

THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW NEGRO
DURING AND AFTER THE WAR

CLEVELAND GAZETTE

League Asks Full Manhood Rights

May 19, 1917

The National Equal Rights League, an organization founded by Boston activist William Monroe Trotter, was a small, militant civil rights organization. In contrast to Du Bois's view that black Americans should "close ranks" during World War I, League members did not believe that the struggle for equality on the home front should be put aside for the duration of the war. Instead, they pledged loyalty to the government at the same time they insisted that the American republic protect blacks' legal and civil rights. The Cleveland Gazette was an African American weekly newspaper.

BOSTON.—The Boston branch of the National Equal Rights League sends out the following memorial to the people of the United States. The league pledges loyalty to the government and asks that colored Americans be protected in their legal and civil rights along with other loyal citizens of the American republic.

The league in its memorial says:

"... As the United States of America enters this awful war the world speculates whether Americans of color will be loyal because of the denial of rights to a majority of them...."

"The Boston branch of the National Equal Rights League, meeting when the country is at war, realizing its responsibility as a branch of the only nation wide organization formed by and of and led by colored citizens to oppose race and color discrimination, declares false all charges of disloyalty...."

"Colored Americans would be less than human if they did not feel bitterly every bar from employment, from public accommodation, because of our race and color. Deep is the resentment against enforced segregation by city, state or the federal government whether in the civil or military service. But we have no thought of taking up arms against this our country. Ours it has been to save the government from

rebellion. This work of our fathers we shall not destroy. There is not gold enough in all the treasures of the nations of the earth to corrupt us, for it is not a question of money, but of equality of rights.

"To the national government which call[s] us all to war, to our fellow Americans of every race variety, we would appeal in the name of fair play of justice and humanity. We are all citizens of a common country.

"There is need no longer of subjection of Americans to the race prejudices of fellow Americans. In the presence of a common danger and a common obligation, with a war devastating Europe caused by racial clannishness and racial hatred, under Almighty God let the United States of America and the people thereof give up race persecution and persecution at home. Let the door of the workshop, the school, the college, the civil service, the army, the navy, the military school, the naval school now and henceforth open alike to every citizen of the republic without regard to race and without distinction of color. Let the right to travel, to vote, to have court protection be free, without barrier or denial.

"Give, Mr. President and all our governors, the same encouragement for volunteering or enlisting to white, to brown, to yellow, to black, Americans all, by vouchsafing the same free chance to enlist, to rise on merit, and on return home the same right to civil service and to civil rights without bar or segregation.

"Now is the time for all in authority to declare for the abolition of all racial discriminations and proscriptions and for all to join in our unphenated Americanism for victory under the favor of the God of all mankind...."