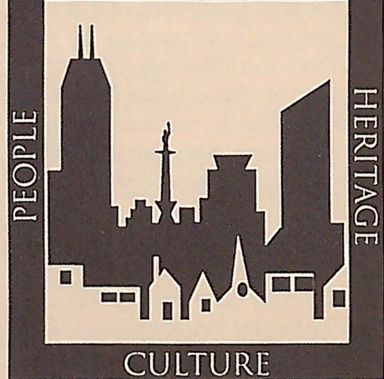


ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INDIANAPOLIS



Presented by the

POLIS Research Center

at

**Indiana University-
Purdue University
at Indianapolis**

Winter 1992

Volume 2 • Number 2

Toward Freedom:

The African American Experience in Indianapolis

African Americans have been present in Indianapolis since its founding in 1820. John Tipton, a member of the capital site selection committee, brought a young black male with him to the confluence of White River and Fall Creek, as did Alexander Ralston, surveyor and planner of Indianapolis, in 1822. One hundred seventy years later, over 21 percent of the metropolitan Indianapolis population is African American. Their history is marked by noteworthy accomplishments as well as a rich heritage.

From the beginning, African Americans, who comprised less than 3 percent of the city's population by the eve of the Civil War, encountered laws requiring them to post bonds to guarantee "good behavior," prohibiting them from settling in the state, barring them from public schools and service in the militia, and preventing racial intermarriage. One local black man, commenting on race relations in the 1850s, noted that "it would be better to be the slave of a good and humane master in Kentucky, than to be a nominally free Negro in Indianapolis, with no political or social rights. . . ." Life in the "free" North was anything but free.

With the ratification of the 14th and 15th Amendments, African Americans experienced some gains in political and civil rights. Gradually, the system that had been exclusionary and discriminatory began to open, but ever so narrowly. Schools admitted black children, and courts allowed blacks to testify; stores and restaurants, however, remained reluctant to serve black customers. Importantly, blacks gained an uncontested right to vote. The Republican Party, the party of Abraham Lincoln and emancipation, benefitted most from the growing political activism of many African Americans. James

Hinton was the first Indianapolis black to serve in the state legislature in 1880. James T. Hill became the first black attorney admitted to the local bar. But these achievements represented isolated and hard-won victories.

Between 1890 and 1920, the African American population quadrupled in size and maintained its percentage share of the total population. Two separate societies — one white, one black — continued to exist, causing contemporary observers to label Indianapolis one of the most segregated of northern cities. Efforts at improved race relations were evident through the work of the Afro-American League and the Indianapolis branch of the newly established NAACP. But this work would be stymied later in the 1920s when the Ku Klux Klan dominated the city's political, business, professional, and educational life. Only on Indiana Avenue, the center of the black population and a popular night spot filled with nightclubs and jazz halls, were blacks and whites able to break the color barrier.

In subsequent decades, change came slowly. Housing, health care, education, transportation, and other social services for African Americans remained inferior, and many blacks existed on the margins of Indianapolis life. World War II brought economic relief and new employment, yet the postwar years, which seemed to promise "fair employment practices" and a new beginning for race relations, delivered only marginal improvements. The post-war years proved equally frustrating. Middle-class black families who attempted to move into all-white neighborhoods in the 1950s encountered resistance. Whites moved to the suburbs in increasing numbers, leaving the central city to a poor and predominantly black population. Not

Continued inside

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The African American Community in Indianapolis History

This excerpt is from the larger overview essay written for the Encyclopedia by contributing editor Emma Lou Thornbrough.

The Great Depression which began in 1929 and the unemployment which accompanied it were probably more devastating to African Americans, already a marginal group, than to any other segment of the population. Consequently the New Deal, with its programs of public works and relief, which brought new hope, also resulted in a political revolution among black voters who, with few exceptions, had always been loyal Republicans. In 1932 for the first time two black Democrats were elected to the state legislature. World War II and the prospect of employment in defense industries brightened economic prospects among both white and black residents. Because of labor shortages black workers were given opportunities for jobs in industry and other fields previously closed to them. The official policy of the recently organized CIO prohibited racial discrimination in member unions. Although some locals opposed the policy, blacks for the first time joined labor unions in large numbers and a few black men and women advanced from janitorial positions to the assembly line.

Prospects of employment also brought increased numbers of African Americans to the city. Their numbers were greater than those who had come during the "Great Migration" of the World War I years. By 1950 the black population of Indianapolis was 63,567 or 15 percent of the whole. Migration continued during the prosperous post war years. By 1960 the number of blacks in the city was 98,049, nearly 21 percent. The incorporation of the whole of Marion County, including the predominantly white suburbs, by the Uni-Gov Act in 1969 reduced the percentage of blacks in the city as a whole although their numbers continued to increase at a greater rate than that of whites.

The civil rights movement, which began following the war, brought the most important changes in the status of blacks since Recon-

struction. The Indianapolis branch of the NAACP and the state conference of that organization took the lead in demanding the end of segregation and discrimination. Freeman Ransom, graduate of Harvard Law School and a veteran of World War II, was a recognized leader of the movement. Also important was realtor William T. Ray, president of the Indianapolis NAACP.

In the years after World War II, when the civil rights movement was at its height, a period of unprecedented economic growth and a breakdown of restrictive hiring practices, due in part to fair employment legislation, opened new employment opportunities to educated African Americans. Corporations like banks and insurance companies actively recruited them. The finance center at Fort Harrison employed large numbers, and government offices began hiring more blacks for supervisory as well as routine jobs. School systems sought teachers and administrators, and there were growing numbers of African American lawyers, physicians, and other professionals.

Members of this expanding middle class moved from older "colored" neighborhoods to formerly all-white ones on the northside of the city. Some of these neighborhoods became predominantly black, but whites remained a majority in others. Neighborhood associations like Butler-Tarkington, Meridian-Kessler, and Mapleton-Fall Creek, worked to maintain racial balance. Other middle class families moved to suburban areas in outlying townships. The Grandview development in Washington Township became the first predominantly black neighborhood outside the city limits.

Meanwhile older black neighborhoods in the inner city deteriorated, and many of the residents faced unemployment as opportunities for workers without skills and education declined. The percentage of persons classified as below the poverty line increased, and social problems became more severe. Many households were headed by single women, often unmarried, who were dependent on welfare to care for their children. Unemployment among young black males, many of them school dropouts, was widespread, and crime among them continued to be a growing problem.

In the years since World War II African Americans in Indianapolis along with African Americans nationally have won long sought victories in the courts and legislative halls. Many enjoy a standard of living, better housing, and better educational opportunities than their parents and grandparents. But while members of this group have prospered beyond their own hopes and expectations, there are increasing poverty and hopelessness in the inner city. The ideals of a truly racially integrated and just society have not been achieved. ■

Meet the Contributing Editors - African American Section

Emma Lou Thornbrough, professor of history emeritus at Butler University, is co-contributing editor of the African American section of the Encyclopedia of Indianapolis. An expert in the field of African American history and race relations in the city and state, Thornbrough brings great knowledge and exceptional insight to the project.

Thornbrough is the author of numerous articles focusing on African American history and Indiana history and several books including The Negro in Indiana Before 1900 (1957); Since Emancipation: A Short History of Indiana Negroes (1963); Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880 (1965); and The Indianapolis School

Busing Case (forthcoming).

Wilma Gibbs is Program Archivist and head of the Black History Program at the Indiana Historical Society. She served previously as branch librarian for the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library. Gibbs has been very active in gathering and preserving black history collections throughout the state. She edits Black History News & Notes, a newsletter published by the Society. Gibbs has written several articles on black history, and is currently editing a collection of articles to be entitled Connecting the Dots: The Quest to Gather the History of African Americans in Indiana. ■

Toward Freedom: - from page 1

all whites joined the flight from the city. Some local groups, such as the Butler-Tarkington Neighborhood Association formed in 1953, worked to promote interracial harmony. Still, a national race relations survey conducted in 1965 placed Indianapolis above the South in terms of racial segregation.

Recent decades have witnessed many changes. Federally mandated school desegregation came in the 1970s and 1980s. Cuts in government funding for social services seriously affected impoverished blacks. However, according to a 1986 survey the Indianapolis black community ranked eleventh in economic achievement among 48 communities studied nationwide, with a high degree of black home ownership. Government and corporate affirmative-action programs enabled minority-owned businesses to participate in downtown renewal

projects and encouraged the promotion of blacks to key administrative positions, such as the appointment of James Toler as chief of police in 1992.

African Americans have made significant contributions to the heritage and culture of Indianapolis. Yet this story, like so much of the city's history, is unrecorded, a task the Encyclopedia of Indianapolis will remedy in part. Why remember this past, a time of progress but also of pain? We have little understanding of the attitudes and experiences of the vast majority of the city's population; we know so little about the reality of black and white lives, past and present. Without a knowledge of the past, without a common history, we face a tragic future, ignorant about each other and mindless about how far we must yet travel to realize the promise of equality for all citizens. DGV ■

Managing Editor's Report

The Encyclopedia staff (recently augmented when Barbara Waldsmith joined us as an editorial assistant) can report considerable progress during the past few months on four distinct but interrelated aspects of the volume's development: entries identified, entries assigned, entries submitted, and entries approved.

Contributing editors, task forces, and the staff have compiled final entry lists for all subject categories. As of early November, almost 1,700 entries had been identified, assigned a proposed word count, and entered on the project's data base. While there may be some minor adjustments to these lists in the months ahead, the content of the Encyclopedia has now been largely determined.

We continue to have success recruiting researchers and writers. By the time this newsletter appears we will have assigned approximately 1,200 entries (about 70 percent of the total) to over 400 authors. However, several hundred entries are still available, anxiously awaiting adoption. We encourage anyone with an interest in writing for the volume — as well as

authors who have already contributed — to contact the editorial staff. Many subject categories still have entries available; we seek assistance particularly in sections dealing with the city's economy (especially short business histories), labor organizations, neighborhoods, public safety, and radio and television.

Authors are also submitting entries at a steady rate — over 700 of them at last count — and we are naturally delighted with the prompt response of many contributors. We remind those few authors with overdue entries that the project is on a very tight schedule; we need you to complete your work and submit it as soon as possible. Our deadline for receipt of all entries is July 1, 1993, for publication in Fall, 1994.

The editorial work on entries that have been turned in continues apace. This is a time-consuming process, and we ask for patience from authors who have not heard from us about their entries as quickly as they (and we) expected. Anyone concerned about the status of his or her entry is welcome to write or call the POLIS office for an update. ■

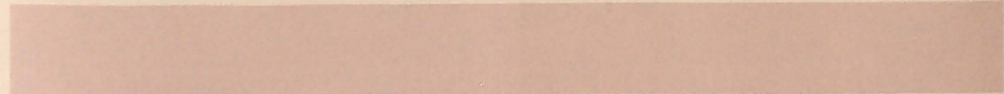
African American Section - Approved Entries to Date

Alpha Home
Antislavery Movement
Bagby, Robert Bruce
Bailey, Robert
Bethel AME Church
Black Churches
Black Fraternal Organizations
Black Press
Black Women's Organizations
Blacks in Business
Blacks in Indianapolis (overview essay)
Blacks in Politics
Brokenburr, Robert Lee
Broyles, Moses
Cable, Mary
Circle City Classic
Citizens' Forum
Civil Rights
Crispus Attucks High School
DeFrantz, Fayburn
Diggs, Elder Watson
Elbert, Samuel
Federation of Associated Clubs
Flanner House
Fox, Lillian Thomas
Freetown Village
Furniss, Sumner
Haywood, Garfield T.
Hill, James T. V.
Hinton, James S.
Indiana Avenue
Indiana Black Expo

Indiana Christian Leadership Conference
Indianapolis Asylum for Friendless Colored Children
Indianapolis Colored World
Indianapolis Freeman
Indianapolis Human Rights Commission
Indianapolis Music Promoters
Indianapolis Recorder
Indianapolis Urban League
Knox, George L.
Light of the World Christian Church
Lockefield Gardens
Mance, Mercer M.
McCoy, William D.
NAACP, Indianapolis Branch
National Medical Association
Osborn, Benjamin
Phyllis Wheatley YWCA
Puryear, John A.
Ransom, Freeman B.
Revels, Willis
Richardson, Henry J.
Sanders, Mozell
School Desegregation
Second Baptist Church
Senate Avenue YMCA
Sigma Gamma Rho
Sissle, Noble
WTLC Radio
Walker Urban Life Center
Walker, Madam C. J.
Ward, Dr. Joseph

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Timeline

African Americans in Indianapolis

1831 State law requires blacks entering Indiana to post bond as a guarantee against becoming a public charge.

1836 African Methodist Episcopal Church forms in city.

1847 Black citizens of Indianapolis organize a Masonic lodge, the city's first African American fraternal organization.

1855 John Freeman, a wealthy Indianapolis black man, is charged and tried as a runaway slave.

1866 Dr. Thomas B. Elliott, Indianapolis school board, reports "the colored people of the state and city have . . . been deprived of advantages of the school fund, or any privileges of the schools. . . ; In our judgement, humanity, justice, and sound public policy demand that this class of our citizens should receive the benefit of our common school system."

1880 Black local of the Knights of Labor, a union of unskilled laborers, forms in city; James S. Hinton is first black from city elected to lower house of Indiana General Assembly.

1896 The Indianapolis *Recorder* established.

1898 Group of white philanthropists led by Frank Flanner establishes Flanner House to provide self-help programs for blacks.

1902 Senate Avenue "Colored Young Men's Prayer Band" becomes branch of YMCA.

1903 Lillian Thomas Fox establishes Women's Improvement Club of Indianapolis as literary club; later evolves into organization to help blacks secure medical care in local hospitals.

1909 Indianapolis Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) established.

1910 Madame Walker Company founded.

1918 Dr. Sumner Furniss, first black intern at Indianapolis City Hospital, elected to Indianapolis City Council.

1922 Mapleton Civic Organization and White Supremacy League demand segregated schools. Board of School Commissioners recommends separate schools for the nearly 800 black high school students in the city.

1927 Crispus Attucks High School opens.

1938 Lockefield Gardens, a Works Progress Administration project, opens to provide low-income housing on Indiana Avenue.

1941 Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce establishes Indiana Plan of Bi-racial Cooperation.

1945 Blacks organize boycott against the annual "Negro Day" at Riverside Amusement Park to protest discriminatory admission policies. Although boycott reduces attendance to 50 people, park owners refuse to end restrictions.

1948 Survey for American Council on Race Relations finds that Indianapolis is one of the least desirable places in terms of race relations.

1949 Indianapolis *News* runs series of articles focusing on discrimination in the city. House Bill 242 outlaws segregation in public schools.

1955 Crispus Attucks wins state high school basketball championship; repeats title in 1956 and 1959.

1965 Indianapolis Urban League formed.

1968 *United States v. Board of School Commissioners of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*, filed on May 31, alleges that State and Board of School Commissioners had conspired through acts of the General Assembly to maintain a system of racially segregated schools.

1970 Indiana Black Expo, Inc. established to present "programs" which uplift the traditions and condition of African American citizens.

1976 Mayor William H. Hudnut pushes for minority recruitment in police department through an affirmative action plan.

1982 Dr. Percy Clark appointed superintendent of Lawrence Township Schools, first black superintendent in Marion County. Freetown Village, a living history program interpreting black life in Indianapolis, established.

1983 Blacks in Indianapolis comprise 10th most affluent black population in nation. Average income is \$17,700 (vs. whites \$22,804); 48% own their homes.

1984 Circle City Classic established.

1987 Indiana Avenue Historic District placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

1991 Dr. Shirl E. Gilbert II appointed first black superintendent of IPS.

Taylor Symposium Examines African American Religion

The role of African American religion in the modern city will be the focus of the fourth annual Joseph Taylor Symposium to be held on February 8, 1993. Entitled "Liberating Visions: The Public Mission of Black Churches," this year's symposium features Robert Franklin, Director of the Program for Black Church Studies at the Chandler School of Theology, Emory University, as the keynote speaker.

Franklin will be joined in a morning panel discussion by David Wills, Professor of Religion and Black Studies at Amherst College and one of the editors of the pioneering African-American Documentary History Project.

Interested citizens are invited to participate in the symposium. Luncheon tickets are available for \$20. For more information, contact Lamont Hulse at (317) 274-2458. ■

African American Population of Indianapolis

Year	City Population	African American Population	% of Total Population
1850	8,091	405	5.0
1870	48,244	2,931	6.0
1890	105,436	9,154	8.7
1900	169,164	15,931	9.4
1920	314,194	34,678	11.0
1950	427,173	63,867	15.0
1960	476,258	98,049	20.6
1970	744,768	134,320	18.0
1980	765,233	155,310	20.3
1990	797,159	169,654	21.3

African American Percentage of Township Populations, 1990

Center	40.9%
Washington	25.3%
Lawrence	24.0%
Pike	19.7%
Wayne	13.5%
Warren	13.2%
Decatur	1.1%
Perry	0.9%
Franklin	0.5%

- + Indianapolis possesses 40% of the state's black population. It is the 16th largest black community in the U.S., surpassing the cities of Birmingham, Oakland, Newark, and Jacksonville.
- + 42.5% of Indianapolis black households own their homes.
- + As of 1987, there were 2,686 black owned businesses in Indianapolis: 54% are service businesses; 15% retail; 9% construction.

[Source: US Census Bureau]

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URBAN AGENDA: IUPUI ON THE CIRCLE

Wednesday,
January 13, 1993
12:00 - 1:00 pm

Indianapolis Archaeology in the Public

Interest: Ransom Place

Anne Pyburn, Assistant Professor of Anthropology
Rick Jones, Indiana State Archaeologist
Jean Spears, Ransom Place Neighborhood Association, Inc.

Thursday,
February 11, 1993
12:00 - 1:00 pm

The State of Black Indianapolis

Monroe Little, Assistant Professor of History and Director of Afro-American Studies, IUPUI

Thursday,
March 11, 1993
12:00 - 1:00 pm

Neighborhood Power:

Municipal Federalism in Indianapolis

Roger Parks, Associate Professor of Public and Environmental Affairs,
IU-Bloomington
Bill Blomquist, Assistant Professor of Political Science, IUPUI

Wednesday,
April 14, 1993
12:00 - 1:00 pm

Indianapolis from a Religious Perspective

James Divita, Professor of History, Marian College and President,
Indiana Religious History Association
Jan Shippo, Professor of History, Religious Studies, and American
Studies
David J. Bodenhamer, Professor of History and Director, POLIS
Research Center, IUPUI

Wednesday,
May 12, 1993
12:00 - 1:00 pm

Indianapolis During the Hudnut Years: An Appraisal

Mark Rosentraub, Associate Dean, Indiana University School of
Public and Environmental Affairs and Director, Center for Urban
Policy and the Environment, IUPUI
Comments by William H. Hudnut, III, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute

Time:
12:00 - 1:00 pm

Place:
Associated Group
120 Monument Circle
Conference Room A

Wednesday,
June 2, 1993
12:00 - 1:00 pm

Amusement Parks in Indianapolis

David Vanderstel, Assistant Editor, Encyclopedia of Indianapolis
Connie Ziegler, Research Assistant, POLIS Research Center, IUPUI

For more information
on this series contact
Lamont Hulse at
(317) 274-2458.