

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Harry C. Smith

editor, politician

“Smith helped pass one of the strictest anti-lynching laws in the country”

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Background Information

Birth: January 28, 1863

Death: December 10, 1941

Smith was born in West Virginia, and moved to Cleveland, Ohio as a child. He attended one of America’s first public schools, Central High School, a school for both Black and White students. This experience made him believe in the equality between the races. While in high school, he was active in his high school’s music programs. At this time, he also began writing for a weekly newspaper, the Cleveland Sun. He graduated high school in 1882.¹

Smith’s Resistance

After graduating high school, he and three friends founded a newspaper, the Cleveland Gazette in 1883. He was initially the editor of the Gazette, but then bought out the other three founders and became the only owner of the newspaper.¹ The newspaper published eight pages every week. The paper discussed politics, activities and events for Blacks in Cleveland and other cities in the state. Smith also used the Gazette to promote civil rights for Blacks and even challenged the government in Ohio to protect them physically. He became so popular that he was elected to the Ohio Legislature (local government) in 1893 and served until 1899. He worked to pass laws that helped victims of violence and lynching in Ohio including the Ohio Civil Rights Act of 1864 and the Anti-Mob Violence Act of 1896. These were very strict laws that helped dramatically decrease lynching in Ohio.²

Achievements

Smith was involved in the Niagara Movement and a member of the Nation Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Select Committee.² Smith’s political savvy helped to usher in protective laws for African Americans. He left behind a legacy of journalistic activism and political involvement.

¹ Wikipedia contributors. (2020a, May 3). *Harry Clay Smith*. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Clay_Smith

² Yu, K. (2008, May 31) *Harry Clay Smith (1863-1941)*. Retrieved from <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/smith-harry-clay-1863-1941/>

