee.”

Following Kennedy’s testimony, black witnesses recounted their experiences at the plant. What happened to Louise E. Stallworth was typical. In May 1944, she went to Baldwin and filled out an application for a production job. As was the custom she completed the blank on the form titled “race” with the word “Negro.”

Bloch: “Now tell us what happened?”

Stallworth: “Well, after I filled out the
application blank, the young man came to the door of
the office and asked me what I wanted, so I told him
that I was sent there by the United States
Employment Center [sic] for the job of inspector train-
ing. I asked him if he had such a job and he said yes.
So then he asked me to come into the office. I handed
him my application blank that was filled out. So he
told me that the job would require two weeks training
period and I said, ‘That is quite all right.’ In speaking
he glanced down at my application blank and he said,
‘Oh, you are a negro.’ I said, ‘Yes.’”

At this point, the interview stopped, and
the Baldwin official told Stallworth that “in about a
couple weeks we will let you know if we have any-
thing.” She was never called.41

The case against the Strietmann Biscuit
Company shared the same premise as the case against
Baldwin. Strietmann employed over 600 workers who
packed food for the military. Only about twenty
blacks [mostly women] worked there, and all were
janitors. W.H. Armstrong, Strietmann’s lawyer,
defended this discrimination by arguing that: “We
cannot employ ‘non-white’ women on production
work because of the fact that such employment would
cause most of our white help to resign.” Testimony
from Evans Douglas, a union member, supported
Armstrong’s statement. Douglas told the committee
that if blacks were hired on the production line, “my
machine goes down.”43

On March 17 in the hearing against the
Victor Electronic Products Company, the FEPC clearly
showed that Cincinnati war industries treated
blacks unfairly. Victor Electronic Products Company
flatly refused to employ blacks. FEPC attorney Frank
Reeves explained that Victor’s management claimed
it could not hire blacks because its “present workers
were Kentuckians who would quit rather than work
with non-whites and be obliged to share washroom
and locker room facilities with them.” Reeves added
that Charles L. Harrison, president of Victor, “ques-
tioned the ability of negroes to perform the intricate pattern of [the company’s] work.”44

Victor’s union shared its management’s
views. This stance became apparent when Walter
Shohl, the company’s attorney questioned Norbert
Auer, president of International Brotherhood of
Electrical Workers (AFL), Local #1264. Victor’s attor-
ney asked Auer what would happen if “a substantial number of negro workmen” were hired. Auer
answered that he “couldn’t say, but [he was] almost
positive that [the white workers] would walk out.”45

Esther Lupariello, a worker at Victor, reinforced this
statement.

Reeves: “Do you know the attitude of
the workers at the Victor Electronic Products?”

Lupariello: “I certainly do. I am no official
of the union. I am just a member, but I have made
it my business to go around and ask some of them and
they are all against it [that is, the hiring of blacks].”

Reeves: “Is it your judgement, at least,
on what you have learned and heard, that the employ-
ment of negroes [sic] would lead the employees to
walk out?”

Lupariello: “They certainly would.
Anybody that thinks they won’t, they should just
send one out there and the whole place will be empty
in five minutes. No union, no guards, no management
will hold them.”46

Workers like Lupariello gave Victor an
excuse not to hire black Cincinnatians, even qualified
ones. In December 1944, Victor placed an advertise-
ment in a local newspaper calling for drill and punch
press operators. Joseph Todd, a black complainant,
had experience with these machines at the Cincinnati
Tool Company, and applied at Victor. His interviewer
told him that the “company did not hire colored peo-
ple in the shop.” The official did offer Todd “a job cut-
ting the lawn and washing the President’s car.” Todd
told the FEPC that “Naturally I refused the job. That
ended the interview.”47

After the proceedings against Victor, the
committee took up the case against the Schaible
Company which demonstrated that changes in
employment policies were possible. Schaible settled
with the FEPC as Kirk and Blum and Cambridge Tile
had done. Schaible’s agreement mirrored those that
the other consenting firms signed. Less than a month
later in April, 1945, Chairman Ross told Schaible’s
management via telegram that all counts of discrimi-
nation against it were dropped.48
Overall, the hearings could not be considered a success. Only three of the firms settled with the FEPC, not enough to alter employment practices in Cincinnati significantly. The hearings ended on March 17, 1945, with little evidence that the intransigence of companies like Victor was not the only position held in Cincinnati. 7

The FEPC had planned to return to Cincinnati to try to convince Crosley, Baldwin, F.H. Lawson, Streitmann, and Victor to comply with Executive Order 9346, but in July 1945, Congress cut its budget. As a result, the FEPC closed many of its regional offices, including the one in Cincinnati. In its Final Report (1946), the committee acknowledged that some Cincinnati businesses had initiated new employment programs and hired more blacks. However the five recalcitrant firms that had attended the hearings “were [either] unwilling to initiate such programs or capitulated to the bias of their workers.” 8

Although the FEPC failed in its overall mission of opening the gates of most Cincinnati war plants to blacks, it had some accomplishments. In addition to opening up a few firms, the FEPC succeeded in exposing the prevalent employment discrimination against African Americans in Cincinnati. At the same time, the committee sent a clear message that refusing blacks jobs and failing to upgrade them were unfair employment practices and were not to be rationalized on the basis of the alleged bigotry of white workers or on the claim of aiding the war effort.

The FEPC’s actions also gave some people confidence in this method of attacking unfair employment practices. Civil rights leaders, such as Theodore M. Berry, saw the FEPC as an efficient vehicle to advance fair employment. When the federal committee disbanded in 1946, he joined others in Ohio in pushing for a state FEPC. In 1947 State Senator Howard Metzenbaum introduced a bill in the Ohio General Assembly “to prohibit discriminatory employment practices based upon race, color, religious creed, national origin, or ancestry, and to create an Ohio Fair Employment Practices Commission.” 9

For twelve years, Ohio civil rights leaders fought for this type of bill which mirrored Roosevelt’s executive orders. On April 29, 1959, Ohio Governor Michael DiSalle signed an Ohio FEPC bill into law. 10 Thus, while President Roosevelt’s FEPC failed to eradicate employment discrimination in Cincinnati, the committee’s action gave a focus to the post-war fair employment movement.

1. See Richard Polenberg, War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945 [New York, 1973] and Dominic J. Capcci, Layered Violence: The Detroit Rioters of 1943 [Mississippi, 1992]. In Cincinnati, on June 5, 1944, the day before D-Day, 9,000 white workers at Wright Aeronautical went out on a four day strike to protest the upgrading of seven trained black workers to operate idle machines in the cylinder department. On April 18, 1945, 197 white workers at the Continental Can Company went on strike, because the company had hired two black porters. A third racially motivated strike happened at General Motor’s Delco Products Plant on April 18, 1945, when 273 white workers walked out for five days, because Delco had hired a black welder, Cletus Moster, to work an idle machine.
2. For more information on the FEPC and fair employment during World War II, see Merl E. Reed, Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946 [Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1991].
3. Theodore M. Berry (b. 1906) was the president of the Cincinnati NAACP branch in the 1930s. During the war, he spent time in Washington, D.C. working with the Office of Facts and Figures. In the 1960s, Berry lobbied for fair employment and housing laws in Ohio and from 1972-1973 he was mayor of Cincinnati.
4. See Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, Cincinnati Industrial Survey, 1925 [New York, 1925], pp.27-35. See also Theodore M. Berry, “Survey Abstract: The Status of the Negro in Industry and Occupational Opportunities in Cincinnati” [Cincinnati, 1930]. In December 1930, Berry published the survey in the National Urban League’s Opportunity magazine. Berry’s survey which he presented to the city government and the article in Opportunity contain virtually the same statistical data. The main difference between the two is that the Opportunity article is in a more readable form.
5. See Theodore M. Berry, “Survey Abstract: The Status of the Negro in Industry and Occupational Opportunities in Cincinnati,” pp.1-2. Berry did not use the 1930 census because it was not available to him at the time he made his study.
9. Ibid.
13. Asa Philip Randolph [1889-1979] was the co-founder of the Messenger, a militant Socialist monthly in 1917. He founded and served as the first president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) in 1925. In 1935 he served as a member of Mayor Fiorello La Guardia’s New York City Commission on Race. Six years later, he organized the March on Washington Movement which led to the FEPC. He became co-chairman of the National Council for a Permanent FEPC in 1943. After the war he was elected a vice-president of the AFL-CIO. He was one of the leaders in the 1963 march on Washington.
14. See Merl E. Reed, Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement, pp.1-17.
16. An executive order and agencies created by it are examples of administrative law, not statute law.
17. Paul Vories McNutt [1891-1955] was the governor of Indiana 1933-1937. In 1937 he was appointed high commissioner to the Philippines. In 1939 he became the head of the newly created Federal Security Agency. McNutt had hopes of capturing the 1940 presidential nomination of the Democratic Party, but his campaign lost momentum as rumors of corruption during his term as governor surfaced and as German victories added to the growing sentiment for a Roosevelt third term. Along with his duties in the WMC, McNutt remained the head of the Federal Security Agency until 1945.
20. Ibid., pp.3-4.
21. Ibid., pp. 4-7.
22. Ibid., p.7.
23. Ibid., p.13.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. This agreement was the same one that with Schaible signed two days later on March 17.
29. Transcript of the 2 p.m. session of the March 15, 1945, FEPC Hearing in Cincinnati, Ohio, Papers of the President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice, Legal Division, Records Relating to the Hearings, Case No. 72, box 1, file 72.2, p. 61. Hereinafter: Cincinnati FEPC Hearings.
Company supervisors testified that since their company recruited largely Southerners from Kentucky and other southern states, they felt that the white workers would not accept black employees.

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