Segregation in Indiana during the Klan Era of the 1920's

By Emma Lou Thornbrough

During the First World War there began a mass migration of Negroes from the rural South to the cities of the North which was to have marked effects upon the character and institutions of these cities. The number of Negroes moving into Indiana was not as great as the number moving into the neighboring states of Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois, but in the years from 1910 to 1930 the colored population of Indiana doubled. Hopes for economic betterment were probably the most important reason for the migration, but the desire for greater personal freedom, for political and civil rights, and for opportunities to educate their children also brought Negroes northward. In Indiana the newcomers found little of the legalized Jim Crowism which they had known in the South, but they encountered much prejudice and discrimination. Although there were no racial disorders comparable to the riots in East St. Louis, Chicago, and Detroit, the influx of Negroes led to a movement for segregation on a scale previously unknown. In these same years the Ku Klux Klan, an organization which was habitually a strong advocate of white supremacy, was also rising to a position of unprecedented power in Indiana. It is not unusual for present-day commentators to see a close link between these two developments and to conclude that the increase in segregation measures was due primarily to Klan influence. This is a relationship, however, which has never been closely analyzed, and before the nature of the Klan's role can be understood it is necessary to look first at the segregation measures as they were originated in the state in the years following World War I.

1 In Indiana the Negro population increased from 60,320 in 1910 to 111,982 in 1930; in Illinois, from 104,049 to 328,972; in Ohio, from 111,452 to 309,304; in Michigan, from 17,115 to 169,453. United States Bureau of the Census, Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932 (Washington, 1935), 9, 12, 15.
These measures were confined for the most part to urban areas, because it was there that the Negro population was concentrated. In an earlier period, Negroes entering the state had settled in Evansville and the other Ohio River communities; but by the time of World War I new arrivals moved farther north, to Indianapolis, in the central part of the state, or to the cities in the Calumet region, especially Gary. The largest number went to Indianapolis, where the colored population increased from 21,816 in 1910 to 43,967 in 1930 (when it comprised about 12 per cent of the total population of the city). A more spectacular increase occurred in the extreme north, where a steel empire was arising on the shores of Lake Michigan. The population of Gary, which was little more than a small town in 1910, had grown to just over 100,000 in 1930. In this same twenty-year period the city's Negroes had increased from 383 to almost 18,000 — approximately 18 per cent of the total population. In the neighboring city of East Chicago, where there were only 28 Negroes in 1910, the number had grown to more than 5,000 by 1930. By the latter date nearly 60 per cent of the Negro population of the state was found in Indianapolis and the Gary-East Chicago area. Most of the remainder was in other cities and towns, census figures showing that over 92 per cent of the Negro population lived in urban areas.

Although the new arrivals settled in cities, most of them came from rural areas in the South, and an increasingly large number came from the Lower South. Before 1900 most Negroes migrating to Indiana had come from the Upper South, especially Kentucky, while a very few had come from the Lower South. By 1930, when the census showed that 67 per cent of the total Negro population had been born outside of Indiana, persons from Kentucky still outnumbered by a large margin those from any other single state. In Indianapolis the number of Kentucky-born Negroes was only slightly smaller than the number native to Indiana. But in the Calumet area most Negroes came from the Lower South. In Gary in 1930 the largest single group came from Mississippi, and the second largest from Alabama. Each of these groups was substantially larger than the number born in Indiana. In 1930 more than 86 per cent of the Negroes in the steel city had been born outside of
Indiana, and of these an overwhelming majority came from the South.²

The problems of assimilation created by the abrupt transition from a simple, rural way of life to the more complex patterns of city life were complicated by Indiana’s long tradition of racism. In the pre-Civil War period the Black Code of Indiana had scarcely been equaled in its harshness by the law of any other northern state. In the years following the Civil War the adoption of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments removed most of the legal disabilities against Negroes in the state,³ and by the time of the migration of the First World War era only a few remnants of earlier racial distinctions remained in the law code. One of these was a severe prohibition against marriages between white persons and persons with as little as one-eighth Negro blood. Another was the school law, which gave local school authorities the option of maintaining segregated schools or of allowing members of both races to attend the same school.⁴

In spite of the fact that there was little legal segregation, in practice there was little mingling of the races. In the larger cities Negroes were unable to find housing outside of well-defined areas, which were largely slums. Since 1885 there had been a civil rights law prohibiting discrimination in the use of public accommodations, but it was largely a dead letter. Negroes almost never ventured into a “white” hotel or restaurant, and signs announcing that the proprietor “catered to white trade only” were not uncommon. When Negroes went into a theater or concert hall they sat in the gallery. In the rural parts of the state there were many small communities in which a Negro was not allowed to settle or even spend the night.⁵

³ See Emma Lou Thornbrough, The Negro in Indiana before 1900 (Indianapolis, 1957), passim, especially 68-70, 120-27, 162-66, 233, 249. The Indiana constitution of 1851 absolutely prohibited Negroes from coming into the state to reside. Before 1866 Negroes were not allowed to testify in court in a case in which a white man was a party. Until 1869 Negro children were not admitted to the public schools.
⁴ Ibid., 266-70, 329.
⁵ For example, one county history published in 1916 contains the statement: “Washington County has for several decades boasted that no colored man or woman lived within her borders.” Quoted, ibid., 225.
In Indianapolis, where the bulk of the Negro population lived, race relations were normally peaceful. At least there were few overt signs of antagonisms. The leading Negro newspaper, the *Freeman*, which was far from militant in its editorial policy, frequently asserted that racial harmony prevailed, but some of its content seems to indicate that friction was avoided in part by the failure of Negroes to take advantage of all the rights which were legally theirs. One editorial admitted: "We have learned to forego some rights that are common, and because we know the price. We would gain but little in a way if certain places were thrown open to us. We have not insisted that hotels should entertain our race, or the theaters, rights that are clearly ours." But even the conservative *Freeman* insisted that Negroes could not give up the right to live where they chose.\(^6\)

The rapid increase in Negro population created new tensions, especially in housing. The parts of the city which had been the Negro districts simply could not house both the older residents and the newcomers. As immigrants from the South took over these districts, older residents sought to buy homes in hitherto all-white neighborhoods. The largest concentration of Negroes in Indianapolis had always been just northwest of the downtown business area. After the war this area began to expand northward — toward upper middle class white neighborhoods. Property owners, faced with the prospect of Negro neighbors and fearful of a decline in real estate values, organized themselves into local civic leagues, which had as their chief purpose the barring of Negro residents. One novel device to which one group, the Capitol Avenue Protective Association, resorted was to try to isolate and humiliate Negroes who bought property by building spite fences on either side of the property. But a young Negro dentist, faced with this form of retaliation, obtained an injunction which prohibited the practice.\(^7\)

Sometimes opposition to Negro neighbors took a more sinister form. When, despite warnings, a Negro family moved into a white

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\(^6\) *The Freeman* (Indianapolis), April 22, 1916. When there were signs of opposition to the use of the public parks by Negroes, the *Freeman* warned that it was wiser not to go to the parks in large numbers. It asserted: "What we wish is our right of enjoyment rather than to be in the parks at all times. If we are careful in not overdoing the matter ... the right to go where we wish will not be opposed." *Ibid.*, August 12, 1916.

\(^7\) Indianapolis *World*, May 6, 1921.
neighborhood in 1924, a hand grenade was thrown through a window of their house. Following this episode handbills were circulated in an adjacent neighborhood, asking "DO YOU WANT A NIGER FOR A NEIGHBOR?" The handbills appear to have been the work of a group which unabashedly called itself the White Supremacy League and which had as its objective not only barring Negroes from white neighborhoods but excluding them from most forms of employment as well. Members were bound by oath not to employ Negroes in their homes or trade at stores which employed Negroes. This group represented an extremist element, but its president was also active in the Mapleton Civic Association, an organization which included in its membership eminently respectable businessmen. A printed statement of the aims of the Mapleton group frankly stated: "One of our chief concerns is to prevent members of the colored race from moving into our midst, thereby deprecating property values fifty per cent, or more." Members of the association pledged themselves not to sell or lease property to anyone except a white person. The agreement was reported to have worked so well that for three years no more Negroes had moved into the Mapleton area, and some who were already residents had moved away.

Although private efforts of this sort met with some success in stemming the Negro tide, stronger measures were sought. In response to pressure from civic groups, including particularly the White Citizens Protective League, the Indianapolis city council enacted a residential zoning ordinance in March, 1926. Declaring that "in the interest of public peace, good order and the general welfare, it is advisable to foster the separation of white and negro residential communities," the measure made it unlawful for white persons to establish residence in a "portion of the municipality inhabited principally by negroes," or for Negroes to establish residence in a "white community," except with the written consent

8 The group was said to aim at securing the dismissal of Negroes from positions in the federal civil service and from employment by local government. Freeman, July 26, 1924. The president of the White Supremacy League wrote a long letter to the Ku Klux Klan publication, The Fiery Cross, justifying white supremacy. She insisted that she had no animosity toward Negroes but had a 'marked respect for the negro who keeps his own kind, who does not display an anomalous desire for 'social equality' and who respects the white authority of the United States." Fiery Cross (Indianapolis), January 19, 1923.

9 Freeman, March 1, 1924.
of a majority of persons of the opposite race inhabiting the neighborhood.\textsuperscript{10}

The measure was sponsored by a Republican member of the council who said he had received petitions containing more than five thousand names asking for the enactment of the ordinance. The only member to oppose it was a Democrat, who insisted that it was unconstitutional and violated "the spirit of American institutions." More than eight hundred cheering, hand-clapping, stamping spectators crowded into the council chambers while the ordinance was under consideration. After the favorable vote the president of the White Citizens Protective League declared with satisfaction: "Passage of this ordinance will stabilize real estate values . . . and give the honest citizens and voters renewed faith in city officials."\textsuperscript{11}

The mayor, asserting that it was not the duty of the executive to pass upon the validity of an act of the legislative branch, signed the ordinance, even though he admitted that the entire legal staff of the city was of the opinion that it was unconstitutional. In a lengthy message justifying his action the mayor expressed the opinion that there was no intention to discriminate against either whites or Negroes in adopting the ordinance and that its "tenor" precluded either race from obtaining any advantage over the other. He went so far as to say that if critics would study the law with "open minds" they would "hail with delight this step toward the solution of a problem that has long caused deep thought and serious study by members of both races."\textsuperscript{12}

Doubts as to the constitutionality of the ordinance arose because of its similarity to a Louisville ordinance which had been declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in 1917.

\textsuperscript{10} Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana, from January 1, 1926, to December 1, 1926 (Indianapolis, 1927), 54. Persons who owned property before the adoption of the ordinance were permitted to reside in it and also to sell it, but if a Negro sold property to a white, or a white sold property to a Negro, the purchaser was not allowed to take up residence without obtaining the written consent of a majority of persons of the opposite race in the neighborhood. The term "community" as used in the ordinance was defined as every residence within 300 feet of the property involved.

\textsuperscript{11} The vote was five to one in favor of adoption. Three members of the council, two Republicans and one Democrat, where not present. Ibid., 77-78; Indianapolis News, March 16, 1926; Indianapolis Star, March 16, 1926.

\textsuperscript{12} Journal of the Common Council, 1926, p. 82. The mayor was John L. Duvall, a Republican, who was elected with the backing of the Ku Klux Klan and subsequently sent to jail for violation of the Corrupt Practices Act.
Backers of the Indianapolis ordinance, who declared themselves ready to take a test case to the Supreme Court, were not unaware of this precedent, but were hopeful that in the years which had elapsed since the Louisville case the highest tribunal might have changed its mind. The principal reason for their optimism was the fact that the Supreme Court of Louisiana had recently upheld the constitutionality of a New Orleans racial zoning ordinance which had served as a model for the Indianapolis enactment. The court had held that the Louisville precedent did not apply because the New Orleans ordinance (like the Indianapolis ordinance) did not prohibit outright the buying or selling of property but merely restricted the right of purchasers to occupy property. They ruled that the ordinance was not discriminatory because it applied equally to whites and blacks and dealt with "social relations" rather than civil or political rights.\(^{13}\)

The optimism of members of the Protective League proved to be unwarranted. By 1926 there was a vigorous chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Indianapolis, which was eager to take every possible step to invalidate the ordinance. The national office of the NAACP, which had won one of its first victories in the United States Supreme Court in connection with the Louisville case, was also interested in the situation in Indianapolis. Funds amounting to about five thousand dollars were quickly raised to carry on the fight, and a case which bears the signs of having been arranged with the deliberate purpose of testing the ordinance was soon on the docket of a local court. The case arose from the refusal of a Negro physician to fulfill a contract for the purchase of real estate in a predominantly white neighborhood. He based his refusal on the grounds that the zoning ordinance would prevent him from occupying the property. The judge who heard the case ruled in favor of the Negro, declaring the zoning ordinance unconstitutional in the light of the precedent established by the Louisville case. He held that the ordinance deprived a citizen of his constitutional rights by making his right to

\(^{13}\) *Tyler v. Harmon*, 158 La. 439 (1925). On a second hearing the Louisiana Supreme Court refused to reverse its decision. *Tyler v. Harmon*, 160 La. 943 (1926). In the Louisville case, *Buchanan v. Warley*, 245 U.S. 60 (1917), the Supreme Court ruled that the ordinance violated the Fourteenth Amendment because it interfered with property rights without due process of law. The decision did not rest on the equal protection clause.
live in his own property depend upon the consent of other citizens.\footnote{National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, \textit{Seventeenth Annual Report} (1927), 10. The case was Edward S. Gaillard versus Dr. Guy L. Grant, decided in the Marion County Superior Court, November 23, 1926. Indianapolis \textit{News}, November 24, 1926.}

Hopes of supporters of the ordinance for an appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States were dashed when that tribunal reversed the Louisiana Supreme Court decision as to the New Orleans ordinance.\footnote{\textit{Harmon v. Tyler}, 273 U. S. 668 (1927). In a per curiam decision the Louisiana court was reversed on the authority of \textit{Buchanan v. Warley}. After the invalidation of the racial zoning ordinance, white property owners turned increasingly to the use of racially restrictive covenants, which continued to be enforceable in the courts until the decision of the United States Supreme Court in \textit{Shelley v. Kraemer} (334 U. S. 1) in 1948.}

The successful attack on the zoning ordinance was the only significant legal victory in the fight in Indiana against segregation during the 1920's. On other fronts, and especially in connection with segregation in the schools, there were some serious defeats. In Indianapolis the movement for residential restrictions went hand in hand with a movement to remove Negroes from hitherto mixed schools. From the time that colored children were first admitted to the city elementary schools in 1869, the general policy had been to require that they attend separate schools, but there had always been a few schools with mixed enrollments. Inasmuch as most Negroes lived in all-Negro neighborhoods children had usually attended the school nearest them, but sometimes there were complaints that children were required to travel long distances to attend Negro schools rather than schools nearer to their homes. Indianapolis high schools had never been segregated. As early as 1872 a Negro student had been admitted to Indianapolis High School, which was later renamed Shortridge High School. Thereafter, although their numbers were not large, there were always Negroes enrolled in the school, which had the reputation of being one of the best public academic institutions in the country. In later years as two new high schools were built, Negroes attended them also. It was always the policy to employ Negro teachers in the all-Negro elementary schools, but Negro teachers were never assigned to the mixed elementary schools or the high schools.\footnote{Thornbrough, \textit{Negro in Indiana}, 332-34, 341; Indianapolis \textit{News}, May 13, 1919.}

The growth of the Negro population after World War I and the consequent movement of Negroes into new neighborhoods led to
demands for a more restrictive policy. Two principal arguments were used by those favoring segregation. First, they insisted that the presence of Negroes in the same schools as the whites menaced the health of the latter and that Negroes should be segregated to protect the white children. Second, they argued that Negroes would benefit from segregation — that in their own schools they would take more pride in their work, their scholarship would improve, and that they would develop more initiative. The latter argument, more than the first, dealt with intangibles, and proponents never made clear how segregation would bring about the desired results. Their conclusions, too, now appear to be completely at variance with the views of the Supreme Court in the segregation cases of 1954 and with a large body of sociological studies.

A resolution presented to the Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners in 1922 on behalf of the Federation of Civic Clubs was a forceful statement of the health argument and a revealing commentary on Negro housing. It pointed out that, while Negroes constituted only about one tenth of the total population of Indianapolis, about one fourth of the deaths in the city were among Negroes. "For years," it asserted, "the Marion County Tuberculosis Society has emphasized the care of incurable consumption among the colored people as the greatest social need in this city." Because crowded housing conditions made it impossible for a tubercular patient to be cared for at home without endangering other members of the family, a large number of cases of incipient tuberculosis were believed to exist among colored school children. For this reason the school board was asked to establish separate schools for all Negro children and to staff them with Negro teachers.17

At the same session a letter in support of segregation was presented to the school board on behalf of the Mapleton Civic Association and the White Supremacy League. The contents have not been preserved, but they were of such a nature as to cause the president of the board to remark that the letter "contained such statements as rendered it impossible to properly be received by the Board, without the reservation that its receipt was in no sense to be construed as endorsement on the part of the Board of the sentiments which it contained." 18

17 Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners (Office of the Board, Indianapolis), Minutes, Book W, 227.
18 Ibid., 226-27.
In response to such pressures the Board of School Commissioners set up new boundaries for fourteen elementary schools for Negroes and required that Negroes attend them. Groups of Negro parents protested in vain. When the attorney for the school board ruled that under the law the children could be required to attend the Negro schools even though they had to travel long distances, two parents sought court orders to permit attendance at the schools nearest their homes. But in both cases the court upheld the right of the school board to carry out the transfer. After these transfers, which occurred in 1923, elementary schools were predominantly all white or all Negro. The process of separation of the races was carried almost to completion in 1929 when Negroes were removed from three more schools.

Before the latter date segregationists in Indianapolis had also been successful in removing Negroes from the mixed high schools and putting them in an all-Negro school. The demand for separate high schools was backed by many white groups. Among them was the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, which presented a petition to the Board of School Commissioners in September, 1922, setting forth the “necessity” for a “separate, modern, completely equipped and adequate high school building for colored students.”

This movement met with strong and bitter opposition in the Negro community. Various delegations representing Negro civic and ministerial groups appeared before the school board, while other groups sent written protests. A petition from the Better Indianapolis Civic League forcefully and eloquently presented the arguments against a separate school. Declaring that the public school system was the most powerful factor in American society for the “engendering and transmission of sound democratic ideals,” it emphasized that “no one section of the population” could be “isolated and segregated without taking from it the advantages of the common culture.” Since money for the public schools came from taxation of all the people it was “unjust, un-American, and against

19 Ibid., Book Y, 22, 85, 159, 185, 304-305. See also Indianapolis Times, January 14, 1957, for a later survey of these problems.
20 Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners, Minutes, Book FF, 293.
21 Ibid., Book W, 396. The Mapleton Civic Association also worked for a separate high school. A statement of its accomplishments said: “Through our efforts the School Board has promised to provide separate schools for the colored pupils of the city, especially a high school, this season, and we believe this will be of assistance in segregating these people.” Freeman, March 1, 1924.
the spirit of democratic ideals that one section of the citizenship should subvert the funds of the common treasury to discriminate against another section solely on the basis of ancestry.”  

The report which the board adopted on December 12, 1922, recommending a separate school, embodied a different point of view. It declared that the enrollment of over eight hundred Negroes in the city high schools showed a “laudable desire on their part and on the part of their parents” for an education, but that a “new, modern, well equipped high school” of their own would provide them with the “maximum educational opportunity” and the fullest opportunity for the development of initiative, self-reliance, and the other qualities needed for good citizenship.  

The movement for a Negro high school was closely linked with the movement to relocate Shortridge High School, which was regarded as the best college preparatory school in the city and which included in its enrollment a number of students from wealthy and influential white families. The school occupied ancient and inadequate buildings in an older part of the city, not far from a Negro slum area. That new quarters for the school were badly needed was undeniable, but the zeal of some of its patrons for a new building and a new location on the north side of the city was clearly motivated by a desire to get rid of Negro students, who constituted 10 to 15 per cent of the enrollment. In a report of a survey of the school, made by one of the leading women’s clubs of the city, it was emphasized that one of the reasons for planning a new building was the fact that “there are numbers of colored students packed into crowded class rooms with the white children.” The Freeman commented bitterly that it was “evidently thought that to call attention to the Negroes as mixed with white children would be the weightiest argument for action on the part of the School Commissioners.”  

After the school board decided to build both a Negro high school and a new Shortridge at a new location, a delegation of whites appeared before it to request “in the interest of economy” that the old buildings at Shortridge be used for the Negro school, “thus releasing building funds for other construction projects.”  

22 Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners, Minutes, Book X, 29, 50, 51.  
23 Ibid., 64.  
24 Report of the Women’s Department Club, ibid., Book Y, 321; Freeman, March 21, 1924.  
25 Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners, Minutes, Book Y, 319.
the school board, instead of acting on this suggestion, went ahead with the construction of a Negro school, which was substantially equal to new schools being built for white students so far as construction and equipment were concerned. The board no doubt hoped that the new school and the employment of Negro teachers to staff it would make segregation less offensive to the Negro community.  

But before the building was started, a group of Negroes, backed by the NAACP, brought suit to enjoin construction on the grounds that the proposed school could not meet the requirements of “equality” under the “separate but equal” doctrine. Lawyers for the Negroes argued that the new school could not be equal to the three Indianapolis high schools already in operation because no single school could offer the range of subjects — academic and technical — which were offered in these schools. To build a Negro school truly equal to the combined three schools would be so expensive as to be prohibitive. After the local court in Marion County refused to grant the injunction an appeal was taken to the Indiana Supreme Court. That court, sustaining the action of the lower court, held that the suit was premature — that the mere fear that the proposed school might not offer courses of equal caliber was no reason for not building it. If, after the school was in operation, a case arose in which a colored pupil was denied some “educational advantage accorded white children of equal advancement,” then proceedings could be taken “to secure the constitutional rights of such a child.” In the meantime, the court declared, an injunction would not be granted “merely to allay the fears and apprehension of individuals.”

As the new school, which was named Crispus Attucks after the Negro of Revolutionary War fame, was nearing completion in 1927 the Board of School Commissioners announced that it would be the policy of the board to require all colored high school students

26 The Freeman, June 28, 1924, objected to the location chosen for the Negro school on the grounds that it was in a depressed residential area, near a glue factory and the city dump. Such a location, it declared, would have a depressing effect upon pupils “already humiliated by the fact that they are being forced from rooms of Shortridge, Manual and Arsenal Tech solely because of color.”

27 Greathouse v. Board of School Commissioners of City of Indianapolis, 198 Ind. 95-107 (1926).
to attend that school.\textsuperscript{28} The board, in fact, followed this policy until the state legislature adopted a law in 1949 which required the desegregation of all public schools in the state.

In Gary, where the Negro population was increasing at a faster rate than in Indianapolis, the school segregation provoked a more militant response. In that city there had been a policy since 1908 of maintaining separate elementary schools for Negroes, which were staffed by Negro teachers,\textsuperscript{29} but until 1927 Negroes were not required to attend a separate high school. Nearly all of the burgeoning Negro population of Gary was concentrated in the central part of the city, known as "the Patch." In that area was located Froebel High School, a four-year institution, with a racially mixed student body. Some Negroes were also enrolled for the first two years of high school work in two Negro elementary school buildings. A few Negroes — not more than fifty — were scattered in schools in other parts of the city.\textsuperscript{30}

Racial tension was occasionally evident at Froebel, but no serious racial disturbances occurred in the Gary schools until September, 1927. These disturbances broke out not at Froebel but at Emerson High School when twenty-four Negroes were transferred there from a Negro school, known as the Virginia Street school. A few days after the transfer white students at Emerson went on strike in protest. About six hundred of them paraded down the main street of the city, some of them carrying placards which said: "We won't go back to Emerson 'til it's white." In spite of the fact that the school principal threatened them with expulsion the number of strikers grew, until by the third day over thirteen hundred were absent from classes. At a mass meeting of students the superintendent of schools and the vice-president of the school board declared that the Negroes must remain at Emerson for the time being, but implied that they would be removed when a new Negro high school

\textsuperscript{28} Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners, Minutes, Book CC, 166. Negro groups protested when the Board of School Commissioners announced that the new school would be known as Jefferson High School. As a result the name was changed to Crispus Attucks, a name suggested by some Negroes. \textit{Ibid.}, Book BB, 113.

\textsuperscript{29} In 1910 the superintendent of schools, William A. Wirt, was quoted as saying: "We believe that it is only justice to the Negro children that they be segregated. There is naturally a feeling between the Negroes and the whites in the lower grades and we believe that the Negroes will be better cared for in their own schools. Besides they will take pride in their work and will accomplish better results." Moore, \textit{Calumet Region}, 392.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Gary Post Tribune}, September 27, 1927.
could be erected — in two or three years. In the meantime the superintendent indicated that it would not be necessary to include Negro students in the social and athletic activities of the school. The members of the board of education, after a conference with the mayor, also gave assurances that the transfer of the Negro students was intended to be temporary, that there was no intention of making Emerson permanently a mixed school, and gave promises that no more Negroes would be transferred there.31

At the end of four days the strike was settled by what the local newspaper referred to as a “peace treaty” between the students and the school and city authorities. The strikers were not to be penalized and the city council voted $15,000 for the purpose of erecting a temporary structure for a Negro school. The appropriation was carried in spite of negative votes of the three Negro members of the council and over the protests of a group of Negroes who crowded into the council chamber.32

Plans to remove the Negroes from Emerson to the temporary building ran into a snag when the local branch of the NAACP secured an injunction to prevent the expenditure of funds for that purpose.33 The authorities then changed their tactics and decided to make some renovations in the school from which the Negroes had been transferred in the first place. At the end of the Christmas vacation, in January, 1928, less than four months after the strike, all Negroes except for three seniors were removed from Emerson and transferred either to the Virginia Street school or to Froebel.

Efforts by Negroes to block the transfer were unsuccessful. One parent, with the backing of the local and the national office of the NAACP sought a mandamus ordering the superintendent of schools to readmit his daughter to Emerson. The lawyers for the Negro student tried to prove that the Virginia Street school, which she was ordered to attend, did not meet the state requirements for a four-year high school, but both a local court and the Indiana Supreme Court rejected their plea.34 The segregationists won a com-

31 Ibid., September 26, 27, 28, 29, 1927.
32 Ibid., October 4, 1927.
33 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Nineteenth Annual Report (1928), 17.
34 State ex rel. Cheeks v. Wirt, 203 Ind. 121 (1932). The court pointed out that the Virginia Street school was but one of six elementary school buildings in Gary in which courses equivalent to the first two years of high school work were offered and that pupils were transferred from these schools to the four-year high schools to finish their work. This was held to meet the requirements of the state law.
plete victory so far as Emerson High School was concerned. In addition to transferring the Negroes back to the Virginia Street school, the school board rearranged school districts in such a way as to provide that students who finished the tenth grade in that school would continue at Froebel instead of Emerson. As a final step, the city council appropriated $600,000 to build a high school for Negroes which would be equal in all respects to the other high schools. When completed this school was named Roosevelt and made an all-Negro institution with a Negro faculty. Froebel High School, which was on the same side of the tracks, continued to have a mixed enrollment and to be the only unsegregated school in Gary. Emerson, on the other side of town, remained all white until 1945, when another student strike, this time at Froebel, led to the abandonment of segregation throughout the Gary school system.35

Thus in Gary and Indianapolis, two major centers of Negro concentration, the decade of the 1920’s saw impressive gains by the advocates of segregation. In the southern part of the state, where Negroes had first settled, the schools had always been completely segregated. A few northern towns, where the number of Negroes was small, moved toward segregation for the first time in this decade. One of these was Elkhart, where the total Negro population was only about five hundred. Other northern cities, including South Bend and East Chicago, where the number of Negroes was larger, never adopted segregation.36

It is difficult to generalize on the course of racial discrimination in institutions of higher learning, since the number of Negroes enrolled in them was small. At least one private institution is known to have adopted a quota system in the 1920’s limiting the number of Negroes admitted. In the state universities there were no racial restrictions in admission policies, but Negroes were not allowed to live in the residence halls maintained by the institutions and were barred from a number of university activities. At Indiana Univer-

36 Robin M. Williams, Jr., and Margaret W. Ryan (eds.), Schools in Transition: Community Experiences in Desegregation (Chapel Hill, 1954), 68-69, 118. In the cities with segregated school systems there were opportunities for employment for Negro teachers. South Bend, on the other hand, did not employ a single Negro teacher until 1950.
sity a house for Negro women erected with private funds was opened in 1929.\textsuperscript{37}

Some of the same discriminatory pattern that developed in the public schools during the 1920's may be discerned also in the city regulations governing places of public accommodation. Although discrimination in such places was prohibited by law, it continued to be customary in the decade for Negroes and whites to patronize different establishments. One place where the color line was drawn for the first time was in the public parks of Indianapolis and Gary. In Indianapolis, Douglass Park was acquired in 1921. It was not officially designated as a park for Negroes, but the swimming pool and playgrounds which were subsequently built there were marked with signs which said “Negroes only.” After the opening of this park Negro groups found it impossible to get permission to hold functions in the other city parks. In Gary, one park was divided into two areas with “separate but equal” recreational facilities for members of each race. Negroes were excluded from the only park in the area which had a beach on Lake Michigan, and as a result a group of Negro businessmen leased private property on the lakefront for a beach in 1926.\textsuperscript{38}

These illustrations of segregationist practices, whether in places of public accommodation or in the public schools, are evidence of the increasing sharpness of racial discrimination during the 1920's. It was a period, at least in the larger urban areas of Indiana, when the color line seemed marked more indelibly than before. The question which remains is that of the responsibility of the Klan — the extent to which the segregationist measures may be attributed to its influence.

Of the strength of the Klan there can be no doubt. The Klan moved into Indiana in the years following the First World War. By 1923 there were klaverns all over the state, with a membership estimated at between a quarter and half a million. The Klan infiltrated Protestant churches, social organizations, and politics. For a time it dominated the Republican party, which in turn controlled state government. But its heyday was short-lived. It col-

\textsuperscript{37} Indianapolis \textit{Star}, June 8, 1929. Residence halls at Indiana University were opened to Negro men in 1948 and to Negro women in 1950. Indianapolis \textit{News}, April 23, 1959.

\textsuperscript{38} Indianapolis \textit{World}, July 18, 1921; \textit{Freeman}, August 9, 1924; Moore, \textit{Calumet Region}, 391.
lapsed in the midst of a series of disclosures which shook the complacency of Indianans, even though they were inclined to be fairly tolerant of wrongdoing in political circles. David C. Stephenson, former Grand Dragon and dominant figure in the Klan, was sentenced to life imprisonment for a particularly revolting sex crime. A few months later a whole series of public officials identified with the Klan had been accused of various kinds of malfeasance. Some of them escaped conviction but all were disgraced. Ever since that time politicians have frantically sought to dissociate themselves from any hint of Klan ties. Because the Klan was so thoroughly discredited there has been a tendency in recent years to make it a scapegoat and blame it for segregation measures which a later generation finds discreditable. The evidence in support of this belief, however, is tenuous.

In exploiting popular prejudices the Indiana Klan relied most heavily upon traditional fears of Roman Catholicism. The theme which was harped on most consistently in the pages of the official Klan publication, the Fiery Cross, was the alleged desire of the Church of Rome to dominate the government and schools of the United States, a theme in which existing prejudice against foreigners was fully exploited. Appeal to race prejudice, in comparison to the appeal to anti-Catholicism, was relatively slight despite Indiana’s long history of racial bigotry. In fact, efforts were sometimes made to convince Negroes that the Klan was their friend.

But white supremacy was one of the avowed tenets of the Klan, and part of the appeal to Hoosiers was the use of the well-worn argument of the necessity of maintaining racial purity. One Klansman explained that in “selling” the Klan to prospective members one approach was to bring up the subject of white supremacy “in this way — not anti-negro, but to keep the black man black and the white man white.” A full-page advertisement in the Fiery Cross from the Wayne County Klan declared that it unalterably opposed “contamination of the pure blood of the Anglo-Saxon race with an inferior nationality.” A Junior Klan had among its ideals, along with “shielding the chastity of the home and the purity of our womanhood” and “the practical value of the Scriptures,” a pledge “to maintain forever white supremacy.”

40 Deposition of Hugh F. Emmons, p. 377, in Papers Relating to the Ku Klux
At the same time the *Fiery Cross* and Klan spokesmen frequently asserted that they were not enemies of Negroes but were in reality their best friends. One editorial declared: "The fact that the Ku Klux Klan believes in white supremacy has furnished much propaganda for the enemy to use among the negro population, inciting hatred for the Klan in that quarter, although thousands of intelligent negroes realize the meaning of the sentiment expressed by 'white supremacy,' and are not excited by the slanders of the Klan." It insisted that there were many cases "wherein worthy negroes have been materially aided in time of misfortune by the Klan." One form of aid cited was gifts made to "worthy" Negro churches. It was reported that a gift to the Edinburg Colored Baptist Church was "gratefully received by the secretary of the church, who knows that the Klan is not the enemy of the negro as alien propaganda would have his people believe." The *Fiery Cross* insisted, also, that Klansmen were law-abiding and that they were opposed to lynching. In one instance, it was claimed, members of the Klan were responsible for preventing the lynching of a Negro accused of assaulting a white woman. In spite of these protestations of good will, however, it was well known that processions of white-robed Klansmen sometimes paraded through Negro districts as warning to Negroes to be law-abiding and to "keep in their place."

Attitudes among Negroes toward the Klan were mixed. Because it was identified with Protestantism and was publicly opposed to sin, some Negro clergymen either praised it or refrained from criticism, but other Negro ministers were frankly opposed to it. Negro intellectuals generally were openly suspicious and hostile. Most disturbing to them was the power which the Klan displayed in the Republican party.

Klan and D. C. Stephenson (Archives Division, Indiana State Library); *Fiery Cross*, February 16, September 28, 1923. In a typical piece of Klan oratory, defending the fact that the Klan was open to white members only, one speaker declared: "We are not anti anything. We are just white. We are not only white, but you just bet your life we are going to stay white. Whenever a man goes to mixing God's colors he gets into trouble, and he is not only doomed but he is damned and they [sic] ought to be." *Ibid.*, December 6, 1922.

41 *Fiery Cross*, July 6, August 31, 1923.

42 This incident occurred near Culver, Indiana. *Ibid.*, May 25, 1923. In another instance it was claimed that Klan members protected a Negro minister in Hammond who was threatened by Catholics and foreigners when he sought to have a Negro church built near a Catholic church. *Ibid.*, December 5, 1924.
The identification of the Klan with the party of Lincoln created a curious dilemma for Negro voters. As a legacy from the days of Reconstruction, Negroes had always retained an unquestioning loyalty to the Republican party. In the Democratic party, which in the South, at least, was the symbol of white supremacy, Negroes were a rarity. The injection of the Klan issue into the 1924 election campaign created the possibility of a change in the traditional political alignment. In the May primaries the Klan-backed candidates on the Republican ticket were victorious almost without exception. No Negro Republicans were nominated, but for the first time in history a Negro Democrat was nominated as a candidate for the Indiana house of representatives. One Negro newspaper, the Indianapolis Ledger, was undoubtedly subsidized by the Klan, and its editor was active in support of Ed Jackson, whom the Klan backed for the Republican nomination as governor. In an effort to hold the support of Negroes the Jackson group attempted to promote a kind of Klan for Negroes — an organization called “The Ritualistic Benevolent Society for American Born Citizens of African Blood and Protestant Faith.” Members pledged themselves to support the American government, the Protestant faith, “protection of home and chastity of womanhood,” free public schools, laws punishing lynching, and immigration laws to check the influx of “undesirables” who threatened the jobs of colored workers. The organization apparently met with little success, and on the day of the primary the Negro vote was light.43

From the beginning the Freeman, whose owner and publisher, George L. Knox, had been active in Republican politics in an earlier period, was strongly anti-Klan. After the primary it declared: “The Republican party as now constituted is the Ku Klux Klan of Indiana. The nominees for Governor, House, Senate, and County offices with one possible exception are all Klansmen, in fact there is no Republican party.” The Freeman called upon Negroes to support the Democrats; otherwise they would show that they were not worthy to vote. “The ballot is the only weapon of a civilized people and it is up to the Negro to use that weapon as do other civilized groups.”44

Throughout the campaign the Democratic leaders in Indiana

43 Freeman, March 29, May 17, 1924; Indianapolis News, May 6, 1924.  
44 Freeman, May 17, 1924
adopted an anti-Klan position. The Democratic state platform condemned efforts to make political issues out of race and religion. While not calling the Klan by name, it declared that the Republican party had been "delivered into the hands of an organization which has no place in politics and which promulgates doctrines which tend to break down the safeguards which the constitution throws around every citizen." The Klan responded by circulating a bulletin during the campaign declaring that the Democratic candidate for governor, Dr. Carleton McCulloch, was "antagonistic" toward the Klan and had "openly and publicly denounced the Klan," and should therefore be defeated.45

The Klan issue in Indiana attracted nationwide attention and aroused apprehension among Negroes in other states. During the campaign the Freeman asserted that because of the Klan, nationally known Negro Republican leaders refused to come into the state to campaign. At the national convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, James Weldon Johnson, the executive secretary, declared that the most important issue before Negroes in the coming election was the Klan. In spite of protestations by Klan leaders that it was not anti-Negro, he insisted that if the Klan gained political power the rights of Negroes would be endangered. In Indiana, he declared, it was the plain duty of Negroes to vote against Republican candidates who were "touched with the tar brush of the Ku Klux Klan." 46

Members of the NAACP in Indiana made strenuous efforts to defeat the Klan-backed candidates and organized an Independent Voters League for this purpose. In October the NAACP and the recently organized League called a meeting in Indianapolis of Negroes from all parts of the state for the purpose of alerting voters to the Klan issue. At a session which several thousand Negroes attended it was voted to endorse the entire Democratic ticket.47

Some Negro clergymen were outspoken in their opposition to the Klan. At the general conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, a resolution was adopted condemning Senator James E. Watson of Indiana for endorsing Jackson for governor. In Indianapolis, the minister of the leading A.M.E. church was known to be a foe of the Klan. On the other

45 Ibid., February 14, 1924; Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," 206.
46 Freeman, July 12, September 27, 1924.
47 Ibid., September 20, October 4, October 25, 1924.
hand, Negro ministers, who were traditionally active in Republican politics, in many instances continued to give their support to that party. Several A.M.E. ministers were listed as speakers by the Republican speakers' bureau. As might be expected, the Negroes most vocal in support of the Republican cause were those holding political jobs. Anti-Klan Negroes were bitter in their denunciation of those "Jim Crow" Negroes who continued to work in the Klan dominated Republican organization. 48

Democrats tried to convince Negro voters that the real issue in the campaign was not between Democrats and Republicans but between Democrats and the Klan. 49 Republicans tried to hold the Negro vote by pointing up traditional political loyalties. Representative Leonidas C. Dyer, of Missouri, author of an anti-lynching bill in Congress, told Indiana Negroes that their real enemy was the Democratic party. "There is no such thing," he said in Indianapolis, "as a colored man being loyal to his race and at the same time voting the Democratic ticket." 50

As the campaign wore on Republican leaders apparently began to feel concern over the possibility of a defection of the normally loyal Negroes. The director of the Republican state campaign bureau for Negroes told party workers that the Klan question had frightened Negroes. "The heart of the colored man is with you," he said, "but his mind is confused." The Klan itself was also apprehensive about the Negro vote. One bulletin from Klan headquarters warned that "the amalgamated enemies of the organization [Klan] are influencing the negro and foreigner to such an extent that practically the entire negro and foreign vote will be cast for the anti-Klan candidates. We must overcome this loss by seeing to it that all Protestant people support those candidates whom we favor." 51 Headlines in the Fiery Cross proclaimed: "Rome Dictates to Indiana Voters: Attempt Is Made to Stampede the Negro Vote." The paper accused the Democrats of "waging a war of hate, misrepresentation, coercion and party destruction with the hope of driving the Negro out of the Republican party and into the Demo-

48 Ibid., May 17, September 20, October 25, 1924.
49 This theme was used repeatedly by the Democrats. See, for example, Indianapolis News, October 17, 1924.
50 Ibid., October 16, 1924.
51 Freeman, September 20, 1924; Mimeographed bulletin, October 25, 1924, in Papers Relating to the Ku Klux Klan.
cratic camp.” “Roman agents” were said to be busily trying to create trouble at every Negro political meeting. But the Fiery Cross expressed confidence that Negroes were too intelligent to be misled. The agents of Rome, it said, “may control the Roman Catholic vote, but their task of driving like a herd of sheep, the negro voter into the McCulloch fold is too big for the Roman corporation. It can’t be done.”

In spite of these brave words there were marked defections among Negro Republicans on election day. In Indianapolis, Negro wards, which normally were solidly Republican, now went Democratic. But these Republican losses were more than offset by the large numbers of white Democrats and independents who voted the Klan-backed Republican ticket. The result was the election of a governor and other state officers who were known to have Klan ties. More than half of the members of the Indiana house of representatives as well as a large number of state senators were elected with Klan support, while innumerable local officials owed their victories in part to the Klan.

During the campaign Democrats had warned Negroes that if the Klan got control of the state government it would enact severe segregation measures, but no such measures materialized. In the 1925 session of the state legislature, in which Klan-supported members were in a majority, several measures were proposed against Roman Catholic influence in the public schools. But not a single segregation measure nor any other proposal to establish racial discrimination was introduced.

By the autumn of 1925, when municipal elections were held in the larger cities in the state, the prestige and influence of the Klan were already badly shaken. The trial of D. C. Stephenson, former Grand Dragon, got under way at the same time as the fall campaigns. But in spite of Stephenson’s disgrace the Klan had not yet lost its power in Indianapolis and Gary. In Indianapolis the

52 Fiery Cross, October 24, 1924.
53 Indianapolis News, November 5, 1924; Indianapolis Star, November 4, 1925.
54 A bulletin issued from the office of the Grand Dragon of the Realm of Indiana, October 20, 1924, said that enemies of the Klan were importing Negro speakers, who were advising Negro voters that a Klan victory would mean that Negroes would be segregated or forced to return to the South. See Papers Relating to the Ku Klux Klan. The only measure mentioning race introduced in the 1925 session was a senate bill sponsored by William E. English, Republican of Marion County, which would have provided a training school in domestic arts for Negro girls. The bill passed the senate but not the house. Indiana Senate, Journal, 74th Session (1925), 132, 792; Indiana House of Representatives, Journal, 74th Session (1925), 751.
Republican candidates for mayor and the city council were openly supported by the Klan. In the election of members of the Board of School Commissioners, which was held at the same time as the municipal election, a slate of candidates known as "the United Protestant Clubs ticket" also had Klan backing. Although the election of the school board was supposed to be non-partisan, Republican workers as well as Klan members were active in support of the Protestant ticket. In the closing days of the campaign a huge rally was held at which the Exalted Cyclops of Marion County Klan No. 3 presided. Prayers and speeches were made on behalf of the Republican candidates for mayor and city council and the Protestant school ticket, all of whom were present.55

All of the Klan-backed candidates were elected. Negroes do not appear to have been aroused over the Klan issue during the campaign as they had been in 1924. Except for a few party workers, they showed little enthusiasm for the Republican candidates, but neither did they show much disposition to support the Democrats. On election day the Negro vote was light, but the Republicans carried the day. Negro wards which had been Democratic the year before were once again in the Republican column. In Gary, as in Indianapolis, the Klan scored a victory. Floyd E. Williams, who was reputed to be a member of the Klan, was elected mayor, and five members of the Gary city council were persons nominated and elected with Klan support.56

There is a widespread belief that the Indianapolis school board elected with Klan backing was responsible for the segregation measures which became so controversial a part of the city's school administration in the remaining years of the decade. A recent book on desegregation in the schools says that "the Klan secured the erection of Crispus Attucks High School in 1927 and established it as a segregated school. In the same year a Klan dominated school board initiated the policy of transporting Negroes away from the elementary school in their neighborhood to more distant schools for Negroes." In a newspaper statement in 1957 the superintendent of the Indianapolis schools also placed the blame for segregation in the schools on the Klan.57

55 Indianapolis News, October 21, October 26, November 2, 1925.
56 Ibid., November 2, November 4, 1925; Indianapolis Star, November 4, 1925; Moore, Calumet Region, 556.
The accuracy of these statements is questionable in view of what we know about the development of segregation measures after World War I. Certainly the Klan did not "initiate" the policy of requiring Negro children to travel long distances to Negro schools. Negro parents were complaining about this policy before the Klan made its appearance in Indiana. In September, 1923, as noted above, the policy of requiring elementary school children to attend segregated schools was greatly extended. In December of that same year the building of a Negro high school was authorized. These developments, of course, all took place before 1925, when the Klan-backed school board was elected. In 1923 the board was made up of members nominated and elected with the support of the Citizens School Committee, a group which in 1925 ran candidates in opposition to the Klan-backed slate; in fact, members of the school board who had voted for the segregation measures in 1923 were defeated by Klan-backed candidates in 1925. In 1923, moreover, the Indianapolis school board had been under constant attack by the Klan because of alleged Roman Catholic influence, especially because the president of the board was a Catholic. The Fiery Cross regularly published articles and editorials on this subject, charging that Catholic influence was impeding the construction of needed public schools. But during 1923 there was not a single item in the columns of that paper on the subject of segregation in the Indianapolis schools.

The Klan-backed school board elected in 1925 instead of initiating segregation merely carried forward policies begun by its predecessor. In 1927, when the Negro high school, Attucks, was completed, the board adopted a policy which apparently had been intended all along, that all Negro high school students must attend this school. The action of the board in 1929 in removing Negro pupils from three mixed elementary schools was a continuation of an already established policy. By that year Negro leaders in Indianapolis, including the president of the NAACP, were active in a campaign to defeat the members of this board who were seeking re-election. Publicly, at least, they did not base their opposition on the board's segregationist policies but rather on discrimination against Indianapolis Negroes in the hiring of teachers.  

58 See, for example, Indianapolis News, May 13, 1919.  
59 Indianapolis Times, November 2, 1929.
The fact that the Klan did not work openly for the segregation of the Indianapolis schools does not mean that Klan influence was non-existent. Since Klan membership and Klan influence were pervasive in the early 1920's, undoubtedly Klan views were represented in the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce and other civic groups which worked for the separation of the races in the schools. By 1926, Klan influence no doubt contributed to passage of the racial zoning ordinance in Indianapolis and the segregation movement in the Gary schools; at that time the influence of the Klan was indirect and covert rather than direct and open. But throughout these years the mayors of both Indianapolis and Gary were reputed to be members of the Klan, and a majority of the city councils of both cities had been elected with Klan support.

Klan influence may have played some part in the tightening of racial barriers in the 1920's, but it does not appear to have been the prime mover. Actually, the rapid influx of Negroes from the rural South into urban centers of a state where there had always been a tradition of racism seems to offer a sufficient explanation of the demand for segregation. The same attitudes among the people of Indiana which caused them to embrace the Klan caused them to favor separation of the races. Although Klan propaganda may have intensified race feeling, it is still conceivable that the segregation measures which were adopted in the 1920's might have been adopted if the Klan had not existed.