



Indiana Humanities Council

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Hoosier History:

THIS FAR BY FAITH: BLACK HOOSIER HERITAGE

African Americans have been a part of Indiana history since earliest times. In the pioneer period they were few in numbers, but after the Civil War the Black population of the state grew steadily as the result of migration from the South. In the 20th century Blacks became increasingly urbanized and concentrated in the industrial cities of central Indiana and the Calumet area.

In Indiana, as in the South which they left, African Americans encountered prejudice and discrimination and lived segregated from the white community. Out of their own resources, through self-help and sharing, they created their own institutions and developed a culture which was distinct, but one which influenced and contributed to the dominant culture.

This photo essay, based on a 1982 publication of the Indiana Humanities Council, summarizes Indiana's African American history in the following chapters:

- Part 1 -- **Early Rural Communities**
- Part 2 -- **The Black Urban Community**
- Part 3 -- **Making a Living**
- Part 4 -- **The Church in Community Life**
- Part 5 -- **Education and the Professions**
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EARLY RURAL COMMUNITIES

Indiana black history includes a rich pioneer legacy. Before 1750 African Americans began arriving in the territory which became Indiana. A description of the French settlement which became Vincennes notes that five slaves were among the community's forty-five settlers in 1746. Following Indiana's admission into the Union in 1816, significant numbers of free Blacks began migrating to the Hoosier state. Throughout the period from 1820 to 1860 African Americans accounted for approximately one percent of the state's population. More than 10,000 resided in Indiana at the outbreak of the Civil War.



*Eli Archey, farming at Beech Settlement, ca. 1910.
Courtesy Indiana Historical Society Library*

Like their white counterparts, Black pioneers settled in a variety of both urban and rural environments. Reflecting the backwoods, agrarian nature of Indiana in this early period, the majority lived in the countryside. Several Black families often settled in the same vicinity, thereby forming distinct rural communities. A dozen or more of these farming villages were formed in the forty years preceding 1860. Greenville Settlement in Randolph County, established in 1822, apparently was the first such community to take shape. Other Black pioneer villages included Cabin Creek and Snow Hill (Randolph County), Weaver Settlement (Grant County), Beech Settlement (Rush County), Lyles Station (Gibson County), Roberts Settlement (Hamilton County), and Lost Creek (Vigo County).

Generally, each African American rural community was comprised of families that had emigrated from the South, most commonly from North Carolina and Virginia.

They came to the Indiana frontier in search of better economic fortunes and to escape the threat of slavery.

Some of these early pioneers had been born and raised as free men, with many coming from families that had lived unrestrained by slavery for successive generations. The large, extended Roberts family of northeastern North Carolina was one such group. Others had been manumitted only more recently by their owners, often Quakers. In later years an unknown number of fugitive slaves formed a part of these farming communities as well.



Thomas P. Weaver of Beech Settlement, Rush County, ca. 1880-1910, with unidentified woman..

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society Library

Black pioneers faced more than the obvious dangers and difficulties common to life in a frontier wilderness; they were also confronted by the hostility of white Hoosiers. Prevailing attitudes ranged from grudging acceptance to outright hatred of African Americans, and a number of both formal and informal restraints were imposed upon the group. The most obvious display of anti-Black sentiment was a clause in the 1851 Indiana State Constitution which prohibited further Black immigration to the state.

To protect their precarious status, Black pioneers often settled near groups of Quakers. Opposed to slavery, the Friends as a whole were more accepting of Black settlers than almost any other group of whites; and as such, they served as an important buffer.

The records of each Black settlement indicate that the institutions of religion and education were valued highly. Churches and schools were both literally and figuratively built at the center of the community. Churches often were begun within a year or so after a group of settlers had taken residence. Most were originally Methodist Episcopal churches, with many converted to the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) denomination by the Reverend (later Bishop) Paul Quinn after the mid 1830's. A number of Baptist churches also were organized.

Education on the frontier was uneven at best, yet the importance of schooling was apparent even during the first trying years of each settlement. Denied access to public schools until 1869, the children of each community attended private subscription schools organized by their elders. Schools were often taught in a community church or at a nearby schoolhouse. Usually offering the mere basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, they were open for the children of all who were willing and financially able to support the school.



*Union Literary Institute, an early school of higher learning,
located in Randolph County.*

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society Library

Opportunities for education beyond this common school level were limited. Union Literary Institute, a manual training school in Randolph County, established in 1846, provided the most extensive advanced offerings for black students.

Following the end of the Civil War Black rural communities in Indiana were at a crossroads. Most had evolved into small, bustling farming communities encompassing several hundred acres of farmland. Some settlements such as Lost Creek, Roberts Settlement, and Lyles Station were experiencing prolonged periods of growth and prosperity. At the same time, however, little additional

farmland remained available to accommodate further expansion. Increasingly it would become more difficult to make a living from the soil. While a few settlements continued to grow throughout the final decades of the 19th century, overall the Black rural communities began to decline. The children and grandchildren of the state's African American pioneers began migrating to nearby towns and cities in order to seek their fortunes. By World War I it was apparent that the golden era of black farming had slipped away.

At present only a small number of African Americans work the Hoosier soil once cleared by their forefathers, yet the legacy of the Black rural experience is very much alive. A number of prominent Hoosiers during the past century have been descendants of early Black pioneers. Among the most outstanding were leaders such as Mathias Nolcox, the first principal of Indianapolis' Crispus Attucks High School; Richard Bassett, one of four Black state legislators during the 19th century; Carl Glennis Roberts, a former president of the National Medical Association; and Ezra Roberts, a director of the Education Department at Tuskegee Institute during the early 20th century.



*John Nolcox family of Lyles Station, Gibson County, ca. 1910.
Courtesy Indiana Historical Society Library*

Countless other men and women have achieved recognition as teachers, lawyers, ministers, doctors, business persons, and professionals in a variety of additional fields. Despite being scattered throughout Indiana and across the country, many of these descendants have maintained a strong sense of identity with their common past. Each summer family reunions are held at communities such as Beech Settlement, Lyles Station, and Roberts Settlement. Coming together to celebrate their pioneer heritage, the descendants demonstrate their enduring sense of family pride and strength, a legacy from their Hoosier ancestors.

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THE BLACK URBAN COMMUNITY

After the Civil War more and more African Americans moved from the South northward and cityward. Newcomers and many of the older residents left rural communities and the towns along the Ohio River to settle in industrial centers farther north. The largest number settled in Indianapolis, which has continued to have the largest Black community in the state, although the percentage of Blacks is greater in some other cities. Evansville is the only city in southern Indiana with a sizeable African American population.



*Firemen from Hose Company No. 9, Evansville, ca. 1910.
Courtesy Special Collections, University of Southern Indiana*

Beginning with the "great migration" during World War I and thereafter, African Americans from the deep South flocked to the industrial centers in the Calumet area, particularly the steel city of Gary, where they have become a majority.

A pattern of all-Black or predominantly Black neighborhoods developed early, and as numbers grew there were larger and larger concentrations of Blacks. White property owners and real estate interests resorted to legal and extra-legal methods to prevent African Americans from moving into previously all-white neighborhoods. Blacks were usually shut off from buying new houses or renting desirable apartments. Consequently Lockefield Gardens in Indianapolis, the first public housing project in the state, was a source of Black pride. In the 1950's Flanner House introduced the concept of self-help housing with a "sweat equity" down payment on a home which the owners helped build.

After World War II whites in increasing numbers moved to the suburbs. In recent years a few Blacks have moved to the suburbs, but most Blacks remain concentrated in the cities as the percentage of whites in those areas declines. Patterns of residential segregation prevail in most urban areas in spite of government policies to insure open housing.

Within the African American community, institutions developed which are the counterparts of those in the white community but distinct from them. Underlying all Black community institutions is the Black family, which has survived seemingly overwhelming obstacles in slavery and freedom and has been a source of strength and pride. Families relied on the church for stability, and families in turn strengthened the churches. Often members of the family belonged to the same congregation for generations. Parents, often at great sacrifice to themselves, encouraged children to go to school and secure an education which they believed would "set them free."

In addition to their own churches African Americans also created their own fraternal, social, and cultural institutions and sought to meet their economic needs through their own business enterprises. From earliest times self-help, mutual aid, and volunteerism have characterized Black society. This has resulted in a veritable network of organizations.



The national award-winning drill team of American Legion Post No. 359, Richmond, Indiana, ca. 1955.

Courtesy James McDougle, Richmond

One of the oldest is the Masonic Order, founded by Prince Hall during the American Revolution. Since the founding of the first lodge in Indiana in 1848, Black Masons have furnished leadership and made important civic contributions. After the Civil War other secret fraternal organizations, often with larger memberships than the Masons, proliferated. Some of them such as the Elks, Odd Fellows, and Knights of Pythias were separate units of white fraternal groups. Others such as the United Brothers of Friendship were solely African American. All of these organizations had women's auxiliaries. In addition to filling social and

recreational needs they carried on various benevolent functions, furnishing death benefits for members and caring for widows and orphans.

There were many other charitable and philanthropic organizations. A notable example was the Alpha Home for Aged Colored Women in Indianapolis, the first institution of its kind in the United States. It was begun with a gift from a white woman but has been maintained by financial contributions from Black citizens.

Two of the most important settlement houses serving the needs of the African American community were Flanner House in Indianapolis and Stewart House in Gary. They furnished various welfare services and were recreational centers and meeting places for the lodges, scouts, and clubs. Excluded from full participation in white-dominated Y.M.C.A.'s and Y.W.C.A.'s, Blacks formed their own branches of these national organizations. One of the strongest was the Senate Avenue Y.M.C.A. in Indianapolis. It not only served educational and social welfare purposes, but also helped mobilize community opinion on public issues through its forums and "monster meetings" which were addressed by nationally famous Black leaders.

Social and literary clubs were numerous but most of them also served some civic or benevolent purpose. The many women's clubs which began in the late nineteenth century and have continued to the present were a significant force in the African American community. A good example was the Woman's Improvement Club, founded in Indianapolis in 1904 by Lillian Thomas Fox, one of the first Black woman journalists. The club combined cultural activities such as book reviews and lectures with social welfare programs. For years it raised funds to help maintain an outdoor tuberculosis camp.



Women's Improvement Club tuberculosis camp, Indianapolis, 1905. An example of the community spirit fostered by the work of Black women's clubs.

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society Library

Many of the scores of women's clubs throughout the state were affiliated with the Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs which was in turn affiliated with the National Association of Colored Women. One of the most notable club women was Sallie Wyatt Stewart, an Evansville teacher, who served as community president of both the Indiana and national organizations.

Black newspapers are among the important institutions in the African American community. These weeklies have almost always had a precarious financial existence, and many which were begun failed after a short time. Only a few survived to become successful business enterprises, but they have served to give the Black community a sense of identity, to publicize Black achievements, and to voice Black protest. The earliest paper in Indianapolis appears to have been the *Leader*, published from 1879 to 1885 by three brothers who were teachers and civic leaders 3 Robert, Benjamin, and James Bagby.

The *Indianapolis World* was published from 1882 until 1924. Better known was the *Indianapolis Freeman*, founded in 1888 and soon acquired by George L. Knox, probably the wealthiest African American in Indianapolis at that time and an influential Republican. Knox published the paper until his death in 1926. The *Indianapolis Recorder*, founded in 1897, is still published today and has been continuously owned by one family, the Stewarts.

In 1916 the *Gary Sun* began publication and continued to appear until 1929. The *Gary Colored American* (later the *Gary American*) was launched in 1927 and continued until the 1940's. Today the *Info*<> and the *Crusader* are published in Gary.

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MAKING A LIVING

Increasing residential segregation and the growth of all-Black or predominantly Black communities in Indiana's larger cities led to the growth of numerous small businesses owned by African-Americans.

Black entrepreneurs sometimes catered to a white clientele, especially before the large-scale migrations from the South began. For a long time African-American barbers serving white customers were common. The most notable example was George L. Knox of Indianapolis. Probably the most powerful Black Republican in the state in the late nineteenth century and reputed to be the wealthiest, he invested some of the profits from his barbershop in the *Indianapolis Freeman*. In Evansville Glover's Barber Shop catered to a white clientele from 1898 to 1928.

A variety of other Black-owned businesses served the African- American community. These included drug and grocery stores and other small stores, restaurants, taverns, boarding houses, hotels, real estate businesses, funeral homes, movie houses, theaters, and nightclubs.



Indianapolis grocers Benjamin and Frances C. Stout on their way to city market, ca. 1890.

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society Library

Many of these small enterprises survived only a short time, but there were a few exceptions. Best known was the Madame C. J. Walker Company in Indianapolis, which manufactured a hairdressing preparation and cosmetics. During its heyday from about 1910 to the 1940's, it developed an international business which made its founder the first African-American woman millionaire in the United States.

In the same area near Indiana Avenue, J. Wallace Hall amassed a comfortable fortune from the Hall Realty Company, which he operated from 1922 to 1957. In 1906 William G. Gaines established the Gaines Funeral Home, the first Black funeral home in Evansville. It is still the leading business of its kind in the city.

In spite of efforts by Black chamber-of-commerce-type organizations such as the Gary Board of Trade and branches of Booker T. Washington's National Negro Business League to encourage African-Americans to patronize Black-owned businesses, these businesses, like small businesses generally, have for the most part disappeared. In the past as today most African-Americans have been wage earners and have not been employed by Black-owned businesses.

African-Americans came north hoping to find a better economic future, but most of them were forced to eke out an existence in menial, low-paying jobs. This was in part because they lacked education and training, but even those with skilled trades were forced into menial work. As Frederick Douglass observed in 1880: "It is easier to get a colored lad into a lawyer's office to study law, than into a blacksmith shop to hammer iron."

Decade after decade, United States census reports classed the vast majority of African-American men simply as "laborers," which meant that they usually did any kind of manual labor which was available. They were found in such occupations as those of teamster, hod carrier, waiter, porter, and janitor. A few worked in coal mines and quarries and a few in the building trades.



*Foremen at No. 7 blast furnace, Inland Steel Company, East Chicago, 1982.
Courtesy Inland Steel Company–Indiana Harbor Works, East Chicago.*

The rise of the steel mills and other heavy industries in Gary and East Chicago helped spur African-American migration from the South from 1915 onward, but for many years Blacks were found only in the most menial jobs in the steel mills. Labor union policies were among the obstacles to better jobs. There were a few African-American members, but most A.F.L. unions were hostile to Black labor. Exclusion in some cases led African-Americans to attempt to organize their own unions. It also led to the use of Blacks as strikebreakers, which had the effect of intensifying white hostility.

One of the differences between the African-American community and the white community until very recently has been that a much larger percentage of Black women have traditionally been employed than have white women. Economic necessity compelled Black housewives and others to supplement family income--usually as domestics or laundresses and in other service jobs. Until World War II almost no African-American women had jobs in industry.

Beginning with the New Deal era of the 1930's and World War II, government policies, changes in union policies, and increased educational opportunities have combined to open new job opportunities for African-Americans although the percentage of Blacks in unskilled, low-paying work remains disproportionately high. The founding of the C.I.O. and the rise of powerful industrial unions, notably Steel Workers and United Automobile Workers, opened union membership and new employment opportunities. From the beginning it was the national policy of the Congress of Industrial Organizations to oppose race discrimination in member unions, a policy supported by the Indiana C.I.O.

Some locals resisted, but C.I.O. leadership worked to convince management to adopt more liberal policies in the hiring and advancement of African-Americans. In spite of the persisting prejudice of some white workers, African-Americans also began to win positions of influence in the unions.

Positive efforts by government, both federal and state, although not always successful, have also helped to advance economic opportunities. A beginning was made when Franklin D. Roosevelt created a Fair Employment Practices Commission during World War II. Thereafter state laws and acts of Congress, notably the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and executive orders expanded the scope of government efforts. The result has been increased opportunities for better jobs and advancement in industry. Increasing numbers of African-American women are found in industry. Government policies and changing public attitudes as well as educational attainments have begun to open other kinds of employment for both women and men. Recent census figures show African-Americans in managerial and administrative positions and increasing numbers in white collar positions.

Participation in union activity and a growing number of African-Americans in industry helped to develop a new kind of Black leader in politics and civil rights. James S. Hunter of Lake County, a welder, who was elected to the Indiana General Assembly in 1940 and served there for a quarter of a century, rose through the ranks of the C.I.O. Jesse Dickinson of South Bend, elected to the lower house in 1942 and later to the state Senate, was also active in the C.I.O. Charles E. Decker, elected to the General Assembly in 1946, and the only African-American from Evansville ever elected to that body, was president of the Vanderburgh County C.I.O.

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THE CHURCH IN COMMUNITY LIFE

No matter how poor this church was, nobody ever came through here that needed something that we didn't give them something. Nobody. Whatever had to be paid, people just dug in their pockets and gave their quarters and fifty cents. They didn't have it easy . . . Years ago, it was a struggle together. Had to be to survive.

The above quotation from the deacon of a Black church in Richmond, Indiana, captures the essence of the historical role of the Black church. In addition to fostering the religious faith which has enabled African-American people to survive and overcome, Black churches, through their mutual aid and outreach activities, sometimes initiated by ministers and sometimes by lay people, have helped to meet social and economic needs. Black ministers have also often furnished civic and political leadership.

African-American churches have played a vital part in the struggle for freedom and civil rights. Some African-Americans have always attended predominantly white churches and some of them have seen all-Black churches as symbols of self-segregation, but most have chosen to create and support their own separate institutions.

Before the Civil War the African Methodist Episcopal Church was the largest African-American denomination in Indiana. It continued to grow and exert influence in the post-war years. Smaller groups affiliated with the A.M.E. Zion Church. But as more and more migrants arrived from the South, Baptists became the most numerous denomination. A.M.E. churches and A.M.E. Zion churches organized conferences and had a hierarchical system separate from the Indiana Conference of predominantly white Methodist churches. Government of Baptist churches was more decentralized, but an Indiana Association of Negro Baptist Churches was organized.

The vast majority of Blacks were either Baptists or Methodists, but African-Americans have been members of almost all denominations, and there have been several examples of all-Black congregations in predominantly white denominations. One of the earliest was the Second Christian Church in

Indianapolis. A later example is Witherspoon Presbyterian Church, also in Indianapolis. There have also been all-Black Episcopal churches.

An increasing number of African-Americans are members of the Roman Catholic Church. Some congregations are largely Black and are served by Black priests. In addition to the churches which represent established denominations, newcomers from the South sometimes formed independent congregations in "storefront" churches.



*Spirit of prayer captured at Flanner House, Indianapolis, ca. 1955.
Courtesy Indiana Historical Society Library.*

Churches have served the needs of their members through a variety of activities and a network of church organizations. Church choirs and other musical groups have served a spiritual purpose and a social purpose as well as developing musical talents. Sunday schools, men's groups, women's groups, and youth groups have also served social as well as religious purposes through dinners, teas, picnics, and annual outings.

Churches serve as meeting places for many community organizations and reach out into the community in a variety of ways. Some of these are continuing activities such as day care centers. Church societies have always dispensed charity to the needy and helped care for the sick and elderly. They have responded to special needs created during periods of crisis. For example, at the time of the "exodus" of 1879 which brought hordes of destitute immigrants from the South into Indiana during a cold winter, church groups provided food, clothing, and

shelter. The Great Depression of the 1930's had a devastating effect upon the financial resources of churches, but members nevertheless carried on a wide range of relief activities.

In the area of civil rights, church members have, themselves, participated and have given support to other groups in many local efforts such as integrating movie houses and restaurants and winning equal employment policies in police and fire departments and private businesses. Such church-related efforts have provided a training ground for many community leaders.

Black ministers have always been community leaders as well as providers of spiritual leadership, and they have frequently been political leaders as well. This was especially true in the nineteenth century when there were few educated African-Americans. Ministers were prominent in the conventions that sought educational and political rights before and after the Civil War. One of the most important leaders of that period was Moses Broyles, the minister of the Second Baptist Church in Indianapolis. Broyles was a forceful orator and a stalwart Republican who helped educate Blacks in political activity. Two of the four African-Americans elected to the state legislature before 1900 were ministers -- James M. Townsend of the A.M.E. church and Richard Bassett, a Baptist. More recently Marshall A. Talley, a Baptist minister and a Democrat, was elected to the General Assembly in 1936.

Black ministers have been even more prominent in furnishing leadership in the civil rights movement. In the 1960's ministers organized branches of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Indiana, headed by the Rev. Mr. Andrew Brown of St. John's Missionary Baptist Church in Indianapolis.

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EDUCATION AND THE PROFESSIONS

Before the Civil War, African-American children were barred by state law from attending public schools, although in a few individual cases they appear to have attended "white" schools. For the most part such schooling as they received was in schools financed out of their own meager resources. A fortunate few attended two private academies, the Union Literary Institute in Randolph County and the Eleutherian Institute in Jefferson County.

In 1869 the state legislature provided that Blacks might attend public, racially segregated schools. In 1877 the law was amended to allow school officials to decide whether to maintain separate schools. In towns in the southern part of the state schools were segregated. In Indianapolis most elementary schools were segregated, but there was no separate high school for African-Americans until the 1920s. As a result of the "great migration" of Blacks from the South, powerful white groups began to demand the tightening of segregation.



*School photograph for community school at Beech Settlement, Rush County, 1882.
Courtesy Indiana Historical Society Library.*

Crispus Attucks High School was opened in 1927, and African-Americans were no longer allowed to attend other high schools. During the same period all elementary schools were completely segregated. In Gary a policy of segregation in elementary schools was begun in 1908, but there was no separate high school until Roosevelt High School was begun in 1927.

These all-Black high schools, built as the result of prejudice, nevertheless became symbols of African-American pride and achievement. Because teaching was one of the few vocations open to educated Black men and women, these schools were able to boast superior faculties, including persons with advanced degrees.

During World War II and thereafter, African-American citizens launched a campaign to end segregation in public accommodations and education. Some communities, including Gary, began to eliminate separate schools. In 1949 the Indiana General Assembly passed a law which declared it to be public policy to provide "equal, non-segregated, non-discriminatory educational opportunities regardless of race, creed, national origin, color or sex" and to "eliminate and prohibit" segregated schools from kindergartens to the state universities.

Indianapolis, with the largest African-American population in the state, presented the most important test of the law. The school board immediately began a policy of assigning elementary school children to the schools nearest their homes, abolishing separate elementary school districts for whites and African-Americans.

The desegregation of high schools was also begun. The first racially integrated classes were graduated in 1953, although, as the result of residential patterns and optional school districts, enrollment at Attucks High School remained almost entirely Black. Evansville and the smaller cities in southern Indiana also began to dismantle separate school systems.



Principal Charles Rochelle with students at all-black Lincoln High School in Evansville, ca. 1950.

Courtesy Special Collections, University of Southern Indiana.

The 1949 school law prohibited discrimination on account of race in employment and assignment of teachers and led to the gradual integration of teaching and administrative staffs.

Compliance with the 1949 law did not result in truly integrated schools. As the result of residential patterns, particularly the movement of whites to the suburbs, city schools frequently became "resegregated" in a few years. This led to prolonged litigation in the federal courts.

Until quite recently few blacks graduated from colleges or universities, and the number with professional degrees was even smaller. Higher education was often obtained only in the face of formidable obstacles. Probably not more than a dozen blacks graduated from Indiana institutions before 1900. The first black male graduate was Benjamin Templeton, who received a degree from Hanover College in 1837. The first woman graduate was Gertrude Mahorney who received a degree from Butler University in 1887.

Although there were no racial barriers to admission to the state universities and no overt barriers in the private ones, African-American students usually led a life apart from other students. They organized their own Greek letter fraternities and sororities. Not until after World War II were Black students admitted to residence halls at Indiana and Purdue universities. Some Indiana students attended private black colleges in other states and graduated from professional schools such as Meharry Medical College and the Howard University Law School.

Because African-Americans have always placed great value on education, persons with degrees have enjoyed prestige in the black community; and a large proportion of civic and political leaders have been drawn from the professions. Educators have always been regarded as leaders. For example, Gabriel Jones, an Indianapolis teacher, was one of four African-Americans elected to the Indiana General Assembly before 1900. Another Indianapolis teacher, William McCoy, was named minister to Liberia in 1892. Mary E. Cable, an elementary school principal, was the founder and first president of the Indianapolis N.A.A.C.P. More recently Andrew Ramsey, a high school teacher of foreign languages, was for many years one of the most influential civil rights leaders in the state.

Unlike most white physicians Black members of the medical profession have been prominent in public affairs. The first Black M.D. in Indiana, Samuel A. Elbert, obtained his degree in 1871, and was a civic leader in Indianapolis and a nominee for the General Assembly in 1882. Dr. George Washington Buckner of Evansville

was appointed minister to Liberia by President Woodrow Wilson. Dr. Sumner Furniss, the first African-American to be admitted as an intern in the Indianapolis City Hospital, was a leader in the African -American community from the 1890s until his death in 1953. He was the first president of the Negro Y.M.C.A. and was elected to the Indianapolis City Council in 1918.

Later Dr. Theodore Cable, a graduate of Harvard and the Indiana University School of Dentistry, was the first African-American Democrat elected to the Indianapolis City Council and was also a member of the Indiana General Assembly. Dr. Lucian B. Meriwether, a Republican and the first Black dentist to serve on the staff of Indianapolis General Hospital, and a long time community leader, was a member of the City Council in the 1940's. Dr. Robert V. Stanton, a dentist who graduated from Meharry Medical College and an influential political figure in East Chicago, was one of the first Black Democrats elected to the General Assembly.



*Mercer Mance, first African-American elected judge in Indiana, 1958.
Courtesy Indiana Historical Society Library.*

Members of the legal profession have been even more numerous as leaders in civil rights and politics. Only a few examples can be mentioned. J.T.V. Hill, the first African-American admitted to the bar in Indiana, was a long time civic leader and one of the first Black Democrats in Indianapolis. One of the most prestigious leaders was Robert L. Brokenburr, a graduate of Howard University Law School and the second president of the Indianapolis N.A.A.C.P. He was the first African-American member of the Indiana Senate, elected in 1940 and re-elected several times. Henry J. Richardson a graduate of Indiana University Law School, a Democrat, served in the Indiana House of Representatives in the 1930s and was an early advocate of stronger civil rights legislation. Later he played an important part in the framing and adoption of the 1949 school law.

Two of the first South Bend African-Americans to serve in the General Assembly were lawyers, Chester A. Allen and Zilford Carter. More recently a black woman lawyer, Harriet Bailey Conn, a Republican, served as State Public Defender and was elected to the General Assembly in 1966. The first African-American elected judge in the state was Mercer Mance, a graduate of Harvard Law School, who was elected to the Marion County Superior Court in 1958.

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CIVIL RIGHTS AND POLITICS

Much of the history of African Americans in Indiana has been the history of their struggle to attain full citizenship rights. Until after the Civil War, although Indiana was a "free" state, Blacks were denied political rights and subject to various legal disabilities. Most notorious was Article XIII of the Indiana Constitution of 1851 which barred African Americans from settling in the state. Blacks could not vote, there were restrictions on their right to testify in court, and Black children could not attend public schools.

As early as the 1840's there were organized efforts by Blacks through state conventions to protest these disabilities. Members of the Prince Hall Order of Masons and the A.M.E. church played leading parts. Later other fraternal organizations and most churches were involved in civil rights activities. Indeed, most African American organizations have joined at different times and in various ways in these activities.

In several cities branches of the National Urban League have worked against racial discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment and education. But the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has had the longest and most notable part in the struggle for civil rights. The Indianapolis branch, founded in 1913, was followed by branches in other cities and towns throughout the state. A state conference was formed in 1929.



*N.A.A.C.P. civil rights march in Indianapolis, 1963
Courtesy Indianapolis Star-News.*

In the 1920's the rapid growth of the Black population intensified race prejudice and led to efforts to enforce segregation. Lawyers for the N.A.A.C.P. won a case in which an Indianapolis residential zoning ordinance was declared unconstitutional, but they failed in their efforts to block the construction of segregated high schools in Gary and Indianapolis.

After World War II a coalition of the N.A.A.C.P., labor unions, and church groups, Black and white, joined in a campaign to end Jim Crow practices and remove vestiges of legalized discrimination. The school law of 1949 which has already been mentioned was one important victory.

Another target was refusal of service and discrimination in places of public accommodation such as restaurants and theaters. Since 1885, a state law had prohibited such discrimination but it was weak and seldom enforced, and earlier efforts to strengthen it had failed. Members of the N.A.A.C.P. and their friends began an "eating crusade" and sit-ins to force restaurants and other businesses to end discriminatory practices. These met with some success although efforts to secure a stronger law failed. But there were some legislative victories. In 1945, the General Assembly adopted a Fair Employment Practices Law, one of the first such state laws, but it lacked compulsory features.

Beginning with the 1961 session of the General Assembly, a coalition which called itself the Indiana Conference on Civil Rights Legislation lobbied effectively at successive sessions. Laws adopted in 1961 were expanded and strengthened at later sessions. An Indiana Civil Rights Commission was created which acquired enforcement powers to eliminate discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and education. A number of cities created their own human rights commissions and passed open housing ordinances.

The heightened interest in such legislation and the willingness of legislative bodies dominated by whites to pass such laws reflected the growing concern about the rights of African Americans at the national level. This resulted in a series of civil rights acts passed by Congress, beginning in 1957. The 1964 Civil Rights Act created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and included provisions concerning public accommodations and school desegregation which affected Indiana, as did the Housing Act passed in 1968.

The struggle for civil rights was obviously linked to political action, and civil rights leaders have played a prominent part in politics. Indiana African Americans were interested in politics and political action to attain equal rights even before they

gained the right to vote with the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1869. In the early years nearly all Black voters were loyal to the Republican party, the party of Abraham Lincoln and the party which conferred political rights on African Americans.



Rev. James M. Townsend, Richmond, ca. 1885. Townsend was among four African Americans elected to the Indiana House of Representatives between 1880 and 1900. Courtesy Indiana Historical Society Library.

A few African Americans held public office in Indiana in the nineteenth century. A total of four, all Republicans, were elected to the Indiana House of Representatives, the highest office which African Americans attained. The first was James S. Hinton, a veteran of the Union Army and a prominent Mason, who was elected in 1880. The others were James M. Townsend of Richmond, elected in 1884; Richard Bassett of Howard County, elected in 1892; and Gabriel Jones of Indianapolis, elected in 1896.

After 1900, both major parties largely ignored Black voters for thirty years. During the Great Depression of the 1930's Democrats for the first time began to nominate African Americans for political office, and Republicans renewed their appeals to Blacks in order to counter the Democrats. During the New Deal years of the 1930's most Blacks transferred their allegiance to the Democrats. But in Indiana, a state which has been more often in the Republican column than the Democratic, some African American leaders remained loyal Republicans, particularly in Indianapolis.

The first Black Democrats elected to the General Assembly were Dr. Robert V. Stanton and Henry M. Richardson, elected in 1932. Since then, African American members, usually representing both parties, have served in every session in the lower house. A smaller number have served in the Senate.

The first African American woman legislator in Indiana, Daisy Riley Lloyd, was elected to the House of Representatives in 1964. The first woman state senator, Julia M. Carson -- now serving in the U.S. House of Representatives from the Tenth District (Indianapolis) -- was elected in 1976. Some members of the General Assembly who have served several terms have acquired considerable influence, but the total number of African American members has remained a small minority.

Several African Americans have been elected to local judgeships, and a larger number have been members of city councils. The election of Richard G. Hatcher as mayor of Gary in 1967 was a political milestone in Indiana, as he became only the second African American mayor of a major northern city. His successive bids for reelection made him a nationally influential figure.



*Richard G. Hatcher on election night 1971, when he was reelected as mayor of Gary.
Gary Info.*

Hoosier History: THIS FAR BY FAITH: BLACK HOOSIER HERITAGE

ENTERTAINMENT AND THE ARTS

Entertainment, whether for personal satisfaction, profit, protest, or prestige, was a part of life in the Black community long before the first slave ship sailed from Africa. From creating song while bending under the lash during slavery to "living it up" to forget about adversity during the Great Depression, music and entertainment have enabled African Americans to survive and overcome.

With increasing numbers and concentration of African Americans in cities like Indianapolis, Gary, South Bend, Fort Wayne, Evansville, and Muncie, Black entertainment flourished. In contrast to the nightclubs of Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance, Black entertainers in the night clubs, dance halls, theaters, and casinos in Indiana performed, for the most part, before all-Black audiences.



Peru, Indiana, native Speed Webb was among the most popular band leaders of the 1930's.

Courtesy Duncan Schiedt, Pittsboro, Indiana.

Entertainment of this sort was at its height from the 1930's to the 1950's. Places like Gary's Louisiana Kitchen and Buzz Box were found in the larger African American communities throughout the state, but it was Indiana Avenue in Indianapolis which became nationally known. It was in dance halls and clubs along "The Avenue" that many Black entertainers began their careers, in establishments

like the Walker Casino, Trianon Ballroom, Cotton Club, Elks Club, Pat Riley's, Danny's Dreamland, the Blue Eagle, and the British Lounge.

Jazz was popular in these spots, but blues was even more popular. Pianist Jesse Crump, who played in Indianapolis and Chicago and later returned to Muncie, composed numerous blues songs. Blues was a lasting force in all forms of Black music and song and in poetry.



*The Jackson Five, ca. 1970.
Courtesy Gary Post-Tribune.*

Among musical entertainers who started on the road to fame in Indianapolis were J. J. Johnson, Wes Montgomery, Freddie Hubbard, Leroy Vinegar, Carl Perkins, James Spaulding, Larry Ridley, Slide Hampton, Dave Baker, and Virgil Jones. The Montgomery brothers, Wes, Monk, and Buddy, became successful recording artists, known as the Mastersounds, and each of the brothers later became a star in his own right. Noble Sissle of Indianapolis teamed with Eubie Blake as author of such successful musicals as "The Chocolate Dandies," and also performed in them. Russell Smith, who composed ragtime and directed his own orchestra in Indiana, joined Sissle in New York as a performer.

Singer Deniese Williams came from Gary, as did "The Jackson Five." Other well known popular singers with roots in Indiana were Eve Rene, Bobby Marshall, and Flo Garvin.

Many other musical entertainers who never became known outside the state traveled the Indiana circuit for years, performing at night and making a living at other jobs during the day.



*Ball Brothers Band, Muncie, 1922.
Courtesy Muncie Public Library.*

This particular chapter in the history of Black entertainment had come to a close by the end of the 1950's. The special conditions which had made it possible no longer existed. As places of entertainment became racially integrated in the 1960's, African Americans deserted those in the Black community. Dispersal of Blacks to outlying areas in the cities also contributed to the decline. Tastes in popular music changed. Jazz and blues, which were the specialties of Black musicians, gave way to rock. Popularity and accessibility of other forms of entertainment, including television, also were factors in the decline.

African Americans from Indiana have also distinguished themselves in other fields of the performing arts. Film actors William Marshall and James Edwards and Charles Goddard, author of the prizewinning play, "No Place to be Somebody," are prominent examples.

In the realm of more serious music, the famous baritone Todd Duncan was born in Indianapolis and graduated from Butler University. He created the role of Porgy in "Porgy and Bess," starred in the stage production of "Cabin in the Sky," and was the first male African American singer to appear with a major opera company, the New York City Opera. Tenor George Shirley, who gained world fame on the concert and operatic stage, began his career in Indiana.

Several African American Hoosiers have also made reputations in the visual arts although they are not as widely known. Three painters are perhaps the best examples. John Wesley Hardrick graduated from John Herron Art Institute and did most of his painting in Indianapolis, although he won a Harmon Bronze Medal for work exhibited in New York. He was primarily a portrait painter, and his work was recognized and sought out in his own community. Many of his portraits hang in Indianapolis homes. He also painted landscapes in pastels and oils and

painted a mural for the Allen Chapel of the A.M.E. Church which opened in Indianapolis in 1928.



*"Self-portrait" by nationally acclaimed artist John W. Hardrick, Indianapolis, ca. 1927.
Courtesy Alain Locke, editor, The Negro in Art.*

William Scott was another muralist who received his early training at Manual Training High School in Indianapolis under Otto Stark, attended Herron Art Institute and the Chicago Art Institute, and studied under Henry O. Tanner in Paris. He painted several murals in Indianapolis and in Washington, D. C., most of which have disappeared. Among the places in Indianapolis which were adorned with his work were the Senate Avenue Y.M.C.A. and the children's ward of the Indianapolis City Hospital.

Best known was Hale Woodruff, who died in 1980. Another graduate of Herron Art Institute who also studied in Paris with Tanner, he continued to study in Mexico, and the influence of Mexican mural painters is evident in some of his work, especially a mural of the Amistad Revolt. His early paintings are vivid and realistic portrayals of the black experience. His later works are more abstract.

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BLACK HOOSIERS' SPORTS HERITAGE

Hoosiers love sports. Frequently excluded for many, many years from playing on all-white teams, African Americans created their own teams, which became symbols of race pride. Later, through their pre-eminence in almost all sports, Black athletes played an important role in breaking down racial barriers. Indiana history is dotted with those moments when an African American athlete's towering home run, breathtaking touchdown run, exhilarating slam dunk, devastating left hook, or spectacular auto win transcended the realm of sports to become symbols of the group's culture and racial achievement.



Colored Speedway Association officials, promoters of the Golden Glory Sweepstakes, Indianapolis. Courtesy Indiana Historical Society Library.

Indiana African Americans have long been devoted to baseball, the most American of games. Shortly after the Civil War two amateur teams were reported in Indianapolis -- the Eagles and the Mohawks, both drawn for the most part from the ranks of barbers. By 1887 there were two professional teams in Indianapolis -- the Indianapolis Browns and the Black Diamonds -- and teams in several smaller cities. In the 1920's the Indianapolis ABC's was one of the charter members of the Negro National League. Black owner and manager C. I. Taylor fielded a team which included Indianapolis-born Oscar Charleston, who won a place in the Major League Hall of Fame. In the 1940's Naptown was also homebase for the

Indianapolis Clowns, the team which gave baseball's home-run king, Henry Aaron, his start.

For Indiana African Americans, like most of their fellow Hoosiers, devotion to sports reaches its apex in their love for basketball. In high schools with racially mixed enrollments, Black players occasionally played before the Second World War, but until 1943, teams from segregated Black schools were not allowed to play in the high school basketball tourneys. Threats of legislation which would change the make-up of the State Athletic Commission led to a change in policy which opened the way for participation by African American schools beginning in 1943. After the ban was lifted, Roosevelt of Gary and Attucks of Indianapolis were potential champions in every tourney. In 1955, 1956, and 1959 all-Black teams from Attucks won the state crown, as did an all-Black team from Roosevelt in 1968. In 1951 and 1968 respectively Bob Jewell of Attucks and Jim Nelson of Roosevelt received the tournament's Trester Award.

African American players from these two schools and from several other schools have been named the Number 1 players on the annual Indiana All-Star squads. These include George Crowe, Franklin (1939), "Jumping Johnny" Wilson, Anderson (1946), Bill Garrett, Shelbyville (1947), Hallie Bryant, Indianapolis Attucks (1953), Wilson Elson, Gary Roosevelt (1955), Oscar Robertson, Indianapolis Attucks (1956), Larry Humes, Madison (1962), George McGinnis, Indianapolis Washington (1969), and Ray Tolbert, Anderson Madison Heights (1977).

Numerous other Black players have been members of the All-Star teams. Several of them have gone on to make distinguished records in college basketball. Indiana University was the first team in the Big Ten Conference to include an African American, Bill Garrett, on its team. Several Black Hoosiers have been prominent in professional basketball. Those who have played on American Basketball Association championship teams include Indianapolis' George McGinnis and Evansville's John Barnhill of the Indiana Pacers and Kokomo's Jim "Goose" Ligon of the Kentucky Colonels.

Hoosier African Americans who have played on National Basketball Association championship teams include Indianapolis' Oscar Robertson of the Milwaukee Bucks and Gary's Dick "Skull" Barnett of the New York Knicks. Numerous other Blacks from Indiana have played on other NBA teams. And Black Hoosiers have played for the Harlem Globetrotters since the 1950's. Some of them have been

former Attucks stars Hallie Bryant, Willie Gardener and Willie Merriweather, Anderson's "Jumping Johnny" Wilson, and Muncie's Sammy Drummer.



George Taliaferro, All-American running back at Indiana University (I.U.) during the mid-1940's.

Courtesy I.U. Athletic Publicity Department.

African Americans have frequently been Most Valued Players on high school football teams, and Black players have been invaluable members of college and university football teams for many years. A host of Black Hoosiers have worn the crimson and cream of Indiana University since Preston Emmanuel Eagleson became the first Black varsity player in 1895. Jesse Babb and Fitzhugh Lyons broke the Big Ten's color barrier in the early 1930's. Gary's George Taliaferro, a 1981 inductee into the College Football Hall of Fame, earned All-American honors and led his team to a Big Ten championship during the middle 1940's. Jeffersonville's Bob Kirk was a starter on the 1968 Rose Bowl squad, and Evansville's Stoner Gray was a member of the 1979 Holiday Bowl champions.

Black Hoosier stars have also shone in the realm of professional football. Among them has been George Taliaferro, who played for the Dallas Texans and Baltimore Colts after graduating from Indiana University. After earning his degree at Purdue, Richmond's Lamar Lundy became an integral part of the Los Angeles Rams' "Fearsome Foursome" in the 1950's. And Gary's Fred "The Hammer"

Williamson played in the first Super Bowl game in 1965 as a member of the Kansas City Chiefs, the American Football League champions.



*Marshall "Major" Taylor, the fastest bicycle racer in the world at the turn of the century.
Courtesy Indiana Historical Society Library.*

In an earlier era African Americans distinguished themselves in bicycle and professional automobile racing. Indianapolis born Marshall "Major" Taylor was the American bicycle champion in 1898 and 1899. Another native of Indianapolis, Charles Wiggins, was the fastest Black auto racer of the 1920's and 1930's. He was a car builder, a car owner, and three-time champion of the prestigious Gold and Glory Sweepstakes. Other Black Hoosier auto drivers of this period included Lawrence Wiggins, brother of Charles, Gene Smith, Bobby Wallace, Sumner "Red" Oliver and Charles "Dynamite" Stewart.

The Olympic Games, the highest goal of amateur athletes, have also been enriched by the participation of African American Hoosiers. Among them have been Lee Calhoun from Gary and Jo Ann Terry Grissom from Indianapolis who won medals in track in the 1950's. In basketball Oscar Robertson of Indianapolis was a starter on the Olympic team in 1960 as was LaTanya Pollard of East Chicago in 1980. Indianapolis boxing coach Sergeant Johnson was trainer for the Olympic boxing team that fought in Montreal in 1976.



*Indianapolis boxing coach Sarge Johnson, trainer for the 1976 United States Olympic boxing team.
Courtesy Indianapolis Star-News.*

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