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Writing the History of Karamu House

Philanthropy, Welfare, and Race in Wartime Cleveland

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Like the majority of settlement houses, little is known about Karamu House's past. Founded at the end of the Progressive Era, rebuilt in the 1940s, and continuing, indeed thriving, to this day, scholarly neglect of the Karamu settlement in Cleveland, Ohio, is a subject worthy of explanation. As is the case with its more notable peers—Hull House in Chicago and the South End settlement in Boston, to name just two—scholars have tended to portray settlement houses as exemplary of the spirit and intention of progressive reformers, while failing to explore the histories of particular institutions. Most of what is written about such organizations is derived from former members, relayed from personal memory rather than archival records, and often hagiographic in delivery. This is certainly the case with Karamu House, a neighborhood settlement started by Cleveland's Second Presbyterian Church as the Playhouse Settlement in January 1914, and made famous by its later successes in drama and the arts.

Accounts that do discuss Karamu's past have tended to be organized around a few definite dates. This is an approach that compresses history into facile join-the-dot tales. Isolating particular moments in the past and

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arranging narratives around them is, nevertheless, a method of doing history with high purchase, especially, though by no means exclusively, within popular formats. Yet it is also an unhistorical method. With its emphasis on a few supposedly key moments, such an approach attempts to impose an order and coherence on events that contemporaries would have failed to recognize as true. This critique is by no means confined to the history of welfare institutions. Indeed, some of the best-known stories of the past revolve around the work performed by key “dates.” We might think, for example, of 1789 or 1968 for confirmation of this point, while recognizing that 9/11 and 7/7 will soon serve a similar function.¹ Identifying the problems inherent in this method of historical production, this essay will argue that such dates are themselves products of historical caricature, often fixed in place less by the significance that contemporaries accorded them than by the role they have assumed in later archival processes and narrative constructions. As Haitian scholar Michel-Ralph Trouillot has noted, this joint process of creating and selecting certain dates is objectionable both for its reductionism and also for the way in which it compromises the complexity of the past through its narration in the present. Authors of Karamu history who cite just a few dates—the settlement’s opening in 1914, the plant’s destruction through fire in October 1939, and the reopening in 1949—I will argue, have “impose[d] a silence upon all events surrounding the one being marked” and in turn have distorted the history of this institution. Focusing on the decade between 1939 and 1949, what follows is an attempt to propose a different way of narrating the past lives of institutions.²

For a number of reasons, it is fitting that the first scholarly account of Karamu House examines the years 1939–49. This was the decade in which the buildings familiar to present-day observers came into existence; the settlement was officially named Karamu House and rebuilt after a lengthy

1. The year 1789 commonly refers to the French Revolution; 1968 to the student uprisings in the U.S. and Europe; 9/11 to the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon; and 7/7 to the terrorist attacks in London in July 2005.

2. Michel-Ralph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1995), 117. There are few accounts of specific settlement houses, though the following offer brief glimpses of aspects of the movement and particular institutions: Ruth Hutchinson Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889–1930* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1992); Stuart Hecht, “Social and Artistic Integration: The Emergence of Hull House Theatre,” *Theatre Journal* 34 (May 1982): 172–82; Cathy L. James, “‘Not Merely for the Sake of an Evening’s Entertainment’: The Educational Uses of Theater in Toronto’s Settlement Houses, 1910–1930,” *History of Education Quarterly* 38 (Autumn 1998): 287–311; Howard J. Karger, “Phyllis Wheatley House: A History of the Minneapolis Black Settlement House, 1924 to 1940,” *Phylon* 47.1 (1986): 79–90; Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Hull House in the 1890s: A Community of Women Reformers,” *Signs* 10 (Summer 1985): 658–77; Mary Ann Stankiewicz, “Art at Hull House, 1889–1901: Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr,” *Women’s Art Journal* 10 (Spring–Summer 1989): 35–38.

funding campaign.³ Indeed, one of the most impressive achievements of this period was the amount raised by the settlement's staff and members toward the construction of a new plant. Following the fire of October 1939, trustees at the settlement calculated that they would need approximately \$500,000 to continue their work. After some ten years, not only had they achieved this feat but exceeded it, and all at a time when the United States was experiencing extensive economic uncertainty and Cleveland was undergoing considerable demographic transformation.⁴ To convey the enormity of their task, one recent estimate suggests that \$500,000 in 1939 is the equivalent of just less than \$10 million in 2000.⁵ These trends are even more impressive when one considers that they ran against the general trend of settlement houses, as the 1940s sounded a death knell for America's first generation of such institutions. Comprehending why it was that Karamu survived this turbulent period, and how it did so, has important ramifications for how we understand national patterns within this sector of the welfare system. Our task is made all the more enticing by the neglect scholars have shown to settlement houses during this period. Indeed, it is the case that most historians of the settlement movement have written about their subject within a frustratingly narrow framework, one that begins around 1880 and finishes shortly after the Wall Street crash of 1929. Locating the heyday of these institutions in the 1910s, the conventional narrative then traces a decline in settlements during the 1920s, only to conclude with the migration of settlers into the agencies of the New Deal in the 1930s.⁶ Examining the events of these years—while

3. Before May 1940, Karamu House operated under a variety of names, including the Playhouse and the Neighborhood Association. It changed its legal name in May 1940. Despite this, even a decade later some confusion still remained as to the institution's correct name, see "Memo: David Stevens with Russell Jelliffe," Mar. 14, 1951, folder 4620, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board, Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC), Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.

4. The best overview of the general demographic trends in these decades is found in Kimberley Philips, *Alabama North: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915–45* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1999). Figures for these changes can be found in *Hearing Before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights*, Cleveland, Ohio, April 1–7, 1966 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1967), 645–46.

5. See Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "Purchasing Power of Money in the United States from 1774 to 2005," www.MeasuringWorth.com, accessed Nov. 15, 2006.

6. This characterization aptly captures the trajectory of the following studies: Mina Carson, *Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885–1930* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990); Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890–1940* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1984); Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement House Movement, 1890–1945* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1993); Judith Ann Trolander, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1975). Trolander's centenary account of the settlement house movement does cover the period 1886–1986, though it too adheres to the familiar narrative of decline and withdrawal following the First World War. See, Judith Ann Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change: From the Settlement House Movement to Neighborhood Centers 1886 to the Present* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1987).

providing a corrective to such elegiac portrayals—also offers an insight into Cleveland’s race relations record, the role of philanthropic organizations in local projects, and the tenor of welfare thought in the period between the late 1930s and the early years of the Cold War.

FIRES, FUNDS, AND FAMOUS FRIENDS

Although the fire that took place at the settlement on Sunday, October 22, 1939, caused extensive damage to the original plant, it did not destroy the structure. In the years after the blaze, the staff frequently complained that they had to work in a building “where the oft patched walls and ceilings are literally falling down.”⁷ Reports of the actual incident in the city’s press relayed clearly what had happened to the Neighborhood Association, as Karamu House was originally titled. Fire had rendered the plant “useless for production for at least six weeks,” while damages were said to run between \$2,500 and \$5,000.⁸ The plant was damaged but not destroyed, according to newspaper accounts. Yet in press articles accompanying the settlement’s rebuilding campaign, which began in December 1941, and in pieces written subsequently about the institution, these distinctions were often overlooked, allowing those who had little contact with the plant either at the time or later to believe it really had all vanished that autumnal evening in 1939. “The two-story frame structure of the Gilpin Players at 3801 Central Ave., was destroyed by fire in October, 1939,” one report from the *Cleveland Press* informed readers following the opening of the new plant in 1949, no doubt in a flourish intended to convey the scale of the task faced by the settlement’s members. The settlement distributed promotional literature that spun a similar narrative: “the renovated poolroom, converted by loving care and arduous labor into a healthy, thriving theater, was reduced to embers and a pile of ashes as fire totally consumed it.”⁹ Fire, smoke damage, and water from the firemen’s hoses had indeed left much of the building beyond repair, especially the theater, but, after an inspection by the fire chief the following morning, it was decided that most of the plant could operate as before. And for most of the next decade it did so, almost daily.

7. Karamu House pamphlet, n.d. (ca.1941), box Jac-Jz, Za Van Vechten, Charles Van Vechten Papers (CVV Papers), Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

8. “Damage \$5000 as Fire Guts Home of Gilpin Troupe,” *Cleveland Call and Post*, Oct. 26, 1939, 3; “Fire Hits Home of Gilpin Players,” *Cleveland Press*, Oct. 23, 1939, 11.

9. *Karamu House: A Promise Fulfilled . . . A Goal in Sight* (Cleveland, Ohio: Sweetbriar, ca. 1954): 4, copy found in Humanities Room, New York Public Library (NYPL); *Karamu House: A Three Quarter Decade Commitment to Excellence* (Cleveland: n.p., 1991), 9, copy in author’s possession.

Within two days of the fire, the settlement's joint program with the Rutherford B. Hayes High School in downtown Cleveland resumed, with script readings and dance rehearsals once again occurring at the settlement house.¹⁰ As late as September 1947 it was admitted to officials at the Rockefeller Foundation that "the old property of Karamu House is still being used pending construction of the new theater unit."¹¹ Activities did not in fact cease in the decade between the fire and the official opening of the new facility in October 1949. Indeed, scholar's suggestions that the fire halted the institution's work are ironic given the vibrancy, success, and expansion that took place in the settlement's program during these years. As trustees were well aware, continuation, not cancellation, of the settlement's daily activities was an integral part of their plan to rebuild the institution.

The talented young artists and performers associated with the settlement enjoyed some of their greatest success during these years. Their feats regularly filled the city's press columns, and accolades accumulated. Karamu House groups not only toured but also were frequently invited to perform at neighboring institutions and organizations. And when they did, their shows not only won praise but also helped underline the importance of supporting trustees' efforts to raise funds. Painters and printers associated with Karamu earned much recognition for their talents in the years following the fire. Artists like Charles Sallée, Hughie Lee Smith, and Elmer Brown regularly took the top prizes at the Cleveland Art Gallery's May Show, and on a number of occasions they received recognition outside of the Western Reserve.¹² Their work toured exhibits and in January 1942, one month after the funding campaign had been launched, the American Association of Artists displayed work done at the settlement in an exhibit opened by Eleanor Roosevelt. It was an ideal way to open the funding campaign.

At the forefront of the efforts to raise the institution's profile were its long-standing ambassadors, the Gilpin Players. Named for the distinguished stage actor, Charles Gilpin, who had visited the settlement in the early 1920s and contributed toward the foundation of the group, the Gilpin Players quickly won the plaudits of the nation's theatrical press. By the early 1930s, the group was recognized as one of the country's leading black amateur dramatic organizations. Unlike the artists and dancers affiliated with Karamu, however, the fire dealt the settlement's acting groups a particularly harsh blow. Of all

10. See [Rowena Jelliffe] *Summary Report of the Joint Program of R.B. Hayes School and Karamu House* (Cleveland: 1940), 8, copy found in Humanities Room, NYPL.

11. Russell Jelliffe to W. W. Brierley, Sept. 26, 1947, folder 4620, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board, RAC.

12. The success of the artists associated with Karamu is hinted at in Rowena Jelliffe to Langston Hughes, Apr. 28, 1941, folder 1674, box 88, *Langston Hughes Collection*, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

the artists, the actors relied most on the building, but the stage had been severely damaged by the fire. To continue, the group had no choice but to tour, something they could do only if other Cleveland theaters offered them use of their facilities. Within hours of the fire, the city's Brooks Theater proclaimed its interest in staging the Gilpins, and the Western Reserve University's Eldred Hall Theater and Finney Chapel at Oberlin College followed with similar invitations.¹³ At the time, such offers were loudly praised as examples of the city's racially liberal outlook. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* could not restrain itself, headlining that "Art knows no frontiers, national or racial." "The truth of this is shown when the Cleveland Play House offers the use of the Brooks Theater to the Gilpin Players, the noted Negro dramatic company, for the month of November." Local residents shared such sentiments, as a letter to the editor of a rival paper confirmed: "Especially at this time when newspapers are so full of stories of intolerance and race hatred throughout the world here is something every citizen of Cleveland should be proud of," one proud local wrote. "The Play House has now proven that it is indeed a civic institution which stands for tolerance and fair play."¹⁴ What neither contemporaries nor the settlement's chroniclers mentioned, however, was the opposition the Gilpins occasionally encountered in these years.

Prior to the Hough Riots of July 1966, Clevelanders generally liked to believe that they lived in one of the nation's most tolerant cities. The first U.S. city to vote a black mayor into office, these popular assumptions have remained largely in place in the city even today. Yet beneath the surface, tensions seethed in Cleveland, just as they did in nearby Chicago and Detroit. Discriminatory practices and segregation occurred there just as much as in other northern cities. The difference was that in Cleveland, like in Chicago a few years later, the municipal authorities worked hard to conceal such incidents from public view. While it was common knowledge that the Gilpins had been offered use of the Brooks Theater and Eldred Hall, few knew of the venues from which they had been turned away.¹⁵

13. For reports that the Gilpins played at Finney and Eldred Hall theaters, see Russell Jelliffe to Langston Hughes, Feb. 26, 1940, folder 1674, box 88, James Weldon Johnson Collection (JWJ) Mss. 26, Langston Hughes Collection.

14. Editorial, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Oct. 26, 1939, 10, folder 499, box 28, Karamu House Papers, WRHS, Cleveland; Albert M. Brown to Editor, *Cleveland News*, clipping, October 1939, folder 499, box 28, Karamu House Papers.

15. Arnold Hirsch is the scholar who has done the most to uncover the way race relations were "managed" by municipal councils' special bureaus. Looking at Chicago in the 1940s–50s, Hirsch examined the "hush-hush" press policy pursued by that city's Commission on Human Relations. See his *Making The Second Ghetto: Race & Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), esp. chap. 2. Studying Cleveland's history implies the need for an earlier chronology than that supplied by Hirsch, while implying such practices ranged beyond just Chicago. The best examination of the Hough Riots of July 1966 can be found in Leonard Moore, *Carl B. Stokes and the Rise of Black Political Power* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2002), esp. 47–51.

Just as residents of the nearby township of Brecksville, Ohio, had opposed the settlement's summer camp in the early 1930s, the Gilpins faced equal resistance, details of which can only be found tucked away in private records. Indeed, the only evidence of opposition to the Gilpin's performing in certain areas of the city is from private letters penned by members of the settlement. In one such letter between Rowena Jelliffe and the poet Langston Hughes, the director told her friend how Cleveland's Cain Parks Theater had proved unwilling to let the group use its vacant property in the spring of 1942. Requests to stage a performance at Cain Parks had been greeted by a "flat refus[al]" from the Theater's organizers, Rowena wrote. Significantly, it was a decision supported by the city's mayor, Frank Lausche, a man the director believed had been "afraid of repercussions from his property value conscious clientele." Despite Karamu trustees' best efforts to lobby city authorities to reverse their decision, Rowena was forced to conclude dejectedly that "the Mayor was unmoved."¹⁶ Only by careful manipulation of public records has Cleveland been able to maintain the image of its racial liberality. As future mayor Carl Stokes would later remember in his memoirs, "the white mentality, and its ability to wrench self-congratulation out of the simple maintenance of its old, predictable ways, quickly created the myth . . . that Cleveland was a liberal city, committed to reform."¹⁷ The Gilpins' experience confirms the veracity of Stokes's opinion.

If local press reports are to be believed, the fire that damaged the plant probably did not shock trustees too much. Two previous, much smaller fires had already taken place in the course of 1938–39. Indeed, it may have been this spate of fires at the settlement house that provided younger members with the experience necessary to win a city accolade for spotting fire hazards, ironically just five months before the more serious blaze struck in October 1939.¹⁸ Moreover, in the weeks preceding the third fire, trustees and members had devoted many meetings to thinking about the future of the institution: where it should be located, whether a new one ought to be built, and what activities it should encompass. The fire did little to alter the tenor of these conversations. Indeed, thinking about the settlement's future, in particular the adequacy of its structures, was an overarching trait of its history between the early 1920s and late 1930s. One reflection of the continuity that existed between pre- and postfire scheming was the fact the architectural plans ultimately submitted to the Rockefeller Foundation in

16. Rowena Jelliffe to Langston Hughes, Apr. 22, 1942, folder 1675, box 88, Langston Hughes Collection.

17. Carl B. Stokes, *Promises of Power: A Political Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 73.

18. "Playhouse Settlement's Fire Wardens Receive Award," *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 11, 1939, 12.

1941 had been presented to the settlement's board as early as January, 31, 1939, nine months before the fire.¹⁹ To focus on just the occasion and date of the fire is to miss such overlaps in the fabric of the settlement's life.

Long before the fire struck, board members were already on first-name terms with members of major philanthropies, like the Rockefeller Foundation and, to a lesser extent, the Carnegie Corporation. This was no idle exchange of letters either, for on occasions monies had been received too. In the early part of 1939, for example, the Rockefeller Foundation transferred \$1,200 to the association to provide a salary for the distinguished playwright Ridgeley Torrence, who was about to start a three-month stint studying the settlement's copious play material.²⁰ Recognizing the crucial role played by private foundations and philanthropic bodies is something historians have hesitated to do, and yet, arguably, their influence by midcentury equalled, if not overshadowed, that of the diabolized community chest.²¹ Similarly, devising ways of raising money, admittedly on a much smaller scale, was a regular part of life at the settlement.²² Overseeing these efforts were the settlement's experienced husband-and-wife directors, Russell and Rowena Jelliffe.

The Jelliffes had moved to Cleveland in the summer of 1915 and quickly built up an admirable reputation and list of friends. By the 1940s they were treasured by Cleveland society. Paul Bellamy, the aged editor of the city's *Plain Dealer* newspaper observed in 1953, with only a little hyperbole, that the Jelliffes "are everywhere received as having a little less stature than the saints."²³ Arriving at the settlement house fresh from their graduate studies in the University of Chicago's social work program, the pair had been chosen for their professional qualifications, businesslike manner, and settling experience, attributes that challenge conventional histories of the settlement movement.²⁴ In an interview conducted on her behalf, writer Arna Bon-temps described Rowena Jelliffe as "well-groomed and . . . attired in good taste. She wore a tailored blouse of white silk trimmed with lace, a tailored skirt of gray wool, tan walking shoes of leather which matched her bag. Her hair was in a modified version of the snood. Her jewels were a string of pearls and pearl ear-bobs." The writer concluded, "My grandmother would call her

19. See the plans included in "Application for a grant of monies for capital account and endowment purposes," folder 3093, box 259, series 200, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation, RAC.

20. Russell Jelliffe to George J. Beal, Jan. 14, 1939, folder 3092, box 259, series 200, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation.

21. For discussion of the funding of settlement houses, see Trolander, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression*.

22. "Playhouse Settlement Scholarship Drive," *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 25, 1939, 7.

23. Paul Bellamy to Dr. Charles Fahs, Mar. 28, 1953, folder 3236, box 357, series 200, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation.

24. For the argument that settlement workers only began to wield Masters of Social Work qualifications in the decades after World War II, see Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 31.

a ‘perfect lady.’”²⁵ The manner in which the Jelliffes directed the funding campaign exemplified these traits of efficiency, competence, and expertise. It was a reflection of their genteel, rather patrician upbringing that neither Russell nor Rowena Jelliffe ever claimed any skill in raising money though. As Russell humbly confided to Carl Van Vechten on one occasion in 1946, “Mrs Jelliffe and I . . . were certainly never fashioned nor trained to undertake the task of money raising on any major scale.”²⁶ Such deference became a continuous refrain of their letters in these years. “No two people were ever so poorly equipped to undertake such a major task,” Russell wrote another supporter in the early months of the postwar.²⁷ When they were asked in later years about their success in raising the necessary funds, the pair remained equally modest, brushing aside any suggestion that they were well suited to such campaigns. In the only published account of the couple, the writer John Selby noted that fund-raising was “a strange world” to them.²⁸

But the pair’s humility only went so far. If the Jelliffes made such comments as a ploy to win sympathy from prospective backers, then friends and professional correspondents rarely let such comments pass without setting them straight. “You give me special credit for the spirit you possess naturally, I am sure,” David Stevens, head of the Rockefeller Foundation’s humanities program answered Russell in 1941, “and I know you are quite capable of keeping after funds without my encouragement.”²⁹ And it was these more honest assessments that provided a better reflection of the couple’s uncanny abilities in overseeing their funding efforts. As both Russell and Rowena showed at various stages of the campaign, they were unrivaled in tapping up prospective backers and knew exactly whom to approach and when. Despite the prodigious number of fund-raising letters they mailed, they were always careful to frame applications in ways that they knew would win the most positive assessment from particular programs. They were also tenacious. The slightest indication that someone was willing to give a dollar, frequently invited a further letter making the case for two. When, in later years, the Rockefeller Foundation casually informed them that it might be willing to provide \$7,500 toward the salary of one staff member perhaps over the course of two years, the pair began a campaign to match this amount from the city of Cleveland. Weeks later when Rocke-

25. Anon. to Arna Bontemps, Oct. 19, 1944, folder 5, box 1, JWJ Mss. 6, Arna Bontemps Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

26. Russell Jelliffe to Carl Van Vechten, Mar. 9, 1946, folder Za Van Vechten, box Jac-Jz, Charles Van Vechten Papers.

27. Russell Jelliffe to Paul Green, Jan. 22, 1946, reel 23, Paul Green Papers (microfilm), Wilson Library, University of North Carolina (UNC), Chapel Hill.

28. John Selby, *Beyond Civil Rights* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1966), 115.

29. David H. Stevens to Russell Jelliffe, Jan. 28, 1941, folder 4619, box 440, RG 950, General Education Board.

feller officers informed them that they had been successful in securing the money for a year, they expressed their “deep . . . regret [for] the limitations which your officers have seen fit to impose on us. It was our hope . . . that your grant might run for a period of at least two years.” Adding that their matching benefactors were supporting the program on the understanding that the Rockefeller Foundation would be providing funds for a period of at least three years, the Jelliffes tried to force the hand of one of their most crucial backers. It was a masterful stroke, and a reflection of just how savvy Russell and Rowena were in dealing with such matters.³⁰

But along with the efficiency with which they ran their campaign, their record was also characterized by extreme hard work. Perhaps as proof of their commitment to the future of the institution, they rarely ceased their work during holidays. Russell would dispatch just as many letters on December 26 as on any other day. Their doughty attitude to life and to the ordeal of raising such large sums shone through in their more personal correspondence. “Stamina, patience and a ‘chins up’ attack keep us believing that in some way we will win out,” they enthused to their friend and supporter Noel Sullivan, in September 1947.³¹

Accounts that narrate the history of Karamu, with the Jelliffes placed firmly at the center, are common and understandable. Indeed, even their contemporaries agreed the couple was synonymous with the institution. Yet it needs to be remembered that they were not the only ones working at the settlement or involved with its funding campaign. Indeed, oftentimes, they could have done little without the assistance of fellow staff, residents, and trustees.

Trustees proved equally as active as the Jelliffes in contacting their famous acquaintances. The coal magnate Leonard Hanna told his good friend Judith Anderson, the Tony Award-winning stage actress, about the settlement’s plight prompting a swift donation and offer of further support from her.³² In making these connections with the region’s glitterati, no one proved more useful than the famed writer and poet Langston Hughes, a former resident at the settlement and a close friend of the couple. On a number of levels it was Hughes and other members like him who were greatly responsible for the success and direction of the funding campaign. Both Russell and Rowena clearly understood this, a fact signalled by the tone of the first letters they mailed Hughes following the fire. “This is an S.O.S.,” Russell wrote five weeks after the fire. “[W]e need your help now as never before.”³³ Fortunately,

30. Russell Jelliffe to Robert July, Jan. 6, 1950, folder 4620, box 440, RG 950, General Education Board.

31. Russell and Rowena Jelliffe to Noel Sullivan, Sept. 10, 1947, box 42, Noel Sullivan Papers, University of California Berkeley.

32. Russell Jelliffe to Noel Sullivan, Dec. 10, 1948, box 42, Noel Sullivan Papers.

33. Russell Jelliffe to Langston Hughes, Dec. 1, 1939, folder 1674, box 88, Langston Hughes Collection.

they received it in abundance. If he was not supplying contact details for the rich, famous, and influential friends he had made in the course of his career, Hughes was sending letters of support encouraging prospective backers, occasionally serving as something of a Greek chorus for their funding efforts. Frequently Russell would write Hughes telling of conversations he had had with wealthy patrons, and requesting that Hughes might take the matter up with them at a later date. Told of the possibility that the Karamu artists' work might be displayed by the American Association of Artists in New York City, Rowena's letter to Hughes was typical: "Do you know anyone [on the American Association of Artists] board?" "All exhibits are arranged by a committee," she pointed out, "and a note to anyone you knew on that board . . . might reinforce our case a lot."³⁴

Exemplary of the role Hughes played in these years was the couple's trip to the West Coast in April 1947. It was a trip both Russell and Rowena hoped would allow them to raise adequate capital to begin construction of the facility, and for which they sought to approach wealthy residents of Hollywood who previously had expressed interest in their work. Having worked and resided in the region on and off for a number of years, Hughes proved a major boon in the organization of the trip. Prior to the couple's departure for California the writer mailed a handful of carefully worded letters to his friends and professional acquaintances, introducing the Jelliffes and calling attention to Karamu's plight. One of those he wrote was Charles Leonard, a man Hughes had first befriended when the pair shared a number of writing jobs through the early 1940s. By the time Hughes wrote his old friend in April 1947, just a week before the Jelliffes' anticipated arrival in Hollywood, Leonard was working as a public relations officer for the Oscar-winning actor James Cagney, and, as such, was a man who could ensure the couple got introduced to the most likely backers.³⁵ Wealthy Californian Noel Sullivan, a former patron of Hughes and a man deeply sympathetic toward his bon vivant and reclusive lifestyle, also received a letter from the middle-aged writer. Sullivan had supported Hughes when the writer returned from the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s, not least by offering him exclusive use of his Carmel-by-the-Sea cottage for a year. Following an explanation from Hughes as to the couple's situation, the wealthy patron did likewise for Russell and Rowena when they were in town a decade later.³⁶ Finally, Hughes and his

34. Rowena Jelliffe to Langston Hughes, July 18, 1940, folder 1674, box 88, Langston Hughes Collection.

35. For Hughes's friendship with Charles Leonard see Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes: I Dream a World* (1986; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1:391. Langston Hughes to Charles Leonard, Apr. 10, 1947, folder 1675, box 88, Langston Hughes Collection. A fuller description of Hughes's relationship with Leonard can be found in Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, vol. 2.

36. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 1:chap. 11.

well-known association with the settlement's Gilpin Players served as a rallying point for encouraging people to give generously. Needing a new focus for their campaign, beyond just the general plea of rebuilding the settlement, trustees hit on the idea of naming their new theater after Hughes. The idea was quickly embraced. With furnishings said to cost around \$10,000, Sullivan gave generously, immediately contributing \$2,000 and adding to that figure in later months; Amy Spingarn, wife of the former president of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), and a benefactor of Hughes during the 1920s, donated \$500.³⁷

More obvious, in terms of the contribution made to the funding campaign, were the roles members like Hughes assumed in giving generously of their own time and labor. Occasional lectures by the writer would bring in a couple of hundred dollars for the fund, as well as a few lines in the city's newspapers. For trustees, perennially troubled by the size of the figure they had to raise, it must have been reassuring to receive Hughes' pledge that "if at [any] time [when I am in Cleveland] I can be of any use, if I can give for you a public (or private) talk or reading, or in any way help to raise money locally, I will be only too happy to do so."³⁸ Hughes was by no means alone in turning his talents to raising money, and it is one of the defining traits of Karamu's history during this period, that all groups' activities assumed such a role.

SOCIAL WORK AND WAR

If most historians consider the fire of 1939 as the greatest impediment to Karamu's work during the 1940s, those living through the early 1940s equally credited the war and its associated disruptions. "We still make progress in spite of the heavy competition of the European War," Russell informed the Rockefeller Foundation in early 1941. Through its first year of operation, the funding campaign was carried on in a country divided and anxious about its own role in world affairs and in an austere economic climate geared toward servicing wartime needs. The nation's entry into the conflict in December 1941, and the official launch of the Karamu funding campaign that same month, had an even closer coincidence. "Starting our campaign for the larger Karamu program on December 5, 1941 (two days prior to Pearl Harbor), we were at the outset seriously affected by the war," Russell wrote Van Vechten in the weeks before the construction of the new facility. U.S.

37. Russell Jelliffe to Charles Van Vechten, Aug. 14, 1947, folder Za Van Vechten, box Jac-Jz, Charles Van Vechten Papers.

38. Langston Hughes to Russell Jelliffe, Jan. 15, 1940, folder 1764, box 88, Langston Hughes Collection.

involvement in the conflict posed a number of serious problems for Karamu House. Understanding the impact of the conflict helps explain some of the reasons other settlement houses struggled to survive post 1945.³⁹

Staff at the settlement were naturally affected by the war, and many were either drafted into the military or at least joined the city's booming wartime industries. "The Gilpins are now scattered far and wide," Rowena wrote when U.S. involvement in the war was just five months old. With the region's War Labor Board located in the Union Commerce Building in the heart of downtown Cleveland, new contracts and factories sprang up throughout the Cuyahoga Valley, and employment in the city rose 34 percent in the four years between 1940 and 1944. But such industries affected work patterns too, and frequently staff and members had to reduce the hours they could spend at the settlement. Disruptions to shows and social work programs were frequent. The settlement's singers, a group formed with Marjorie Witt Johnson's dancers in the late 1930s, were forced to decline any number of shows in the early years of the war. "They were invited to sing at the Army War Show just here, but couldn't because too many of them (in defence industries) had to work that Friday night," Rowena told Hughes on one occasion.⁴⁰ Shortages of trained staff members also placed a strain on Karamu's social-work program. "Could do a lot if we had workers, but the army takes them steadily from us. Fess is gone. Carl is gone. (Both in the army.) Frank Less is in the army, and Beatty . . . Paul is facing a call, as well as Andy."⁴¹ In the years immediately following the war, a number of the settlement's staff continued the exodus by relocating to suburban communities just outside the city—all part of the growing number of aspiring middle-class African American families who were responding to the economic and demographic processes set in motion by the conflict.⁴² The inconveniences caused by the fire paled in comparison to the disruptions posed by wartime. And yet the settlement continued and even thrived despite these dual challenges.

Considering what other scholars have written about Karamu's history, one might think that the settlement provided nothing more than "cultural-arts" activities, as one account has termed it. With the prominence enjoyed by groups like the Gilpin Players, the Karamu Dancers, and other artists, a number of leading scholars have recently argued that by the 1930s the Neighborhood Association did little more than cater to middle-class African Ameri-

39. Russell Jelliffe to David H. Stevens, Feb. 1941, folder 4619, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board; Russell Jelliffe to Charles Van Vechten, Mar. 9, 1946, folder Za Van Vechten, box Jac-Jz, Charles Van Vechten Papers.

40. Rowena Jelliffe to Langston Hughes, Sept. 24, 1942, folder 1675, box 88, Langston Hughes Collection.

41. Rowena Jelliffe to Langston Hughes, Mar. 30, 1943, folder 1675, box 88, Langston Hughes Collection.

42. Andrew Weise, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004), esp. chap. 4.

cans. Cleveland's black residents who lived on "dead-end street," one scholar wrote, received little by way of welfare provision. Such observations, however, are based on a reading of the settlement's more obvious and public projects and fail to take account of those activities that took place on an everyday basis inside the settlement's crumbling walls. For during this period, Karamu emphasized social work and, particularly, education. It was such emphases that confirmed the settlement's place within the city's welfare armory.⁴³

Confirmation that the Karamu program was dedicated to social work and educational programs in these years came by way of an impromptu visit from the head of the Rockefeller Foundation's humanities program, David Stevens, in the fall of 1948. Following his visit to the settlement, Stevens wrote in the settlement's grant file that the institution was functioning as "a community service center as well as a center for . . . developments of dramatic and artistic quality."⁴⁴ Other visitors offered comparable assessments about Karamu's program during this decade. Two years prior to Stevens's visit, John McDonell, director of an interracial settlement house in Pittsburgh, compiled a report on Karamu on behalf of the National Federation of Settlements. In that document, he described Karamu's program as being one "primarily educational in emphasis with a sharpening of emphasis on the point of the cultural arts." Having observed the daily routine of the plant, McDonell refused to support the view that Karamu was solely concerned with the arts, countering that the greater attention he saw being given to dance, painting, and drama was principally due to Karamu's wartime "inability to get the quality of staff desired" for its educational and social action programs. Writing in detail that revealed his solicitous examination of Karamu's program, McDonell pointed to the settlement house's work with Cleveland's Institute of Family Services and the processes by which local agencies referred their clients to Karamu for advice and training, as evidence of the group's commitment to such issues.⁴⁵

Karamu's interest in social work was not just as a referral agency, however. Staff members were also encouraged to use the settlement's resources to devise their own programs, and in that way the institution's infrastructure remained suitably supportive of member-led programs. The program that best conveyed this was one that Karamu officially established in early 1939 with the Rutherford B. Hayes High School, a downtown school at which

43. Typical of these views is Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn's account, *Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement House Movement, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1993).

44. "Internal Memorandum: David H. Stevens," Oct. 28, 1948, folder 4620, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board.

45. John McDonell, "Field Report on Visit to Karamu House," Mar. 4, 1946, folder 44, box 464, National Federation of Settlements, Elmer Anderson Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

one of the settlement's staff served as principal. Examination of internal reports produced for the program clearly demonstrate that members' involvement in such schemes was anything but dilettantish.⁴⁶

Enterprises like these with neighboring schools, as well as formal attempts to establish a youth community center—the Karabar—in 1941, all sprung from the same intentions as those that supported the better-known dramatic companies. Indeed, to set the settlement's artistic and craft groups apart from social and welfare concerns is to mistake the contours of welfare thought in these decades. For drama, dance, and other forms of artistic expression were held by some to be not at all irrelevant to the kinds of issues that commonly occupied social workers:

It is only recently that the power of the drama as a living force in daily life has been appreciated. Not only is it an educational force along intellectual and spiritual lines, but it offers first hand to the individual, a vision of the possibilities of self employment and self equipment for the positive business of everyday existence.

So wrote Arthur Colt Holden, the New York City architect and polymath, in his definitive work *The Settlement Idea* [1922]. His sentiments were echoed in a report compiled on the settlement's involvement with the school. "Special attention was given throughout the program to furthering the child's vocal expression, believing that satisfactory reading and writing more readily follow ease of speech" one assessor thought. When Lillian Peck, the secretary of the National Federation of Settlements and *grande dame* of the movement, visited Karamu she too endorsed its artistic program as "consistent with good educational method."⁴⁷ Recreation and dramatic pursuits for staff at Karamu held, in much the same way as they had for earlier thinkers like Luther Gulick, the purpose of encouraging people to develop new ways of thinking about themselves and their surrounding environments. Offering opportunities for dance and drama were not marks of frivolity in the settlement's program but hallmarks of a commitment to a particular kind of approach to welfare. To argue, as a number of synthesising accounts have, that settlements that failed to look like the canonical institutions of the early twentieth-century were not really settlements is to miss the historically contingent nature of that term. As one article appearing in *Social Forces* in May 1936 stated succinctly, "The Settlement Scene Changes."⁴⁸

As well as the effects it had upon the everyday activity of the settlement,

46. *Summary Report of the Joint Program of R.B. Hayes School and Karamu House*, 7–8.

47. Lillian Peck to David H. Stevens, Oct. 25, 1939, folder 3092, box 259, series 200, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation.

48. Sidney J. Lindenberg, and Ruth Ellen Zittel, "The Settlement Scene Changes," *Social Forces* 14.4 (May 1936): 559–66.

the war also caused other, often unforeseen, problems for the settlement's fundraisers. Weeks before the D-Day landings, in spring 1944, Russell told his various sponsors of the inconveniences that the wartime economy had brought. "The war situation may clear within the year," Russell wrote optimistically, "and, if so, we may be able to secure materials which today are out of the market."⁴⁹ Not only did wartime demands ensure bricks and wood remained in short supply, but a dithering postwar economy wracked with spiralling inflation added to the settlement's woes. In September 1947, officials at the Rockefeller Foundation learned that the settlement would delay construction "until business conditions became stabilized."⁵⁰ Estimated costs spiralled exorbitantly in the five years between Pearl Harbor and Churchill's Iron Curtain speech. An internal memorandum composed by one funding source in late 1947 charted this rise: "the estimated costs of building and equipment," it read "in 1941, \$195,000; in 1946, \$330,000; in 1947, \$480,000."⁵¹ Only slightly fazed by the fact that the campaign's financial targets were always moving further away from their original total, the settlement's trustees responded by writing their existing backers to see if they would consider increasing their donations. Adding that construction costs were now forecast to be much higher than previously thought—"due to the war situation and the subsequent postwar rise in building material and labor costs"—Russell Jelliffe asked whether one backer would consider adjusting their offer accordingly. The donor, like most, proved sympathetic.⁵²

Wartime exigencies disrupted the daily life of many of the nation's settlement houses in a similar fashion: interrupting work schedules, shortening opening hours, tightening the purses of their backers. What set Karamu staff apart from their peers, however, was their realization that such a context also provided certain opportunities for advancement and consolidation. As Russell reflected years later, "the war years complicated our efforts in many ways and decidedly helped in others."⁵³ Rallying rhetoric from the nation's propaganda mills about democracy and freedom was thus appropriated by Karamu to describe its own "mission" in analogous terms. Sponsors were told that supporting the Karamu program was "in the interest of national defense and the long period of post-war adjustment."⁵⁴ "American

49. Russell Jelliffe to Dr. Jackson Davis, Apr. 12, 1944, folder 4619, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board.

50. "Interview: Russell Jelliffe and W. W. Brierley," Sept. 23, 1947, folder 4620, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board.

51. "Internal Memorandum: W. W. Brierley," Dec. 2, 1947, folder 4620, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board.

52. Russell Jelliffe to Dr. Jackson Davis, Mar. 16, 1946, folder 4620, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board.

53. Russell Jelliffe to Paul Green, Jan. 22, 1946, Paul Green Papers.

54. Fred C. Baldwin to Dr. Jackson Davis, Nov. 5, 1941, folder 4619, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board.

Democracy Must Be Strengthened in the face of present world crisis by an honest acceptance of the Negro as a positive, constructive force in our common society,” one of the settlement’s flyers proclaimed.⁵⁵ And Karamu billed itself as an institution that achieved such goals. Amidst the Truman Administration’s attempts to make civil rights central to its postwar agenda, and its efforts to refashion the distribution of welfare, the settlement’s universalist claims helped win for it a place within the newly configured American polity.⁵⁶ But the circumstances created by the war served as more than a publicity stunt. And it was a federal act introduced in the prosecution of the conflict that provided the means necessary to begin construction of the new plant. In light of the restrictions placed on private construction by wartime necessity, it was deeply ironic that the rebuilding of the settlement began because of measures enacted because of the conflict.

REBUILDING KARAMU

The idea that Karamu was rebuilt and reopened in October 1949, after a decade’s suspension in its program, and that construction proceeded from a single set of plans drawn up at the outset of the funding campaign in 1941, are beliefs that have framed popular memories of the institution. Both assumptions are typical of the rather simplistic way in which the history of institutions is written more generally, according to rigid dates and pat explanations. And yet neither is true, for it was the overriding success of Karamu’s funding campaign that it was able to adapt according to the circumstances it faced at any given moment. Costs of rebuilding the plant changed constantly over the course of these years, fluctuating with inflation rates, building estimates, trustees’ changing aspirations, and the generosity of donors. And, as such, designs were amended to reflect the influence of these factors. The rebuilding of Karamu then took place incrementally, a detail that to some extent gestures at its success in surviving these difficult years.

As correspondence with funding bodies revealed, trustees and staff at the Karamu settlement had been seriously engaged in thinking about rebuilding from the mid-1930s onwards. To that end, a building committee had been established to investigate how to proceed. Even without a fire—the event made central to the fund-raising campaign of the 1940s, and which subse-

55. “American Democracy Must Be Strengthened” (Karamu House pamphlet), folder 4620, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board. See also comments in “Statement for Carnegie-Myrdal Study, ‘The Negro in America’” (1941), folder 107, box 7, Russell and Rowena Jelliffe Papers, WRHS.

56. Harvard Sitkoff, “Harry Truman and the Election of 1948: The Coming of Age of Civil Rights in American Politics,” *Journal of Southern History* 37 (Nov. 1971): 597–616.

quent accounts have taken to be such a fundamental turning point in the settlement's past—the institution would have been rebuilt, probably at a different site too. Despite previous attempts throughout the 1930s to build a new plant, trustees' initial reactions following the fire were not principally concerned with rebuilding. In the early stages of the campaign, between the fall of 1939 and the spring of 1940, fund-raising efforts were done solely with the goal of raising \$200,000 “in order to put the Neighborhood Association in good working order and to endow part of its overhead.” As late as January 1941, fifteen months after the fire and eleven months before the funding campaign was officially announced, Fred Baldwin, President of the Karamu trustees, was requesting the Rockefeller Foundation provide the settlement with a donation of \$50,000 “for capital account purposes.” From the documents Baldwin included behind his letter it was clear that the majority of monies raised by Karamu were to be used as an endowment, not as a building fund.⁵⁷ Only in the rejection of this initial application and in the talks that followed with officers from the Rockefeller and Rosenwald Foundations were trustees persuaded of the benefits of constructing an entirely new plant. Reading the letters that passed between the staff of the settlement in Cleveland and the officers of the foundation in New York, makes it possible to discern also the influence private sponsors had on the course of particular settlement houses. Doing so provides an opportunity to intervene in one of the most settled debates within the historiography of settlements.⁵⁸

The decision to rebuild the Karamu settlement, and the particular form that plan took was actually reached through trustees' interactions with a number of agencies and figures outside of the settlement association, indeed outside of Cleveland. The next application that the Rockefeller Foundation received from the settlement's President looked quite different from the first when it arrived there in November 1941. Gone were any references to the ambiguously worded “capital account,” and instead the document was peppered with the more definite sounding “new building program.” Where earlier applications had suggested a portion of received monies would be used to expand the settlement's program in “related literary projects,” later applications focused solely on specific buildings, a “Theatre Unit, Administration Unit, Music Unit, Arts & Crafts Unit.” Estimated costs appeared alongside each of these details. The application was as much an indication of what trustees thought this particular philanthropic organization would be willing

57. See in particular “Interview: Russell Jelliffe with David H. Stevens,” Apr. 1, 1940, folder 3092, box 259, series 200, RG 1.1, Rockefeller Foundation; Fred C. Baldwin to David H. Stevens, Jan. 10, 1941, folder 4620, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board.

58. In her first work, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression*, Judith Trolander argued that community chests and other sources of outside financial backing perverted the settlement's original goals of social and economic reform.

to support as it was an acknowledgment of their own intentions. And so with other proposals. Few of these proposals were empty suggestions; hooks to catch the largesse of philanthropic backers; instead they were reflections of the organic and ever-changing nature of the funding campaign. As much as the settlement's trustees were directed by an awareness of what foundations would be willing to support, their conduct in these years equally demonstrates that they were far from supine recipients of such money.⁵⁹

Trustees' outlook toward the building of the new plant was characterized by dexterity in the way it responded to new opportunities. This was the case in January 1945 when the settlement began building on its new site following an agreement reached with the federal government to build a day-care unit at the Quincy Avenue and 89th Street plot. Up until this point, no mention had been made of any such provision at the new settlement, as a careful reading of the second application submitted to the Rockefeller Foundation would confirm. But by agreeing to the terms of the federal grant, the settlement not only gained important funds with which they could construct a small plant. More important were the expedited rights to build at a time when such privileges were scarce. Under the terms of the agreement, the government determined to provide \$32,000 toward the cost of building the structure—a figure eventually raised an additional \$10,000 to meet escalating labor costs—in return for Karamu's agreement to provide a day-care facility.⁶⁰

Having spoken with Russell on the phone shortly after work on the nursery unit commenced, Dr. Jackson Davis of the Rockefeller Foundation wrote that "RJ says the [day-care] program is needed more than ever in Cleveland and they are very anxious to get Karamu House built so as to take full advantage of their opportunity."⁶¹ The willingness to include a nursery at the new plant was an expedient move, and one that ended up unexpectedly expanding the settlement's program to include childcare. At the time it was built, however, no one was under any delusions as to what trustees intended for the building. More than half a year before the nursery building was finished, the Jelliffes wrote their friend Paul Green, the North Carolinian Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, telling him of their ultimate inten-

59. Trolander is deterministic in putting down the argument that finances secured from outside sources—whether private or public—always had a significant and, in her view, undesirable bearing on settlements. See *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression*, 9–10, 91, 150–51. She even extends this critique to the role of the federal government (*ibid.*, 158).

60. On the cost of the nursery see Russell Jelliffe to Langston Hughes, Dec. 4, 1944, folder 1675, box 88, Langston Hughes Collection. Indications that the federal donations were increased to \$42,000 are penciled in the margin of "Total Funds Raised in Cash and Good Pledges," May 21, 1947, folder 4620, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board. Karamu raised its donation to \$28,000.

61. "Internal Memorandum: Jackson Davis," Mar. 14, 1946, folder 4620, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board.

tions for the nursery. The buildings then intended for use as the child-care center, the couple informed Green, “will eventually become the graphic arts studios for painting, drawing, etc. and the craft shops for ceramics, metalcraft, sculpturing, etc.”⁶² Just months after the nursery opened, actors from the Gilpins were performing there, providing further opportunities to publicize the settlement’s work.⁶³ Over the years that followed, the settlement took advantage of other such opportunistic deals, incorporating elements previously un-thought of because money or favor suddenly became available to support it. And this willingness to adapt to the opportunities presented them was a crucial reason why the Karamu settlement continued where similar institutions in other cities faltered.

It was another eighteen months before any more construction took place at the new plot of Quincy Avenue and 89th Street. Increased costs and shortages of materials continued to frustrate members’ plans, and the likelihood of realizing their goal of building the intended settlement grew ever more distant. With little indication that costs would lower, and with the patience of donors wearing thin at the lack of activity, trustees at the settlement decided, nevertheless, to start building their new plant but according to a pared down plan, a plan B. Plan B was an attempt to build the original design while only partially furnishing its interior, completing the project as further funds became available. As well as a pragmatic response to the period’s economic fluctuations, the various difficulties involved in securing funds within the city itself also meant such an approach to fund raising was prudent. Beginning in the postwar years, Karamu did not just compete with the city’s other art and cultural institutions in enticing local residents to direct their recently acquired disposable income toward its causes. The arrival of businessman Arthur McBride and impresario Bill Veeck, and their parallel transformation of the city’s football and baseball franchises, heralded a new moment in the way Cleveland residents spent their money and time. In short, their efforts ushered in a new leisure industry to Cleveland. While the city’s branch of the NAACP was first to fall victim to these new attractions—internal memoranda explaining the noticeable drop-off in interest in the branch between 1948 and 1953 as the result of national politics and local sports—Karamu too also found fund-raising much harder as a consequence of the Indians’ and Browns’ success.⁶⁴ Indeed, as late as January 1952, visitors to the new plant would notice that floors and other cosmetic aspects remained unfinished. Nevertheless, in the short-term it was significant that Karamu’s planners

62. Russell Jelliffe to Dr. Paul Green, Jan. 22, 1946, Paul Green Papers.

63. “The Bard at Karamu,” *Ebony* 3 (Oct. 1948): 36–39, 41–42.

64. Charles P. Lucas to Roy Wilkins, Aug. 12, 1949, series C, The Midwest, reel 12, NAACP Papers.

were able to adjust their forecasts and revise their plans, and this proved a significant factor in the campaign's ultimate success.⁶⁵

According to the official narrative of the Karamu settlement, the new plant finally opened its doors to local residents exactly a decade after the fire, in October 1949. But to fetishize such dates distorts the impression we have of the institution's history during the previous years. For while trustees, staff, and local residents came together for the ceremonious opening of Karamu in October 1949, the occasion changed little in the everyday details of the settlement's life. Ever since the opening of the nursery in the late summer of 1946, plays had been staged at the new plant, and staff were active in putting on workshops and organizing groups of actors, craft workers, and those seeking work. Moreover, to focus on particular dates prevents us from seeing the overarching history of the institution, for construction and funding efforts at the plant would continue unchecked for at least another seven years after the celebrations passed, ultimately raising a figure almost treble what original estimates had predicted.⁶⁶

Such expansion was only made possible with the support the settlement received from federal programs and, more significantly, philanthropic foundations, namely the Rockefeller Foundation. As I have attempted to suggest, that most of the Karamu's new plant was constructed with funds from these various sources ought to encourage scholars to re-evaluate the arguments they have made about the influence of private benefactors. If civic and business enterprises provided a continuous source of income for turn-of-the-century settlements then it was the largesse of philanthropic foundations that provided the crucial source for their institutional expansion in the 1930s and 1940s, as the records of the Rockefeller Foundation and Julius Rosenwald Fund attest. That this was so means scholars must fashion more subtle arguments about the relationship between the funding and direction of the settlement house movement. As the experience of the Karamu settlement demonstrates, while foundations like the Rockefeller would only countenance supporting certain projects, the settlement's staff proved equally adroit at identifying the limitations of these interests, in drawing up applications they knew would be read favorably, and, above all, in realizing that with time the building might be used for other ends.

65. On the floors still being unfinished see "Interview: Jelliffes," Jan. 31, 1952, folder 4620, box 441, RG 950, General Education Board.

66. The total cost of the settlement house would reach \$1,360,000, according to an estimate Russell made twenty years after the fire. See Jelliffe to Marian Anderson, Mar. 13, 1959, folder 2974, box 47, Mss. 200, Marian Anderson Papers, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.