

Chapter One: African Americans in Indianapolis

Introduction

Race and politics have played an important part in shaping the history of the United States, from the first arrival of African slaves in the early seventeenth century to the election of an African-American president in 2008. The Great Depression and the New Deal represent a period that was no exception to the influence of race and politics. After Franklin Roosevelt succeeded Herbert Hoover to the American presidency, there was much faith and hope expressed on the editorial pages of the *Indianapolis Recorder* that African Americans would be treated fairly under the New Deal. Hope began to wane when little political patronage was dispensed, in the form of government jobs, once the Democrats took office in 1933. As the first incarnation of the New Deal progressed, African Americans continued to experience prejudice, segregation, unfair wages, and generally a “raw deal.” But what was more, African-American women and men were not given a fair opportunity to ensure for themselves better political, social, and economic standing in the future. This struggle for full-fledged citizenship was further underscored when Congress failed to pass anti-lynching legislation in 1934 and 1935.

The New Dealers, Franklin Roosevelt chief among them, did not seize the opportunity presented by the Great Depression to push for civil rights and social justice for African Americans. Their intent was not necessarily malicious. A more nuanced view of the issues shows that political expedience, and a measure of indifference, led the New Dealers to not treat civil rights as the pressing issue that it was. Roosevelt and the New Dealers believed that they faced the potential for significant resistance to their

economic recovery program from Southern Democrats on Capitol Hill if they tried to interfere with race relations in the South.

Race continued to play a role in government administration because the perceived political cost to alter the status quo was too high. However, some of Roosevelt's closest advisors took steps to reduce racism in government and improve conditions for African Americans. Harold Ickes, Frances Perkins, and Harry Hopkins provided good examples by having spoken out against race discrimination in the administration of New Deal programs. But these efforts did not expand much beyond policy statements about enforced equality and fairness under New Deal programs such as the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Many New Deal programs were based in Washington, D.C., but were administered locally. As Jacqueline Jones explains, there were discriminatory practices on the local level that the New Deal programs left in place. For instance, the National Recovery Administration permitted wage differentials that favored whites over blacks. While African Americans did benefit from the New Deal through direct and work relief, the state and federal governments failed to realize their opportunity to contribute to a rise in the political, social, and economic standing of African Americans.¹

Some black leaders wondered whether, paradoxically, the Great Depression presented an opportunity to African Americans to seize upon citizenship because, as Tuskegee faculty member Hazel Harrison wrote, the "Depression, like death, has been a leveler." Almost everyone was poor, not just African Americans. President Roosevelt

¹ Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), chapter 3; Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), chapter 2; Roger Biles, *A New Deal for the American People* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), chapter 9. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), chapter 6.

promised in his campaign a “new deal” and pledged to remember the “Forgotten Man.” Harrison observed that previous crises in American history had also presented opportunities for African Americans to improve their station in life. The Civil War, for all of its death and calamity, ended slavery and made citizens out of African Americans. Likewise, the Great War took African Americans “from [their] natural habitat, the South” and sent them northward in search of industrial jobs and abroad as soldiers. Harrison asked whether the depression will “uphold the tradition and in turn prove a blessing to the Negro?”² Harrison saw the opportunity to forge ahead in the cause of civil rights and earning full citizenship.

This thesis examines the first years of the Roosevelt Administration, roughly 1933 through 1936. This timeframe was carefully chosen because it was a period when the issues surrounding race and racism were brought to the fore. In the initial period of the New Deal we can see how Roosevelt met and failed to meet the expectations of African Americans. The prevailing view among the African American leadership in 1935, argued Harvard Sitkoff, was that the federal government had “betrayed [African Americans] under the New Deal.” Sitkoff referred to these “denunciations of the New Deal by blacks” as commonplace from 1933 to 1935. But beginning with the Second New Deal in the middle 1930s the criticism turned to applause.³

Because of its demographic diversity, Indianapolis provides an interesting context for this study. In addition, Indianapolis offers a good example of a city with an industrial economy leading up to the Great Depression as well as an established African American community. The capital city of Indiana received large numbers of the African-American

² Hazel W. Harrison, “The Status of the American Negro in the New Deal,” *The Crisis* (November 1933), 256, 262.

³ Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 56-59.

migrants coming from the rural South to the urban North during the Great Migration of the nineteen-teens, but the city had a substantial population of black citizens since its founding in the early nineteenth century. But we also find that Indianapolis was a city with its own set of racial tensions. Additionally, since New Deal programs were, in many cases, administered locally, we can get a sense of racial context of Indianapolis during this period from examining the words of the African American leadership there. In that sense, the capital of the Hoosier state can provide an interesting case study in the thoughts and feelings of African Americans as the New Deal began to unfold and the long struggle for political, social, and economic citizenship continued.

Another motivation for choosing Indianapolis is its status, even now, as a second-tier city. Indianapolis offers a nearly untapped source of history waiting to be written about. It is my hope that this thesis contributes to the historiography of the Midwest. Not only do I wish to contribute to regional studies, but I wish to offer a synthesis of two historiographies: the literature of citizenship and that of the New Deal and race.

Emma Lou Thornbrough shows in her posthumous publication *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century* that African Americans in Indiana strongly supported Roosevelt and other Democrats in the 1936 election, with as much as 75 percent of black votes in Indianapolis going to the Democrats. Freeman B. Ransom was chosen by the national Democratic Party to lead the campaign for African American votes in Indiana. He strongly supported Roosevelt and the New Deal in his speeches throughout the state. Ransom encouraged voters to support Roosevelt, reminding them that “Through the New Deal every Negro in the state has benefited.” After the First New Deal and a record of not supporting African American interests, because of the Second New Deal, Roosevelt

was still able to earn another term with the help of Indiana's African American votes. Even after he lost Indiana's electoral votes in 1940 because of Hoosier Wendell Willkie's presence on the Republican ticket, African Americans continued to support the Democratic Party in large numbers. Thornbrough pointed out that in the election of 1944, the *Recorder* finally threw its support behind the Democrats.⁴ The newspaper cited the "empty promises of the Republicans since Emancipation" and the "solid performance" of Roosevelt and the New Dealers as the only "avenue of hope."⁵

In his assessment of the New Deal era and the struggle for civil rights, Harvard Sitkoff explains that both white workers and African American workers did not have their needs met through government works programs. However, during Roosevelt's second term as president, the number of African Americans on relief and the amount of money they received in payment rose over the amount during his first term. This movement in 1936 and following showed, according to Sitkoff, the "New Deal's determination to administer relief with more concern for need than color" as well as "the movement of whites from the ranks of the jobless to the employed." Sitkoff also points out that, on a national level, the African American press and journals that had been such vocal critics of the First New Deal "did not print a single anti-WPA article" in Roosevelt's second term. In fact, articles in *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* lauded Harry Hopkins and the WPA for investing in African-American communities and making a commitment to racial equality, unlike previous New Deal programs. Sitkoff's evaluation of the New Deal's impact on African Americans focuses on the advances in health,

⁴ The *Recorder*, traditionally a Republican-leaning publication, had, until then, been hesitant to endorse Democrats.

⁵ Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 92-93; "Demos Open Headquarters," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 5 September 1936; "To Corral Race Vote—New Deal," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 12 September 1936; "Roosevelt Headquarters Are Opened; F.B. Ransom in Charge," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 19 September 1936.

education, and economic standing in the years following 1935. Even with persistent racial discrimination, “the New Deal’s massive relief program meant relatively more to blacks than to whites.” But still, improvements in health, education, and economics did not bring African Americans to a level equal to that of white Americans.⁶

For Sitkoff, the crusade against lynching “buoyed the hopefulness of the black struggle.” Even though the movement to gain civil rights did not succeed in convincing Congress to pass a federal law, the struggle itself had value. Sitkoff explains that the “battle against this most criminal and atrocious manifestation of racism aroused blacks more than any other issue, altered the attitudes of many whites, and forged a sturdy interracial coalition.” Sitkoff gives credit, at least in part, to the New Deal for having “paved the way for a major effort to enact federal anti-lynching legislation. Roosevelt had generated reform impulses and stirred sympathy for the forgotten men.”⁷

Nancy Weiss tempers Sitkoff’s assessment by showing that significant discrimination did continue to exist under the WPA and that even under the Second New Deal, the position of African Americans grew worse. She writes, “Left to their own devices, local relief administrators followed their own conservative instincts.” Although the WPA was managed more centrally than FERA, local leaders outside the view of Washington were able to enforce their own rules for the treatment of African American workers. Weiss writes that Washington did indeed intervene and resolve issues of which it was made aware, but with so many projects and numerous local relief offices discrimination continued to be all too common in the WPA.⁸

⁶ Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 69-71, 74-75.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 244-246, 268-279.

⁸ Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 175, 178-179.

Weiss asks readers to consider whether the Roosevelt Administration and the New Dealers ought to receive accolades for giving relief to African Americans in severe poverty or criticized for allowing and even causing racial discrimination in the administration of relief and for “solidifying the inferior status of blacks.” On the one hand, New Dealers issued statements demanding colorblindness and on the other hand, they still allowed discrimination under their watch. In Weiss’s assessment, because the New Deal failed to “escape the racism typical of American society in the 1930s,” it sometimes worsened rather than improved the social, economic, and political life of African Americans.⁹

Two scholars, T.H. Marshall and Alice Kessler-Harris, have made notable contributions to the historical literature on citizenship. In 1950, Marshall, a British sociologist, established an analytical framework for understanding citizenship. In his seminal work, *Citizenship and Social Class*, he presented citizenship as progressing from civil rights in the 18th century, to political rights in the 19th century, and, ultimately, to social rights in the 20th century. Marshall defined the first “element” of citizenship, that of civil rights, as possessing individual freedom—“liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice.” By political rights, Marshall meant the ability to have and use political power “as a member of a body invested with political authority.” The social element of citizenship Marshall viewed as the entire “range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society.” In order to be considered a full citizen, Marshall argued, one must possess all three of these

⁹ Ibid.

rights, writing that “citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community.”¹⁰ Interested in analyzing the rise of the British welfare state in the post World War II era, Marshall examined the growth of citizenship only among English males and did not consider either women or minorities in his study.

Kessler-Harris has written extensively on the subject of citizenship and offers three modifications of Marshall’s approach that are relevant to this study: (1) an application of “citizenship” to the context of the New Deal; (2) a critique of his focus on white men; and (3) the introduction of the additional category of “economic citizenship.” Her 2001 book, *In Pursuit of Equity* examines the “changing conceptions of fairness” as American social policies were formed during the New Deal. She argues that as New Deal policies were being developed, industries that heavily employed women were excluded from coverage. These jobs included clerical work at all levels of government, agricultural jobs, and domestic service, among others. She explains that “[the] upshot [of these policies] was the exclusion of 55 percent of African American workers and 80 percent of women workers.”¹¹

Elsewhere, Kessler-Harris writes that during the Depression, the American government built policies that came from the perspective of a “deeply gendered, racialized, and sometimes nostalgic vision of the past...” that favored white males to the near exclusion of all others. Rhetorical notions of American individualism and economic freedom were reserved “largely to the province of white males.”¹² That is to say,

¹⁰ T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950; reprint, London: Pluto Press, 1992), 8, 18.

¹¹ Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 16, 96-7.

¹² Alice Kessler-Harris, “Limits of Social Citizenship in the Depression Era,” *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 1253-1259.

African-American men and women did not fit into the definition of those who are economically free to choose.

Kessler-Harris expanded on Marshall's conception of citizenship by adding a new aspect, that of "economic citizenship." She writes that this new category "can be measured by the possession and exercise of the privileges and opportunities necessary for men and women to achieve economic and social autonomy and independence." Kessler-Harris is drawing on Marshall's argument that citizenship involves the right to work. But she takes it a step further to examine what happened to women who were kept from obtaining good jobs. Closed access to jobs prevented women's economic independence and left them having to depend on men, who believed that a good job was their right.¹³ She explains that the importance of economic citizenship for women, and by extension African Americans and others for whom it was historically not taken for granted, that it "provides the surest path to full participation in the polity and the political power."¹⁴ For those who lacked economic citizenship, then, political power was also not within reach.

The analysis of citizenship in its various forms herein is similar to that presented by Marshall and Kessler-Harris, with some important differences. I propose that in the context of the African American struggle for citizenship in the 20th century, and especially in the 1930s, citizenship is best described in terms of political, economic, and social rights. Like Marshall and Kessler-Harris, possessing political citizenship can be understood as that which provides a group with a voice in how they are governed (in the spirit of Lockean political philosophy). As with Kessler-Harris's approach, this work relies on the importance of economic citizenship in allowing African Americans the

¹³ Alice Kessler-Harris, "In Pursuit of Economic Citizenship," *Social Politics* 10 (2003): 158-160.

¹⁴ Alice Kessler-Harris, "Gender Identity: Rights to Work and the Idea of Economic Citizenship," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 46 (1996): 415.

opportunity to hold jobs that paid well and could provide the resources to live a good life. But in the context of the African American struggle for citizenship in the 20th century, and especially in the 1930s, social citizenship is best described as having a place in society. Social citizenship for African Americans in the twentieth century meant no longer having to contend with Jim Crowism, job and pay discrimination, and the fear of lynch mobs. In the works of Marshall and Kessler-Harris, this aspect of social citizenship is not addressed largely because the populations with which both scholars are concerned did not have to face such problems. The experience of African Americans' quest for citizenship challenges the "progression" that Marshall lays out (from civil to political to social). It is more appropriate to say that African Americans' citizenship ebbed and flowed from the 14th Amendment in 1868 to the Great Depression and beyond. By exploring a critical moment in the centuries-long struggle of African Americans for full citizenship in the United States, this study seeks to develop our understanding of both African-American history and the meaning of citizenship in America.

The *Indianapolis Recorder* and the papers of the Indianapolis branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) provide much of the primary source material for this thesis. Founded in 1895, the *Recorder* has been an important African American newspaper. During the period of the Great Depression, the *Recorder* acted not only as a source of news for African Americans in Indianapolis, but the paper also provided interesting insight into the hearts and minds of its publishers and readers through commentaries, editorials, and letters to the editor. In the period covered by this thesis, the *Recorder* offered a range of viewpoints on the issues of the day and both criticized and praised the Democratic-led governments of Indiana and the United

States. Additionally, the *Recorder* was part of a national network of news providers called the Associated Negro Press (ANP). Not only did the *Recorder* offer important local news, but it also brought a national perspective to its readers.

The papers of the local branch of the NAACP, mostly containing correspondences between the members in Indianapolis and the national headquarters in New York City, serve as another key source in this work. Despite its internal struggles, the organization played a crucial part in protecting the interests of its constituents. Other primary sources include the papers of Henry J. Richardson, Jr., an African-American member of the Indiana House of Representatives. Richardson was responsible for a 1933 bill outlawing race discrimination on the job. For a broader national perspective on the issues addressed in the *Recorder*, I have also included in my research contemporary articles from two important periodicals: *The Crisis*, the journal of the NAACP, and *Opportunity*, the National Urban League's publication.

While my two main sources, the *Indianapolis Recorder* and the NAACP papers, are rich in what they offer an historian, they are still limited. These sources do not represent the entire African American population of Indianapolis, let alone that of the entire country. What they do offer, however, is an understanding of the mindset of the black leadership in Indianapolis and their interaction with the New Deal.

This thesis is organized around several themes. In the second chapter I address the various New Deal programs and how they were received by African Americans in Indianapolis. In the third chapter, I examine from the same perspective the politics of civil rights, party patronage, issues of economic citizenship, and the push for anti-

lynching legislation. All of these problems fall into to the larger category of the pursuit of political, economic, and social citizenship for African Americans.

African Americans in Indianapolis before the Great Depression

Although an integral part of the city's history from its founding, the black population of Indianapolis was subjected to discrimination and segregation. In the early years of the twentieth century, before the Great Migration, a majority of the African-American population still lived in the rural South, most of them earning a living as sharecroppers. But in Indiana during this period, a migration of African Americans from rural southern Indiana to the state's northern towns and urban centers had already begun. This migration represented a move from a southern agrarian way of life to northern industrial life, which was mirrored on a national level in the coming decades by the Great Migration, referring to the mass migration of African Americans from the mostly rural and agricultural South to the industrial and urban North during the era of World War I.¹⁵

As of 1910, immediately preceding the decade of the Great Migration, nearly 90 percent of the African-American population lived in the South, of which 72.6 percent of this group was classified as living in rural places. What made this population shift so great is not its quantity (there was an even greater population movement following World War II), but rather the significant changes to the economic and social life of the cities where they moved, and ultimately the nation as a whole. Economic conditions in the South were not favorable; farming conditions had begun to decline in the early twentieth century, especially for black sharecroppers. In the North, on the other hand, the start of

¹⁵ Richard B. Pierce, *Polite Protest: The Political Economy of Race in Indianapolis, 1920-1970* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 1-4; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 2; James H. Madison, *The Indiana Way: A State History* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 241.

World War I meant a rise in factory production and the demand for laborers. This demand for workers coincided with the decline of immigration from abroad, mostly from Europe, and the rise of African American migration from the South. Once the United States entered the Great War, labor shortages rose even further, which created opportunities for African American men and women that had been virtually unavailable before. These black migrants were filling the jobs that would have been filled by Eastern Europeans had the United States government not begun to clamp down so tightly on the flow of people across the Atlantic in 1924. However, with the rise in the African-American population in the North, the level of racial discrimination and acts of race violence rose, too.¹⁶

Most African-American migrants to Indiana, coming from within state or nearby Kentucky and Tennessee, had set their sights on Indianapolis, the state's capital and largest city, as their destination.¹⁷ By the beginning of the 1900s, Indianapolis had the largest African-American population of any city in Indiana, and it would maintain this distinction for the entirety of the century. In 1900, Indianapolis had a total population of 169,164, of which 15,391 were African American, or nearly 10 percent of the total count. This percentage of African Americans was among the highest of any northern city. By 1900 nearly three quarters of Indiana's black population lived in what was considered an urban setting; by 1910 the number had increased by more than five percentage points, to just over 80 percent. Some black farming communities in the state even disappeared altogether as a result of urban migration. This trend is not altogether surprising when one

¹⁶ Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 34; James H. Madison, *Indiana Through Tradition and Change: A History of the Hoosier State and its People, 1920-1945* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1982), 8.

¹⁷ It should be noted that most of the African American migrants in Indiana did *not* come from the Deep South, but from so-called Border States. This distinction is noteworthy because of differing experiences with racism and prejudice for African Americans among the regions of the South.

takes into account that Indiana's urban population steadily increased, from 20 percent of the total in 1880 to just over 50 percent by 1920.¹⁸

Even though most of the influx of African Americans came to Indianapolis from within Indiana's borders in the early 20th century, there was also a steady stream of newcomers from southern states as far back as the Civil War. A significant number came from Kentucky and settled in the Ohio River cities and towns before moving to Indianapolis and the Calumet region in northwest Indiana a generation or two later. When taken as a whole, however, Indiana's African-American population, both rural and urban, remained quite small. The black Hoosier population stood at a mere 2 percent of the total in 1880, rising to only 2.8 percent by 1920. However, the vast majority of the state's African Americans settled in racial ghettos, where their impact could be felt despite their relatively small numbers. Even prior to 1900, Indianapolis had an established community of African Americans, most living in the vicinity of Indiana Avenue, just northwest of downtown Indianapolis. Others settled on the near eastside of the city. As new African-American migrants arrived in these neighborhoods and the concentration of black residents increased, the white residents began to move away and further solidify the racial distinction of these areas.¹⁹

In much the same way that residential patterns and neighborhoods were established by social mores and racial prejudice, employment patterns were similarly determined. Broadly speaking, African Americans could only work in jobs that whites permitted them to have, which were generally at the bottom of the economic ladder and

¹⁸ Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 4; Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Historical Society, 1968), 363.

¹⁹ Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 370; Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 15-17; Madison, *The Indiana Way*, 242-243; Madison, *Indiana Through Tradition and Change*, 8.

usually undesirable. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, most African-American men were employed as “common laborers,” which for the most part meant that they either worked as domestic servants or as porters. Others built roads, cleaned floors, drove teams of horses, waited tables, or worked as “helpers” to skilled laborers. There was one skilled trade, however, that black men seemed to rule, and that was barbering. Likewise, African-American women held only certain jobs, mostly as domestic servants and laundresses.²⁰

Residents in the well-established African-American neighborhoods of Indianapolis viewed the increase in the black migrant population between 1900 and World War I with some trepidation. In the words of an unnamed longtime resident of the city, one could feel an “increase in [the] colored population by [an] increase in racial discrimination.” On the one hand they felt sympathy for what the new arrivals experienced while living in the South, while on the other they were wary of the possible negative impact of a sharp increase in the city’s black population because Indianapolis was not very far removed from the South, in both geography and mentality. Much like previous generations’ experiences, an increase in black residents meant an increase in discrimination to them. The city’s two primary black newspapers were disagreed with each other over the impact of the southern exodus. The *Indianapolis Freeman* disapproved of the migration, declaring that African Americans did not actually have many opportunities in the North and the migration would only cause trouble. The *Indianapolis Recorder* claimed the other side of the argument, writing that the influx was

²⁰ Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 6. Thornbrough cites the Census Bureau’s *Negro Population, 1790-1915*; Jones, *Labor of Love*, 196-197.

not creating problems and that it was the responsibility of “our institutions” to make them welcome.²¹

The influx of African Americans from the Upper South challenged the notion among Hoosiers of a homogenous and tolerant society, argues James H. Madison. While the total black population of Indiana hovered around 3 percent of the state’s total number of people during the 1920s, the total number of African Americans living in Indiana increased significantly from the 1920s to the 1940s. In that time, the white population grew by a decidedly smaller increment. During the early twentieth century, the reputation of Hoosiers for hospitality did not apparently apply to African Americans. Discrimination and segregation were prevalent throughout the state. Segregation extended to schools, parks, cemeteries, theatres, hospitals, and even the society columns in newspapers. In some parts of Indiana there were unofficial “Sundown Laws” that forced African Americans to be indoors or out of town after dusk. These sorts of discrimination and segregation were not exclusive to the southern portion of the state. Northern cities, especially the state’s largest urban areas, were not immune.²²

For African Americans living in Indiana, one experience following World War I was a crystallizing of residential segregation, even more so than in previous generations. African Americans had always lived in separate neighborhoods, but as the black population increased and with it a demand for housing, the pressure intensified from Indianapolis’ white residents to more clearly draw the line between neighborhoods. This drive for residential segregation was motivated by the movement of African Americans from their established enclave along Indiana Avenue to other parts of the city. Some

²¹ Ibid., 4-5, 36-37.

²² Madison, *Indiana Through Tradition and Change*, 7-9.

residents responded by forming the White Citizens Protective League in 1920, which successfully lobbied the city council to pass a race-based residential zoning ordinance. With the help of the NAACP, in 1926 the ordinance was deemed unconstitutional by the Marion County Superior Court. Regardless, the racist sentiment had been made clear.²³

Along with the movement to make residential segregation official was a call to segregate schools. Segregating elementary schools would have had little effect, since most African Americans lived in enclaves and parents sent their children to neighborhood schools. High schools, though, were a different story. The Board of School Commissioners decided in 1921 that a completely segregated school system was called for, including segregated high schools. By 1923, new boundary lines had been drawn and African American students were removed from predominantly white middle schools and white students were likewise transferred from predominantly African-American schools. Some parents of the black students complained because they would be forced to pay the cost of transporting their children to schools that were often a greater distance from their homes than the previous school. A contemporary newspaper article from the white press cited that black students posed a threat to the health of white students because of the risk of spreading tuberculosis. A leader from the white community backed this statement by claiming that having a crowded school with a mixed student population posed a clear threat to white students.²⁴

From the time that Indianapolis's white population began calling for segregated high schools, there had been promises of building a new high school for African-American students. In September of 1927 the school finally became a reality and its

²³ Ibid., 10; Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 51-53.

²⁴ Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 54-56.

doors were opened. The school was named after Crispus Attucks, an African American hero known for dying in the Boston Massacre. While a symbol of racism and segregation, Crispus Attucks High School became an important institution for the African-American population of Indianapolis. The school provided students with a high quality and well-rounded education and even a great sense of pride in the athletic achievements of the school, which won the state basketball tournament in the 1950s.²⁵

The Great Crash

The 1920s, normally viewed as a prosperous period, can be characterized from an African American perspective as one of increasing racial discrimination and deepening segregation. The economy expanded during the 1920s and workers' productivity increased to new heights. Overall industrial output grew by 60 percent during the decade. The rate of unemployment hovered around 2 percent, and the gross national product rose steadily every year. Inflation remained low and per capita income continually increased. This economic growth hid some very serious problems, however. Thousands of banks failed in the 1920s, which is hardly a sign of a truly healthy economy. A number of laborers worked for wages that were too low and organized labor was virtually impotent. African Americans held a near monopoly on the most degraded and degrading jobs, but they still saw competition from immigrants coming from Mexico and southeastern Europe.²⁶

Agriculture suffered the most among the various sectors of the economy during the 1920s. During the Great War, the United States had become Europe's chief supply of

²⁵ Ibid., 58.

²⁶ Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 5-6; Alan Lawson, *A Commonwealth of Hope: The New Deal Response to Crisis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 21-22; Justus D. Doenecke, *The New Deal* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2003), 5.

food as a result of crop shortages there. But after World War I, production began again in Europe, which brought about a dizzying drop in agricultural prices in the United States. Several million farmers gave up the trade in the 1920s, while many others lost their land and were forced into sharecropping. The farmers lobbied for aid from Washington, but President Coolidge twice vetoed a congressional bill that would have raised prices.²⁷

The economic growth and unbridled optimism of the 1920s came to a halt with the stock market crash of October 1929 and the subsequent depression. The nation was stunned by how far it had fallen. The excess and prosperity of the previous decade stood in sharp relief to the deprivation and poverty of the depression decade. The political elites were divided on how to address the problem. The welfare and relief system that was in place has been called a “patchwork of voluntary institutions and pinch-penny state and local agencies.”²⁸ The natural social response to a crisis of this nature was to restore order, but all levels of government struggled with how to appropriately help those left most desperate, as well as how to repair the social and economic damage. Before the arrival of the New Deal in 1933, the responsibility for relief was left up to local community leaders, which in Indiana meant primarily township trustees. Beyond what little aid trustees could provide, much of the remaining burden for relief work fell to private charities. But as the Depression wore on and the financial health of these charities and local governments waned, it became clear that federal help would be

²⁷ Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 6-7; Lawson, *Commonwealth of Hope*, 21-23.

²⁸ Lawson, *Commonwealth of Hope*, 8-9.

necessary. However, the thought of government aid from any level was anathema to many Hoosiers, especially those in power.²⁹

Herbert Hoover had been elected as President of the United States in 1928. Prior to his election as president, he had held a number of federal appointments. While serving under Calvin Coolidge as Secretary of Commerce, Hoover had warned that the economy was unstable. Coolidge disregarded Hoover's astute advice. He was once quoted as saying, "That man [Hoover] has offered me unsolicited advice for six years, all of it bad!" It was rather unfortunate, then, for President Hoover when he inherited an economic disaster waiting to happen.³⁰

The 1930s was a period characterized by high unemployment and profound poverty, as well as discrimination and segregation. Even though both whites and blacks experienced poverty and unemployment as the economic crisis deepened, there is little argument among scholars that African Americans had it far worse than other Americans. Black workers generally held jobs as unskilled laborers, and were therefore the least secure in their positions. In 1930, about 85 percent of employed African Americans worked in agriculture, as domestics, or in factories. As white unemployment increased, black unemployment rose too because whites were taking jobs from black workers in positions that previously would have been considered undesirable. The *Recorder* asserted that black workers were being fired in order to make positions available for white workers.³¹

Following the Great Crash of October 1929, President Hoover met with leaders from business, labor, and agriculture. Hoover attempted to prevent the problems on Wall

²⁹ Madison, *Indiana Through Tradition and Change*, 105-106.

³⁰ Lawson, *Commonwealth of Hope*, 24; Doenecke, *New Deal*, 6-7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 72-73; "I Am Free, Black and 21," *The Crisis* (April 1933), 79.

Street from impacting the whole of the nation's economy. However, the Crash was merely signified a deeper crisis. Myriad factors, including depressed agricultural prices and an over-inflated financial system, were responsible for the coming of the Great Depression. Hoover dealt with the crisis as economic depressions, panics, and recessions had been dealt with in previous decades. He urged industrial and agricultural employers to expand production, stabilize prices, prevent strikes, give relief, share work, and most important, not to reduce wages. By the summer of 1930, Congress passed and Hoover signed a bill that appropriated \$800 million for public works projects that would employ a large number of people. Hoover Dam, named after the president, was one such project. Between 1929 and 1932, virtually the entirety of Hoover's term as president, government spending grew by 50 percent. But as unemployment increased and poverty became more widespread, people called upon the federal government to do even more. In October of 1930, Hoover formed the President's Emergency Committee for Employment, which was called upon to organize relief at the state and local level but without spending federal dollars. This committee underwent several name changes, but the outcome remained the same. Unemployment was only getting worse and the conservative philosophy of less government and less spending that had been heralded during the 1920s was inadequate for the present economic crisis.³²

Indiana's Republican governor Harry Leslie did not want to acknowledge that government aid was necessary in the first years of the economic crisis. Late in 1930, Governor Leslie formed the Indiana Advisory Committee for Relief of the Unemployed. The committee agreed with the governor that the state government should not give aid to those in need. The prevailing philosophy at the time was that churches and private

³² Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 8-9, 18-19; Doenecke, *New Deal*, 7-8, 12.

charities should be responsible for looking after the poor. In early 1931, Governor Leslie addressed the Indiana General Assembly and said nothing regarding issues of relief or unemployment. In 1932 he called a special session of the Assembly, but only to address taxation issues. Governor Leslie did request some aid dollars from Washington through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, but only grudgingly and on a very limited basis. He firmly believed that local aid organizations should care for their own and that the state and federal governments should not.³³

The Election of 1932

President Hoover lacked much in political skill, but it hardly seemed to matter. Regardless of the individual nominated to run on the Republican ticket at any level of government, an uphill battle awaited them during the campaign of 1932. The promises that Franklin D. Roosevelt made to the American people of a “new deal” roused many to vote the Democrat into the White House. The election of 1932 represented a wholesale change in the political winds of the United States. Across the nation and at all levels of government there began a widespread shift toward Democratic leadership. Indiana was no exception; the Democrats’ campaign in the Hoosier state rested on declaring that the way to end the economic crisis was to vote out of office the Republican leadership. This campaign tactic worked, propelling Democrat Paul V. McNutt to a victory in the gubernatorial race. After Roosevelt finally won the Democratic presidential nomination, he campaigned on the party’s platform of public works supported by the federal government, a strong currency, paying down foreign debts, relief for the unemployed,

³³ Madison, *Indiana Through Tradition and Change*, 106-107; Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 74-75.

and social insurance. Roosevelt's platform appealed to the nation, which propelled him to a momentous presidency.³⁴

One group that was largely not persuaded by Roosevelt's promises was the African-American electorate. Ever since black men could vote following the Civil War, they had supported the Republican Party, the party of Lincoln, the Great Emancipator. This consistent support for the Grand Old Party did not die with Herbert Hoover's bid for a second term as president. Even though Hoover did little for African Americans, most supported, if half-heartedly, his candidacy in 1928 and again in 1932. Despite the Republican Party's consistent failures to meet the needs of African Americans, there was even greater distaste for the Democratic Party, stemming from their experience with Southern Democrats.³⁵

Early in 1933, local African-American leader Freeman B. Ransom wrote a letter to William Pickens at the national headquarters of the NAACP. In the correspondence, Ransom responded to Pickens' inquiry regarding the "conditions affecting colored people" in Indianapolis, noting that conditions were "about the same as everywhere else." He explained that prior to the Depression, African-American workers found jobs in factories or domestic service, but that those industries had been shut down, leaving 75 percent of the city's black population jobless. Domestic workers were laid off or replaced by whites.³⁶

³⁴ Doenecke, *New Deal*, 7-8, 12, 18-19; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 8-9; Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 80; Madison, *Indiana Through Tradition and Change*, 82.

³⁵ Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 174-175.

³⁶ F.B. Ransom to William Pickens, March 10, 1933 (Papers of the NAACP, Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939, Indianapolis, microfilm).

Chapter Two: Roosevelt's First Administration and the New Deal, 1933 through 1936

The Beginnings of a New Deal

From the start of the New Deal, members of the Roosevelt Administration were keen on fixing the economy and putting people back to work. Their intentions were no doubt honorable. Roosevelt did not push for reform on the issue of civil rights, segregation, and discrimination for fear that he might alienate his southern supporters, which would cost him crucial votes needed to pass New Deal legislation and address the economic problems he saw as his priority. Before the National Recovery Administration (NRA) was instituted in 1933, a fifth of the African-American workforce was unemployed. Those who were employed when the NRA was in effect often were the first to lose their jobs when personnel cuts were required. Often, wages for African-American workers were sub-minimum under the Recovery Administration. The Wagner Act, part of the Second New Deal, was a piece of legislation designed to allow workers to organize. However, the Wagner Act was not effective in helping the cause of black laborers, since many were not permitted to be union members. In fact, sometimes the only work an African American could find was as a strikebreaker. The Second New Deal that began in 1935, which included the Works Progress Administration (WPA), helped to turn the tide of African-American political support in favor of Roosevelt and the Democrats. African Americans received Social Security payments, employment in the National Youth Administration (NYA), WPA, and CCC³⁷ (though many were in segregated camps), and a voice in the Administration through agency leadership. While it is true that the New Deal programs gave many jobs to low-income African American

³⁷ The CCC began in the First New Deal, but because of its success and popularity, continued into the Second New Deal.

families and, in gratitude, black voters supported Roosevelt and other Democrats, many also bemoaned the discrimination they experienced because of the very same programs. The discrimination continued in the early years of the New Deal, as well as the complaints.³⁸

The First New Deal, begun almost immediately upon Roosevelt's arrival in office in 1933, represented an effort to get the sputtering economy moving again. The programs that Roosevelt and the New Dealers proposed were a break from the past in that they demonstrated extensive federal involvement in the running of the economy. On the other hand, the New Deal in many ways maintained the status quo in regard to the civil rights of African Americans. What follows is an overview of several New Deal programs that operated in Indianapolis or involved a number of residents of the city.

Civilian Conservation Corps

Only a few weeks after Roosevelt began serving as president, he released a report called "Three Essentials for Unemployment Relief." He wasted no time in telling Congress how to fix the problem that was ravaging America's economy. President Roosevelt insisted that to reduce unemployment, a three-pronged attack was necessary. First, the federal government should take the responsibility to employ more people. Second, Washington should give grants-in-aid to state governments in order to fund work relief programs. And third, Roosevelt recommended establishing a federal labor-creation program. It was in this report that Roosevelt suggested creating what would become one of the most successful and well-liked New Deal programs, the Civilian Conservation

³⁸ Thomas T. Spencer, "The Good Neighbor League Colored Committee and The 1936 Democratic Presidential Campaign," *Journal of Negro History*, 63 (October 1978): 307-316; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 112-113; Doenecke, *The New Deal*, 121-123; Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 83.

Corps (CCC). Roosevelt estimated that by the summer of 1933, the CCC could employ up to a quarter of a million young, urban men.³⁹

The CCC was intended to give jobs and wages to unemployed men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. The initial enrollment was for a six-month period, but the enrollee could renew for up to two years. The wage was \$30 for a month's work, of which \$25 was sent home to the man's family. In a speech given to young men enrolled in the CCC, Roosevelt said, "It is my belief that what is being accomplished will conserve our natural resources, create future national wealth and prove of moral and spiritual value not only to those of you who are taking part, but to the rest of the country as well." Despite its occasional critics, the CCC was largely popular with the public. Its workers fixed roads, dug ditches, planted trees, cleared underbrush, built campgrounds, and restored historic battlefields.⁴⁰

Roosevelt projected that by the Civilian Conservation Corps could employ up to a half a million men, including African Americans, by the fall of 1933 and would therefore go a long way toward reducing nationwide unemployment. The editor of the *Recorder* approved of the CCC since it would likely employ "many thousands of members of the race." The *Recorder* found this information to be encouraging for Indianapolis' African Americans in an otherwise dark time. But as the CCC continued operation, the fact of racial segregation and discrimination became more evident. Historian Harvard Sitkoff explains that even though African-American men were unemployed at double the rate of

³⁹ "The President's Message," *New York Times*, 21 March 1933.

⁴⁰ "Greetings to the Civilian Conservation Corps," *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 2, *The Year of Crisis, 1933* (New York: Random House, 1938), 107-108, 271-272; "Points of First Roosevelt Bill Aimed at Unemployment Relief," *New York Times*, 22 March 1933; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 38; Doenecke, *The New Deal*, 34-35; Lawson, *Commonwealth of Hope*, 118-120; Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 80.

white men, whites were consistently chosen over blacks by local officials. Only 5 percent of enrollees in CCC camps were African-American its first year. The number increased by one percentage point in 1934. Robert Fechner, Roosevelt's appointee to run the Corps, concerned the editors of the *Recorder*. They raised the alarm that Fechner was committed to racial segregation. Fechner reasoned that communities throughout the country would not abide the mixing of races in their vicinity.⁴¹

In two separate letters, one from President Roosevelt and another from Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes, Fechner was encouraged to appoint African-American men to positions of leadership at the CCC camps. Ickes disagreed with Fechner's view that African Americans were not fit to hold positions of leadership. He told Fechner that these men should not be discounted merely on account of their race. Roosevelt's letter to Fechner suggested that he appoint some African Americans to foremen positions, "not of course in technical work but in the ordinary manual work."⁴² The two letters illustrate the differing views on race that existed within the Roosevelt Administration. The president was not concerned with forging ahead on civil rights. Ickes, on the other hand, was among the few New Dealers who saw civil rights for African Americans as a priority and approached the New Deal as an opportunity to bring African Americans into full citizenship. But he was clearly in the minority.

While the CCC did not operate within the boundaries of Indianapolis, many young men from the city, including African Americans, shipped off to various camps

⁴¹ "Job creating program," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 18 March 1933; Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 51.

⁴² Franklin D. Roosevelt to Robert Fechner, September 27, 1935, *New Deal Network*, <http://newdeal.feri.org/aaccc/fdr.jpg>, accessed May 29, 2009; Harold Ickes to Robert Fechner, September 26, 1935, *New Deal Network*, <http://newdeal.feri.org/aaccc/ickes.jpg>, accessed May 29, 2009. (The URLs are linked to an image of the actual letters. The originals are held at the National Archives in "CCC Negro Foremen" file, Box 700, General Correspondence of the Director, Record Group 35, College Park, Md.)

around Indiana and the United States. CCC director Robert Fechner's claim that communities where the Corps was present would not react well to interaction between whites and blacks is supported anecdotally by an incident that occurred in the summer of 1935 in the town of Mitchell, in southern Indiana. The story, published in the *Recorder* illustrated that racism persisted and simmered just beneath the surface.

The Civilian Conservation Corps camp near Mitchell at Spring Mill State Park had a group of African-American workers along with a larger number of white workers. As a group of the young black men walked down the street on a late August evening, they encountered what was described by the *Recorder* as a pair of "white ruffians" who were "under the influence of liquor." A fight between the two groups began when one of the white men attempted to strike one of the black men. After the fight began, a white mob arrived on the scene, along with police officers sent to protect the young African-American men. Both sides of the fight were taken to the mayor's office for questioning, whereupon another fight broke out between the two groups. Meanwhile, the white mob waited outside the mayor's office for a chance to attack the African-American men. But when a group of workers from the CCC camp came to the mayor's office bearing baseball bats in defense of the comrades, the crowd dispersed.⁴³

The state police escorted the CCC workers back to the camp. However, a member of the mob was able somehow to shoot at the group as they traversed back to Spring Mill, injuring at least one of the men. The *Recorder* reported that "resentment of the townspeople at the presence of the colored men" was at least partly to blame for the "near-riot." The investigation of the event did not discover that any fault lay with the

⁴³ "Orders probe of CCC clash with whites," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 31 August 1935; "The Voice of the People," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 21 September 1935. The *Recorder* does not state what the race was of the CCC workers who intervened.

African-American CCC workers, apart from the color of their skin and their presence in the town. In a letter to the editor of the *Recorder*, Indianapolis African-American leader and NAACP branch president G.N.T. Gray reported a rumor that the State Park Board was considering transferring the African-American workers from the CCC camp at Spring Mill to another less hostile location.⁴⁴ Gray believed this to be an injustice and called for the African Americans “who made it possible for the members of the board to be elected, to register vigorous protest against any such action.” Gray continued his commentary by writing that “taken in connection with the board’s action in preventing the establishment of a camp for colored boys at Frankfort it would appear that race prejudice is thriving out of all proportion to the Negro’s valuable service to the party in power.”⁴⁵ The issue in this incident is not only the simmering racism that prompted the near-riot in Mitchell, but, to Gray’s point, that African Americans lacked the voice of full citizenship that would have made it possible to take a stand against the actions that were being considered by the State Park Board.⁴⁶

Federal Emergency Relief Administration

Early in his first term, President Roosevelt and the New Dealers sought to form an agency that would work on a much grander scale than previous programs administering federal relief. A Senate bill proposed the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in 1933 (FERA), which was designed mostly with the intent of providing work relief for those who were employable. This new piece of legislation allocated \$500 million of

⁴⁴ Evidence that indicates whether the transfer actually happened or was only considered by the Board is not forthcoming.

⁴⁵ “Orders Probe of CCC Clash with Whites,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 31 August 1935; “The Voice of the People,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 21 September 1935.

⁴⁶ The outcome of any action taken by the State Park Board was not found in the *Recorder*.

federal money that would be granted to individual states. It was decided that the distribution would be carried out by two methods. The first way promised a federal dollar for every three state dollars contributed, which accounted for about half of the awards granted. The other half of the allocated money was an unconditional grant for situations in which a state was clearly unable to match three dollars to one. In both methods of distribution the federal government was simply the granting agency and the state governments were truly in charge of how the money was spent. This method promised decentralization to those concerned that Roosevelt was vying to have too much power centered in Washington.⁴⁷

Following the bill's passage by Congress in 1933, President Roosevelt appointed Harry L. Hopkins, a New York social worker and former president of the American Society of Social Workers, as head of the FERA. Prior to Roosevelt's presidency, Hopkins was head of a relief agency under then-Governor Roosevelt in New York. Hopkins was an energetic defender of this system of government relief, which had many vocal critics. Hopkins argued that using federal money for public works projects that relied on the labor of the unemployed was the best option for giving people back their dignity after having been idle for so long. He said: "Give a man a dole and you save his body and destroy his spirit; give him a job and pay him an assured wage, and you save both the body and the spirit."⁴⁸

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration was one of the programs of the New Deal that was crucial in Indiana early on in the Roosevelt Administration. The

⁴⁷ "Three Essentials for Unemployment Relief," *The Public Papers and Address of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 2, 80-81; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 39-40.

⁴⁸ "Senate Approves States Relief Bill," *New York Times*, 2 May 1933; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 38-40; Doenecke, *The New Deal*, 35-36; Lawson, *Commonwealth of Hope*, 118-119.

distribution of aid to the needy occurred on a state and local level. Therefore state and local officials determined who was eligible for aid and in what amount it would be distributed. For this purpose, Indiana's Governor McNutt established the Governor's Commission on Unemployment Relief, or GCUR. Between the years 1933 and 1935, Indiana received nearly \$72 million in FERA grants. These federal funds represented the vast majority of the relief money spent in Indiana at the time, accounting for nearly three-quarters of the total amount of relief payments by the time FERA ended. Local government money amounted to just over one-quarter of relief. State money did not even reach 1 percent of total relief aid in Indiana in that span of time.⁴⁹

In March of 1934, the state's plan for a strong work relief program was coalescing. The *Indianapolis Star* reported that the GCUR would be in charge of appointing county-level officials to administer the federal relief dollars. That way, local interests were acknowledged, since a major argument against federal relief had been that the politicians in Washington did not know what the people in Indiana really needed. The plan put forth by the Governor's Commission included three major objectives. The first was to employ at least one member of every family on relief rolls to provide enough income that would be adequate to supplement direct relief. This part of the plan was geared primarily toward those living in urban areas with a population of more than five thousand. The second objective of the plan was to supplement agricultural workers and farmers in order to stabilize an aspect of Indiana's economy that employed a great many of its workers. The third objective, which worked in tandem with the first, was to provide relief for those who had previously been employed in industries that were not

⁴⁹ Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 80-82; Madison, *Indiana Through Tradition and Change*, 108-109.

likely to bounce back from the depression and would not be likely to produce a livable income again in the same occupation.⁵⁰

The GCUR was particularly active in fostering projects in Indianapolis and Marion County. An April 1934 article in the *Indianapolis News* explained that Indianapolis and Marion County would receive the lion's share of GCUR projects, seventy out of 109 in all of Indiana. The various projects included staffing Long, Coleman, Riley, and City hospitals with nurses, cleaning the woodwork at the public library, building a dam and levee at Eagle Creek, painting traffic lines, remodeling the clubhouse at Coffin golf course, and repairing sidewalks in Woodruff Place.⁵¹

During the summer of 1934, the GCUR took over a meat packing plant for use as work relief and direct relief. The packing plant bought meat from farmers who were struggling to feed their livestock because of a drought. Farmers received income through the purchase of their livestock, then individuals were able to find work processing the meat, and finally hungry families could receive direct relief in the form of relatively protein-rich food. The example of the meat packing plant shows how well the GCUR and federal relief dollars could work to aid the people in need.⁵²

That same year, the federal government conducted a study of the Governor's Commission on Unemployment Relief. The study was titled "Results of the Occupational Characteristics Survey of Indianapolis unemployment relief cases for May, 1934." While only focusing on one month out of many during the Great Depression, their research provided an impression of the different employment and unemployment

⁵⁰ "Plans Perfected for State's New Works Program," *Indianapolis Star*, 29 March 1934.

⁵¹ "Marion County Projects Listed," *Indianapolis News*, 11 April 1934.

⁵² "Plant Taken Over for Canning Meat; Relief Work is Planned by GCUR," *Indianapolis News*, 16 August 1934.

experiences of African Americans and whites, men and women in Indianapolis. The occupational characteristics survey was conducted to gather data on the demographics of families registered with public unemployment relief agencies for that single month. The study contained a disclaimer stating that the results would not be used in any way to determine future relief funding for individuals and families. The survey examined heads of household for a sampling of 2,242 FERA cases in the city. Of the total number of heads of household surveyed, three-quarters were male and one quarter was female. In terms of race, two-thirds of those surveyed were white and one third was black. While it is not clear if the sample was representative, it appears likely that white relief cases, regardless of gender, outnumbered black relief cases by nearly two to one. Even though the unemployment rate for African Americans outstripped that of whites, they received a disproportionately small amount of FERA relief.⁵³

Civil Works Administration

In November of 1933, President Roosevelt established the Civil Works Administration (CWA), another New Deal program designed with the dual purpose of improving infrastructure and putting people back to work in order to help them survive the winter. The *Recorder* called Roosevelt's move an "honest effort" and a "stroke in a logical direction" because the CWA had the potential to put many thousands of unemployed African American residents of Indianapolis back to work. This move by the Roosevelt Administration, commented the editorialist, would certainly produce "great social good." Over the winter of 1933 and 1934, the Civil Works Administration funded the White River improvement project, which spanned from 10th Street to Michigan Street.

⁵³ "Results of the Occupational Characteristics Survey of Indianapolis unemployment relief cases for May, 1934," Governor's Commission on Unemployment Relief, Marion County file, 18-R-1, box 11, pages 1-5, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis.

In early December, the *Recorder* reported that many African-American workers in Indianapolis were employed on this CWA project, thus removing these men from relief rolls for the time being. The article reported that one third, or approximately a thousand of the people hired for the CWA project in Indianapolis were African-American men, who were “selected without regard to color or politics.” Early in 1934, the editorial page of the *Recorder* expressed a sense of hopefulness about the Civil Works Administration and what it could do to benefit the African-American population of Indianapolis. The author wrote, “Quite naturally there is less discontent and a more discernable gleam of hope around an increasing number of fire-sides in this city... It is safe to say that comparatively few of the hundreds of colored citizens now on the CWA payroll have had any regular jobs in many months.” The author showed gratitude for the existence of the program that was bringing “a large measure of encouragement to our people who have suffered untold miseries and privations throughout the long drawn out period of the depression.”⁵⁴ The African-American population of Indianapolis had real hope that the Roosevelt Administration and the New Deal could help them out of their economic plight. The Civil Works Administration and the jobs it provided were important components of that sense of hope.

Two weeks later, however, some bad news came to the African-American workers in Indianapolis who were relying on the Civil Works Administration to earn a living. In a move called a “drastic demobilization,” the leader of the CWA, Harry Hopkins, announced that by the middle of February, the works program would begin

⁵⁴ Biles, *A New Deal For the American People*, 103-104; Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 80; “Honest Administrative Effort,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 18 November 1933; “Thousands of Negroes Given Work Here,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 2 December 1933; “More Work for Negroes,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 13 January 1934.

reducing its workforce by one million people every two weeks. The editorialist at the *Recorder* remarked that Congress must approve the money to keep the program running, since “millions of Americans are eating regularly as a result of the government’s make-work idea... The [money] requested by the President, the people’s President, for the purpose of continuing his noble program must be appropriated by Congress.” There was a palpable sense of urgency and a great deal of hope being placed in the New Deal and President Roosevelt to make jobs that would help people put food on the table. By the middle of February, Congress had approved the bill that would provide the financial support for the program. The *Recorder* author wrote: “Fully aware of the seriousness of the emergency, the House very wisely passed the measure for the great good it will accomplish... Thousands of citizens of both races now employed as a result of the civil works activities are assured of employment throughout the winter and spring months.”⁵⁵

In another editorial published in the *Recorder*, the newspaper expressed appreciation on behalf of the people for the jobs provided by the Civil Works Administration. The author continued, writing that the African-American population in Indianapolis and the entire state of Indiana was entitled to and should receive their fair share of the federal government’s “make-work patronage,” because they deserved their “just portion of federal relief, not as Negroes, but as full-fledged American citizens. We want, and must obtain, a Square Deal at the hands of the administration.” The author called the discrimination against African Americans and barring of them from working to improve the national economy an “unpardonable social sin.” The *Recorder* demanded a “Square Deal” from “Mr. Roosevelt” and stated that they “will be satisfied with no less.”

⁵⁵ “Civil Works Administration,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 27 January 1934; “The CWA Relief Bill,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 10 February 1934.

There were rumors that the “local civil works administration is grossly unfair to colored citizens.” The complaint was born of wage differences between the races on CWA projects. The works program was meant to benefit all people “irrespective of color, creed, or race” The editorialist believed that the fault lay not with the government but with the labor unions that would not allow black workers to be counted among their ranks.⁵⁶ President Roosevelt certainly made policy statements that barred discrimination in the New Deal programs, but there was little enforcement, as evidenced by the problem in Indianapolis with the labor unions having too much authority in setting wages.

National Industrial Recovery Act

Of all the programs in the First New Deal, one in particular received the most attention from the African American press. The National Industrial Recovery Act, or NIRA, was a controversial and experimental piece of legislation that tested the limits of cooperation between government and business. It also tested the limits of the tolerance of the African American leadership for racial discrimination.

The National Industrial Recover Act established the National Recovery Administration (NRA), which was charged with enforcing certain codes guiding industrial activities. This legislation called for the suspension of antitrust laws for a limited amount of time and created codes that limited production, labor hours, and prices. In addition, the Industrial Recovery Act provided funds for a Public Works Administration (PWA) that would, Roosevelt hoped, help to revive the economy by putting more people back to work. The NRA, at first lauded and then widely despised,

⁵⁶ “We Want a Square Deal,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 17 February 1934; “Discrimination in CWA,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 24 February 1934.

was nothing if not a complicated and convoluted set of codes that was at times even contradictory.⁵⁷

The leadership was divided between General Hugh Johnson, who was appointed to lead the NRA, and Harold Ickes, appointed to run the PWA. Some critics of the NRA believed that it would deplete economic competition and increase the number of monopolies. Despite its known shortcomings, the NRA received wide support, but in part only out of desperation. The National Recovery Administration was terminated by the Supreme Court in 1935, after only two years of operation, because it was determined to be unconstitutional. While the program had received enthusiastic accolades before it began, very few people were sad to see it go after only a couple of years. No one lamented the NRA's passing because it was largely ineffectual in bringing about any real positive economic change.⁵⁸

The National Recovery Administration, Roosevelt said, was passed by Congress in June, 1933 "to put people back to work," and to "let them buy more of the products of farms and factories and start our business at a living rate again." He explained that the job of the NRA was to take place in two stages. The first was to get the unemployed working again by the winter of 1933-1934. The second stage was to make the economic future of the country more hopeful. The Roosevelt Administration thought that the program could hire men right away, reaching a million by October of 1933. The goal was to create jobs quickly.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Louis Stark, "Recovery Act Drafted," *New York Times*, 29 April 1933; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 78-79; Doenecke, *The New Deal*, 52-53.

⁵⁸ Louis Stark, "Recovery Act Drafted," *New York Times*, 29 April 1933; Lawson, *Commonwealth of Hope*, 84-85; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 78-79; Doenecke, *The New Deal*, 53-55.

⁵⁹ "Presidential Statement on N.I.R.A.," *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 2, 251-256.

Roosevelt strongly believed in the Recovery Act. He wrote in a 1933 statement that “no business which depends for existence on paying less than living wages to its workers has any right to continue in this country.” One of the ways that the NRA proposed to increase employment rates was to get unemployed individuals re-hired at their previous jobs. The plan was to have companies and corporations hire more people to do the same amount of work by reducing the number of hours that people might work in a week’s time and still maintain a living wage. In addition to reducing hours and fixing wages, the NRA codes included creating and strengthening “modern guilds” and giving workers a “charter of rights.” President Roosevelt wrote that “when a trade association has a code ready to submit and the [trade] association has qualified as truly representative... a public hearing will be held by the Administrator or a deputy.” But what was considered truly representative and by what definition the president did not say. Nor did he indicate whether African Americans were going to be protected by this standard. Roosevelt continued by writing that the Labor Secretary would establish a Labor Advisory Board to ensure that each and every impacted group of laborers, regardless of whether they are organized, would be “fully and adequately represented in an advisory capacity and any interested labor group will be entitled to be heard through representatives of its own choosing.”⁶⁰ Perhaps one of the greatest weaknesses of the NRA was that it did not carry out this promise.

In September of 1933, the *Indianapolis Recorder* reported that President Roosevelt’s program for economic reconstruction was beginning to gain momentum. Because of the early optimism that welcomed the NRA, a large demonstration was held in Indianapolis to show support for the program. The author indicated that some of

⁶⁰ Ibid., 251-256.

Indianapolis's African American population took part in the demonstration. As a result of the NRA, hundreds of local black workers got their old jobs back and many more had anticipated finding work as a result of the recovery legislation. However, just a week later, the *Recorder* reported from a story filed in Washington, D.C., that the NRA's codes would exclude protections for 30,000 African Americans who would have received financial benefits on a flood control project in Mississippi. The NAACP reacted with protest by filing a legal brief which charged that the NRA codes governing contractors did not protect black laborers with a minimum wage and maximum work hours, while it did protect white workers.⁶¹

The NRA, as it turned out, was ineffective in general, but especially for African Americans. Apart from some glimmers of hope from the CCC and CWA, the early years of the Roosevelt administration and its New Deal promises offered little to the black population. Even though Roosevelt Administration members, such as Frances Perkins, made statements in favor of African Americans, New Deal program were, in practice, racist institutions. The National Recovery Administration was no exception to this rule. The codes developed and enforced by the NRA completely excluded 75 percent of employed African Americans because they were working either as domestics or agricultural laborers, two categories of workers who were left out of the NRA. Further, the codes did nothing to address the issue of longer hours for lower wages to which African Americans were widely subjected. The Recovery Administration's codes were not as explicit in language as some southern entrepreneurs and employers wished them to be in terms of codifying lower wages for African Americans, but the discrimination

⁶¹ "Inexcusable Negligence," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 9 September 1933; "NRA Codes Bars 30,000 Negroes from Benefits," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 16 September 1933.

subtly remained in the language of the codes. For example, the low wage occupations widely known to be dominated by African-American workers were exempted from NRA codes regulating minimum wage. In addition, the codes carried geographical stipulations that excluded wage restrictions in areas where African Americans held a majority of the low wage jobs. These restrictions were at times explained as merely coincidental; at other times, a more overtly racist explanation was used that African Americans were accustomed to lower wages and should therefore continue receiving less pay. Roosevelt's response to the complaints about the discriminatory nature of the codes is telling: "It is not the purpose of the Administration to impair Southern industry by refusing to recognize traditional differentials." This strategy represented Roosevelt's desire to not alienate the southern Democrats' votes that were so crucial to his political success.⁶²

Historian Nancy Weiss relates the story of NAACP's second in command, Roy Wilkins, who wrote a letter to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt stating, "There is hardly a phase of the New Deal program which has not brought some hardship and disillusionment to colored people." Wilkins visited a work camp and commented that African-American workers there were laboring in "virtual slavery" because they worked too long and were paid too little compared to white workers. Prominent Senator Robert Wagner, Democrat from New York, requested an investigation into the matter of the

⁶² Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 47, 54-55; Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 56-57; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 176; Jo Ann E. Argersinger, *Toward a New Deal in Baltimore: People and Government in the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 14; Doenecke, *The New Deal*, 121; Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century*, 76-77.

virtual enslavement of southern black workers under the NRA, but the Senate only set aside a paltry sum of \$1,000 for the fruitless inquiry.⁶³

African Americans in the South faced two problems. First, they were not given a fair share of the available jobs. The jobs that they *did* get were usually the most dangerous, laborious, and degrading. Second, they were being pressured to accept lower wages than white workers. An editorialist for the *Recorder* wrote, “Negroes and whites, being equals before the law as bona fide American citizens, should receive equal pay for the same quality and quantity of work done.” The writer referred to this concept as “just plain justice,” and something to which “colored Americans are entitled.” He did not expect that the NRA would cater to any one group over another, but rather give a “square deal for all people...” Business owners in Memphis, however, recoiled at the NIRA’s requirement of equal pay regardless of race. These white employers called the code’s wage scale “too generous” for African Americans. And, in fact, Memphis employers ignored the equal pay requirements.⁶⁴

In the August 1933 edition of *Opportunity*, the National Urban League spoke out against the National Recovery Administration. The author began the article, “If there were those who supposed for a moment that the identity of interests of black and white labor would be recognized in the codes submitted by the Industry in accordance with the provisions of the National Industrial Recovery Act, by this time they must be aware, to say the least, that their hopes were ill founded.” The author wrote that the codes were written in a way that “ruthlessly excluded” unskilled African-American workers from

⁶³ “Inexcusable Negligence,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 9 September 1933; Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 177.

⁶⁴ “NRA Difficulties,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 7 October 1933; Doenecke, *The New Deal*, 121-123; Roger Biles, *Memphis in the Great Depression* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 93-94.

benefitting from the minimum wage and maximum hours provisions of the NRA. The writer called this racial discrimination “glaring” and “ill-concealed,” and pointed out that in industries where a majority of the laborers were African American there was an “adroit attempt” to determine wages based on race. Race-based wages were problematic for all workers, the author reasoned, because in order to pay one group of workers less there could be, as a result, downward pressure on all wages. The *Opportunity* claimed that President Roosevelt had spoken out against this practice and promised to put an end to it. But Roosevelt’s words were not enough; the Labor Department must be vigilant to prevent racial discrimination in the South.⁶⁵

The following month, T. Arnold Hill, a longtime leader at the Urban League, wrote an article for *Opportunity* titled “An Emergency is On!” The emergency, according to Hill, was not the international depression that was wrecking the economies of countries around the globe. Rather, Hill referred to the fact that African American workers were being dismissed from their jobs. It was, Arnold explained, the white supremacist attitudes of employers that compelled them to believe it was intolerable to pay black workers a wage equal to that of white workers. Hill expressed that some people were afraid that this practice would force into unemployment those African Americans who *did* have a job. A solution would be to include a dual wage scale in the NRA codes, thus making it legal to pay black workers less than white workers. Hill responded to this idea by calling it both “economically unsound and socially unjust.” In terms of the economic unsoundness of the plan, Hill argued that having one-ninth (the approximate portion of African-American workers) of the country’s labor force out of work or underpaid would severely impede recovery because one of the largest problems

⁶⁵ “Black Labor and the Codes,” *Opportunity* (August 1933), 231; Biles, *A New Deal*, 175.

with the economy was a lack of consumer confidence. In other words, if African Americans had more money, they would spend it. As for being socially unjust, Hill pointed to the NRA codes that excluded agricultural laborers and domestic workers, which accounted for almost three-fifths of the total number of African-American workers. Hill opined that to let such injustice continue would be to allow black workers to labor in what he called “a system that is little better than slavery.” He called for African-American workers to be compensated “according to their economic value” and not according to “their social status.” The problem was about more than simply wages. The “emergency” was the continuation of the “class distinctions” that kept African Americans from achieving higher status. He closed the article by posing the question: “Is the New Deal departing from the conventional in all important national issues, to be listless to the plight of twelve million persons?”⁶⁶

In the same edition of *Opportunity*, sociology professor Ira De Augustine Reid, wrote an article discussing the lack of coverage for African American workers in the NRA codes. He wrote that half of black laborers were not covered. Like Hill, Reid pointed out that those workers not covered under the codes were engaged in occupations filled primarily by African Americans: domestics and unskilled labor. Reid asked “Is the country’s fourth largest field of employment to be ignored?” He then put forth the argument that paying a fair wage to African Americans would benefit the economy overall by raising the buying power of a significant portion of the population. Reid closed the article by writing that “The NRA should seek to remove and in no way should condone a basic economic discrimination and fear that has long [made feeble] the pulse

⁶⁶ T. Arnold Hill, “An Emergency is On!” *Opportunity* (September 1933), 280.

of American industry.”⁶⁷ Like Hill, Reid was making an argument for full economic and social citizenship for African Americans. The Roosevelt Administration was presented with an opportunity to take African-American citizenship and civil rights to the next level, and black leaders in America were asking the president to do just that.

By October 1933, black leaders raised a cry that African-American workers were not being given due consideration in the Recovery Administration’s codes, and African-American leaders called for a voice in the Roosevelt Administration. President Roosevelt and Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, who administered the PWA, responded by appointing Clark Howell Foreman, a southern white man, to advise Secretary Ickes on African-American issues. Despite Foreman’s track record as a supporter of racial integration, *The Crisis* criticized his appointment and explained that he “does not understand the difficulties of American Negroes, and it is an outrage that we... should be compelled to have our wants and aspirations interpreted by one who does not know them and our ideals and ambitions expressed by a person who cannot understand them.” The *Recorder* called this appointment a step in the wrong direction and pointed to Foreman as a white, pro-Jim Crow southerner⁶⁸ who could not possibly have the best interests of the African-American population in mind, or even know what they would be. Noting that Ickes appointed Foreman in response to claims that African Americans faced discrimination as a result of the National Recovery Administration, the article argued that only an African American person could represent the needs of the race: “The function of

⁶⁷ Ira DeA. Reid, “We Do Our Part... But,” *Opportunity* (September 1933), 279.

⁶⁸ This assessment of Foreman was in conflict with his reputation being against segregation and discrimination.

advisor on matters concerning African Americans belongs to a member of the race.”⁶⁹

Beyond the simple fact that a white man would be serving as a voice of the African-American population did not make very much sense, the appointment was also a slap in the collective face of black Americans, showing that Ickes did not believe an African-American person could serve in this capacity.

Like all workers, African Americans faced difficulties because of the Depression. But because of the NRA, blacks also struggled as consumers, since the codes caused inflation of prices. The black press at the time wrote sardonically that the acronym NRA stood for “Negroes Ruined Again,” or “Negro Rarely Allowed.” In response to NRA policies, in some cities, including Indianapolis, pro-African American groups organized “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaigns in order to encourage grocery stores and other shops to hire black workers or face losing them as patrons. These efforts were somewhat successful, but were even more important as a demonstration of the resolve among African Americans to speak out against social injustice.⁷⁰

Gustav Peck, who in 1934 was serving as the executive director of the Labor Advisory Board, an agency formed to address labor issues related to the National Industrial Recovery Act, argued that African-American workers were benefitting from the NRA just as much as white workers. By his own admission, his conclusions were not based on “compelling statistical evidence,” but he called his conclusion a “fair deduction.” He admitted that the benefits of the NRA were “spread over a smaller

⁶⁹ “NRA and Appointments,” *The Crisis* (October 1933), 237; “Negro Representation,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 28 October 1933; Lawson, *A Commonwealth of Hope*, 93-94; Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 77-78.

⁷⁰ John P. Davis, “A Black Inventory of the New Deal,” *The Crisis* (May 1935), 142; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 176; Argersinger, *Toward a New Deal in Baltimore*, 14; Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 76-77.

portion of the total Negro population..." when compared to white workers because agricultural and domestic laborers were excluded from the codes and the codes in the "service industries" were "badly enforced." Peck's defense of the wage differentials caused John P. Davis of *The Crisis* to take umbrage. Peck explained that the difference in wages was related to geography rather than race. Workers in the South received lower wages because the cost of living was lower. It was only a coincidence to Peck that the bulk of African American workers resided in the South and the majority of white workers in the North. Davis took Peck to task for his admitted lack of statistical evidence and called this admission a "fatal confession." On the issue of wage differentials, Davis asserted that the Labor Advisory Board had missed the point that equalizing pay between the races was "the indispensable antecedent to either national recovery or reform." Davis concluded his rebuttal of Peck by telling readers that the "wage slavery" that destined the NRA to fail also portended failure for the nation as a whole. By 1935, in another *Crisis* article Davis concluded that the hope of rising wages and reduced unemployment stemming from the NRA had "glimmered away."⁷¹

The *Recorder* called the idea that African Americans could justly receive less in wages than whites because they needed less to live on a "treacherous falsity." Nevertheless, employers argued their case claiming that it only made sense to pay African Americans less than whites because they were accustomed to living on less money. From the perspective of African Americans, this discrepancy was only a ploy to keep black Americans in their same social position. The editorialist in the *Recorder* wrote that because of the "weak economic status the Negro is forced to subsist on less

⁷¹ Gustav Peck, "The Negro Worker and the NRA," *The Crisis* (September 1934), 262-263, 279; John P. Davis, "NRA Codifies Wage Slavery," *The Crisis* (October 1934), 298-299, 304; Davis, "A Black Inventory of the New Deal," 141.

than his white brother. Upon the NRA devolves the responsibility of seeing to it that the Negro is not cheated of his perfect right to equal existence before the law.” The author argued that the lack of economic citizenship contributed to scarcity of opportunity for African Americans under the NRA, and indeed the New Deal as a whole.⁷²

Public intellectual and Howard University professor, Kelly Miller was a regular columnist for the *Recorder*. In one particular column he wrote on the topic of the NRA. He used an ornithological comparison of the NRA’s Blue Eagle (the agency’s symbol) and the concept of Jim Crow. In 1933, as the NRA was beginning, Miller wrote in positive and hopeful terms about the Blue Eagle: “May he spread his protecting wings over the new industrial regime, insuring justice, fair play and equal opportunity for all.” Referring to Jim Crow, he wrote that the bird, as it were, was “ghastly, gaunt” and “befouls the aims and ideals of the American Eagle.” Miller asserted that the Blue Eagle and Jim Crow could not coexist. He wrote, “The eagle must destroy Jim-Crow or have his dominion polluted with cowardice, injustice and the slavish spirit.” As it turned out, Miller was wrong in his initial estimation of the Blue Eagle. The NRA ended up being a source of trouble for African Americans. With the exclusion from benefits of domestic and agricultural workers and an increase in prices without an increase in standard of living for black workers, the NRA did nothing to defy Jim Crowism. Miller acknowledged that President Roosevelt did not have Jim Crowism in his background, but pointed out that the country cannot ignore racism and expect it to simply go away.⁷³

With employers ignoring the requirements of the NRA codes and the purposeful exclusion of occupations held predominantly by African Americans, the NRA was a

⁷² “Treacherous Falsity,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 20 June 1934.

⁷³ Kelly Miller, “The Blue Eagle and the Jim-Crow,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 23 September 1933.

failure in terms of aiding African Americans in their quest for economic, political, and social citizenship. This is an excellent example of the tension between the policies and goals of the Roosevelt Administration and the desire of African Americans for full citizenship. Black leaders called upon President Roosevelt and other New Dealers to improve their economic, political, and social citizenship. But the NRA did not, in the end, provide the answers or improve the economic situation for African Americans.

The First New Deal could in some ways be considered a success. People were earning a living, however modest, through work relief programs. While not strong, the economy was beginning to show signs of stabilizing. Even with the Supreme Court's decision to outlaw the NRA, Roosevelt and the New Dealers were undaunted. They forged ahead with new legislation on an even grander scale. As programs from the First New Deal expired, they were either re-upped or replaced. But thus far the New Deal had done little in the way of civil rights for African Americans. However, the Second New Deal brought an ambitious work relief program, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), that lived up, in at least small ways, to the promises of federal protection against race discrimination.

Works Progress Administration

In 1935, the Roosevelt administration began to experience pressure from members of the political left such as Huey Long. Roosevelt and the New Dealers reacted to this criticism by forming the Second New Deal, which provided an even stronger role for the central government. In this period, too, there was a shift in federal policies on civil rights and race discrimination. African-American workers and families began to experience fairer treatment from Washington under the Works Progress Administration. Thanks in

no small part to the WPA, the shift of African American votes from the Republican to the Democratic Party was more or less complete by the election of 1936.⁷⁴

Federal policy shifted away from funding direct relief. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration was abolished, which left the GCUR with little in the way of money or power. The care of the needy returned to the township trustees, but not to pre-New Deal levels. The Works Progress Administration replaced FERA and was based on work relief and public works.⁷⁵ Nearly a year into Roosevelt's first term as president and with more perspective on the economic crisis, the White House released a statement on the direction that government relief must go in order to effectively meet the needs of the American people. In this statement Roosevelt asserted that since the beginning of the New Deal, experience demonstrated that unemployment had to be dealt with in more than one particular way. Roosevelt identified three discrete groups of people who still faced a crisis because of high unemployment rates: rural families, single-industry towns, and large urban populations. Speaking of the urban workers, the president stated that the unemployed living in cities were entitled to receive an "adequate assurance of means to maintain themselves during the balance of the period of their enforced idleness." Roosevelt also stated that a limit would be placed on the amount of time that a person might be employed through work relief, so that no one would begin to see the federal government as a permanent crutch.⁷⁶

By the early winter of 1934, the Roosevelt Administration had begun to plan a new work relief program that would be more centralized than previous attempts.

⁷⁴ Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, chapter 9; Jones, *Labor of Love*, 197.

⁷⁵ Madison, *Indiana Through Tradition and Change*, 115-118, 124.

⁷⁶ "White House Statement on a Plan for Relief," *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 3, *1934: The Advance of Recovery and Reform* (New York: Random House, 1938), 108-111.

Previous New Deal works programs reflected local views to a greater extent than under the WPA. The plan, the *Recorder* reported, would be very costly, indeed a “stupendous sum.” Roosevelt found support among some professional economists, notably John Maynard Keynes, who proclaimed that such large amounts of government spending were necessary to lift the nation out of economic doldrums in 1935. In December of 1935, the sun had set on the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. In April 1935, FERA’s replacement was created with the passage of the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, which set aside \$4.8 billion to finance federal work relief projects. The program that was charged with directing these projects and this large outlay of federal dollars was the Works Progress Administration. To direct the WPA Roosevelt had to choose between PWA leader Harold Ickes or FERA leader Harry Hopkins. Based on his personality and history of effectiveness, Hopkins was Roosevelt’s choice to lead the new agency and Ickes was appointed to lead the WPA’s planning division. The new works program paid its workers more than direct relief stipends but not more than market wages paid for the same work. The reasoning for this, explained Roosevelt, was so that workers would still pursue private employment and not come to rely on the federal government for work. In addition, lower wages per person meant more people could find work with the WPA.⁷⁷

Although a number of WPA workers were paid for make-work projects, which included such simple tasks as raking leaves, about 75 percent of the jobs were on construction projects. Over the course of its eight years, the WPA was responsible for building over 650,000 miles of road; building or fixing more than 124,000 bridges; and

⁷⁷ “Federal Relief,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 8 December 1934; “New Deal Alphabet Soup Now Includes 81 Units,” *New York Times*, 19 May 1935; *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 4, 1935: *The Court Disapproves* (New York: Random House, 1938), 132-140; Doenecke, *The New Deal*, 87-88; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 104-105; Lawson, *A Commonwealth of Hope*, 120-121.

constructing approximately 125,000 buildings, over 8,000 parks, 13,000 playgrounds, nearly 900 landing strips, 2,500 hospitals, and almost 37,000 school buildings. Besides building projects, the WPA was responsible for many school lunches, the cataloging of many books, and numerous rat deaths.⁷⁸

In much the same way that the FERA and other previous New Deal programs provided work for white collar workers and young people, the WPA also gave work to many unemployed writers, actors, artists, and youngsters. The Federal Writers' Project was responsible for state histories, slave narratives, and recording rural folklore. The Federal Art Project both taught art and produced it. Perhaps most famous are the post office and courthouse murals that were sponsored with WPA dollars. The Federal Theatre Project put on over a thousands plays, some even written for the Project. Interpretations of the productions were seen by some to be propagandistic in favor of the New Deal; therefore, the program was abolished by Congress in 1939. The National Youth Administration (NYA) provided part-time work for high school and college students, as well as people of school age who were not currently enrolled. The NYA gave entry-level opportunities to over three million young people, who earned between \$5 and \$30 a month carrying out tasks as typists, laboratory aides, and tutors.⁷⁹

In October 1935, the state director of the Works Progress Administration in Indiana, Wayne Coy, told the public that "all of Indiana's employables will be at work by the last of the present month." The newspapers called this "very good news," especially considering how difficult winters were for the unemployed as well as for private

⁷⁸ Doenecke, *The New Deal*, 89; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 107-108; Lawson, *A Commonwealth of Hope*, 121-122.

⁷⁹ "5,000 Hired by WPA; Total Now is 25,000," *New York Times*, 4 September 1935; Bruce McClure, "Federal Relief Aids in Service of Arts," *New York Times*, 15 September 1935; Lawson, *A Commonwealth of Hope*, 137-139; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 108-110; Doenecke, *The New Deal*, 89-90.

charities, when so much help is sought. It was projected that twenty-five thousand people in Indianapolis would be put to work on WPA projects by the end of October, and that fifty thousand workers would be transferred from PWA projects to WPA projects. The *Recorder* editorialist called the Works Progress Administration “logical” and expressed hope that the new plan, part of the so-called Second New Deal, would not only improve economic conditions, but also would help to “[rebuild] the shattered morale and self-respect of thousands of ambitious and worthy citizens.” Emma Lou Thornbrough pointed out that the WPA in Indiana employed a relatively higher percentage of African Americans, both male and female, than whites. By 1940, 5.5 percent of Indiana’s population worked for the WPA. But 16 percent of African American men and 11.3 percent of African American women were employed on WPA projects.⁸⁰

Even as African Americans were able to find work with the WPA, the number of unemployed always exceeded the number receiving aid. In some cases in Indiana, WPA projects excluded African-American workers because of local opposition. Women were especially difficult for the WPA to employ because, in many cases, the number of women looking for placement on a WPA project simply exceeded the number of openings. In Indianapolis African-American women had an extremely difficult time finding placement on WPA projects. When women were able to find work with the WPA, it was for tasks that were traditionally considered to be gender-specific, including work as domestics and in canneries.⁸¹

When the WPA was designed, the Roosevelt Administration determined that no individual seeking work with the program would be denied employment because of

⁸⁰ “New Works Progress Plan,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 12 October 1935; Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 103-104.

⁸¹ Madison, *Indiana Through Tradition and Change*, 127.

discrimination against gender, race, creed, or political views. According to WPA officials, the program provided jobs for eligible persons based on two criteria: need and employability. Yet these were not the only two factors taken into consideration. In reality, gender and race were often taken into account when deciding who would receive employment on WPA projects.⁸²

According to Donald S. Howard, who in 1943 was serving as the Assistant Director of the Charity Organization Department at the Russell Sage Foundation, discrimination that took place against African Americans had more to do with local agencies than it did with the policies of the federal government. He cites an official from the NAACP as saying that federal control of the Works Progress Administration was necessary in order to ensure that discrimination against African Americans would be kept as minimal as possible. Local prejudices could not be completely done away with, but while the federal government held the reins, it was at least kept at bay, according to the unnamed NAACP official.⁸³

When the Works Progress Administration was created in 1935, the state governments had much less control over the distribution of relief than under the FERA. There was an Indiana office of the WPA, which was staffed by former employees of the GCUR and based in Indianapolis. To a much greater degree than before, the administration of the program occurred in Washington, D.C. However, Indiana had more than one thousand local government workers overseeing relief administration.⁸⁴

⁸² Donald S. Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1943; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 264, 269, 278. One should also note that differences in state and regional distribution of aid could have been a factor as well.

⁸³ Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy*, 291-292, 295-296.

⁸⁴ Madison, *Indiana Through Tradition and Change*, 124-125; Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy*, 54-55; "Relief Agencies Carrying Lowest Case Load in Three Years," *Indianapolis News*, 1 July 1936.

In just a few short months of operation, the WPA had nearly 75,000 unemployed Indiana residents on its rolls. In the remainder of the 1930s Indiana had a large number of its unemployed on WPA rolls, ranging from over 50,000 to a peak of nearly 90,000. The percentage of Hoosiers receiving aid from the WPA during this time was well above the average across the United States. Indiana's WPA director, Wayne Coy reported in 1936 that agencies that provided both direct and indirect relief had the lightest caseload in three years, since the federal government had begun to intervene in relief. Presumably, this was a direct result of the Works Progress Administration and FERA before it.⁸⁵

To Governor McNutt, federal programs could only partially solve the problem of poor relief. In Indiana there were 86,000 heads of household provided with work relief through the GCUR, but 40,000 were left with no aid. In all, 125,000 Hoosier households were on relief mid-way through 1935. Most of the WPA projects in Indiana involved work on transportation infrastructure. Other WPA projects included sewer construction, sewage treatment plants, flood control, parks, airports, and public buildings. For white collar workers, projects included a real estate survey, and an analysis of traffic patterns. In the early 1940s, the Federal Writers Project funded jobs for around three hundred people who wrote a state history titled *Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State*.⁸⁶

President Roosevelt insisted, in an Executive Order that he issued in May of 1935, that workers who had the experience and training to perform the particular duties of a project would not be discriminated against for any reason. WPA leader Harry Hopkins issued a similar order in the summer of 1936 with very similar verbiage to that

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ "40,000 Indiana families face township care," *Indianapolis Star*, 7 May 1935; Madison, *Indiana Through Tradition and Change*, 126. For an interesting read about the history of the FWP in Indiana see George T. Blakey, *Creating a Hoosier Self-Portrait: The Federal Writers' Project in Indiana, 1935-1942* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

of Roosevelt. The specific areas highlighted by Hopkins for which people would *not* be discriminated against included race, political party, or religion. In 1939, Congress inserted a provision into the WPA legislation that made it unlawful to discriminate, or even threaten to discriminate, against a person for reasons of race, religion, or politics.⁸⁷

Howard argued that African Americans faced difficulties in finding WPA employment for two primary reasons. First, black workers had trouble initially being referred and certified for WPA work. Second, it was difficult for African Americans to find sponsors to “initiate and contribute to the cost” for jobs that African-American workers were considered to be eligible to fill.⁸⁸

The first problem was related to agencies responsible for referring workers to WPA projects. Since it was commonly assumed that African Americans were considered to be accustomed to a lower standard of living sometimes these agencies denied work to the black unemployed in favor of whites who were used to having a higher standard of living and, therefore, in more need of work. Although these policies were not sanctioned by the federal government, they were not prohibited either. The second difficulty for African Americans arose from the limited number of positions available to unskilled workers. As a result of years of discrimination and segregation, African Americans were not qualified to hold skilled labor positions and, therefore, were unable to demonstrate the skills necessary to hold jobs on WPA projects. Furthermore, African-American women had the greatest disadvantage, being doubly handicapped by race and gender

⁸⁷ Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy*, 285-286; Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 69.

⁸⁸ Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy*, 291-292, 295-296.

discrimination, because they had found employment primarily as domestics, which is not an occupation that developed skills necessary for work on WPA projects.⁸⁹

Howard argued that even with policies, orders, and laws in place to prevent discrimination, African Americans generally were underrepresented on WPA projects. The percentage of African Americans employed by the WPA was perhaps in proportion to the percentage of the total U.S. population that they represented, but certainly not the percentage of unemployed workers. Howard cited a study which argued that the unemployed African American should receive equal consideration, if not special consideration in determining WPA employment since it was decidedly more difficult for African Americans to find work in private industry. In another 1935 WPA study of 1,100 workers, African Americans represented 26 percent of relief cases, but only 15 percent who were able to leave the rolls because of finding private employment. Howard stated that because of the way that records were kept it can be relatively difficult to determine in real numbers the proportion of white and black individuals employed by the WPA.⁹⁰

Because African Americans had for so long been discriminated against in terms of employment, being relegated to very few industries and professions such as domestics and barbers, it was not always likely that an African American worker seeking WPA employment would be “qualified” and “experienced,” which Hopkins and Roosevelt said were the only criteria for hiring on WPA projects. Discrimination was then, in a way, part of the system even if it was not explicitly stated as policy.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy*, 288-289, 294.

Chapter Three: The New Deal and the Pursuit of Citizenship by African Americans

African Americans Speak Out

In 1933, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt first took the presidential oath, African Americans were hopeful that he would support their pursuit of civil rights and citizenship after years of political neglect from both sides of the aisle. Even as America's black population was shifting its political allegiance from the Republicans to the Democrats, the party that for so long represented southern repression, it was difficult for them to find succor from any politician interested in gaining and keeping political capital with other politicians and voting blocs. *The Crisis* pointed out that the nationwide victory of Democrats encouraged speculation among African Americans as to whether their lot would improve or worsen. The author wrote: "Some colored people are always afraid of the Democratic party because of the overwhelming influence of the South." That is to say, the South, and by extension Democrats, were symbolically, and quite literally, associated with the oppression of African Americans.⁹¹

Several months later the *Recorder* published a commentary on the Roosevelt Administration's New Deal, which asserted that African Americans had to help themselves and not rely on others to pull them up from the bottom rung of the social, economic, and political ladder of citizenship. The author believed that "If [African Americans] are ever to make and maintain for ourselves a place in the economic, political, and social sun, Negroes must think for themselves."⁹²

But history proved that government involvement was necessary if progress was to be made in the pursuit of social citizenship. The lynching problem, especially, drew the

⁹¹ No title, *The Crisis* (January 1933), 13.

⁹² No title, *Indianapolis Recorder*, 3 June 1933.

line between political and economic citizenship and social citizenship. The rights of political and economic citizenship come from the initiative of groups and individuals, whereas the rights of social citizenship call upon government to protect. It would be an overstatement to say that Roosevelt did not try at all to look after the social, political, and economic needs of African Americans, but he tried only enough to earn their votes without alienating the southern wing of the Democratic Party. President Roosevelt made policies which declared that racial discrimination was not allowed in New Deal programs; on the other hand, he permitted the National Recovery Administration's codes to exclude occupations held predominately by black workers. Roosevelt did not attempt to quiet his activist wife, Eleanor, for championing the cause of African Americans, but he did not support anti-lynching legislation because doing so would have almost certainly eroded his support in the South. Because of the deeply entrenched racism endemic in many regions of the country and the unwillingness of local governments to take action to end segregation, discrimination, lynching, and many other social ills tormenting African Americans, federal government action was necessary to help this segment of the American population find its "place in the sun." But Roosevelt and his advisors were not willing to take the political risks required to ensure that African Americans got a square deal.⁹³

John P. Davis, a leader in the National Negro Congress and the Joint Committee on National Recovery,⁹⁴ offered an assessment of the New Deal and the Roosevelt Administration in 1935 at the midway point of FDR's first term as president. Davis

⁹³ Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, chapters 2 and 3; Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, chapter 2; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, chapter 9.

⁹⁴ Davis cofounded the Joint Committee on National Recovery which lobbied New Dealers to consider African Americans needs.

emphasized the importance of measuring the “gains and losses which have come to [African Americans] under the New Deal.” He wrote that the intentions of the Roosevelt Administration were obvious to anyone who took a close view of the New Deal programs. Davis drew from figures provided by the federal government to point out that “grave abuses [existed] in the administration of rural relief” for African Americans. Furthermore, the National Recovery Administration did nothing to increase the standard of living for African Americans and, in fact, effectively lowered their standard of living by putting downward pressure on wages by excluding black-dominated occupations from the NRA codes. Davis wrote, “In the code-making process occupational and geographical differentials at first were used as devices to exclude from the operation of minimum wage and maximum hours the bulk of the Negro workers.” Even when the codes were refined, the wage discrimination continued to be a factor and perpetuated the “inferior status of the Negro,” as Davis put it.⁹⁵

By the summer of 1935, as the First New Deal drew to a close, the NAACP resolved to redouble its efforts to forge ahead in the cause of civil rights and full citizenship for African Americans. The Association wrote that the depression was deepening and with it the economic situation of twelve million African Americans was worsening. Black workers continued to face employment discrimination on government relief jobs. In an effort to save money, the federal government established monthly wage limits on relief jobs based on the geographical location of the project. In sections of the country where the majority of African Americans worked, the government mandated the lowest wages. The author wrote, “it is no accident that in the expenditure of four billion,

⁹⁵ Davis, “A Black Inventory of the New Deal,” 141-142, 154; “Report Indicates New Deal is Bad Deal for Negroes,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 18 May 1935.

eight hundred and eighty million dollars appropriated by the Congress, the taxes for the raising of which are extracted by the federal government from the pockets of black men at the same rate as white, wages far below the level of decent subsistence should be established for those states in which the bulk of the Negro population of America resides.” The NAACP was trying to point out that as citizens of the United States, African Americans paid taxes and supported their government just like everybody else and yet they were discriminated against in a way that indicated a status as less than full citizens of the Republic. On the issue of lynching, the NAACP “vigorously and unequivocally [condemned] the impudent and disgraceful filibuster led by a small reactionary bloc in the U.S. Senate against the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching bill.” The Association called the failure of Congress to pass the bill a “confession of the impotence of the federal government to protect its own citizens.” In its statement, the NAACP said that it would not accept excuses for failure of the bill based on its unconstitutionality, a common argument among the bill’s opposition.⁹⁶

As Alice Kessler-Harris has shown, the racialized policy-making under the New Deal reflected the struggle for citizenship that African Americans faced during the Depression. From the NAACP’s Charles Houston’s statement that, “from a Negro’s point of view” the New Deal was “like a sieve with holes just big enough for the majority of Negroes to fall through,” we can see that African Americans had an uphill battle against issues of race and discrimination under the New Deal.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ “NAACP Makes Resolutions,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 20 July 1935.

⁹⁷ Houston quoted in Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, 97.

Confronting Discrimination and Racism

Kelly Miller published a column regularly in the *Recorder* as well as various other African-American periodicals throughout the country. In his first *Recorder* column following Roosevelt's first inauguration, Miller expressed hope that the new president would save the country and that partisanship and greed would not even enter into the equation. Miller wrote:

In the midst of the nation's distress we hear little or nothing of race, classes, sex, section or factionalism. Most of our internal bickering... [has] given to way to the common stress and strain. We have almost forgotten the race problem in the face of the universal demand of pity and need. And yet these dark days force upon our attention the special circumstances of a group shut off from the rest by the double bars of race and class. The brunt of depression bears hardest on the man at the bottom. When this depression shall have been lifted, where then will the Negro stand in the general economic equation? ... [The] future outlook is certainly not assuring. Mr. Roosevelt is committed to a program of such reconstruction of which the Negro cannot [afford to] fail to become the beneficiary.⁹⁸

Miller saw that the ascendance of Franklin Roosevelt to the presidency would certainly be no cure for the plight of African Americans. He knew that the coming of the promised New Deal presented a crossroads for African Americans in the cause for civil rights and receiving full economic, political, and social citizenship.

In order to make the most of this crossroads for African Americans, an organization calling itself the Negro Industrial League formed in the early years of the Depression. Its primary goal was to protect African-American consumers and laborers. The League committed itself to ensuring "the protection of the interests of the race" at times when the "Federal Government lends its hands to aid recovery" for the country. In a document, the Negro Industrial League argued that unless black workers saw benefits

⁹⁸ Kelly Miller, "A Blessing in Disguise," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 18 March 1933.

from the National Recovery Administration, they should not have to pay a higher cost of living. The author continued this thought by writing that what African Americans really wanted, according to the Negro Industrial League, was to receive the “full measure of benefits from the spread of employment” under the New Deal. The author, however, was skeptical of the ability or the desire of the federal government to administer the program broadly enough to benefit African Americans. Since African Americans made up “a large part of the total purchasing power of the nation” the government “should make for a policy liberal enough to enable our people to maintain an economic status commensurate with their rights as Americans.” The editorial closed by saying that since the project was funded through taxing the entire country, the reconstruction program should benefit the entire country.⁹⁹

According to one *Recorder* editorial, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins said that the Administration’s plan for economic recovery included as a “principal feature” a “square deal” for African Americans. Because of Perkins’s reputation for being racially progressive, it is easy to believe that she would advocate for a square deal for African Americans, but for the most part, members of the Roosevelt Administration were not concerned with issues facing the black community. Their top priority was fixing the economic crisis. In the editorial, Perkins was quoted as saying that “as the government undertakes the problems of relief administration, or providing work opportunities, or raising basic wage levels... we shall not forget the special problems of the more than ten million people who belong to your race,” which is to say, the collateral impact of years of discrimination. Furthermore, she added that the “broad principle of non-discrimination”

⁹⁹ Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 67; “Unvarnished Truth,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 8 July 1933.

against African Americans was to be part of the federal government's plans for creating employment.¹⁰⁰

Several factors kept race and discrimination from being a priority for the Roosevelt Administration in the beginning. First, the New Dealers did not think that African Americans should be singled out for special treatment in order to be fair to whites, and second, Roosevelt's "world view" did not even consider race as a factor. He was a well-born white aristocrat who prior to his presidency had little contact with poor people or people of color. But perhaps most prominently, the New Dealers were more sensitive to the need for southern votes in Congress to pass legislation than to the needs of African Americans. However, Roosevelt was in a difficult and unenviable situation. He was sympathetic to the needs of African Americans, but also felt the burden of having to fix the nation's economy. He believed that he could not both fix the economy and champion civil rights for fear that he might lose the support of Southern Democrats in Congress.¹⁰¹

That same year, an editorialist for the *Recorder* called upon African Americans all over the United States to "awaken thought" and demand from the federal government their fair portion of government spending on the Roosevelt White House's public works bill, the Public Works Administration. The author expressed concern, based on experience, that since the white population "will be clamoring for jobs," they will get hired instead of African Americans. This *Recorder* article wrote that the NAACP warned African Americans of a similar exception based on race when it came to benefitting from the National Recovery Administration. The author wrote, "There is sound logic in the

¹⁰⁰ "Our Economic Chance," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 27 May 1933; Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 44.

¹⁰¹ Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 37-38.

claim that unless the race makes haste in mustering a force sufficiently formidable to make its demands felt our people will get the crumbs and a few crumbs at that.”¹⁰² There was a persistent concern among African Americans that they were being left out of the New Deal.

The tone of this August editorial was a little more skeptical and pessimistic compared to the one from May (cited above), in which the author wrote optimistically that Labor Secretary Frances Perkins had promised a square deal for African Americans. But Secretary Perkins was in a difficult spot on matters relating to civil rights. As former social workers, Perkins and FERA head, Harry Hopkins, were sympathetic to the cause of civil rights for African Americans. However, upon joining the Roosevelt Administration, these two in addition to Harold Ickes, faced an uphill battle against the southern wing of the Democratic Party that had a stranglehold over legislation in Congress. If Southern Democrats perceived the administration as a threat to southern folkways such as race discrimination, segregation, and lynching, then New Dealers risked failure in Congress with other administration measures to strengthen the economy. Roosevelt said, “First things come first, and I can’t alienate certain votes I need for measures that are more important at the moment by pushing measures that would entail a fight.”¹⁰³

In the fall of 1933, President Roosevelt appointed a group of African Americans to advise him on matters concerning the black population, especially economics. The *Recorder* called this move “commendable.” The editorialist summarized the goal of this so-called Black Cabinet, explaining that members were appointed to “enable colored Americans to participate more fully in recovery activities in accordance with the

¹⁰² “Awaken Thought,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 5 August 1933.

¹⁰³ Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 44.

Rooseveltian ‘New Deal.’” The hope was that this group of advisors to the president would give African Americans a chance to “do their full part in the national program of improving the economic and living condition among all the American people.” In other words, the Black Cabinet was seen as an opportunity to obtain fuller economic citizenship, which could lead to social and political citizenship as well. As it turned out, the Black Cabinet was largely ineffective, mostly on account of the lack of enthusiasm of New Dealers for hearing about African-American concerns. However, this group continued to function on an informal basis, meeting weekly at the home of Mary McLeod Bethune. Bethune would become a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt and a key player in pushing ahead the cause of civil rights despite the reluctance of the Roosevelt Administration.¹⁰⁴

The National Urban League, an important advocate of the social, political, and economic rights of African Americans, especially during the Great Depression, released a statement early in Roosevelt’s first term that called for a new deal for African Americans that would allow them to be part of *the* New Deal. The editorialist for the *Recorder* who wrote about the National Urban League’s statement referred to African Americans as “economic pariahs” who, more than any other group, were “bearing the hardest jolts incident to the economic depression.” In the October 1933 issue of *Opportunity*, the southern field secretary of the National Urban League, Jesse O. Thomas explained that the goal of Roosevelt’s New Deal in general and the NRA more specifically was to spark growth in the American economy by creating jobs. Thomas wrote that African Americans faced an uphill battle, especially among white southerners, over whether they

¹⁰⁴ See Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, chapter 7; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 185; Doenecke, *The New Deal*, 123; “Commendable Movement,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 11 November 1933.

should receive federal help on an equal basis with white people. The latter group, southern Democrats mostly, could see codification of wage inequality as the only way to ensure the success of the National Industrial Recovery Act. Thomas pointed out that what these people failed to understand was the economic contribution that African Americans were capable of and the detriment to recovery that maintaining their *status quo* socioeconomically would cause. Thomas closed his article by admitting that such a drastic change in wage standards in the South would be “little less than revolutionary.”¹⁰⁵ If Thomas was correct in his assessment, President Roosevelt had a steep hill to climb with the southern wing of the Democratic Party and this was largely the reason that he did not use his presidential authority to push for improved civil rights and anti-lynching legislation. Roosevelt faced substantial pressure from a strong southern Democratic presence in Congress, and even from within his own administration. Even his running mate, Texan John Nance Garner, was a presence in the administration whom African Americans believed influenced the president against civil rights and social equality.¹⁰⁶

Political Citizenship

Despite receiving substantial support from African Americans in Indianapolis as early as the 1930 election, the Democratic Party did not have the support of black voters nationwide. Most African Americans supported incumbent Republican President Herbert Hoover in the 1932 election. This apparent lack of support nationwide for the Democratic Party left African Americans with little political leverage once the new Democrat-led administrations and legislatures took over in Washington and throughout

¹⁰⁵ *Indianapolis Recorder*, 22 April 1933; Jesse O. Thomas, “Will the New Deal be a Square Deal for the Negro,” *Opportunity* (October 1933), 308-311.

¹⁰⁶ Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 34-41; Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 35-39; Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 175-176.

the United States in 1933. African Americans who supported Democratic candidates had some expectation that their efforts on behalf of the party would be repaid through political patronage. According to T.H. Marshall's definition, political citizenship is more than simply being able to vote. This type of citizenship involves the "exercise of political power." For African Americans, having political authority meant being a political factor, and that meant being able to garner party patronage in return for their support.¹⁰⁷

In the early 1930s, local black leader Freeman B. Ransom and Walter White, the national leader of the NAACP, corresponded about the issue of political allegiances of African Americans in the city. Ransom explained to White that many of the prominent African Americans in Indianapolis favored the Republican Party, despite the strong influence the Ku Klux Klan had upon it. The views of average African Americans, however, were more complicated. Writing in October of 1930, Ransom told White that "the masses are for the Democratic Party... and in spite of the unfortunate fact that the Democrats have no money I think you will find over 75 percent of the colored vote will go Democrats this time." A month later, following a midterm election, Ransom reported to White that "the Democrats went over big here as you know." Following the election, the *Recorder* reported that African Americans in many of Indiana's major cities left the Republican Party to support the Democrats. "The Marion county ticket was swept into office supported with approximately fifty per cent of the colored votes," a report noted. In the same article, the author explained that this shift in African-American votes resulted from the "gospel of Democratic principles [having been] carried into every precinct and ward." This victory for Democrats in Indianapolis presaged the major nationwide shift

¹⁰⁷ Biles, *A New Deal for the American People*, 175; Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 42; Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 39; T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 8.

that would take place later in the 1930s.¹⁰⁸ Because of their early support for the Democrats, African Americans in Indianapolis expected some level of reward for their loyalty.

Nancy Weiss writes that in the election of 1932, African-American voters were wary of Roosevelt and the Democrats, even if they were disillusioned with President Hoover and the Republicans. She writes, “The Democratic nominees in 1932 offered blacks little inducement to overcome their traditional antipathy to the party.” Roosevelt’s background did nothing to assuage this caution nor did it necessarily provide him with empathy. In Weiss’s analysis of the 1932 election, she writes that African Americans had indeed voted against Hoover, but speculates as to whether this was a vote *for* Roosevelt or simply *against* a failed incumbent. Since the African-American vote was still not large enough to constitute a political factor, according to Weiss, it was not clear if the Roosevelt Administration felt it owed black voters any favors.¹⁰⁹

The landslide electoral victory in 1932 in favor of the Democrats showed that the American people were drawn to the idea of a “new deal” that Roosevelt promised in his campaign. An equally important question that weighed on the minds of black voters was whether and how much African Americans would benefit from the “weighty swing into the Democratic column.” The *Recorder*’s editorialist wrote that America’s “fair minded citizens” agreed unanimously that the beginning of the Roosevelt Administration and the New Deal was as good a time as any for African Americans to be “decently

¹⁰⁸ F.B. Ransom to Walter White, 9 October 1930, Papers of the NAACP; Walter White to F.B. Ransom, 11 October 1930, Papers of the NAACP; F.B. Ransom to Walter White, 14 October 1930, Papers of the NAACP; F.B. Ransom to Walter White, 19 November 1930, Papers of the NAACP; Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, chapter 1; “Democrats Sweep State in Landslide: reports claim Negro voters voted in large numbers for winning party,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 8 November 1930.

¹⁰⁹ Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 17-19, 29-33.

recompensed” for supporting the Democratic Party in the 1932 election. The writer said that to do so would be a “masterly political stroke.” President Roosevelt and other party leaders did not necessarily see things that way. Their political motivation tended to come from their desire to pass New Deal legislation. To carry that out quickly, they responded not to pressure from African Americans but from the southern Democratic wing in Congress. The *Recorder* indicated that it was aware that African Americans might not see eye to eye with the Roosevelt Administration on the question of patronage but that it would finally settle the question as to whether “Negro patronage is wanted and appreciated” by the Democrats.¹¹⁰

The African-American press in Indianapolis reported early in Roosevelt’s first term that there were “rumblings of spreading dissatisfaction, born of bitter disappointments and blighted political aspirations...” among black Democrats. The *Recorder* wrote that African Americans who had voted for the Democratic Party were “clamoring for recognition by the party patronage dispensers.” The situation in Indiana mirrored that of the national scene, where African-American Democrats who worked on the election did not see the benefits of patronage that were promised to them by party leaders. For their part, party leaders did not think that the work of African Americans on the campaign was significant enough to warrant patronage and, if they wanted recognition, they would have to do something to earn it.¹¹¹

The *Recorder* stated that there had been for a long time an “increasingly imperative necessity for a vaster measure of direct representation in the government of America for its millions of colored citizens.” The author laid the responsibility for the

¹¹⁰ “Democratic Patronage,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 1 April 1933.

¹¹¹ Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 43; “Patronage Dispensers,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 20 May 1933.

“comparatively insignificant social status” of African Americans on a “miserable lack of honest-to-goodness representation in the governmental affairs.” The *Recorder* did not, however, simply blame white party leaders for the problem. Rather, it placed the responsibility on African Americans for failing to seek out the kind of political voice that the author deemed a necessity for accomplishing anything. The editorialist called upon African Americans in Indiana to do something about the “woeful lack of colored political representation in the cities of our own state” in order to advance “our people politically, industrially, and otherwise.” In closing the editorial, he wrote “It is an inseparable duty of all colored Democrats as well as Republicans to work to that end. Our social salvation is impossible without it.” The author recognized that in order to achieve social citizenship it would be necessary to first achieve a political and economic power.¹¹²

For African Americans, gaining a role in governing the country through working in government jobs was a pressing issue following the election of 1932. The shifting political and economic winds presented a crucial opportunity to gain full citizenship. An editorialist at the *Recorder* believed that the best way to achieve this goal was through patronage: that is to say, Democratic Party leaders and elected officials ensuring government jobs for African Americans. The *Recorder* asserted in 1933 that the political shift of black votes was due at least in part to being mistreated by the Republican Party and being denied patronage by the GOP. Nevertheless, as African-American support for the Democrats grew, so too did the demand for jobs, which the editorialist at the *Recorder* pointed out was not simply for the sake of gaining employment, but was ultimately for the purpose of gaining a role in government. The author’s assessment

¹¹² “Patronage Dispensers,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 20 May 1933; “Negro Representation,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 6 October 1934.

presaged what T.H. Marshall would, a decade and a half later, claim to be a fundamental element of political citizenship.¹¹³

From sociologist Kelly Miller's perspective, the "Negro question" was not a "political factor" for either the Democrats or Republicans because the only thing that the political parties were concerned with was getting votes during elections. He wrote that "the public mind is bored with our constant howl for rights and recognition." Miller discussed the need for representation by African Americans in government jobs, which should come about as a result of patronage. Miller lamented that, since African Americans were not a "political factor," as he called it, they would not receive the political appointments and government jobs due a group that so strongly supported the Democratic Party in the 1932 election.¹¹⁴

In April of 1933, shortly after the newly-elected Democrats took office, Democratic Governor Paul McNutt appointed a "member of the race" to Indiana's industrial board, a move that "rank-and-file" African-American voters in the state looked upon favorably. The *Recorder* believed that this appointment was a step in the right direction for the state's African-American population gaining full economic, social, and political citizenship. The author acknowledged, however, that there was still work to be done on behalf of "colored workers." The newspaper pointed out that in Marion County, "capable" African-American Democrats were "yet without any reward for time, thought, and other essential contributions to [the] Democratic victory in Indiana." The author believed that this showed negligence on the part of Indiana Democratic leadership and could ultimately result in the loss of newly converted African-American Democrats. The

¹¹³ "Needed Political Program," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 4 March 1933; Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 8.

¹¹⁴ Kelly Miller, "The Negro and the New Cabinet," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 11 March 1933.

author went on to write, “Democratic leaders could counteract this single potentiality through the simple policy of giving a measure of justice to [whom] it is due.” African Americans were asking for justice and a fair opportunity at having full citizenship. The writer was curious to see what Governor McNutt would do in the near future to satisfy the demand for more representation in state government jobs. The writer claimed that to pay heed to African-American demands and give patronage would be a “splendid diplomatic stroke; fitting evidence of Democratic appreciation for its newly acquired Negro following.” The author wrote that “the very life of our political aspirations depends upon it.”¹¹⁵ He understood the gravity of the moment and the crucial importance of being recognized as a political factor, without which the hopes of achieving full citizenship would be impossible.

Despite initial optimism among African-American Hoosiers, Governor McNutt did not meet the expectations of the black community in Indianapolis. A month after appointing an African American to the state’s industrial board and buoying the hopes of black aspirants to government jobs, the McNutt Administration said that as the result of efforts to reorganize state government to make it more efficient and cost effective, no new appointments would be made. A spokesperson did say, however, that positions previously held by African Americans would be again filled by black employees. McNutt was evidently aware of the growing political importance of African Americans in Indiana. The McNutt spokesperson also said that appointments “must be supported on the two legs of necessity... and personal fitness with a background of party service.” The Administration insisted that this decision was made on the basis of economics, rather than

¹¹⁵ “Democratic Patronage,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 8 April 1933. This is a different article from the one published on April 1, 1933 even though the titles are the same.

race or politics. Black leaders in Indiana expressed their disappointment over this political slight. A *Recorder* editorialist wrote, “If we are to maintain our hard-earned political prestige and thereby obtain that NEW DEAL in the scheme of things to which we aspire, Negroes must stand together undivided and fight together for the common good of the race.”¹¹⁶ This editorial spoke to the importance that the political changes of 1933 held for African Americans. The issue here was less about simply jobs or patronage, rather the issue at its very core was about achieving full political, economic, and social citizenship.

The *Recorder* reported that because of the results of the election of 1934, African Americans in Indianapolis were given more Democratic Party patronage than in previous elections. The author wrote, “There is no denying that the colored citizens of this community are steadily obtaining more and more of their legitimate share of recognition in the governmental affairs of Indianapolis.” The editorialist believed that it was only just and right that African Americans receive more patronage. After all, they contributed a great deal to the election of Democrats in the fall of 1934. The author called this a “circumstance that is bound to be productive of great political advancement for Colored Americans.”¹¹⁷ In the pursuit of political citizenship, patronage was most certainly a key aspect of gaining ground for African Americans in the 1930s.

Economic Citizenship

One commentator believed that the economic crisis and the “new and reformed economic patterns to be evolved from the present temporary collapse” would leave African Americans “far less secure” economically. The African-American worker was a

¹¹⁶ Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 80; “Reorganization Cuts off Negro Job Increases,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 6 May 1933; “New Deal,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 6 May 1933.

¹¹⁷ “Democratic Patronage,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 12 January 1935.

“marginal laborer” and that margin had “continually narrowed since the great war.” The *Recorder* warned that African Americans in Indianapolis were being prevented from earning a living and were being kept from “all economic and industrial opportunities.” The author reported that jobs held by African Americans were still being given to the “other fellow’s kind.” On works projects funded by the federal government “the colored citizen is being given the rawest of deals,” in what were referred to as “organized discrimination, ostracization, and Jim Crowism.” According to Kessler-Harris’s definition of economic citizenship, in their marginal status African Americans were being denied the right to work and to participate in a meaningful way in the economic life of the nation.¹¹⁸ While these leaders thought it was important for the government to be more responsive to the needs of black citizens, they also emphasized what African Americans could do for themselves.

A religious leader for African Americans in Indianapolis, Reverend A.W. Womack, spoke to a crowd to commemorate the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. In his address, he told the audience that African Americans “must face the future as intelligent, determined but ruthless competitors of the white man, or be trampled in the ignominious dust of obscurity.” Womack exhorted his listeners to win “or be kicked aside as weaklings.” To do so, Womack told the crowd, African Americans must establish businesses that compete with white businesses. In this way, Womack told his audience, black people can achieve a certain level of economic citizenship and, therefore, not depend upon others for their own well being. The Reverend pointed to the “success

¹¹⁸ George F. McCray, “On the Occupational Future of the Negro,” *The Crisis* (June 1933), 129-130; “Our Approaching Economic Death,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 13 July 1935; Alice Kessler-Harris, “Gender Identity,” 412.

of the colored electorate” in the elections of 1934 as an encouraging sign for the future outlook for African Americans.¹¹⁹

A crucial component of establishing economic citizenship for the African-American community in Indianapolis was to have businesses owned and staffed by black workers, argued Benjamin Osborne. Despite being relatively new to Indianapolis in 1934, Osborne established himself as an outspoken supporter of African American civil rights and economic citizenship.¹²⁰ He reminded the *Recorder*'s audience that the goal was to keep the money within the community. As the Lockfield Gardens Apartment project, which included some commercial space, was just beginning, Osborne encouraged members of the community to “establish [themselves] in business by seeing to it that [they] control part of the business. If we cannot establish ourselves individually we certainly ought to have sense enough to do it collectively.” Osborne not only encouraged people to take charge of creating their own opportunities to earn a living, but to also work together to achieve the desired outcome. He continued, “There was a time when our race relied on sympathy and charity, but today humanity is less sympathetic and charitable and we either have to do for ourselves or die by being relegated to the scrap heap of humanity.”¹²¹ For Osborne and other African-American leaders, the Great Depression presented an opportunity, despite its enormous trials, to take control of economic opportunities and to finally gain ground in the effort to establish full citizenship.

¹¹⁹ “Future Outlook Bright, says Emancipation Day Speaker,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 5 January 1935.

¹²⁰ Osborne moved to Indianapolis in 1932 to establish a chiropractic office. He became a leader in the local Democratic Party and would serve as Marion County's Center Township Trustee from 1966 until his death in 1986. See Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 249.

¹²¹ Benjamin Osborne, “The Voice of the People—Our Opportunity,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 22 September 1934.

A month later, an editorialist for the *Recorder* lamented the lack of jobs for African-American men and women, citing the loss of jobs by “members of the other group,” meaning whites, as well as the “disgracefully large number of [African-American] families... on relief.” The author pointed to these factors as reasons for African Americans to no longer “[neglect] to better their industrial condition.” Like Osborne, the editorialist pointed to the depression as an opportunity to improve economic conditions for African Americans in Indianapolis by taking the initiative to establish businesses and “get into the habit of creating jobs for themselves” and to do so “for the good of the group.” The *Recorder* noted that the depression has “wrought its peculiar vengeance” on African Americans nationwide and that it should serve as a warning that African Americans ought to be self-sufficient in business. To the writer, this end could be achieved through “business enterprises owned and operated by members of [the] group.” The author called the depression a “blessing in disguise,” and informed readers that in order to “advance [the] fundamental interests [of the] race” they must “pull [themselves] out of our present stagnant state of mind industrially.”¹²²

Not only were African-American business owners crucial to the economic welfare of the race, black consumers played an integral part as well. In July 1935, George McCray wrote in *The Crisis* that African Americans “have the organized power of consumers.” African Americans, in other words, could demonstrate power through their spending habits, especially through supporting African-American-owned business, and gain a degree of economic citizenship by way of the bottom line. Perhaps with a hint of

¹²² “Wanted Jobs for Negroes,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 27 October 1934; “Our Hard Hit Race,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 16 February 1935; “Wanted More Negro Business Enterprise,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 23 February 1935; “More Negro Payrolls Created,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 21 September 1935.

sarcasm, McCray pointed out that being able to organize as consumers is one positive aspect of segregation.¹²³

The Politics of Civil Rights

The Indianapolis branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people was organized in 1912 or 1913 by local school principal Mary Ellen Cable, three years after the establishment of the organization on a national level. In its early years the branch was an active and vital part of the African-American community in Indianapolis. But as time passed, the branch experienced a repeated pattern of decline and growth in membership and activity. Nevertheless, the Indianapolis NAACP would, as Thornbrough describes, become “the most significant force for civil rights in the state in following years.” In the 1920s, the branch spoke out through group meetings and broadsides against lynchings, Jim Crowism, and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. In late 1922, the group protested unsuccessfully the establishment of a segregated high school, which in 1927 would become Crispus Attucks High School.¹²⁴

In the early 1930s, there was an internal political struggle within the Indianapolis branch of the NAACP. G.N.T. Gray was the president of the local chapter in the early 1930s. He was, according to Ransom, “very much Republican. As a matter of fact [he is] on the payroll of the Republican Party.” Ransom believed that Gray and the other Republicans would “do anything to defeat [the Democrats’] purpose here.” Whether Ransom’s statement was true, the political rift within the African American community at

¹²³ McCray, “On the Occupational Future of the Negro,” 130.

¹²⁴ Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks*, 17, 29-30, 49, 57-62; c. 1920 broadside, Papers of the NAACP; “Rousing Get-together for Local NAACP,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 26 November 1921; “Campaign for Colored Association Planned,” *Indianapolis News*, 3 December 1921; Alberta Dent to Robert Bagnell, n.d., 1922, Papers of the NAACP; Walter White to Alberta Dent, 7 December 1922, Papers of the NAACP; Louis Berry to Walter White, 14 December 1922, Papers of the NAACP.

large played itself out in the politics of the local chapter of the NAACP. Walter White, national head of the NAACP, was kept apprised of the ongoing drama through his correspondence with Ransom. White called Gray a “thoroughly bad egg” and wrote that he did not “see why the Board does not have right to take action to protect the Association from a man of this stripe.” By November 1932, Gray was removed as president of the local branch. Two charges were brought against him as the cause for his ouster. First, he was dismissed because he owed money for his subscription to *The Crisis* and had refused to pay; and second, he was accused of being a “tool for the Republican machine.”¹²⁵

The Indianapolis branch continued to struggle after ousting Gray. The branch was without leadership and in serious need of reorganization as the Roosevelt Administration was taking over in Washington. Leaders of the NAACP on a national level—Mary White Ovington, William Pickens, Walter White, and Roy Wilkins—all expressed through their correspondences with Indianapolis’s African-American leaders their concern over the condition of the Indianapolis branch. By the middle of 1933, a new leader had been elected to many accolades from the national office. However, her tenure was brief. Not even a year later, Ransom wrote that the branch was again without a president. Walter White kept up correspondence with what remained of the leadership in Indianapolis, urging them to reorganize and find a president.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ FB Ransom to Walter White, 18 October 1932, Papers of the NAACP; Mr. Bagnall to Mr. White, 1 November 1932, Papers of the NAACP; Walter White to William Pickens, 1 November 1932, Papers of the NAACP; Mr. Bagnall to Mr. White, 4 November 1932, Papers of the NAACP; “Resolution to remove GNT Gray as President of Indpls Branch,” 14 November 1932, Papers of the NAACP.

¹²⁶ William Pickens to Flora Carter Davis, 3 January 1933, Papers of the NAACP; Mary White Ovington to Henry J. Richardson, Jr., 25 April 1933, Papers of the NAACP; Mary White Ovington to Violet T. Lewis, 25 April 1933, Papers of the NAACP; Walter White to Eloise Keller, 3 June 1933, Papers of the NAACP; Eloise Keller to Roy Wilkins, 12 October 1933, Papers of the NAACP; Walter White to Flora Carter Davis, 23 October 1934, Papers of the NAACP; FB Ransom to William Pickens, 13 April 1935, Papers of the

On the same day that Franklin Roosevelt was inaugurated for his first term as president, the *Recorder* published an editorial titled “Legal Jim Crowism,” which told readers that racial discrimination was still an issue that must be dealt with on a governmental level. The editorialist explained that the Indiana General Assembly had a bill before it that would amend the Civil Rights Law of 1885, making racial discrimination on state public works projects illegal. A week later, the headline across the top of the front page read “Job Discrimination Abolished in Indiana.” The article stated that the anti-Jim Crow bill was now in Governor McNutt’s hands and he would likely sign the bill soon. The *Recorder* saw the bill as an important step for the political and economic freedoms of Indiana’s African Americans.¹²⁷

Shortly into his first term as a representative in the Indiana General Assembly, Henry J. Richardson, Jr. helped to ensure passage of the aforementioned legislation, the first of its kind. In a memorandum from Walter White to the staff at *The Crisis*, he told them of Richardson’s role in passing “for the NAACP... the first bill prohibiting discrimination in employment because of race, creed or color on state-financed projects.” The bill required employers, under contractual obligation, to not discriminate against workers on the basis of race, color, or creed. (Richardson was subsequently commended with a paragraph explaining his accomplishment and an accompanying photograph in an issue of *The Crisis*.¹²⁸

NAACP; William Pickens to Olivia Taylor and FB Ransom, 17 April 1935, Papers of the NAACP; FB Ransom to Mary White Ovington, 23 April 1935, Papers of the NAACP; William Pickens to Walter White and Roy Wilkins, 12 June 1935, Papers of the NAACP.

¹²⁷ “Legal Jim Crowism,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 4 March 1933; “Job Discrimination Abolished in Indiana,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 11 March 1933.

¹²⁸ *The Crisis* (January 1934), 16, 18; “Constructive Legislation,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 25 March 1933; Walter White to *The Crisis* editors, 25 November 1933, Papers of the NAACP; Thornbrough, *Indiana Negroes*, 89-91; Henry J. Richardson to Walter White, 26 November 1934, Papers of the NAACP.

In a letter to his sister, Representative Richardson described his task in the Indiana General Assembly as a duty to be fulfilled unselfishly. He wrote, “I am interested in assisting our group to obtain the recognition to which they are justly entitled as American citizens. The Bills which I have offered for recommendation are for the benefit of the ‘little man,’ and have been passed.” Following the bill’s passage, Richardson received a note of commendation from Walter White and assurances that he had already contacted Governor McNutt “urging immediate signature.”¹²⁹

In his second term in the General Assembly, Richardson sought to build on the momentum of the successful passage of the 1933 anti-discrimination bill. Unfortunately for Richardson, he lacked the political support to achieve passage of this second round of civil rights legislation. The second of Richardson’s civil rights bills was aimed at giving more teeth to previous anti-discrimination and anti-segregation legislation by increasing the fines for violating the civil rights laws. The bill called for businesses that “deny equal rights to all persons” to face a fine of \$300 for each violation, an increase of \$200 over the previous fine. The legislation applied mostly to restaurants, hotels, and theatres. Richardson addressed the General Assembly, the *Recorder* reported, in order to make his case for passage of the bill. He encouraged the state’s legislators, saying:

[F]ollow the lead of eighteen other states in putting teeth into the civil rights law. Failure to grant to colored citizens the equal protection of the law against denial of rights which all citizens should enjoy alike is unconstitutional, unchristian, and anti-social... The present state administration and numerous legislators that have been elected to office with the aid of colored votes should be willing to grant them every right to which they are entitled.

¹²⁹ Henry J. Richardson, Jr. to Nettie O. Richardson, 6 February 1933, box 1, folder 5, Henry J. Richardson, Jr. Collection, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; Walter White to Henry J. Richardson, Jr., 8 March 1933, box 4, folder 3, Henry J. Richardson, Jr. Collection, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.

To Representative Richardson, the passage of the bill had less to do with the increase in fines. Rather, the importance of this civil rights legislation was that it demonstrated the political capital that African Americans had, or did not have for that matter, in Indiana. In response to the failure of the civil rights legislation an editorialist at the *Recorder* pointedly asked whether African-American “citizens of this boasted Democratic nation of ours [are] everlastingly to be belittled, insulted, humiliated and deliberately denied their God-given right to equal justice before the law of the land?” The writer called upon the government to protect the rights of all citizens fairly and claimed that to not do so would be “political ingratitude,” since as Richardson pointed out, some legislators owed their seats to African American votes. The writer exclaimed that these ungrateful legislators were trying to prevent the advancement of the political, economic, and social aspirations of African Americans in Indiana.¹³⁰

As Henry J. Richardson’s second civil rights bill fought for life in the Indiana General Assembly, William Pickens wrote that its struggle “shows how badly we need Indianapolis” to have a strong NAACP branch. Ransom wrote to Walter White urging him to send someone from the national office in order to help the branch reorganize and to start a membership campaign. William Pickens came to Indianapolis in June of 1935 and wrote a letter to Walter White and Roy Wilkins, saying, “In these ten days we have succeeded in resurrecting the dead and really starting the campaign. [It is necessary] to

¹³⁰ Press release, 1 February 1935, box 4, folder 4, Henry J. Richardson, Jr. Collection, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; “Civil Rights Bill Fails,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 2 February 1935; “State Civil Rights Bill Aid is Needed Solon Points Out,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 9 February 1935; “Political Ingratitude,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 9 February 1935; “Prominent State Leaders Endorse Civil Rights Bill,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 23 February 1935; “Civil Rights Bill Fails as 15 Walk Out During Voting,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 2 March 1935; William Pickens, “Civil Rights in Indiana,” *The Crisis* (July 1935), 207, 217.

have an organization in Indianapolis, which is one place that needs an NAACP branch as much as any city could possibly need one.”¹³¹

On a national level, an effort to outlaw job discrimination was undertaken in 1933 by Illinois’ Representative Oscar De Priest, the first African American member of Congress since Reconstruction. If not for the efforts of De Priest, African American men might have been excluded from the Civilian Conservation Corps. Kelly Miller, in a column printed in the *Recorder*, wrote that the De Priest Proviso, as he called it, was designed to give African Americans “an even break” in the federal government’s efforts to rescue the economy. If, Miller argued, De Priest’s rider to the bill was pursued and enforced, it would mean employment for at least 20,000 jobless black men. Miller pointed out that it took an African-American person to ensure that race discrimination was disallowed in the CCC. In his weekly column, he wrote that “no white man would normally have the thought of safeguarding the Negro’s rights and privileges. It requires the presence of the Negro, in person, to safeguard the welfare of the race.”¹³² However, the Corps’ camps were segregated by race and only 10 percent of the CCC was black, a number certainly not congruent with the high unemployment figures for African-American males. Total unemployment in 1933 was nearly 25 percent, but in some cities the number of unemployed African Americans reached as high as 50 percent.¹³³

In a speech given in Cincinnati at an NAACP banquet, Richardson reminded his audience that the “12 million Negro citizens of the U.S.” were “guaranteed by the main laws of the land all the rights, privileges and immunities of American citizenship.” He

¹³¹ FB Ransom to William Pickens, 13 April 1935, Papers of the NAACP; William Pickens to Olivia Taylor and FB Ransom, 17 April 1935, Papers of the NAACP; William Pickens to Walter White and Roy Wilkins, 12 June 1935, Papers of the NAACP.

¹³² Kelly Miller, “The De Priest Proviso,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 15 April 1933.

¹³³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, www.bls.gov/opub/cwc/cm20030124ar03p1.htm, accessed 12 May 2008.

also encouraged the assembly to remember that as “free and responsible beings, equal before the law” the onus was primarily on African Americans to ensure the full rights of citizenship for themselves. He continued by discussing the persistence of Jim Crowism and the fact that there was no legal protection against mob violence and lynching. He declared that if African Americans were indeed “worthy of citizenship” then it is “our bounden duty to protect ourselves against such a state of affairs.”¹³⁴ His exhortation was aimed at rallying people to join and support the NAACP, but his words pointed to a broader issue, that of citizenship. In the eyes of the Constitution, Richardson told his audience, the twelve million African Americans of which he spoke should have been accorded the full benefits of social citizenship, including protection from mob violence and discrimination.

Social Citizenship and the Anti-Lynching Crusade

Beyond the rights that come with political and economic citizenship, social citizenship is, as Richardson described in his speech in Cincinnati, the promise of protection from violence and discrimination, regardless of whether it is perpetrated by the government or by other citizens. For T.H. Marshall, the notion of civil citizenship provided the bearer the right of “individual freedom—liberty of the person...” while social citizenship involved the right “to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society.” To African Americans in the 1930s, this meant that the government had to play a role in their protection from violence. One of the key moments in the struggle by African Americans for citizenship in the 1930s was the anti-lynching crusade. Under Marshall’s definition,

¹³⁴ Speech given by Henry J. Richardson, Jr. at an NAACP banquet in Cincinnati, undated, Papers of the NAACP.

it seems, if African Americans were indeed possessed of citizenship, the government was obligated to provide for their protection from lynch mobs.¹³⁵

Although lynching has largely been seen as a southern problem, one of the most notable incidents occurred in Marion, Indiana, on August 7, 1930. The night before the lynchings, three African-American young men made their way to “lovers’ lane” in Marion in order to rob unsuspecting couples. Tom Shipp, Abe Smith, and James Cameron (who quit the scene before any real crime took place), found Claude Deeter and Mary Ball in a car and threatened them with a gun. After Cameron fled, one of his friends fired at Deeter, who would later die from his injuries. Ball was able to lead Marion police to the three young men. They were arrested and placed in the Grant County Jail in Marion. By the next evening, a mob was forming in Marion that demanded vengeance for Deeter’s death and Ball’s alleged rape. Shipp and Smith were taken from the jail by the mob, beaten to death, and then hanged in a tree on the courthouse square. Not only did the local police not intervene to stop the mob murder, but they made sure that the crowd of gawkers did not interfere with the lynchings.¹³⁶

James Cameron was still in the jail and had to watch his two friends’ murders. After Shipp and Smith were dead, the mob then turned their attention to Cameron. They pulled him from the jail, beat him, placed a rope around his neck and were within seconds of hanging him when someone shouted that he had nothing to do with Deeter’s death. Miraculously, the mob freed him and he was returned to the jail. Cameron served four years in prison for being an accessory to the crime. Mary Ball testified that he had left

¹³⁵ Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 244-246, 268-279; Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 8.

¹³⁶ James H. Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), chapter 1.

the scene before the shooting took place, and that she had not, in fact, been raped that night.¹³⁷

Historian James H. Madison explains that the late nineteenth century represented a high tide for the sort of vigilante “justice” that was carried out by lynch mobs. He writes, “Indiana, like other Midwestern states, struggled mightily with issues of law and order in the several decades after the Civil War.” The historical record indicates that in the approximately four decades that followed the Civil War, 61 people in Indiana were lynched, one-third of whom were African American. Madison points out that when one considers that at this time African Americans comprised only 2 percent of the state’s population, this number is larger than it first seems. The number of lynchings in Indiana increased in the final two decades of the nineteenth century until in 1899, the General Assembly passed a law requiring a sheriff to notify the governor if a lynching had been threatened. The governor, in turn, was supposed to call for a militia to protect the potential victim.¹³⁸

The law was not enforced at first and lynchings persisted until Republican Governor Winfield Durbin took office in 1901. Madison writes that Durbin “was the first Indiana governor to show real courage in the face of lynch mobs.” Durbin was not alone in his opposition to mob murder. Many Hoosiers believed that the disregard for law and order demonstrated by vigilantism “would lead from mob rule to dictatorship, not democracy.” Governor Durbin was successful in his fight against lynching. With the

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 18.

exception of the incident in Marion in the summer of 1930, no more lynchings occurred in Indiana.¹³⁹

Nationally, however, the number of mob murders by lynching in the United States had grown steadily in the first several years of the 1930s, reaching twenty-eight in 1933, and so by early in 1934, there was renewed hope among African Americans that an anti-lynching bill might actually survive Congress, making lynching a federal crime. The push for anti-lynching legislation was more than just about ending mob violence; it became a totem for what Weiss calls “the cause of racial advancement in the 1930s.” Weiss explains that as the New Deal progressed the African American leadership believed that “racial issues might be resolved within the political process.” Instead of dividing their energy to push for reform on issues such as discrimination and Jim Crowism, matters of political and economic citizenship, they focused on calling upon the government for social citizenship and putting an end to lynching.¹⁴⁰

Over the years, several such bills had been introduced in Congress and all met essentially the same end. In early 1934, a number of organizations were preparing to lobby in favor of the bill at the upcoming congressional session. From its founding in 1909, the NAACP had fought to eradicate lynching, focusing primarily on the South where mob violence was most prevalent. The concern for lynching did not exist only among southern African Americans, however. It was a fear that was felt nationwide. Most lynchings, at least in the 1930s, made national news in the black press, including the *Indianapolis Recorder*. The rising tide of mob violence brought the issue to the foreground and led to a call for action. W.E.B. Du Bois, editor of *The Crisis*, told readers

¹³⁹ Ibid., 18-20.

¹⁴⁰ Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 96-97, 100; “Lynchings in 1933,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 6 January 1934.

that they should be encouraged because President Roosevelt had said in a 1933 radio address that lynching is murder, something he called “unusual [for a] President of the United States to admit.”¹⁴¹

The bill introduced in the 1934 session of Congress was spearheaded by two Democratic senators, Edward Costigan of Colorado and Robert Wagner of New York. This renewed effort at anti-lynching legislation, the *Recorder* believed, would be more successful than past attempts because it required that public officials, sheriffs in most cases, be responsible for the safety of prisoners in their custody, regardless of race or the alleged crime.¹⁴² This new approach made the bill ostensibly less about ending the practice of lynching African Americans and more about simply protecting prisoners. The hope was that the revision would make the bill more palatable to those who had previously opposed such legislation. The NAACP believed that President Roosevelt could support such a bill without sacrificing precious political capital. Without the president’s support, the bill stood little chance of passing. In his 1934 address before Congress, the president spoke out against lynching. Supporters of the Costigan-Wagner bill perhaps assumed that from his statements, Roosevelt supported the legislation, believing that the moral good of outlawing lynching outweighed the political risks of supporting such a law.¹⁴³

By late January, as the bill was making its way through the Senate Judiciary Committee, the *Recorder* seemed determinedly optimistic about the likelihood of

¹⁴¹ No title, *The Crisis* (January 1934), 18, 20.

¹⁴² “New Anti-Lynch Bill Ready for U.S. Congress,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 6 January 1934; “Anti-Lynching Crusaders,” *The Crisis* (June 1935), 176.

¹⁴³ Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (New York: Viking Press, 1948), 167-168; “Push Lynching Bill,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 13 January 1934; “The President’s Message,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 13 January 1934; Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 103-104.

passage. The newspaper wrote that a “large number of prominent white southerners” were willing to testify in Congress on behalf of the bill’s passage, leading the NAACP and others to believe that the bill would be successful in outlawing “the lynching evil.” The author declared that “society, civilization, [and] common decency demand that the government purge the nation of the vicious evil of mob violence and lynching.”¹⁴⁴

Kelly Miller wrote in his weekly newspaper column that the onus of eradicating mob violence and the lynching of African Americans fell on the white man. Miller’s view of the white man’s responsibility to end lynching contrasted with the perspective that African Americans were responsible for improving their own economic standing, apart from the white man. This contrast illustrates the difference between the pursuit of political and economic citizenship, something that was viewed as requiring individual and group initiative, and social citizenship, something that must be helped along by government intervention. Prior efforts to outlaw lynching had failed, Miller asserted, because they were seen as a “Negro measure.” To Miller, making lynching a federal crime and ridding the United States of the “stigma” should have been the “highest concern of American Statesmanship” and not simply an act of kindness. Miller wrote, “Material recovery upon which the energies of the nation are now focusing are certainly not of greater importance or consequence than moral recovery without which material prosperity can [not] be of enduring value.” Miller had high hopes that President Roosevelt would use the bully pulpit “for the mobilization of the conscience of the nation to roll away this national reproach.” To Miller, and others leading the fight against lynching, the issue rose above politics and should have been treated as a moral issue.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ “Anti-Lynching Message,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 27 January 1934.

¹⁴⁵ Kelly Miller, “Mob Violence, the White Man’s Burden,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 27 January 1934.

But what made the issue such a struggle was that African Americans lacked the political, economic, and social capital necessary to make this issue about anything more than race and politics. In lacking full citizenship, their rights could be ignored or treated as a political issue, rather than a moral one.

By February, the Costigan-Wagner bill had made its way through committee and was ready to be put to a vote. Indiana's junior senator, Frederick Van Nuys, heartily supported the bill and declared that it would successfully pass both houses of Congress soon. In fact, the *Recorder* told readers that it was only a matter of time before passage of the bill would be an "accomplished fact."¹⁴⁶ However, by the middle of March, hope for the bill's passage began to wane when it became clear that progress on the legislation was purposely suspended. In the March edition of *The Crisis*, a column appeared that explained the Costigan-Wagner bill and told readers to "Wire Your Congressman!" to tell him to support the bill. The editorialist at the *Recorder* declared, "There will be nothing praiseworthy in any act of congress that will make for defeating this measure." With that in mind, the author encouraged readers to write to their congressional representative demanding that the bill be voted upon and passed into law.¹⁴⁷

By June, Congress had adjourned without taking a final vote on the measure, thus defeating the legislation without actually having to vote against it. The *Recorder* placed the blame on a senator from South Carolina and the numerous enemies of the bill in the South for the failure. Discouraged but not defeated, the author wrote that the cause to end lynching would continue "for the good of society." Later, in the summer of 1934, the

¹⁴⁶ "Anti-Lynch Bill to Pass—Van Nuys," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 10 February 1934; "The Costigan-Wagner Bill," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 17 February 1934.

¹⁴⁷ *The Crisis* (March 1934), 66; "Needless Procrastination," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 17 March 1934.

NAACP held its annual meeting in Oklahoma City. In his address before the assembly, the secretary of the organization, Walter White, called for the fight against segregation and lynching to continue unabated, despite the recent setbacks in Congress.¹⁴⁸

Following the mid-term elections in November of 1934, the NAACP was optimistic that the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill could be reintroduced in Congress during the next session and could pass even though strong opposition remained in the South. The best hope for the bill, the *Recorder* stated, was to have the full support of President Roosevelt and a promise to sign the bill if it passed Congress. To do so, he needed to put the legislation on his “must program.” In light of the fifteen lynchings that took place in 1934, in which all the victims were African American, the *Recorder* called upon President Roosevelt and the U.S. government to put a stop to the mob violence. The editorialist questioned why the practice of lynching was accepted in the United States. He asked, “Why is it that not one penny is being expended by the government of the U.S. to put a stop to this cowardly system of snuffing out the lives of innocent citizens...?” The newspaper complained that nothing was being done to put a stop to the “hellish mistreatment” of African Americans, despite that fact that the government had the authority to make lynching a federal crime.¹⁴⁹

The next session of Congress saw the bill introduced yet again. In February 1935, another version of the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill was again making its way through Congress and was before the same committee that had listened to testimony about the same bill the previous February. Democratic Senator Van Nuys of Indiana

¹⁴⁸ “Unpardonable Error,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 30 June 1934; “NAACP Executive Challenges Nation’s Stand on Lynching,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 7 July 1934.

¹⁴⁹ “FDR Can Sign Anti-Lynching Bill NAACP Survey Says,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 17 November 1934; “Lynch Murders in U.S.,” *Indianapolis Recorder*, 12 January 1935.

chaired this particular committee and he was vocal about his support of the bill. Hoosier Congressmen, including Democrats William Schulte, James Farley, and Eugene Crowe, also expressed their support of the bill in *The Crisis*. The argument that the bill's opponents had, and about which the committee was taking testimony, was that the bill was unconstitutional. The Costigan-Wagner bill made it through the judiciary committee and Senator Van Nuys received commendation from the *Recorder's* editorial staff for steering the bill successfully through the hearings. Getting the bill through the judiciary committee was seen as a small victory on the way to making a federal law to "destroy the hellish system of mob rule." Despite its success in the committee, champions of the bill still expected much opposition from southern Democrats. The *Recorder* reported that when Senator Costigan addressed the Senate regarding the bill, there was quite a stir amongst the senators, indicating that the large minority in opposition to the bill intended to "tie up the Senate for months... to prevent its passage." The group that formed the opposition, the "whip-cracking Southerners," as characterized in the *Recorder*, presented an electoral and political challenge to the bill. Those in favor of the bill could not muster enough votes to break the filibuster. The deadlock in the Senate was broken by Republican Senator William Borah of Idaho, who voted against the bill and brought the filibuster to a close. To the disappointment of the NAACP, President Roosevelt did not use his power and position to break the deadlock in favor of the bill. The *Recorder* surmised that Roosevelt "feared to incur the wrath of Southern bigots" and therefore did not support the legislation. The organization's leadership urged members to "keep up the agitation" and "write to President Roosevelt expressing disappointment."¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Walter White, "The Costigan-Wagner Bill," *The Crisis* (January 1935), 10; "Sentiment on Anti-Lynching Bill," *The Crisis* (January 1935), 14, 25, 42-43, 61; "Anti-Lynching Bill Before Sub-Committee,"

By this time, Walter White was disillusioned and discouraged by the failure of the bill and Roosevelt's unwillingness to support the legislation. After a visit with President Roosevelt and the First Lady, White concluded that the president was "unwilling to challenge the Southern leadership of his party." White resigned a post he held on the Virgin Islands Council in protest over President Roosevelt's lack of support for the legislation. Even though the Senate passed a motion to adjourn before taking a vote on the bill, White explained that the legislation was not dead, but that it "lost its position as the pending business of the Senate." White encouraged the branches of the NAACP and others who fought for the bill to keep fighting to outlaw lynching.¹⁵¹

It was not until 1939 that Roosevelt would take any real steps toward outlawing lynching, though in the end his efforts were of no avail. He created a Civil Rights Section within the Justice Department that prosecuted lynching cases. The Civil Rights Section did not win a conviction until 1946. President Truman, in 1947, spoke out against lynching and in favor of more comprehensive civil rights protections in general from the federal government. Southern Democrats continued to resist and the Ku Klux Klan criticized Truman's efforts to promote civil rights.¹⁵²

In January 1940, the House of Representatives easily passed another anti-lynching bill, this time sponsored by Representative Joseph A. Gavagan, Democrat of Harlem, New York. But the bill continued to suffer because of politics. Senators representing

Indianapolis Recorder, 9 February 1935; "Well Done Van Nuys," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 23 February 1935; "Lynch Murder," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 23 March 1935; "Southern Senators War on Lynch Bill," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 20 April 1935; "South Smothers Lynching Bill," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 4 May 1934; "For and Not For the Anti-Lynch Bill," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 4 May 1934; "Anti-Lynching Bill," *The Crisis* (June 1935), 184.

¹⁵¹ White, *A Man Called White*, 169; "Walter White Quits Government Post," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 18 May 1935; Walter White, "The Voice of the People," *Indianapolis Recorder*, 25 May 1935.

¹⁵² Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 66, 288-295; Kevin J. McMahon, *Reconsidering Roosevelt on Race: How the Presidency Paved the Road to Brown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 178-187.

southern states promised a filibuster if the bill was called to a vote. Because Roosevelt and other Democrats had other issues such as national defense on their agendas, the lynching issue was set aside in order to prevent an already tenuous political climate from worsening. The Gavagan bill died in Congress, suffering the fate of similar bills before.¹⁵³

While African Americans benefited from the New Deal's various programs, the federal government did not seize the opportunity to improve the political, social, and economic standing of African Americans. In the first several years of the Roosevelt presidency, the needs of African-American citizens and the cause of civil rights were largely ignored by the administration in favor of what was seen as a more pressing economic catastrophe. Roosevelt forgot the Forgotten Man (and woman) at the bottom of America's social order. African-American leaders forged ahead and made their case before Congress, the President, and the public. Their hard work paid off, if incrementally, in the decades that followed as the struggle for civil rights and citizenship continued to bring about change.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the New Deal, some African-American leaders wondered whether the Great Depression presented an opportunity to African Americans to seize upon citizenship. President Roosevelt had promised a "new deal," but some questioned whether that goal would include a "square deal" for African Americans, who had for so long been subjected to racial discrimination, segregation, and violence.

This thesis has examined the first years of the Roosevelt Administration, roughly 1933 through 1936. This time frame represented a period when the issues of race and

¹⁵³ Ibid.

racism were on the surface. Harvard Sitkoff argues that African-American leaders in 1935 believed that the federal government had “betrayed [African Americans] under the New Deal.” Sitkoff writes that these “denunciations of the New Deal by blacks” were common during the First New Deal. However, as the Second New Deal got under way in 1935, with the promising Works Progress Administration giving jobs to African Americans, the criticism shifted to praise.¹⁵⁴

I have examined several themes from the perspective of African-American leaders in Indianapolis during the First New Deal and the beginning of the Second New Deal. The politics of civil rights, party patronage, economic assistance and jobs, as well as the push for anti-lynching legislation, presented opportunities for African Americans on the path to full citizenship and full participation in American life. “Citizenship,” as T.H. Marshall argued in 1950, “is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community.”¹⁵⁵ During the first Roosevelt Administration, African Americans struggled to be acknowledged as full-fledged members of American society. While they did not achieve this goal, the struggle they undertook was crucial in laying the groundwork for the Civil Rights movement that was to come by the middle of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 56-59.

¹⁵⁵ Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 8.

¹⁵⁶ This is Sitkoff’s overarching argument in *A New Deal for Blacks*.

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