Brave New Alliances

"They're staying home. The men of Little Italy are staying home from work tomorrow to prevent the blacks from marching on Murray Hill School."

When his contact at Little Italy's Alta House called Dolph Norton with this tip late in the afternoon of January 29, 1964, his blood froze. He immediately picked up the phone and called Ralph W. Findley. In the late fifties Findley had been elected the first black president of the Cleveland Board of Education; now he was the director of health and welfare under Mayor Ralph S. Locher. Findley would know what to do about the United Freedom Movement's determination to march with the Hazeldell Elementary School PTA from Glenville through University Circle and up Murray Hill into Little Italy the next morning to protest conditions in Cleveland's elementary schools, where some 30,000 white pupils attended class in buildings that were 95 percent white and some 50,000 black pupils attended class in buildings that were 95 percent black.

After relating the chilling rumor to Mayor Locher's cabinet officer, a friend from the days when Findley had served on a Metro study group on public libraries, Norton asked what could be done to stop the demonstration. If they march, Norton said, no one will be able to prevent violence. If they march up that hill, he concluded, it will all be over.

The two men agreed that each would canvas the settlement-house circuit to see if the rumor could be confirmed and report back his findings.

The United Freedom Movement (UFM), an alliance of 50 local civil
rights groups, including chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), was deadly serious about the march scheduled for the following day, Findley learned. That morning UFM members, who had banded together eight months before on the principle that in unity there is strength, had joined the Hazeldell PTA in picketing Brett and Memorial elementary schools in Collinwood, like Murray Hill another of the city’s all-white ethnic enclaves. Although the picketers had been taunted and even shoved by Collinwood residents, there was no talk of calling off the next day’s protest in Little Italy, where it was rumored that the marchers would be met not with epithets, but with guns.

The issue that had ignited the passions of Cleveland’s blacks and whites alike was the board of education’s handling of the overcrowding of elementary schools in the city’s bloated East Side neighborhoods. From 1950 to 1960 the number of blacks living on the East Side had jumped from nearly 150,000 to more than 250,000. The previous school administration had dealt with the resulting shortage of teachers and classrooms in certain elementary districts by putting thousands of pupils on half-day sessions beginning in 1955. But after William B. Levenson took over as superintendent in the fall of 1961, the board, under pressure from unhappy parents, had instituted the practice of busing schoolchildren from such jam-packed black schools as Hazeldell in Glenville to nearby white elementary schools where there were empty classrooms, such as those in Collinwood and Little Italy. Because the newcomers were not permitted to enter into the activities or use the facilities of the so-called “receiving” schools as a concession to the whites, the new policy had only served to infuriate black parents.

The United Freedom Movement had seized on the issue shortly after it was formed in June 1963 to fight for gains for Cleveland blacks on a variety of fronts, including education, housing and employment. On August 26, UFM leaders presented the board of education with a list of demands, including the full integration of the “transported” students into the receiving schools, the use of integrated textbooks, the hiring of more black teachers and administrators and the establishment of a human relations department.

With their demands still unmet a month later, United Freedom Movement members had agreed at a mass meeting to begin picketing the board of education building the very next day. When the picket line
had gone up on September 25, school board president Ralph A. McAllister had denounced the action as "mob rule." Nonetheless, at its next meeting on September 30, the school board had promised to integrate the transported students into the receiving schools as fully as possible by February 1964. This being the end of January, that deadline was fast approaching without sufficient progress having been achieved, as far as the United Freedom Movement was concerned.

By 10 P.M. the evening of January 29 both Norton and Findley had independently confirmed that an armed confrontation would surely take place if the UFM persisted in its plans to protest the "insufficient diffusion" of Hazeldell elementary students it believed were merely being warehoused at Murray Hill school. Seizing on Findley's suggestion of a meeting of top community leaders to talk about the impending crisis, Norton called the Sheraton-Cleveland Hotel and asked that a meeting room be prepared. Then he began to call every Associated Foundation board member he felt could be of help. No one was home. Norton finally located Ralph M. Besse, who was GCAF trustee Elmer Lindseth's second-in-command at the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company, and Curtis Lee Smith, the executive director of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce. Despite the lateness of the hour, both agreed to come to the hotel, where Findley had assembled a contingent of black political and civic leaders.

They talked throughout the night. Periodically someone would leave the room to phone in a progress report to the mayor or to talk to the police, who were laying plans for mounted patrolmen to be stationed along the marchers' route. As dawn approached, the group was growing desperate over its inability to reach school board president Ralph McAllister, who had an unlisted phone number. Finally, someone suggested sending a policeman to his West Side home to get him. Newspaper accounts of the day's events reported that school board members had entered into secret session with unnamed civic leaders at the hotel at 5 A.M. Talks had progressed sufficiently by the time the march was to begin that the United Freedom Movement agreed to call it off.

It was too late to do anything about the crowd of angry whites who had gathered at the top of Murray Hill. Their ranks swelled by high school youths and adults from Collinwood, who had scuffled with UFM picketers the day before, upwards of 1,500 persons roamed through the streets of Little Italy for the next six hours. Before dispersing, they beat
up several blacks (who had come to the school to check on the safety of their children) and news photographers. They had also smashed a dozen automobiles and hurled eggs, fruit, rocks, bricks and bottles at police officers, reporters, black passers-by and even some priests. The papers would label the day's events a riot, but Dolph Norton's and Ralph Findley's actions had prevented the riot from becoming a bloodbath.

By the end of the day the school board had informally agreed that, effective September 1, "all pupils being transported due to overcrowding only shall be incorporated into receiving school classes as if they were residents of the local school district." The sense of crisis hanging over the city eased, and Norton was able to chuckle a little about the tense and sleepless night he had endured, remembering that when he had arrived at the hotel and had asked for directions, he had been pointed, appropriately, he felt, toward the Saints and Sinners meeting room.

Dolph Norton could be forgiven for feeling as though he were on the side of the angels. In the fall of 1964, as the city's militant blacks put Cleveland's educational system on notice, Norton's long labor with his board to produce a coherent program for the Associated Foundation had finally begun to show concrete results. Not coincidentally, the biggest strides at GCAF had been made in the field of education.

In September, the first publicly supported junior college in Ohio had opened its doors in Cleveland with an enrollment of 1,000 full-time students. The planning for Cuyahoga Community College had been paid for by grants from both the Cleveland and Associated foundations. Because the legislation that enabled the creation of state community colleges had neglected to provide funding for predevelopmental activities, the grants had been a matter of considerable urgency. They also represented acts of courageous leadership, given that the new school had been viewed as competition by Cleveland's private colleges and universities. After much lobbying by Norton and Rawson, Case Institute of Technology loyalist Kent Smith had been convinced of the need to open up the possibility of advanced technical and vocational education to Cleveland's working-class and minority populations. Smith had solicited his peers in the business world so fiercely for contributions to the start-up of Cuyahoga Community College at a meeting he had convened for that purpose, that James A. Rhodes, at the time governor of Ohio, would later call him a "one-man gang" on its behalf.
Even more important, according to Norton, Smith's successful fund raising had marked "the first moment that conservative Republican businessmen ever gave to a 'public' institution." The breaking of this old taboo against private-public partnerships would be of immense importance to the future of Cleveland (as will be seen in subsequent chapters).

The PACE Association, yet another citizens' effort to improve education opportunities in greater Cleveland that the Associated Foundation championed, had also opened for business in September 1963.

The not-for-profit corporation was the first of several program advisory committees that the Associated Foundation would eventually create, in keeping with its proposal to the Ford Foundation. In each instance, these committees consisted of volunteers representing a cross section of the community, selected for their energy and expertise (here longtime resident and civic activist Barbara Rawson had been an invaluable resource), who acted in effect as substitutes for the staff the Associated Foundation chose not to afford. They conducted investigations into problems GCAF had identified as critical, made recommendations to meet them and took responsibility for implementing those recommendations. The foundation paid for their work, but did not control it. As Norton saw it, the foundation's role vis à vis these advisory committees was to be supportive but nondictatorial. "You get them going and you make sure they don't suffer for lack of anything," he said. "You criticize them, you evaluate them and you bring in new ideas. But you're gambling on their performance. When you no longer feel comfortable gambling on them, you get out."

Because GCAF's various program advisory committees became the most important vehicles by which the foundation advanced its objectives, by examining the work of each at some length one can gauge the Associated Foundation's influence on public affairs in Cleveland in the mid-to late sixties. Take the Plan for Action by Citizens in Education (PACE).

If the origins and accomplishments of GCAF's first advisory committee had not been all but forgotten by the eighties, the PACE Association could have served as a model for the broadly based school-improvement movement some hoped that the Cleveland Initiative for Education would become. The PACE organization had evolved naturally out of a citizens' report analyzing the needs of all the area's elementary and secondary schools, which Norton had asked the Associated Foundation board to underwrite in the fall of 1962 with an $18,000 grant.
The idea for the investigation, whose primary target was the Cleveland public schools, had come from Hugh Calkins, a partner in the Cleveland law firm of Jones, Day, Cockley and Reavis, who had taken a leave of absence in 1960 to serve as deputy staff director of President Eisenhower's Commission on National Goals. Education, in general, and the deteriorating conditions in the nation's urban schools, in particular, had been high on the commission's agenda. Calkins had decided to set up a local education commission in Cleveland and had approached Dolph Norton for advice.

Calkins's conception of the Cleveland commission's role, as summarized in a grant proposal he had later authored, was ambitious:

to enlarge the concern of residents of Greater Cleveland to include supporting (without interfering in) the education of children in school districts other than their own; . . . to assist school boards in satisfying the voters, and groups which influence the voters, of the reasonableness of requests for funds; to investigate and report on the [issue of whether] the quality of education in Greater Cleveland [affects] the community's ability to attract and hold business; . . . to inform the public [about] the quality of public education in Greater Cleveland and programs and innovations employed elsewhere; to call attention to ways to minimize cost in providing quality education.

Given the boldness of Calkins's vision, a credible appointing authority for the commission was an absolute prerequisite, Norton had informed him. Norton had someone in mind.

On November 26, 1962, at a breakfast at the Mid-Day Club downtown, Kent Smith had announced that the Associated Foundation was forming a citizen's committee, chaired by Hugh Calkins, whose charge was to report to the foundation on "A Plan for Action by Citizens in Education." "No institutions in our society have been as important to the development of our nation as our schools," Smith had said on that occasion, in explaining GCAF's action. "No institutions are as important to our future. Employment, technical advance, economic and social development will bear a high correlation with the efforts we make to make our schools great."

Privately, the Associated Foundation had seen the need for the PACE report in grittier terms: "There is a growing agreement in Cleveland on the magnitude and importance of the job of the public schools in those parts of the metropolitan area, central city and suburbs, where are found a high proportion of culturally deprived children," Norton had observed in a memo to the board. "A close correlation has been established be-
tween high welfare costs, unemployment, lack of training, inadequate motivation and underachievement in school from the earliest grades.”

Two dozen county residents had personally been invited by Kent Smith to participate on the PACE committee (an honor, thus hard to decline). Their report was released to the public the following April. In urgent tones it described the conditions the committee had found in the Cleveland public schools—a system so hard pressed by the Northern migration of Southern blacks that it could “barely man the classrooms,” let alone seek solutions to the “overwhelming” social problems of the “in-migrants’” children.

Undaunted by the grim picture it had painted, the report confidently set forth a detailed outline for “making our schools second to none in the country by 1970.” The plan relied heavily on the volunteer efforts of ordinary citizens. Some of its 26 recommendations had boldly encouraged political activism. Recommendation 1, for example, called for better qualified citizens to run for the school board in each district, while Recommendation 4 supported a 25 percent increase in per-pupil expenditures in the Cleveland public schools, whose subsidy from the state was the lowest of any district in Ohio.1 Recommendation 4 also suggested that, over and above the standard per-pupil expenditure, an additional 35 percent be spent on each child living in what it termed the “culturally disadvantaged” areas of Cleveland, the extra funds to pay for special psychological, medical, vocational and guidance services. To meet these increased expenditures, the report had challenged the Greater Cleveland Tax Policy Study Commission, a recently appointed political action committee of the Citizens League, “to seek the sources of additional local revenue which will be most fair and will interfere least with economic growth.”2

To coordinate the PACE report’s implementation, the PACE committee had called for the creation of an ongoing organization. Buoyed by the report’s reception in the public prints and Cleveland public schools superintendent William Levenson’s private assurances of cooperation, the Associated Foundation had readily agreed to provide the newly formed PACE Association with three years’ operating support—a commitment of $110,000 that would be supplemented by generous grants in support of various PACE programs.

One of the first tasks undertaken by the new organization was the preparation of an impressive report (that was largely ignored) examining
how meaningful integration of the schools could be achieved without busing. Issued in the spring of 1964 by PACE's committee on intergroup relations, it recommended changes that might have made unnecessary the forced desegregation of the Cleveland public schools, a divisive and expensive process begun in the late seventies that still (even its staunchest supporters will admit) adversely affects the quality of education locally. The Cleveland Board of Education received and filed this thoughtful and dispassionate document without comment. However, in private conversations with National Education Association personnel who were in town to investigate the reasons why superintendent Levenson had abruptly announced his resignation in early 1964, some board members referred to the PACE volunteers as "meddlers," pointing out that "they don't even live in Cleveland."

Associated Foundation support was also to prove critical to a third major educational initiative, launched in the fall of 1963. Community Action for Youth (CAY) brought together the city, the county, the Cleveland Board of Education and the juvenile courts in an unprecedented attempt to deal with the dropout and delinquency problems at a single junior high in Hough, where the rate of youths who got into trouble with the law had increased by 125 percent between 1953 and 1961, as compared to a 22 percent increase for the city as a whole.

On paper, CAY looked to be exactly the type of innovative enrichment program that the PACE committee believed should be established in all central-city schools. The demonstration project had been in the planning stages since 1958. That year, in response to Cleveland Foundation director J. Kimball Johnson's suggestion that the tangle of social service agencies operating in Hough ought to be organized into a coordinated program, the Welfare Federation of Cleveland had appointed a committee to consider the matter. The result had been the creation of the Greater Cleveland Youth Services Commission. It was under the auspices of that entity that Community Action for Youth was to be operated.

The Cleveland Foundation had already contributed $106,000 to the planning process when the Associated Foundation had entered the picture in April 1962, making its first grant ever: a modest but timely $7,000 award. A request for operational support for CAY having recently been turned down by Paul Ylvisaker at the Ford Foundation, GCAF's grant had given the Youth Services Commission time to explore other possible sources of funding.
The Cleveland planners had next approached the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime (PCJD, for short), which had been formed to tackle some of the unfortunate by-products of the nationwide poverty that John F. Kennedy had witnessed for the first time while campaigning for the Presidency in West Virginia and the big cities of the North. The planners had been met with a receptive ear. In June 1963, the Greater Cleveland Youth Services Commission had won more than $1 million in first-year funding from PCJD to implement the CAY program at Hough's troubled Addison Road Junior High School—a staggering sum, in pre-inflationary dollars, to which the Associated Foundation had contributed an additional $100,000 as part of the required local match.

Community Action for Youth was the second of six such demonstration projects launched under PCJD's aegis. Conceived by David M. Austin, a Welfare Federation staff member whose previous experience had included working with street gangs, CAY had proposed to shower the Addison Road school district with a battery of preventive and remedial services designed to keep children moving in productive channels at each level of their development. CAY teachers and social workers were supposed to set up nursery schools to prepare toddlers for kindergarten; tutor elementary students in reading and take them on enriching field trips; start Boy Scout troops; and provide potential junior high dropouts with occupational counseling, vocational testing, work-study opportunities and job placement services. CAY was also to be the Cuyahoga County Welfare Department's first experiment with decentralizing its operation. Staffed by a half-dozen caseworkers supervised by a 26-year-old social worker named Steve Minter, the department's first branch office, which it had set up in Hough at CAY's behest, had served as both a processing and a training center, offering teenage mothers and fathers courses in parenting, for example. Similarly, the county juvenile court would set up a district probation office whose staff members were given reduced caseloads so that they could devote more attention to each delinquent under their supervision.

Unlike the Ford Foundation, the Associated Foundation had been excited about the prospects for Community Action for Youth. Believing that here, at last, was a way of getting a reading on how to solve the troubles of the central-city resident, Norton and two GCAF board members who had participated in CAY's planning agreed to serve as trustees.
Fannie M. Lewis, a welfare mother whose PTA activities had propelled her onto the Hough Community Council, landed a position as the sole grass-roots representative on the predominantly white professional, male board. "It was fascinating," she would say of the experience. "You know that millions of dollars are being spent, but you have no concept of what's going on. It was like chewing on raw meat and not being able to swallow. All I could contribute was my presence." A high school graduate, she decided to enroll in a university without walls in order to further her education. Sixteen years later Lewis would be elected to Cleveland's city council, where, among other contributions, she would help smooth the way for Lexington Village with her constituents, arguing that the market-rate town houses represented renewed economic vitality for the ailing ward, not the first signs of its gentrification.

CAY may have served to introduce Lewis to the fine art of reading multimillion-dollar budgets, "but as far as moving the community from A to B—no," she would later observe. "They were supposed to teach Wayne Lewis how to read. But when my son entered college, I had to spend $5,000 on remedial reading courses."

CAY planning director David Austin also came to believe that Community Action for Youth failed to accomplish its intended goals. "Bailing out the ocean with teaspoons" is how he would later describe the project. Part of CAY's lack of impact could be attributed to the intractability of cultural dislocation, racial prejudice and educational disadvantages. The fragmentation of power in Cleveland also helped to undermine the outcome. Once funding was obtained from the federal government, Austin had been forced to relinquish operational control of the program he had conceived to the Cleveland Public Schools, whose administrators and board, he would later claim, viewed the involvement of outsiders in school affairs as a threat and the program itself as an opportunity to dispense patronage. In theory a model of interagency cooperation that even provided for the involvement of Western Reserve University in a research and evaluation component, in practice CAY disintegrated into a squabble over turf and a scramble for federal dollars. Finding himself unable to implement even the research, of which he had been put in charge, by December 1963 Austin would be gone. Norton himself would resign from the CAY board after two years in a move to make room for more grass-roots representatives.

With periodic infusions of federal and foundation funding CAY sur-
vived until 1966, when it was folded into the Council for Economic Opportunity (CEO), Cleveland’s new antipoverty agency, which had been created by a task force of the city’s traditional welfare bureaucrats (chaired by Dolph Norton) who had wanted to be prepared to qualify for federal funding when the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 took effect. Although it, like CAY, would be attacked as ineffective, white-dominated and politicized, CEO would at least ensure that Cleveland got its fair share of War on Poverty monies. Between 1964, when it was established under the directorship of Ralph Findley, and 1969, CEO would funnel $43 million into the city’s most neglected neighborhoods. But the new services provided would do little more than temporarily ease some of the discomfort of those who lived there, Norton was to realize. Although written about his experience with CAY, a letter Norton sent to Kim Johnson in 1966 serves as an apt summary of the obstacles the Associated Foundation would almost invariably find blocking its path when it tried to work on the issue of central-city poverty:

The problems facing CAY surprised even those among us who knew that the salvation of Hough was almost impossible. Lack of cooperation among sponsoring organizations, personal politics and the complexities of the Civil Rights movement which had just begun when Community Action for Youth was established served to exacerbate problems of . . . attracting competent people to work in the least attractive surroundings and of translating good ideas into productive action.

Norton would later cite the grooming of a generation of neighborhood leaders as CAY’s most important accomplishment. Their subsequent involvement in running the local initiatives of the federal War on Poverty programs that followed in CAY’s wake would round out their education. Indeed, some sociologists would link the fact that the Kennedy administration included a clause providing for “maximum feasible participation” of the poor in its antipoverty legislation (which Lyndon Johnson would go on to promote so enthusiastically) to the lessons learned from the mixed success of the white-run PCJD experiments in effecting real change.

For those looking for such signals, the grants to CAY, PACE and the tax study (see Note 2) flagged the Associated Foundation’s most basic concerns. Education, race relations and municipal governance were the problems that over the years Norton would bring to the board for dis-
cussion again and again. Norton believed that they were at once the severest and most neglected challenges facing Cleveland. "They were also interrelated," Ford's evaluators would later observe, explaining that "in order to improve education . . . and in order to improve race relations you need public money . . . [as well as] leadership and imaginative and competent public officials."

These early grants also revealed something of the approach the Associated Foundation would take to problem solving. Its techniques would later become standard in the community foundation movement. The grants encouraged consensus building and the coordination of effort. They served as a magnet for other resources—intellectual as well as monetary. They held the promise of great reward (and, consequently, risked failing miserably). In short, the grants had been the philanthropic equivalent of jujitsu, a strategy Norton would later explain he had learned from Paul Ylvisaker. "We watched for trends," Norton said. "It's only by trying to identify what the problem is going to be that you can make an investment of a small amount of money and hope to have an impact. Paul used to talk about philanthropy as social jujitsu, jujitsu being the form of self-protection that uses an opponent's weight against him. Essentially, you just try to set the direction of the tremendous forces in society."

As promising as the attempts by GCAF to generate educational reform may have seemed to some, they did little to dissipate the black militants' intense dissatisfaction with the Cleveland public schools. Even the reliability of the informal agreement Norton's and Findley's ad hoc negotiators had wrested from the school board late in the afternoon of the Murray Hill riot had been questioned by the United Freedom Movement. "This is not enough," UFM coordinator Harold B. Williams had argued at a mass meeting that evening. "The board must more fully commit itself." To ensure that it did so, the coalition decided to begin conducting sit-in demonstrations at the board of education building beginning on January 31, 1964. The pressure tactic worked. On February 10, the board agreed in open session to integrate the receiving schools immediately.

The day after the board reaffirmed its intention to integrate, school board president McAllister wrote superintendent Levenson a letter. It instructed that the board should be kept fully informed of all details of the planning for integration and that it should also be made aware of
any communications from groups or individuals seeking to influence the planning. McAllister, a 35-year-old attorney who was widely believed to be preparing for a run for mayor, sent a copy to Levenson and a copy to the newspapers. When the letter was published, Levenson saw it as a public affront and resigned.

The situation was further inflamed in March, when the board let the first contract for three new elementary schools it had promised in 1961 it would build in black East Side neighborhoods. Prior to the sixties the Cleveland public schools had been on a pay-as-you-go plan for capital needs; consequently, the system’s physical plant was in deplorable shape. A Civil War-era school from which pupils had been dismissed to go meet the train carrying Lincoln’s body to Illinois for burial was still in use. At other schools toilets were little more than holes emptying directly into sewers. In November 1962 voters had been sufficiently persuaded of the need for new construction that they had passed a $55 million bond issue—the first capital indebtedness the system had ever incurred. The United Freedom Movement saw the capital campaign from a different perspective, however. Convinced that the new East Side schools were a tool to perpetuate segregation, UFM leaders had called in late February 1964 for a moratorium on construction, which they believed was being speeded up by the board so that it would not have to carry out its promise to integrate certain schools. Speaking through reporters, McAllister had promptly dismissed the concept of a moratorium, saying that it hadn’t originated with “a responsible group.”

When the first construction contract was let, UFM’s education subcommittee was directed to come up with an action plan. On April 6, coalition members began picketing the three anticipated construction sites. During the second day of demonstrations at the site of the proposed Lakeview Elementary School, the Reverend Bruce W. Klunder lay down behind a bulldozer. A Presbyterian minister affiliated with University Circle’s Church of the Covenant, Klunder was among the dozens of whites who had joined the coalition. Unaware of Klunder’s action, the bulldozer driver backed up and accidentally crushed the 27-year-old minister to death.

The news of Klunder’s demise frightened and horrified Dolph Norton. Now something had to be done! Once again Norton, who had for months been trying to persuade the Chamber of Commerce to organize a meeting of his members with their black counterparts to discuss the city’s dis-
integrating race relations, turned to Kent Smith. Norton believed that "Kent was a realist. He might have been unable to empathize—that wasn't his strength—but he could work with you and he could understand the rationale behind your feelings. Kent knew something had to be done. He knew that the world was in crisis."

Norton suggested to Smith the idea of arranging a meeting with John (Jack) W. Reavis. Then managing partner of Jones, Day, Reavis and Pogue, Jack Reavis was a specialist in corporate law who sat on the boards of a half-dozen large local firms and was soon to chair the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce. Norton believed that the 65-year-old Nebraska native, who had served with Smith on the Case Institute board in the fifties, could be a powerful ally in persuading the business community that it had to come to grips with the explosive tensions threatening to tear apart the town.

On Monday, April 13, Norton and Smith met with Reavis at Jones, Day’s offices in the Union Commerce Bank Building downtown. This was their second meeting: At the first, Norton had argued that Reavis should convene a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce to address the problem of race relations. Reavis, Norton remembered, had vetoed that plan on the grounds that chamber members were too conservative, but had agreed instead that selected white businessmen should be assembled at the invitation of Keith Glennan and Kent Smith. The get-together had occurred on Sunday, April 12, at Kulas Hall on the Case campus. There they had attempted to assess the troubles that had led to Klunder’s death. (“Cleveland is a center of Negro pressure because Negroes favor concentration on communities with reputations for good relations so that results are likely,” someone in attendance suggested. That reputation for liberality in racial matters rested largely on the fact that Cleveland had been the first city in the country to establish, in 1945, a Community Relations Board as a part of its municipal government.)

At the second conference with Reavis, Norton pushed for a joint meeting of the white and black leaders. (The previous day GCAF’s director had met with black Cleveland councilman Leo A. Jackson to solicit his advice on which black leaders should be invited to attend.) At first Reavis had wanted Norton alone to speak to the blacks, but eventually he saw the wisdom of others also sitting down with them. "Tempers and tensions were very high indeed," Reavis would recall. "I thought it quite possible that Cleveland would be the first of the Northern cities where
savage violence might break out." Reavis recognized that such a volatile climate was not good for business, and what was bad for business was bad for the community.

Notes of the April 13 meeting taken by Reavis's colleague, Seth Taft, would further illuminate the nature of the deliberations:

1. The interests of the Negro relate to employment, education, housing and (to some degree) police services, with the conservative Negroes privately approving the demonstrations, picketing, and boycotts typified by the activities of the Committee on Racial Equality [sic]. . . . The Negro push is a revolution, and therefore reason and law do not necessarily apply. CORE has been successful because the conservative Negro has not been helped by [white] business people.

2. There should be a group of businessmen organized to seek communication, a "dialogue," with an equal number of leading Negroes, with the hope that joint understanding and improvement of the situation might result.

. . . A tentative list of people to be invited to a joint meeting to be held Sunday, April 19, was reviewed. Mr. Reavis undertook to call the businessmen and Mr. Norton the Negroes.

Norton had been given explicit instructions not to invite anyone from the local chapter of CORE, especially not "that woman." That woman was Ruth Turner, executive secretary of Cleveland CORE. As an articulate and dynamic black woman and a leader of the most militant of the UFM member organizations, Turner, Norton figured, scared some people to death. Nonetheless, he believed that the upcoming meeting for which he had lobbied so hard would not have credibility without the presence of a representative of CORE, which had been active in Cleveland off and on since 1946. He took it upon himself to invite CORE chairman Arthur Evans, Jr.

On Thursday, April 16, news of the Sunday session broke in the local newspapers. "It is simply a meeting to try to establish . . . communication," explained Reavis, who had just that week been elected to chair the board of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce. "There doesn't seem to be a great deal of it right now. There will be no action taken or any decisions made if I can stop it. That's not to be the purposes of it. . . . We want to talk and see what we can find."

Some 40 persons attended the dramatic first meeting of the black and white civic leaders at the Sheraton-Cleveland Hotel at 3 P.M. that Sunday. Except for those with ties to the NAACP or CORE, the majority
of the blacks in attendance were not members of the United Freedom Movement coalition of civil rights groups. Rather, they were middle-class professionals who called themselves the Negro Leadership Committee, an ad hoc group that had been organized before Bruce Klunder's death for the sole purpose of speaking privately with school board president Ralph McAllister about how to end the school crisis. They and the white businessmen conferred for two hours. The session, which had been presided over by Jack Reavis and moderated by Dolph Norton, was "the first time the bulk of the white business sector came in contact with the problem [of race relations]," Reavis would later acknowledge. Again Seth Taft took notes, reporting afterward:

Professor John Turner spoke of the school crisis being a symptom of racial injustice. . . . Leo Jackson spoke of the Negro receiving poor police protection and the law being less enforced against [black crime].

. . . Others spoke of the need for . . . improvement in employment, education and housing. The failure of the unions to admit Negroes to apprentice programs was commented on. There was also comment on the Chamber of Commerce having more Negro members.

. . . It was left that Dr. Norton would call each person present to see if there existed a consensus that the dialogue should continue. . . .

Taft's matter-of-fact account did not capture the powerful emotions expressed that day. Only three whites spoke, Dolph Norton would recall, and their comments were brief. The rest of the time the white businessmen listened. Every black rose to speak, all sounding the same theme as Western Reserve University sociology professor John B. Turner, who made the opening statement. "The dissatisfaction of the Negro comes from years of injustice," Turner stated. "He feels he's been kicked around, politically, economically, socially. You become desperate, like a drowning man, and you strike out in all directions. The American Negro is saying . . . that life without equality is futile." One of the blacks in attendance would later assert that the session had been the first time in his memory that the city's white business leaders had heard from black leaders "not what they wanted to hear, but the real facts."

Afterwards Jack Reavis would describe the session to a reporter as fruitful. "We have established initial lines of communication," he said. If so, they were somewhat tenuous. "We didn't speak the same language," was Oglebay Norton Company president Edward (Pike) Sloan's memory of the meeting. "The blacks would take off on long speeches.
First one of them would speak for half an hour, then another would feel he had to say something, and he would get up for a half hour. Half the time I couldn’t understand their pronunciation. You see, they finally had an audience. It took a lot of forbearance.”

The following Wednesday Norton reported to Reavis that his canvassing of those in attendance at the Sheraton-Cleveland meeting had indicated a desire on both sides to meet again. That Sunday, April 26, at 4 P.M. Reavis convened a meeting of only the white businessmen at Kulas Hall to report the formation of subcommittees on employment, education and housing. Consisting of five whites and five blacks, each subcommittee would “continue the dialogue, arrive at possible actions, and report back [to the white business leaders as a whole] for information and instructions.” Norton reported that “the Negroes he had called concurred in this undertaking; agreed with the three committees; but several mentioned that the subject of police (both protection and brutality) should be included.”

There would be no action taken on the blacks’ request that an additional subcommittee on public safety be formed. After talking with Mayor Locher and Cleveland Press editor Louis B. Seltzer and Plain Dealer editor and publisher Thomas V. H. Vail, Reavis had decided that taking on the reform of the police department would be a losing proposition because of the business community’s lack of influence with that group, according to Norton. A memo Reavis wrote of his discussions dryly observed, for example, that Locher had been “allergic to the suggestion that he meet with the activist Negro group with respect to ‘police brutality’.” Norton had personally been disappointed by Reavis’s decision; his private belief was that blacks were being continually harassed by Cleveland police in “every way.” Every 12 months or so during Reavis’s seven-year-long involvement with the businessmen’s group, Norton would again bring up the idea of forming a subcommittee on police, but the chairman never relented from his original decision.

On Sunday, July 12, 1964, the entire Businessmen’s Committee on Civic Affairs, as it came to be called, met again at Kulas Hall. As before, the Negro Leadership Committee, which was still viewed as a separate entity, was absent. The three subcommittees had been busy throughout the spring and early summer, though none of their activities had been publicly reported, Reavis having secured an agreement from editors Seltzer and Vail “that they will give us no publicity except as we asked
for it because everybody in the group thought we could work together better privately." The education subcommittee, in particular, had substantial progress to report, having met with newly named Cleveland superintendent Paul W. Briggs to brief him on the school controversy. As a result, the subcommittee had concluded that "the time may come when [we] will need to take a public position on certain issues (as opposed to working only behind the scenes) since our failure to do so may undermine the influence of our Negro leaders. The most immediate occasion for such a public statement may be when Supt. Briggs announces his policy and plans for dealing with school problems, and when our prompt support may be especially critical."

On August 5, the day after Paul Briggs met with the school board for the first time as superintendent, the Businessmen's Committee on Civic Affairs and the Negro Leadership Committee gathered at 7:30 p.m. in Kulas Hall. Briggs, who had been invited to make a brief presentation, told of winning the school board's agreement to a 30-day moratorium on purchasing property for new school construction to allow "a chance to look at the direction the schools are headed in and to decide if it might be revised." After the superintendent had departed, Reavis produced a statement that had been drafted by the education subcommittee. The work of "meeting after meeting, on weekends and holidays and way into the night" (as Reavis would later describe the effort), it read, in part:

While there was some difference of opinion as to priorities and emphasis, all members agree that [Briggs's] proposals, as announced Tuesday, are in the right direction and that their attainment will result in marked improvement in the quality of education for all Cleveland children.

... Mr. Briggs will require time to implement his program. We call upon our fellow citizens to help insure the success of Mr. Briggs' administration by granting him cooperation and support.

For our part, we pledge ourselves to continue to meet and work together and to support Mr. Briggs in his efforts to attain the main objective of equality and quality education at the earliest possible time.

The statement was then signed by 31 members of the Businessmen's Committee and 20 members of the Negro Leadership Committee in person and three in absentia. (The two groups would finally be united at summer's end as the Businessmen's Interracial Committee on Community Affairs [BICCA]. The second of the Associated Foundation's pro-
gram advisory committees, BICCA would be provided space in the foundation’s offices and its full-time director and operating expenses paid for in part by annual grants.)

So impressive had been Briggs’s and the businessmen’s performances that even the CORE militants had been mollified. The next day CORE chairman Art Evans announced that Briggs—"a wonderful and forthright man"—should be given an entire semester to develop "a specific program for quality integrated education, to get the school board to approve it and to start putting it into effect."

"This virtually guarantees the peaceful opening of the schools on September 9th," the Cleveland Press concluded. "Cleveland’s new school superintendent may have as long as six months to put into effect some major solutions to the integration issues that have plagued the system for almost a year."

As it turned out, Paul Briggs’s honeymoon would last considerably longer than six months. Due, in part, to the Associated Foundation’s behind-the-scenes efforts to ensure peace in the Cleveland public schools, the issue of integration would not be taken up again for a decade. With the assistance and support of the foundation’s program advisory committees, BICCA and PACE, the schools’ master politician would instead focus community attention on passing bond issues to pay for renewing the system’s physical plant. During Briggs’s administration more than 40 new neighborhood schools would be built, cementing into place the patterns of segregation that finally prompted the NAACP in 1973 to bring suit against the system in the federal courts.

For five long years Paul Briggs fought the desegregation case. So heated was the litigation that The Cleveland Foundation, fearing violence would erupt when the buses inevitably rolled, had been compelled to mount a $1 million campaign to educate the community about the issues. By then the philanthropy’s working relationship with Briggs had been irreversibly damaged. But in the beginning, back in 1964, there had been a productive collaboration between the superintendent and the person who had recruited him: the executive director of PACE.

When he heard the news of William Levenson’s resignation as Cleveland school superintendent in the winter of 1964, Robert B. Binswanger, the executive director of the PACE Association, had called Dolph Norton. "We’ve got to get involved in this business of picking the new
superintendent," Binswanger had exclaimed. (Since the Associated Foundation was paying his salary, it was only prudent to discuss the idea with Norton beforehand.)

Binswanger had been on the job for just a few months, but Norton believed that he had already justified the Foundation's faith in him. (Norton had enthusiastically supported Binswanger's hiring, finding the former Peace Corps staffer a little, well, offbeat, but also potentially the most creative candidate under consideration by the PACE Association.) Shortly after he came aboard in the fall of 1963, the "Barnstormer"—as he had been dubbed by Barbara Rawson, who had a nickname for everyone—had learned that there were 400 children on the waiting list to get into the Cleveland public schools' overcrowded kindergartens. Binswanger had promptly set up free kindergartens operated by volunteers so that the out-of-school children would not fall behind. Out of embarrassment—as then PACE chairman Hugh Calkins saw it—the Cleveland Board of Education had eliminated the waiting list the following year.

Binswanger, who had served the Peace Corps by training teachers headed for work in Africa, had next turned his considerable recruiting skills toward encouraging central-city mothers to run a preschool program he believed would be beneficial for their toddlers. Eighteen preschool centers in all were established on a one-year trial basis in 1964. At PACE's suggestion, the Cleveland Council of Churchwomen prepared 2,000 "preschool bags" containing washcloths and soap, as well as crayons, paper and puppets, all of which the mothers were shown how to use with their children as learning tools. PACE's experiment proved so successful that it would later serve as one of the models for the federal Head Start Program. Before the year was out Binswanger had assembled another impressive volunteer army, this one consisting of 600 greater Cleveland high school students who during summer vacation had helped some 2,000 third to fifth graders from the central city catch up on old lessons and prepare for new work in the fall. He called them the Tutor Corps.

Levenson's resignation had represented an opportunity for PACE to accelerate its imaginative programs—if a sympathetic and dynamic administrator were chosen to replace the outgoing superintendent. Binswanger and Calkins had a candidate in mind: Paul Briggs, the superintendent of the Parma (Ohio) Board of Education, one of six ed-
ucation professionals who had served as advisors to the PACE committee. Briggs, Binswanger had explained to Norton, possessed the political savvy to handle the job. Not only had Briggs once taught political science at the University of Michigan in his home state, but he had survived seven years as superintendent in a working-class Catholic suburb of Cleveland, whose postwar growth had far outstripped the capacity of its parochial and public schools to cope. Norton, who knew the Parma superintendent from Metro days, also believed that "Briggs was absolutely first rate. He had taken the Parma schools, which were a disaster, and made them pretty good, and he did it in spite of the fact that there was tremendous parochial school pressure."

So Norton had encouraged Binswanger to "go to it." Binswanger began mentioning Briggs as the best possible candidate for the Cleveland superintendency in conversations with various well-placed Clevelanders and influential out-of-towners. Invariably he would add that it might not be a bad idea if the Cleveland Board of Education were to avail itself of the services of Professor Herold C. Hunt, who was in charge of the placement office at the Harvard School of Education, where Binswanger had taken both his master's and his Ph.D.

Hunt (with whom Binswanger had already chatted about the Cleveland situation, again mentioning Paul Briggs as the best qualified candidate) had previously consulted with school boards in Philadelphia and Boston on their search for new superintendents. In the spring of 1964, school board member and former PACE trustee George Dobrea, who chaired the search committee, had hired Hunt as a consultant to the Cleveland board. Hunt had produced a short list of nine candidates, including Briggs and Cleveland's deputy superintendent, the odds-on favorite for the job, given the board tradition of always promoting an insider. Binswanger would later explain how pressure to hire an outsider had been brought to bear on the board in a behind-the-scenes telephone campaign orchestrated by Associated Foundation trustees Kent Smith and Tom Burke (the latter having been brought on to replace an ailing Harold Clark). Briggs, the only candidate besides the deputy superintendent who was up to speed on the challenges facing the Cleveland system, had been tapped in a four-to-three decision. There was now in place a new superintendent with whom the PACE Association believed it could work effectively to improve the Cleveland public schools.

With all PACE's previous programs based outside the school system,
Binswanger now looked for a project that would have a visible impact on the system. But it had to be readily achievable, according to what Calkins would come to call the “Binswanger theory”: Tackle the easy stuff first. Binswanger settled on carrying out Recommendation 17 of the PACE report: “By 1965 every school in Cuyahoga County should have a well-equipped library.” Shockingly, having in a simpler era relied on the Cleveland Public Library to serve students, none of Cleveland’s 33 elementary schools had such a facility, and by December 1964 PACE had set up a gift drive under the able direction of board member Helen Bond that would allow individuals and organizations to establish and furnish a school library for $7,500 to $10,000 (federal funds purchased the books).

The project was, as Binswanger recognized, an easy sell, and more than $300,000 was raised, a sum sufficient to establish libraries in all Cleveland public elementary schools and eight Catholic and three Lutheran elementary schools located in the central city as well. The Cleveland Foundation sponsored two libraries, while the Associated Foundation donated $28,000 to place a selected bibliography of books on race relations in the library of every school operated by the Cleveland Board of Education. Because the schools lacked the funds to staff the new facilities, PACE also undertook the challenge of finding and training library assistants, a program that mobilized 1,900 volunteers.

Among the first to sponsor libraries were Cleveland’s May Company department store, the East Ohio Gas Company and the Kulas Foundation. Their commitments were made on the spot by their respective officers at the end of a meeting of the Businessmen’s Interracial Committee on Civic Affairs, at which Paul Briggs gave a progress report on his first six months as superintendent. The meeting marked the beginning of a tradition that served the cause of better public relations for the Cleveland school system well: Briggs began making annual state-of-the-schools addresses to the business community, first to BICCA and later to the Chamber of Commerce, where his remarks were often greeted with a standing ovation.

Briggs’s first report to BICCA was made on January 23, 1965, at which time he briefed the businessmen on his plans to establish a magnet Supplementary Education Center, one of the few attempts at integrating students made during his 14-year administration.

When Briggs concluded his report, BICCA reaffirmed its vote of con-
fidence in the superintendent and pledged its continuing assistance. Briggs subsequently invited four members of BICCA’s education subcommittee to sit on the advisory committee for the Supplementary Education Center (the first in the nation). The advisors helped in obtaining a temporary location for the center in the Erieview urban renewal area, as well as in persuading BICCA members from industry to donate science exhibits. Subcommittee member (and Associated Foundation trustee) Frank Joseph, whose affiliation with the Kulas Foundation brought him in contact with every musical organization in greater Cleveland, single-handedly set up the center’s chamber music concert series.

The concept of a magnet school had first been introduced in the PACE report on integration—a reflection of the trust that Paul Briggs had come to place in Bob Binswanger.

The director of PACE had lost no time in establishing his organization as a source of assistance for the new superintendent. Because the school system had no public information officer, it was Binswanger who had drafted and disseminated the press release officially announcing Briggs’s appointment. Recognizing that the job of school superintendent is a lonely one, Binswanger had also moved quickly to establish himself as a friend, sending Briggs a clever note of congratulations four days after the superintendent was hired. ("As that internationally renowned group of singers known as the Beatles would say, 'Yeah!' 'Yeah!' 'Yeah!'") The note marked the beginning of a three-year-long private correspondence between the two men (who soon had taken to addressing one another, jokingly, as "the Man from PACE" and "the Man from the Establishment") in which Binswanger paved the way for the implementation of PACE’s school program with a steady stream of inside information, banter and praise. Binswanger soon learned that the best tactic for improving the Cleveland educational system was to let the superintendent take credit for PACE’s ideas.

PACE’s behind-the-scenes coaching resulted in many of the reforms Briggs initiated in his early years as superintendent. Speaking to the business community on the achievements of his first five years on October 15, 1969, Briggs would offer the following list:

The system has 1,000 more teachers; in 1964 it had 400 classrooms without teachers. Kindergarten classes are available to every child. There are 3,000 volunteers as against none in 1964.
In 1964 there were no elementary school libraries. Last year 134 such libraries (system-wide) circulated 3.25 million books. The system established free breakfast and lunch programs.

It has built more than 800 new classrooms housing 25,000 children. The Supplementary Education Center has opened. Vocational education has jumped 500 percent, summer school enrollment 800 percent, college enrollment by inner-city youth 100 percent.

Most of the advances could be traced back to PACE.

Take the teacher shortage. Recognizing that the Cleveland public schools faced this problem, Bob Binswanger had in 1965 conceived of an internship program in which returned Peace Corps volunteers were recruited to teach full-time while working toward master of arts (MAT) degrees in a special urban education program initiated at Western Reserve University. The program brought 75 Peace Corps volunteers to Cleveland. More importantly, it served as a prototype for the training of liberal arts graduates at several other local colleges that produced another 300 teachers for the Cleveland system. (Grants from the Associated and Cleveland Foundations subsidized the original program.)

Free school meals? Again, it had been the PACE Association, working with the Committee to Support Our Schools, that won approval from the Cleveland Board of Education in 1964 to start a pilot hot lunch program in 10 Cleveland schools. The program had been launched before Briggs was hired. In 1965, PACE’s Vocational Information Program counseled thousands of junior high schoolers in Greater Cleveland on career opportunities through seminars, field trips and observation days at various local businesses, undoubtedly fueling the students’ increased interest in seeking vocational or college educations.

Even the schools’ Office of Volunteers, set up by a former PACE trustee, was originally Binswanger’s idea. In October 1965 he had been invited to make his first official appearance before the Cleveland Board of Education. Since he had already been on the job some two years, Binswanger wasted no time in sticking his foot farther inside the door, successfully urging that the school administration be empowered to explore the possibilities of a dynamic volunteer program. “The school system does not have enough money to provide the ‘extras’—the person-to-person attention, the new and innovative programs, the unusual enrichment experiences,” he observed, “... but we do have a reservoir of talented, capable, responsive citizens who desire to share in the
process of education.” The Barnstormer knew whereof he spoke. By the
time he left Cleveland for a position as an assistant professor of education
at Harvard in the spring of 1966, approximately 20,000 volunteers had
participated in PACE programs.

Although the Associated Foundation was to provide the PACE As-
association with operating support for another three years after Binswan-
ger’s departure, Norton suspected that the organization had peaked.

Fueled by its success in winning a truce with the United Freedom
Movement for the Cleveland schools, the Businessmen’s Interracial Com-
mittee on Community Affairs had moved quickly to remedy another
source of frustration in the inner city: the inability of blacks to live
wherever they chose.

At the very first meeting of BICCA’s housing subcommittee in 1964,
the blacks had identified their principal problems as discrimination by
banks, real estate brokers and home builders; the city’s urban renewal
policies; absentee ownership of central-city housing; and the need for fair
housing legislation.

Given the ties of commerce between the Cleveland banks and the
businessmen on the committee, resolving the first problem had been the
matter of a few months’ negotiation. On August 28, barely three weeks
after the school truce was forged, Jack Reavis announced at a news con-
ference that BICCA had won a pledge from all eight of the city’s com-
mmercial banks that each would make residential loans to any creditworthy
customer regardless of color, race or religion. Reavis hailed the agreement
as “another Cleveland first”—a claim the NAACP’s Harold Williams,
a member of the housing subcommittee, substantiated.

“The proof of the pudding is in the eating, of course,” Williams
explained to the newspapers, “but this obviously is an unprecedented
step—a forward stride in the whole field of housing. I don’t think any
other city has gone this far. The majority of Negroes perhaps will not
benefit immediately from the banks’ pledge, but more housing will be-
come available all along the line.”

Indeed, the day before the news conference, the housing subcom-
mittee had taken its first step toward helping to open up the entire
greater Cleveland housing market to blacks—an unpopular and lengthy
crusade, of which both BICCA and its silent partner, the Associated
Foundation, were early leaders. To begin its investigation of why 95
percent of all black families in the county lived within city boundaries, the subcommittee had invited one of its own members, state representative Carl Stokes, to speak at its August 27 meeting. Stokes, who had in 1962 become the first black Democrat to be elected to the Ohio House of Representatives, briefed the committee about a fair housing bill that he had sponsored, which had been defeated by the Ohio legislature. Only one person commented on Stokes's presentation, expressing his opinion that "property rights are the cornerstone of our system of private enterprise and [that] fair housing] laws tend to undermine individual initiative and rights."

Jack Reavis later informed Stokes that if the legislator would make certain modifications to his bill, Reavis would push for its enactment. As part of the strategy, the retooled bill exempting owner-occupied single- and two-family dwellings was introduced in the 106th General Assembly not by black Democrat Stokes but by a white Republican. Also part of the strategy was Stokes's concurrent sponsorship of a much tougher bill to draw the fire of opponents. Reavis's partner, Seth Taft, went to Columbus to testify on behalf of the more moderate measure, which passed.

Several days prior to the law's taking effect on October 30, 1965, Reavis again went to bat for it, releasing a statement to the press urging compliance in an attempt to quash a movement then afoot in the real estate industry to place a referendum on the ballot to nullify the new fair housing act. Behind the scenes, Norton recalled, Reavis "got on the telephone and called in chips around the state, explaining to people: 'You're going to cause more trouble in the long run than you will if you go through with it.'" The referendum never materialized.

In the meantime the housing subcommittee, having decided after months of meeting with various experts in the field that it needed help in putting together a coherent program, approached the Associated Foundation for a modest grant to hire consultants to conduct a comprehensive study of the greater Cleveland market. Begun in late 1965, the $2,000 study reached two simple but energizing conclusions: If the living conditions of Cleveland's blacks were to be improved, somebody needed to push, and push hard, for fair housing to be carried out, especially in the all-white suburbs; and somebody needed to work in earnest on rehabilitating the city's dilapidated housing stock. Deciding to focus its energies on the former, BICCA set about organizing and fund-
ing the Fair Housing Council, a professionally staffed coordinating agency for the more than 40 community and neighborhood groups it had discovered working on open housing, largely independently of each other; while the Associated Foundation decided to tackle the latter by the tried-and-true means of forming a citizens’ task force called PATH. 7

Concurrent with these developments in Cleveland, the Urban League had approached the Ford Foundation with a proposal for a national demonstration project to improve minority housing opportunities called Operation Equality. When Dolph Norton, a longtime Urban League member, had caught wind of the proposal, he made it his business to coordinate efforts to ensure that Cleveland was included as one of the eight test cities (the promise of matching funds being a critical part of the coordination); and when Ford had announced that it was committing $1.6 million to Operation Equality, it was he who had brought BICCA’s Fair Housing Council together with the Cleveland Urban League to ensure that each would have a complementary role in carrying out the local demonstration project (the promise of funding for the Housing Council’s work on the project again being critical to the negotiations).

On November 3, 1966, the Associated Foundation and The Cleveland Foundation announced that they would match a Ford Foundation grant of $180,000 over three years to launch Operation Equality in Cleveland. (A side grant of $67,500 was made to the Fair Housing Council for the same period.) Four field offices were immediately set up in Cleveland to provide “assistance” to black families eager to find homes (and financing) in white areas. In actuality, the field workers were supposed to locate blacks brave enough to move onto an all-white street and then serve as their unofficial real estate agent, according to Norton, who worried about the pressure that might be brought to bear on the Associated Foundation’s trustees for supporting such activities.

“This was blockbusting, this was forced integration,” he explained. “It was a bold step for this group. After the grant was passed and the committee had gone out with some trepidation, Kent Smith and Barbara Rawson and I started talking about what’s going to happen when Ellwood Fisher is at a cocktail party and somebody comes up and starts giving him hell.”

It was decided that Kent Smith would send a letter to his fellow board members, stating (as Norton remembered its contents) that “you’re going to be asked at cocktail parties about this grant, and when I’m
asked, I’m going to explain it and say I’m proud of it.” Rawson drafted the letter in language as strong as she dared and was pleasantly surprised when Smith sent her back to the typewriter to strengthen the statement. “That took courage,” Norton would later say of his chairperson’s stand. “Took more than most people nowadays would even recognize.”

Ironically, after two years in business, Operation Equality had helped to relocate only 200 black families. Walk-in traffic at the field offices had been lighter than expected, and most of those who dropped by were looking for apartments for under $100 a month. (The Fair Housing Council had met with greater success in its work, conducting a campaign that saw 45 out of the county’s 60 municipalities pass fair housing resolutions.) With the enactment of the 1968 Civil Rights Act containing a national fair housing provision, Operation Equality decided to shift its focus from providing services to individual clients to attempting to bring the real estate industry into compliance with the new law. Locally, the new campaign would start at ground zero; only a year before, the Cleveland Area Board of Realtors had rejected all the recommendations made by a committee that it had created expressly to develop human relations guidelines for its members.

By 1970, when both Ford and The Cleveland Foundation renewed their grants to Operation Equality, some progress toward integrating the suburbs could be discerned. Whereas 10 years before only one out of every 40 minority families in the county lived outside the city of Cleveland, now one out of eight lived elsewhere. Some would argue that the ghetto’s walls had merely been expanded, given the fact that five contiguous suburbs had absorbed 88 percent of all blacks in the county living outside the city’s boundaries. But Operation Equality continued to fight on, joining in the early seventies with the U.S. Department of Justice to file fair housing suits against several area apartment management firms. The suits resulted in consent agreements governing more than 10,000 units. By 1973, when its local foundation support finally expired, Cleveland’s Operation Equality was the last of the eight original demonstration projects around the country that was still in existence.