



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Delegate Magazine 1975

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[[images - three black and white photographs of exhibits at the National Urban League Conference]]

Urban League

History

The National Urban League grew out of the Committee on Urban Conditions among Negroes, which was formed in 1910 by a young Negro graduate student in social work at Columbia University, George Edmund Haynes, and Mrs. William H. Baldwin, Jr., a white woman who had been active in the League for the Protection of Colored Women. The League's objectives were the improvement of the industrial and living conditions of city Negroes, with special reference to the broadening of occupational opportunities. Interracial in composition, its sponsors included Julius Rosenwald, Roger Baldwin, Booker T. Washington, L. Hollingsworth Wood, Kelly Miller and the Negro journalist Fred R. Moore. The first chairman of its board was Edwin R. A. Seligman of Columbia University, and its executive officers were Haynes and Eugene Kinkle Jones, a Cornell graduate who had specialized in economics and sociology. He became its executive secretary in 1914.

With headquarters in New York, the Urban League soon had branches in major cities across the country. The sociologist Charles S. Johnson became in 1921 its director of research and investigation. In 1923 he founded the League's magazine *Opportunity*, *A Journal of Negro Life*, whose motto was "Not Alms, but Opportunity." The Urban League sought to overcome discrimination in employment and, by counsel and persuasion, to induce industries employing Negroes to give them opportunities for work and industrial training. It sought to have those plants and foundries which used Negroes only in jobs of unskilled labor to upgrade them according to ability. It sought to ease the difficulties of adjustment between white employer and black employees. It developed a program and set up fellowships for the training of young social workers. Some of the most distinguished personalities in that field gained their training and early experience through the Urban League. The annual conferences of the National Urban League became significant gatherings for social workers of both races from all over America.

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