TUGGING ON THE REINS OF POWER

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PERSONS AND EVENTS THAT ENCOURAGED THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL POWER WITHIN THE BLACK COMMUNITY OF SOUTH BEND

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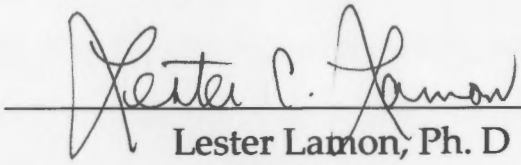

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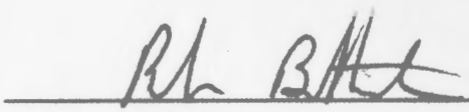

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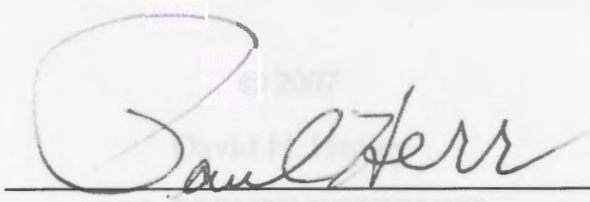

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the black community of the city of South Bend, Indiana. I hope that these pages will encourage an understanding of the remarkable history that is yours, a history of extraordinary leaders who pushed forward an agenda of civil rights, decades before the era of sit-ins and freedom marches. These were black men and women who made a difference, who understood that there is a line, which separates the power of compromise from the surrender of accommodation.

Acknowledgements

In writing this thesis, I have encountered numerous individuals whose talents have aided me in the completion of this project. To name them all is unrealistic: I can only offer a sincere "thank you" to each one of them.

I would be remiss, however, if I did not acknowledge a few of those individuals who have given so much of themselves to make the writing of these pages possible. First, there is my wife Kathy who has never quite understood my passion for black history, but who nonetheless supported me and tolerated turning the spare bedroom into an office, complete with piles of notes, musty smelling papers, and a plethora of boxes full of "important stuff."

My friend and mentor, Dr. Les Lamon, with constructive criticism and thoughtful guidance, has been instrumental in the completion of this project. In addition, my friend John Charles Bryant, has given considerable time and effort in assisting me with this venture. His personal knowledge of local black history and insightful conversations have benefited me greatly. Members of my committee, Dr. Rebecca Brittenham and Dr. Paul Herr, who so graciously gave of their time and experience, helped me find structure amid chaos. I would also like to thank the families of J. Chester, Elizabeth Fletcher Allen, and Jesse Dickinson. Without the help and support of members of these families, none of this would have been possible.

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Introduction

When I began this project, I had a straightforward uncomplicated approach. My intention was to explore and attempt to answer this question, "How did the black community of South Bend establish political power." I chose this topic because I knew from my own experience, while volunteering at the Civil Rights Heritage Center at Indiana University South Bend, that the history of South Bend's black community had been ignored for decades. I was also aware that many in our black community were frustrated that there has been little effort exerted to document the history of South Bend's black leadership of the relatively recent past. It was my intent to fill in some of the missing pages of South Bend's black history. It would be, however, a misrepresentation to the reader to allege that this document fills that void. It represents only a small beginning that, perhaps, will encourage others to continue the process of the study of South Bend's black political heritage.

I realized that finding supporting evidence and sources for this project would be difficult. However, I also knew that from doing numerous interviews with black and white residents of the city that an incredible vein of black history was here, but remained untouched, awaiting exploration. That is why for many reasons South Bend is the perfect setting for this story. A combination of geographic location and the abundance of natural resources encouraged the early settlement of this area, and eventually led to the development of a city known for its commerce, economic prosperity, and rapidly developing industry.

The lure of finding jobs in South Bend's ever-expanding factories is the reason blacks migrated here during the First and Second World Wars. They believed that this

city offered the chance of a fresh start, a new life, free from the barriers of race so accepted in the cities of their birth. What they found was a city that, politically speaking, was in many ways more free then what they had experienced, but still a city that was unwilling to accept them as equals. They found a city whose white political structure, over the course of time, gradually changed from an attitude of benign neglect or curiosity toward its black citizenry to actively attempting to control the city's rapidly increasing black population by promoting policies designed to limit their opportunities. The white citizens of the city wanted to restrict, to certain areas, where a black family could live, where they could go to school, where they could enjoy recreation, and what type of job they could aspire to.

South Bend, however, was not a city that was overtly aggressive in its discriminatory policies. There was never an organized terror campaigned waged against the city's black residents nor any attempt to strip them of their voting or judicial rights. These are the hallmarks of the caste system, which was an unrelenting racist regime that ruled the lives of millions of blacks living in the nation's southern states. In the North, in cities such as South Bend, the growing black population did not encounter such a system, but rather a system of discrimination based upon customary practices, unwritten policies, and hidden agreements, a reality that has proven to be more insidious than the caste system synonymous with the South. The question for the city's black residents then was the same as it is today, how to respond to the white controlled power structure. A partial answer to this question lies within the parameters of population density.

Labor shortages created by two World Wars were responsible for the increased numbers of black residents. As a part of influx of black workers destined for the foundry

at Studebaker or black women relegated to working as domestic servants was a new category of black worker, the black elites. These black men and women were college educated; they were doctors, lawyers, dentists, ministers, and social workers. Contained within the black elite was a small but courageous group of black leaders who represented the Talented-Tenth. From this core group came the leadership that would define black political leadership for decades to come. The Talented-Tenth was unwilling to accept a continuation of discrimination, or maintain the status quo. They represented a "new" way of thinking and redefined the juxtaposition of white versus black political power of the 1930s and 1940s. They organized, planned strategies, and took action in an attempt to open doors that had steadfastly remained closed for generations. Those newly opened doors led to better jobs, job training, better education, and access to opportunities. The Talented-Tenth pushed an agenda of civil rights.

However, increased black population numbers and the arrival of the Talented-Tenth took place in other cities as well. What makes South Bend politically distinctive for the black community is the presence of unique organizations, specific events, dynamic leadership, and a black population willing to make sacrifices to foster the development of black political power.

My initial starting point was to focus upon the political career of black attorney J. Chester Allen. His political victory in the 1938 election sent him to the Indiana General Assembly as the first black state representative from St. Joseph County. After serving two terms, he returned to South Bend to work in the family law firm of Allen & Allen. His political legacy, however, continued long after he had left public office. In the years following his election, five other black men won elections and represented St. Joseph

County at the General Assembly. They were Jesse Dickinson, Zilford Carter, Valjean Dickinson, Bernard White Jr., and Cleo Washington.

Allen was the political pathfinder for other black men to follow. I believed that his election was indicative of the presence of black political power and that by researching this particular election, I would find evidence and the sources necessary to answer the central theme of this thesis. Unfortunately, this supposition proved to be only partially correct. I discovered that Allen's success in 1938 was not just the result of his abilities alone but was also the consequence of the actions of many others who had influenced the development of black political power. Allen's victory was the culmination of a process that had begun long before his arrival in South Bend in July of 1929. Although he passed away twenty-eight years ago, his legacy of community and political leadership guided my research. Allen's political victory was an important piece of the puzzle but still only a piece. This is why he is one of the central characters in this story.

Research revealed that the formation of black political power was the result of many factors that could not be neatly placed within the context of one particular year or the embodiment of one person. Before black political power can exist, there must be present a black culture, a black social consciousness, and a desire to create change. In South Bend, the earliest evidence of a black social consciousness will be associated with the black churches, clubs, fraternal organizations, and other social groups that were influencing the black community in the early 1900s. It is during this period that black political power begins. Consequently, this essay will begin in the first decade of the twentieth century and end in the years immediately after WWII. My decision to close at this juncture is because the late 1940s and early 1950s represent the threshold of what

today is considered to be the modern civil rights movement. This is the era of Dr. Martin Luther King, sit-ins, boycotts, marches, tear gas, and non-violence. It is important not to mix these two separate but connected black cultural, social, and political movements. They are separate because the black generation of the 1920s and 1930s were looking for ways in which to respond to the "white problem." They were experimenting with various political philosophies espoused by black leaders such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. They are connected because the modern civil rights movement is a continuation of the black struggle against discrimination, a struggle that has yet to achieve a positive conclusion. The argument could be made that the black leadership of the 1960s was much more confrontational, even while proclaiming non-violence, with the white power structure than that of their predecessors of the 1930s. The black leadership of the 1930s was pushing an agenda for civil rights while at the same time experimenting with the ways and means of approaching and working with a white power structure that had hitherto always considered the establishment of black political power threatening.

The beliefs of black leaders such as Du Bois and Washington were not the only issues of national importance that had an effect upon South Bend's black politics. The presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal changed the course of black voting preferences. Prior to FDR, the black vote was a foregone conclusion; blacks voted for Republicans. During the era of the New Deal, the Democratic Party made an effort to attract the black vote, and they succeeded. In Indiana, the change was dramatic. Prior to 1900 only four black men, all Republicans, were elected to the lower house of the Indiana General Assembly. Prior to the 1930s, the last black politician to be elected to the Indiana General Assembly was in 1897. It was not until 1933 that a black politician was

again elected to serve as a state representative. Between 1933 and 1949, eleven blacks were elected to the Indiana General Assembly, ten of which were Democrats.[1] The dates coincide with the presidency of FDR, the New Deal, and WWII. The policies of four successive Roosevelt administrations changed the fortunes of black Democrats both nationally and locally.

At the local level, there were issues and incidents that were germane to only South Bend, which aided the development of black political power. The segregated public indoor swimming pool, the Natatorium, and the establishment of the Hering House would figure prominently in the development of local black political power, but there were other important issues. The firing of the city's first black policeman, the beating of a black man and the shooting death, or perhaps the lynching of a black youth, at the hands of the South Bend police, in the months prior to the 1938 election, eroded black support of an incumbent Republican mayor. These events created the opportunity for a Democratic political victory, a victory that sent an unknown black Democratic politician, J. Chester Allen, to the lower house of the Indiana General Assembly. He served two terms and succeeded in establishing a black political presence at the Indiana General Assembly that would endure for decades.

The story of the early beginnings of black political power in South Bend is a fascinating topic. To be in a position to devote my time and talents to writing this story has been an incredible journey, but I would caution the reader to read with discernment and not to be too quick to attach the labels of "villain" or "hero" to any of the individuals within this cast of characters. Always remember that the men and women written about within these pages lived in a different time, had a different history of experiences and

training. Their decisions, political or otherwise, were the result of what they knew and what was accepted for the period of time in which they lived. Their history remains connected with our own history with threads of great strength, but nonetheless, only threads.

Chapter 1: South Bend in Context

The 1930s and the 1940s combined as an era unparalleled in this nation's history. It began with the Great Depression of the 1930s, when America's future was unclear, a time when our leadership seemed ineffective and Americans began to doubt whether the nation possessed the resiliency to withstand the crises that gripped the nation.

By January 1950, domestic fear and uncertainty had diminished. America was the dominant world power, both militarily and economically. The Soviet Union posed a threat but to what degree was difficult to interpret; the Cold War was just beginning.

America had been transformed, brimming with self-confidence; the only doubt was whether there existed any challenge that we could not overcome with out technology, industry, military power or down home charm. The Great Depression was part of our past, and to many the future of America appeared to come with a guarantee. The lyrics of "Brother Can You Spare Me a Dime," had been reduced to a nostalgic tune, meaningless when compared to the prosperity that America had created for itself out of the devastation of WWII.

For black Americans, however, the silencing of Nazi Germany and the destruction of the Japanese militaristic empire had not produced the victory at home over the oppressions of race discrimination and prejudice, circumstances that had shadowed their existence for generations. That these injustices remained in the aftermath of post WWII celebrations was not due to a lack of effort on the part of black Americans. Black men and women had sized the initiative in the years prior to and during WWII to advance the cause of their race. In the North, where the toleration for black political activity was more commonly accepted, black politicians had attempted to combine the nation's war

effort with the issue of jobs and civil rights for black America. They had used to full advantage the vital requirements for labor during WWII to press forward a political agenda that they believed would open the doors of economic opportunity. Black political leadership had used a combination of "confrontation" and "adaptation" to press forward this agenda. In the world following WWII, it was evident that black political power had made its presence known and had achieved some success. During the war, black workers had made significant inroads into job markets that prior to the war had remained steadfastly closed to them. However, the reality for the black worker looking back from his position point of January 1950 was that there had been as many defeats as there had been victories. WWII had changed the nation, but for the black worker, financial prosperity and job security remained elusive. The black worker still faced the same barriers of racial prejudice and discrimination that had always hampered his ability to find meaningful employment.

For those who attempted to forge black political power into an instrument capable of compelling dramatic change, at a time when those desired changes appeared to be in their grasp, the results must have been disappointing. Black political power of the 1930s and 1940s had yet to reach the level of strength necessary to be able to influence the long established political power of whites. Black America had become involved in politics but that did not equate to political power, the type of power able to manifest itself by altering accepted social behaviors, attitudes, and customs.

1.1 The Formation of Black Political Power

Black Americans have endeavored to establish and exercise political power in order to achieve some measure of control over their lives. In the decades following the

Civil War, black Americans have followed the ideology of many diverse black leaders and experimented with various types of responses to the white controlled political power structure under which they lived. An objective of black political power was to limit the black citizen's exposure to, and vulnerability from the whims and dictates of a majority race that, to a large degree, has accepted the premise of second-class citizenship for black Americans.

The period highlighted by the Great Depression, the New Deal, and WWII was the crucible in which black political power became pro-active, making its debut on the American political stage. It extended from a threat to march on Washington, which forced a sitting president to make decisions of national consequence, to black leaders in small town America pressing forward the issue of equal job opportunities for members of their race. Black political power had found a voice that was heard throughout the nation, even in small towns such as South Bend, Indiana.

The terms black political power or black political consciousness should not be confused with the term "black power" which is associated with the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The black citizens who developed and implemented black political power in the 1930s and 1940s were a generation removed from those who chanted "black power" during the 60s. The catchphrase "black power" was a result of the inability of black political power to redress the accumulated grievances of the past and the continued perception, on the part of black Americans, that they were still considered second-class citizens. It could be argued that had black political power achieved the success envisioned in the 1930s and 40s, the term "black power" may never have been used.

The desire for political power from within the black community, or for that matter from within any ethnic minority community, is driven by the need for a sense of security and by the innate desire to share equally in the allocation of available resources. These resources would include education, decent housing, municipal services, fair lending practices, equal admittance to recreational facilities, restaurants, and all types of business establishments owned by the majority citizenry, impartial treatment from the judiciary, the right to vote and access to jobs.

Meaningful employment and the ability to vote are very important. Employment with job security and the opportunity for training and advancement impart the financial resources necessary for the daily requirements of a family. Voting, especially votes cast by minorities that are united by a consensus, provides not only a voice in the political process, but also political strength. Political factions, both in and out of power, will actively pursue the minority vote and will address the concerns or make concessions to the minority voting electorate.

The motivating factor on the part of black Americans to find a political voice and create political power was the prejudice exhibited by the white majority and the resistance of white citizens to share power with minority blacks. For the emerging black leadership of the late 1920s and 1930s, the creation of black political power held the promise of being able to achieve a degree of security and economic parity with whites. There is a direct relationship between job opportunities for blacks and the presence of black political power.

1.2 W.E.B. Du Bois Identifies the Cause, Offers a Solution

Figure 1 W. E. B. Du Bois

W.E.B. (William Edward Burghardt) Du Bois identified the role of racial prejudice as being the major factor in limiting the black worker as early as 1889. Du Bois was the preeminent black social scientist of his time. His writings were critical to understanding the formation of black political power at the beginning of the twentieth century. His opinions had tremendous influence upon the emerging black leadership of the late 1920s and 1930s.

Du Bois documented the extent to which the black worker was relegated to the most menial and low-wage positions. He concluded, "The cause of this peculiar restriction in employment of Negroes is twofold: first, the lack of training and experience among Negroes; second, the prejudice of whites."[2] Du Bois identified six manifestations of race prejudice demonstrated by whites towards blacks: (1) restriction of blacks to menial work roles; (2) vulnerability to displacement due to competition from native whites or white immigrants; (3) resentment of black advancement and initiative; (4) vulnerability to financial exploitation; (5) inability to secure quality education for children or to shelter them from societal prejudice and discrimination; and (6) a wide array of discourteous and insulting treatment in "social intercourse."[3] Identification of the causes of economic and political disparities between white and black citizens was uncomplicated. The difficulty lay in the question of "how to respond."

The emerging black leaders of the 1930s and 1940s, described by Du Bois as being the Talented-Tenth, an educated elite upon whom Du Bois believed the fate of the African American race depended, not only identified with these descriptions of race prejudice but were also determined to challenge discrimination, actively pursue their civil rights and establish a power structure from which to influence and apply pressure upon the "whites only" government monopoly. The question then is the same as it is today, what type of pressure and how much to apply.

Manifestations of black political power can take many forms and are not relegated to just a political party; they might emerge through quasi-political organizations such as the NAACP, or fraternal organizations. In addition, geographic location had a great deal to do with whether or not black Americans would be able to establish political power. Not all sections of this country tolerated the formation of black power, political or otherwise. In the 1930s, the Talented-Tenth would not be openly advocating civil rights in Selma, Alabama, but they could do so in South Bend, Indiana without fear of reprisal.

Du Bois believed that if black Americans were going to become equals with whites in the American culture then they must have the education necessary to be able to compete in all areas of that culture. He realized that having a rudimentary education and a job were not enough. Accomplishments such as these were insufficient to encourage respect for blacks from whites. The power structure created by whites was and is firmly attached to a foundation based upon education, not basic education but higher forms of education and accompanying higher skill levels created by that education. For example, each discipline, whether it is the practiced by a lawyer, a scientist, sociologist, military strategist, financial planner, or history professor, generates a vocabulary, language, and

procedures intrinsic to that discipline. In many ways education is a tool of choice used to elevate status and prestige over others. Education has never been the great equalizer; it is the weapon of choice used by white elites to form individual cells of power, disciplines, and professions, which when interlinked create a vast expanse of power called the white power structure.

Du Bois believed that without access to educational opportunities, post high school and job skills training, blacks would be "left out," barred from the professions that would ultimately produce the leaders necessary for the advancement of civil rights. Without representations in all facets of a society, the minority race is vulnerable to the dictates of the majority.

The key to entering this web of power is education. For black Americans, at the beginning of the twentieth century, acquiring such a key was difficult, especially when black leaders such as Booker T. Washington were promoting only trade schools and normal schools established to train teachers, particularly elementary teachers. Without a broader range of formal education, black Americans were at a significant disadvantage.

Between 1857 and 1867, opportunities for higher education were virtually nonexistent for most blacks. Only about twenty-eight black Americans had been awarded bachelors' degrees form American colleges by 1860.[4] The disparity of education between white and black Americans at the end of the Civil War was staggering. Millions of former slaves lacking even the most basic of educational skills were struggling to find a place within a white culture of which they knew very little. In the decades immediately after the Civil War, the training of black teachers, and especially elementary teachers, was stressed because the need was so great. By 1900, the emphasis

placed upon the training of black teachers had begun to change. Black colleges and universities began upgrading their programs, requiring the completion of two and four year curriculums before graduating. Although frequently administered, financed and staffed largely by whites, these schools educated the majority of black American professionals until after WWII.[5]

There also occurred changes in the type of education sought by black Americans after World War I. Prior to the war, black professionals were primarily educators or ministers. After the war, the professions of being doctors or lawyers were becoming more and more desirable for black Americans. The rapid influx of black Americans into the north and west and growing centers of black populations during the first great migration may have influenced this trend. Increased levels of education and securing work that paid substantially more than working in the agrarian economy of the South gave rise to a new segment of black society, the black elite.

Figure 2 Booker T. Washington

In 1900, Booker T. Washington was the undisputed leader of black America. He represented a response to the pervasive discrimination that black Americans faced on a daily basis. That response was labeled "Accommodation." He was the leader of a generation of black Americans that had been born slaves or still carried with them vivid memories of being enslaved. This was a generation of black Americans conditioned to offer friendship to whites, and to be inoffensive, unassuming, and industrious. The idea promoted by Washington was that by proving that black Americans were essential to the white economy that gradually

black Americans would become increasingly equal with whites. He denounced the black activists who demanded action against white violence and unequal treatment. Washington labeled questions of social equality as being, "extremist folly."[6]

W.E.B. Du Bois was the antithesis of Booker T. Washington. Du Bois believed that being industrious and assisting a white owned economy was not enough; black men and women must also be doctors, lawyers, and college professors, as well as farmers and factory workers. He wrote this about Washington: "There is no question of Booker T. Washington's undisputed leadership of the ten million Negroes in America, a leadership recognized gladly by the whites and conceded by most of the Negroes."[7] Du Bois was unyielding in his belief that the practice of Accommodation was harmful to the cause of black civil rights. After the death of Washington, Du Bois would write, "we must lay on the soul of this man, a heavy responsibility for the consummations of Negro disfranchisement, the decline of the Negro college and public school, and the firmer establishment of color caste in this land."[8]

Figure 3 Robert C. Ogden, Secretary of War, William Howard Taft, Booker T. Washington, and Andrew Carnegie.

Both men had a following, which generated debate as to which man offered the best solution to the white problem. By 1900, their respective ideas represented two divergent paths for black Americans to follow. One path promoted compromise and accommodation with the white power structure and the other believed in asserting one's civil rights and confronting the white power structure. The reality was, however, that a combination of both philosophies would figure prominently in the establishment and the

use of black political power both nationally and in the city of South Bend in the 1930s and 1940s.

1.3 The Foot Soldiers of the Du Boisian Perspective- The Talented-Tenth

During the 1930s, Du Boisian theory found a growing audience. It was a time punctuated by the harsh realities of the Depression but also by a political vitality and social activity on the part of black America. For the first time black intellectuals were making their presence felt. They were leading the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Negro Congress (NNC), and the National Association of Colored Women (NACW).

Franklin D. Roosevelt had sold his plan for reshaping America; he called it the New Deal. Nevertheless, many Americans were not content with the promise of the New Deal. America was a chaotic mix of opinions, ideas, theories, and political ideology all vying for acceptance. Communists, Republicans, Socialists, and Democrats argued the worth of their ideas in an attempt to convince the American electorate that they were the real saviors of the nation. It was a period of national uncertainty, fueled by an economy that had failed and an ever-growing risk of world war. For the black elites and the Talented-Tenth, it was a coming of age. The Talented-Tenth did not dwell upon uncertainty; for them, as the grip of the Great Depression lessened and war loomed on the horizon, it was a time to take action, to push forward an agenda of civil rights and equal job opportunity.

1.4 The Talented-Tenth and the Black Elite

The appearance of black elitism does not equate with being a member of the Talented-Tenth, and they should not be considered as being the same in character. In 1933, Du Bois referenced the newly emergent black elites as being a "petty bourgeois economic grouping."[9] Du Bois was contemptuous of black elites because, although they had achieved high status in the black community, they were often unwilling to challenge white supremacy, a stance that many feared would likely jeopardize their newly acquired wealth and position.

In the 1930s, the dividing lines, or color lines, which separated white and black citizens, were often physical or geographical in nature, such as a river or more often a set of railroad tracks. On one side was a white culture, complete with all the amenities. On the other side was the black culture, a mirror image but much poorer without resources and lacking in opportunities for advancement. Guy B. Johnson, a prominent Southern sociologist of the 'Negro Problem', wrote in 1937, "Finding the door to equal opportunity closed, the Afro-American out of necessity had taken to building a whole system of society on his side of the color line. A variety of leadership elements and institutions had emerged within this separate racial economy the extent to which . . . is not appreciated by the average white man."[10] Black elites found a welcoming haven on their side of the color line. They frequently tolerated the formation of two distinct societies, one white, exercising power and control, the other black, clinging to unrealized assertions of independence yet in reality completely dependent upon a white culture that remained impervious to black demands for equality of treatment and inclusion. The Talented-

Tenth resisted that reality and opposed the establishment of two separate cultures existing side by side, one privileged and the other not.

Unfortunately, scholarship has never differentiated clearly between the two philosophies. Because of their educational attainment, the Talented-Tenth is simply intermixed within the statistical research of black elites. Black elitism and leadership are not necessarily synonymous. The Talented-Tenth are leaders unwilling to accept a cultural division based upon race that results in a disparity. Black elitism accepts the disparity in exchange for increased social status and acceptance by whites.

Geographic regions of the nation that produced educated black elites have changed periodically. Prior to 1900 and at the beginning of the twentieth century black professionals educated in the South remained there, and were joined by many highly educated black elites from the North.[11] In the years before WWI, this trend began to change. Black professionals were leaving the South in search of opportunity in the North. By the late 1920s, young black professionals were seeking their fortunes in the newly developed urban areas of the nation, primarily in our nation's Midwest. In 1930, the percentage of black elites that had been born and were currently residing in the Midwest was 15.5%, but the number of elite living and working in the Midwest was 31.1%.[12]

The Midwest in the decades from 1930 to 1940 witnessed a dramatic increase in the numbers of the black elite, of which the Talented-Tenth are a part. This may explain why South Bend had such an influx of highly educated black men and women beginning in the late 1920s and ending in the mid to late 1930s. They represented the first noticeable evidence of what would become a documented trend. The reason for this

migration of black elites is relatively uncomplicated to explain. The Midwest was experiencing population increases of black communities. In the late 1920s and 1930s recently graduated black professionals moved to areas of the nation that they believed offered the greatest opportunities to find work and build a future. One of those places was South Bend.

Nationally the political affiliations of black elites were clearly discernable in the 1930s and 1940s. The New Deal was a factor in beginning to change the black voter preference from Republican to Democrat, but it had little effect upon the black elite. Throughout the Midwest, the Democratic Party enrolled just 9.7 % of the black elite in 1932, and actually declined to 3% in 1940.[13] Black elites were not politically motivated; fully one-third had no political affiliation when surveyed in 1932 and 1940. If a political preference was noted it was firmly in the Republican column. Reasons offered to explain this have been the discriminatory voter residence laws, poll taxes, literacy tests, and economic reprisals, as well as threats of physical coercion. All are possible or another plausible explanation could be that black elites believed that involvement in politics put them at risk of incurring the anger of whites. Proclaiming to be a Republican or simply refraining from participating in politics was the course of least resistance.

Unlike the black elites, the black working poor and factory workers became enthusiastic supporters of the Democratic Party and of the New Deal. The Talented - Tenth, on the other hand, was very politically active; joining the political party of their choice and vigorously pushing for equality and civil rights offset the apathy demonstrated by black elites for the political process.

The experiences of these early black leaders in the methods chosen to confront the white power structure over the issues of civil rights and equal access to opportunity, both what worked and what did not, were a part of a learning curve that benefited a future generation of black leadership during the 1960s.

1.5 The Predictability of Black Political Participation

Geography is an important element not only in determining where the black elites are coming from or moving to but also in shaping the level of black political activity that is accepted. In 1977 Nicholas L. Danigelis, University of Vermont, developed a theory of the "Predictability of Black Political Activity", as a means to measure the probable political activity levels among blacks. Danigelis asserted that the degree of black political activity was predictable by the geographic region in which they lived. For example, blacks living in areas of the nation that were intolerant of black civil rights, such as the South with its caste system, would face strong barriers that prohibited black involvement in political activity. Black political activity was extremely limited in the nation's southern regions until the era of the modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. In such an environment, blacks faced a duel barrier prohibiting political activity. First, threats of violence and disfranchisement techniques such as poll taxes are immediate impediments. In addition, the framework of prejudice produces apathy among blacks and prevents them from acquiring the necessary political sophistication.[14] Blacks living in such a community would have a low probability of creating for themselves political power. In the North, in cities like South Bend, newly arrived black residents encountered a much different set of expectations and circumstances. Racism did exist here but not the stringent caste system synonymous with the South. Although, the city

has never embraced its black community, neither has the city actively attacked its' black citizens. The white residents of South Bend in the 1920s and 1930s were empathetic or even paternalistic, but at the same time not overly concerned with the extension of black civil rights or extending equality to the black citizens of the city.

In the Danigelis theory, South Bend would be described as being *supportive*. The city could not be characterized as being *intolerant.* There was no overt or protracted attempt to subjugate the black population in this city. The "caste" system that was a way of life in the South was never a part of South Bend's history. In the South, deviance, or refusal to adhere to the caste system's edicts, on the part of blacks or whites, would elicit a prompt and often violent reaction from the majority whites, even including murder or lynching. The white residents of South Bend, in the 1930s and 1940s, would immediately distance themselves from any association with these types of anti black behavior. For the white South Bend resident, the visceral reaction to the words segregation, discrimination, racism, and lynching is that these are all terms associated closely with the South, and are not a part of the city's historical record. A South Bend resident would say with conviction, "No black has ever been lynched in South Bend." However, the black community has indeed encountered hostility and racially motivated violence at the hands of the white majority and thus may not echo those sentiments.

There were specific examples of the "caste" system present, such as the city's segregated, indoor swimming pool, the Public Natatorium. There were also certain restaurants that, from time to time, posted signs stating, "We Don't Serve the Colored Trade," and Playland Park, a privately owned amusement park, limited black patronage to specific days of the week, usually on a Monday. In South Bend, however, the

aforementioned barriers were not considered insurmountable which gave *hope* to the black community that these examples of race discrimination, with time, could be overcome. Hope is the intangible element that plays such an important part in the development of black political power. In areas of our nation where the caste system was do deeply entrenched within the mind set of the white culture, blacks had little hope or incentive to attempt to create for themselves a viable competing political structure of their own. Without hope, apathy becomes the watchword of the black culture and it requires a revolution in thinking such as the modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to change the status quo. Such was not the case in South Bend: even with these identifiers of the caste system present in the city there was never an attempt made to disenfranchise blacks of their voting privileges or to deny at least a semblance of due legal process. In South Bend, there was active white support of the city's black community. Although, driven by paternalism and perhaps a vested self-interest, white support has been evident and conducive to the development of an ethnic community among blacks. The white and black citizens of the city have always been able to form alliances that challenged discriminatory polices. There has never been a successful attempt to limit or stifle debate on the question of race in South Bend.

Chapter 2: Race in South Bend

South Bend 1900 to 1930

For South Bend, a new century began with a blend of old and new ideas. The small black vote was firmly rooted in following the Republican Party line. No one knew then that the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt, and his New Deal would change this, perhaps forever. Robert Vann, founder and editor of the famous black newspaper the *Pittsburgh Courier* would not write his famous admonition, "My friends, go turn Lincoln's picture to the wall. The debt has been paid in full," until another thirty-two years had passed at the height of the Depression. By then his statement heralded the changing attitudes of black voting allegiance.

The first great migration of blacks moving to the North, prompted by WWI, was fifteen years away. The burgeoning industrial power of the Mid West, with its abundance of work opportunities, opportunities that would lure a new generation of black leadership, the Talented-Tenth, to this city was in its infancy. Women, white and black, were just beginning to listen to the voices of emerging feminist leaders whose radical ideas concerning the right to vote would eventually reshape how women thought of themselves. The right to vote would make them true citizens, as equals in the decision-making process of the government that governed them. However, that right to cast a ballot would wait an additional twenty years, until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

The law of the land in regards to race relations rested upon the Supreme Court decision of 1896, *Plessey v. Ferguson*. With this decision, the nation's highest court had declared laws forcing blacks to accept separate accommodation on railroad passenger

cars was legal. Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan was the only dissenting voice. While his colleagues were adding their blessings to the concept of "separate but equal," Justice Harlan was warning of the rift this decision would cause between the races. Justice Harlan's famous quote "Our Constitution is color blind," would one day become a rallying cry on the modern Civil Rights Movement. A half century would pass, however, before *Brown v. Board of Education* would overturn the shameful Supreme Court decision of *Plessey v. Ferguson.* In the years separating these two landmark judicial decisions, the injustice of legalized discrimination spread rapidly, seeping into every facet of American culture. Discrimination became common in restaurants, theaters, public accommodations and even in public supported institutions such as South Bend's indoor swimming pool, the Natatorium.

In 1910, South Bend had a population of 53,684 of which only 604 were black, slightly over one percent of the total population. By 1920, the total population had risen to 70,983. The black population had doubled and was now 1,269 but was still below two percent of the total. The census of 1930 indicated that the number of South Bend's black citizens had again doubled in size and was now at 3,341 or a little over three percent of the total population of 104,193. In 1940, the total population numbers had dropped to 101,268, but the black population showed a slight increase and now numbered 3,355 accounting for 3.5 percent of the total population of the city.[15]

The rise in the number of black citizens was initially due to the increased labor needs caused by our nation's involvement in WWI. South Bend would not see another sharp increase in the black population until the 1940s when WWII labor shortages again

brought large numbers of black workers north, looking for employment. By 1950, South Bend had a black population of 8,134, seven percent of the total population.[16]

Regrettably, these are only historical facts and a few statistics. They do not provide a true picture of what it was like to be black and living in South Bend at the turn of the century. Fortunately, South Bend had a black resident who managed to capture that perspective in his diminutive, self-published manuscript *The Negro in South Bend A Social Study* written in 1923. The author's name was Reverend B. F. Gordon pastor of one of the city's influential black churches, Taylor's A.M.E. Zion Church located at the corner of Eddy and Campau Streets, a church that is still there to this day. Gordon's book allows us to step back into time, to see this city as it once was, a city that was transitioning from rural to industrial. It was a time when the black population was experiencing rapid growth and at the same instant beginning to feel the first indications of a changing white attitude toward blacks that was becoming more threatening.

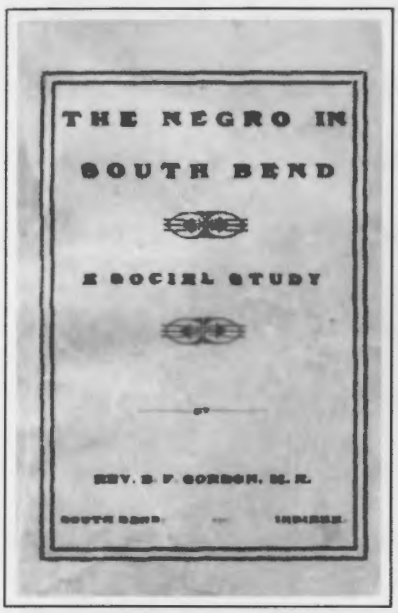


Figure 4 Reverend B. F. Gordon wrote the first "Black" history of South Bend

In 1900, black employment was limited to manual labor, primarily at the Studebaker Wagon Works, or being a domestic servant, janitor, or janitress. Only a few black professionals lived in South Bend. There were several black farmers listed in the census of 1890. Reverend Gordon points out in his book that a main stay of black entrepreneurial business enterprise was the trade of barbering: "Practically all the barber shops were run by Negroes." He noted "Ben Powell had a barbershop in Mishawaka as

early as 1869 on the West Side of Main Street near the center of the village. John B. Lott, William Walker, James Jackson, and others had fine barbershops in South Bend. They catered to the white citizens as one might expect when we learn of the Negro population of South Bend."[17] The early black settlers in the city had found niches within which to make a living, either as a farmer, unskilled labor, by providing services, or as Gordon points out, "catering" to the white population. The black population was small and as far as the white population was concerned, posed no threat politically or economically. That belief, however, was not going to continue indefinitely.

South Bend 1922: The Color Line

Reverend Gordon was very motivated in doing the research necessary in order to establish how blacks were living and working in the city. Prior to the first Great Migration, prompted by WWI, the city's black population was small. Economically the black worker had little impact upon the local work force and blacks lived and worked in the city with few problems. Segregation and racial discrimination were not foremost on the minds of the white citizens of the city because the black population went unnoticed. After WWI and during the years immediately following the war the migration of blacks north caused the black population centers to increase. South Bend was no exception and tensions between the city's white and black populations began to intensify. As Reverend Gordon noted:

> We find that in the last census given up to the World War [World War 1] that there were only 604 Negroes in South Bend. Thus, we see that there was no racial problem since there were so few Negroes. They had no particular communities and problems until the influx of laborers coming here from the South and other small towns in the North, to replace the labor shortage in industry. There were not enough to live to themselves and support any Negro enterprises among themselves.[18]

Educational opportunities appear to have been readily available for black children in the city's school system at the beginning of the twentieth century. Gordon, however, only lists 297 in school, grades kindergarten to senior high, with only 13 students, 5 males, and 8 females, in high school. Gordon was curious as to why these numbers were so small and why so few black children graduated when he took into account the actual numbers of black residents. He drew several conclusions from his research. First, he believed that there was a lack of interest in education among the recently arrived black residents. He attributed this lack of appreciation for education to the deficient schooling black youth received in the South. He also noted that black school age children arriving in the city did not have the educational skill levels that equated with their actual age. Older black children began classes at lower grade levels with much younger white children. This situation undoubtedly made it very difficult for these children to feel a sense of belonging and left them vulnerable to ridicule from their white class mates, resulting in their decision not to return to school. It also, more than likely, led to some early negative stereotypical thinking on the part of both teachers and white students on their perceptions of recently arrived blacks. Secondly, when black children reached the age of 16 they

Figure 5 First row right is James Wallace, a black South Bend High School graduate, class of 1896. In his book, Rev. Gordon, points out that in the years prior to the 1920s, blacks had few problems of finding housing or schooling in the city.

often quit, taking factory jobs, believing further education unnecessary. Financial support of their families may have also been a part of their decision to leave school.

Gordon also noted that black females graduating from high school, who had taken business courses such as typing and shorthand, had no incentive to remain in South Bend after graduation. For a young black woman, a secretarial job in the city was out of the question; she would have to move to Chicago or Indianapolis to find such a job. Graduation from a South Bend High School did not ensure a job opportunity for black youth, a theme that would be repeated for decades to come.

There is probably another reason why there were so few black schoolchildren in South Bend schools. Gordon mentions a lack of attendance.[19] It is unlikely that the city's school administration spent too much time concerning themselves with the absenteeism of black students. The school system did not know how many potential black students there were in the city and did not want to know. It is doubtful that truant officers were scouring black neighborhoods looking for absent black students. Lack of education and restricted job opportunities, other than menial labor for men and working as a domestic for women, placed blacks at a disadvantage both economically and politically.

Figure 6 Lack of skills and education often limited black workers, in the late 1920s, to manual labor jobs in the foundry at the Studebaker Corporation.

Gordon's research of employment statistics in the city is illustrative of this point.

Company Name	No. of blacks employed	Company Name	No. of blacks employed
Studebaker Corporation	450	Westinghouse	21
Singer Mfg. Co.	54	Hotels-Waiters, Bell Boys, etc.	77
City Janitor	1	City Street Dept.	2
County Janitor	1	Negroes in business and professionals	60
Men in domestic work and chaufferurs	60	Women in domestic work	133
Construction Workers, porters, night watchmen, janitor in other factories	120	Women working in stores as helpers	27
Janitors throughout the city	25		

Figure 7 Survey of black employment in South Bend in 1922[20]

The Oliver Corporation, one of the city's most important employers, was conspicuously absent from his listings. Due to a labor dispute, which occurred during WWI, Oliver Manufacturing had opted not to hire black workers, an employment position which remained unchanged until WWII, when acute labor shortages once again necessitated the employment of black workers. At the time Gordon was making his survey, he noted that the Oliver Chilled Plow Company did employ two black females who cleaned the offices.[21]

One of the significant aspects of Gordon's 1922 survey [figure 1] is that if one were to add up the numbers of black workers one would discover that there were over 1000 black citizens employed in South Bend, which supposedly only had a black population of slightly over 1200. How is this possible? Gordon's explanation was that the census records taken in 1920 were inaccurate. His research, using actual counts of black workers, and their families, indicated that by 1922-23, there were 3,856 black men, women, and children residing in the city.[22] This figure exceeds the reported black

population of the city for the census of 1930. It is very possible that accurately counting the number of black citizens was not a high priority for these early census takers and that the actual number of black residents was never definitively determined. The *South Bend Tribune* in June of 1928 certainly believed that the number of black residents exceeded three-thousand when it used the phrase, "the entire colored group of South Bend, consisting of more than 3,000 persons,"[23] lends credibility to Gordon's position.

Increasing numbers of black residents were causing heightened anxiety within the city's white community. The days when the black presence in the city was minimal and seeing a black man or women caused only a passing curiosity were gone. The white residents felt increasingly threatened, and the reaction would be immediate. With each passing day and every new black arrival, the words of Du Bois began to reverberate throughout the city. "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea. It was a phase of this problem that caused the Civil War."[24]

2.2 The Engman Public Natatorium Solidifies the Color Line

On July 2, 1923, the black community, for the first time, witnessed the establishment of a rigid "color line" in the city. In the past, the black residents had experienced discrimination by custom or de facto segregation. Blacks were aware that there were certain restaurants or other businesses down town where they would not be served or waited upon. For the black generation living in South Bend during the 1920s this was a fact, something you just "lived with." Now the city's parks board had taken de facto segregation a significant step further and introduced de jure segregation or segregation by law to the city. The Park's Board had officially declared that the

Natatorium would be a facility open to only whites, ignoring the fact that the Natatorium had been constructed using tax funds collected from both white and black taxpayers.

The color line had become an unpleasant fact for the city's black population. Gordon's reference to the "good-old-days" of race relations in the city is both poignant and nostalgic.

> Before the war [World War I], there was no problem of housing among the Negroes. There were no special places for the Negroes to eat. If he proved his worth and was able, he could go where he chose. In the expression of the language of the street, 'his pocket-book was his guide.' We are only five years removed from that social status, and on the whole the city has not advanced in its attitude toward the Negro population but has gone backward in a small way. There is an entirely new atmosphere from that as pictured to me as existing several years ago. Some say that it is the Southern Negro coming here, but those who know how things happen in other places are convinced that it is the coming of many Negroes. It is the quantity and not the character of the Negroes.[25]

By segregating the Engman Natatorium, the South Bend city administration, with the support of the white residents, had radically changed racial relationships in the city. For the black residents the question was how to respond? Exercising political power, the power of the vote was one response. White South Bend politicians, however, did not regard the black vote as being particularly important. The number of black voters was small and two influential local black saloon owners, who would purchase a black vote for a modest sum or a glass of whiskey, often manipulated their vote.[26] Simply exercising the right to vote was not indicative of black political power. In the 1920s, black political power was an aspiration, a goal to reach for. The formation of a black voting presence that would have a voice in local elections would need both time and leadership to develop. The power of the vote, for the black citizens of the city, had yet to be realized.

In South Bend, to this day, the black vote has never attained a level that would permit a unilateral approach to political decision making. Black political power has always sought to create a black voting presence that white politicians would have to take seriously, a voting block that the white political process would have to actively pursue and accommodate, a collaboration of white and black political power from, which both groups would benefit.

Gordon may not have realized it at the time, but he was capturing a time capsule, a prelude to immense change that was soon to sweep over South Bend shaping black political power. By the end of the 1920s newly arrived blacks would include not just laborers but also the new black professionals, the black elite, and within their ranks were the Talented-Tenth, men and women who represented the new leadership. These would be leaders with new ideas who would build upon the accomplishments of the past and press forward a new agenda. On a national level, they would grapple with the Depression, the New Deal, WWII, an intransient old-line black leadership, and a revolution in black political affiliation. On a local level, they would create black political power, a black vote that would become increasingly important to fortunes of white politicians. This new leadership would challenge the city's color line, eventually forcing its abandonment and extending job opportunities for the black worker during WWII.

Chapter 3: The Power of Associations

Beginnings and Foundations

The South Bend of the 1920s, for blacks, was rapidly becoming a closed community. Opportunities to gather for even basic socialization and recreational activities outside of their homes and churches were limited. The amenities of an open social life that whites were accustomed to were absent in the lives of the black residents of the city. Reverend Gordon made this very clear when he wrote in 1923, "But we are face to face with the need of social opportunities in South Bend. We need hotels, ice cream parlors where our better girls and boys may carry their friends without insult. Hotels where they may move freely and have their pleasant hours together and recreations where they may relax their minds and bodies. These things do not exist in South Bend."[27]

An essential element in the development of political power is a sense of cultural identity, which in turn is dependant upon the ability to socialize. As Gordon points out, in the early 1920s the black citizens of South Bend had few places to socialize without fear of insult, leaving them isolated from the interaction that is so necessary in order to establish capable leadership and a sense of community. Compounding this situation was the action taken by the city, (segregation of the Natatorium) an indication of things to come.

It would take several years before an organized black response would take place. Black political leadership was in its infancy and many of the most important black leaders in the city's history had yet to arrive. There was, however, tangible evidence that the desire for a political voice had already begun.

3.1 The Foundations of Black Political Power

In 1966, Anthony M. Orum, University of Chicago, wrote an article refuting the then commonly held belief that black Americans were apathetic concerning political involvement. Orum's argument was that black Americans were no more politically apathetic than white Americans and that in actuality black Americans were much more likely to be affiliated with a quasi-political association and actively participate in the association.[28]

Orum also called into question a position supported by many scholars that black membership in their own segregated association did nothing to help them succeed in the larger American society.[29] Orum pointed out that the organization of clubs and associations by blacks, even if they were segregated, was a vital component in the establishment of a black cultural identity and the foundation of black political consciousness. In this respect, the most important consequence of activity in associations was a form of civic education. Ideally, voluntary associations are models of cooperative effort. Decision-making follows discussion, debate, and eventually reaching of a consensus among the membership. Participation in associations thus offers blacks an opportunity to acquire an understanding of the processes of cooperation and compromise that are the foundations of democratic living.[30] This bedrock principal is always present in the development of black political power on a national level and in small towns such as South Bend, Indiana. The establishment of local organizations and participation in these organizations is an essential element in a complex growth process of black cultural identity, which encourages the development of a black political consciousness.

If Anthony Orum's assertion that the foundations of black political development are to be found in black participation in associations and organizations what proof is there that this was happening in South Bend?

3.2 *The Black Churches*

In South Bend, black cultural identity is first associated with the church. The city saw the formation of the first black church, Olivet A.M.E., in 1870, located at 310 West Monroe Street. At it inception, this church was a collaborative effort between black Baptists and Methodists.[31] In 1969, the congregation moved to a new location at 724 Notre Dame Avenue, and remains at this location.

Figure 8 Olivet A.M.E Church-1917

In July of 1890, the Mount Zion Baptist Church was organized. A year later the church purchased land at 116 North Birdsell Street, where it remains, presented referred to as the Pilgrim Baptist Church.[32] This church benefited most from the rapid influx of new black arrivals because most of the newcomers settled in the Birdsell Street area.[33] In 1907, Reverend A. M. Taylor, who at one time was the pastor of Olivet A.M.E, took his supporters and moved to the east side of the city and started what was known then as Taylor's Chapel. As the number of parishioners increased, the chapel became a church, called the Taylor A.M.E. Zion Church. In 1914, this church built a new edifice, constructed out of

Figure 9 Taylor A.M.E. Zion Church,, 1920

simple cement blocks, located at 801 N. Eddy Street.[34] The church remains at this location, identified today as the First A.M.E Zion Church. The formation of yet another black church took place in 1923. The Grace A.M.E. Zion Church, located at 1211 Vassar Street, opened its doors to serve a growing black population.

Figure 10 Grace A.M.E. Zion Church

These four churches formed the corner stones of the early religious life of the black residents of the city. Other organizations active within the black community during this early phase of social organization were fraternal associations such as the Masons, the Knights of Pythias, and the Odd Fellows, all having their female auxiliaries.[35] By the 1920s, local chapters of national associations such as the NAACP, and the Colored Women's Federated Clubs were also present in the city as well as black Republican and Democratic clubs. Beginning in the mid nineteen twenties local church affiliations, clubs, and fraternal organizations had become a part of every facet of black cultural life in the city. They ranged from entertainment such as the H. T. Burleigh Theater which began in the early 1930s; to the black equivalent of the Y.M.C.A., the Hering House, which sponsored numerous black youth groups one of the most notable being the Boy Scout Troop 42, in which South Bend's black community took much pride. There was a black political group unique to South Bend called the Sanhedrin Club, a club in which many of the Talented-Tenth would become members.


BURLEIGH CHORAL CLUB
presents
The Bohemian Girl
FIRST M. E. CHURCH
317 North Main Street
8:00 P. M. December 7, 1933 Price 25c

The Sailor Girls often referred to as Uncle Bill's All Colored Girls Softball team, thrilled the city's black community with continuous winning seasons spanning two decades against mostly white opponents. There were several all-black men's baseball teams that the community enjoyed watching, teams such as the Studebaker Foundry Giants and the South Side Speed Boys. Several black women's clubs made their appearance in the city as well; the St. Pierre Ruffin Club was the first, followed by the Our Day Together Club, and the Utopian Club. The Sportsmen's Club was also an influential early black club dedicated to helping black youth.

Figure 11 Stage Performance of "The Bohemian Girl"

Figure 12 Sportsmen Club, Dr. Bernard Streets standing in center of second row.

Churches, clubs, fraternal organizations, local clubs, and associations all helped shape South Bend's minority community. It is here that the modern civil rights movement had its beginnings: within this wide assortment of black organizations the first stirrings of black political power began to develop. It is here that the black citizens of the city began tugging on the reins of power.

3.3 *South Bend's First Black Radicals*

At the turn of the twentieth century, a group of young black women took the first steps toward formulating a political consciousness. They began educating themselves in the history and mechanics of how the government under which they lived was organized. They were preparing themselves for the day when they would have the right to vote and exercise political power. These women were members of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club, organized on December 20, 1900 by Mrs. Anna Beatrice Barton. By the 1930s, this club would be in the position to be able to wield considerable power and influence within the black community. That power would eventually lead to conflict with the local chapter of the NAACP that would cause considerable disharmony within the city's black community.

Figure 13 St. Pierre Ruffin Club in 1903, Anna Barton seated first in the front row. Photo courtesy of Indiana Center for History

Mrs. Barton was an early entrepreneur in South Bend. A trained beautician, she had converted a portion of her home, which was located at 1130 East Sorin Street, into a beauty shop, which she named the Swastika Beauty Shoppe.[36] Mrs. Barton not only provided the most fashionable haircuts of the day but also developed her own beauty cream, which she named "Beauty Muscle Culture for Face, Neck, and Hands." Later, Mrs. Barton became active in the local chapter of the NAACP, elected president of the South Bend chapter in 1929. She also organized the first African American Seventh Day Adventist Church in South Bend.[37]

The formation of the local St. Pierre Ruffin Club is perhaps the most notable event in Mrs. Barton's long history of community service. The Club has been described as being primarily concerned with the cultural and social life of the black community, dividing its efforts among literature, civics, music, art appreciation, home economics, and education.

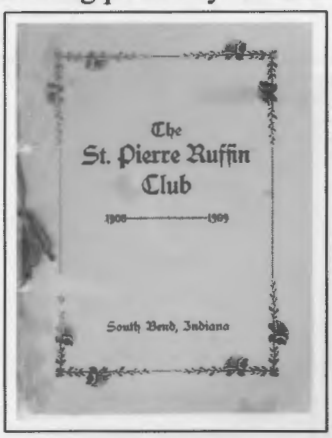
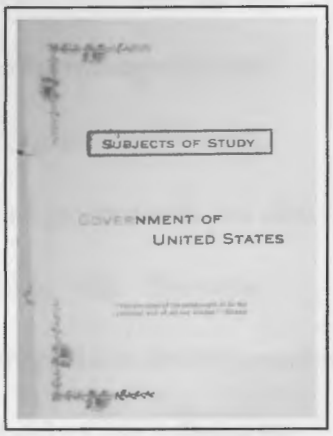


Figure 14 Ruffin Club Program 1908-1909. Courtesy of the Center for History

Women's suffrage, however, was a subject of considerable interest for the first women members. Barton and her fellow club members were following the leadership of Mrs. St. Pierre Ruffin, who presided over the first national convention of black women's clubs in 1895. Mrs. Ruffin supported the right of women to vote and to have control over their reproductive functions. She wrote, "Not all women are intended to be mothers. Some of us have not the temperament for family life."[38] By today's standards, that statement is blasé, but in 1900, it was a statement of a radical. Mrs. Ruffin was instrumental in creating the National Federation of Afro-American Women (NFAAW) at the convention held in 1895. In 1896, the NFAAW merged with the Colored Women's League of Washington from which emerged the National Association of Colored Women. The dynamic leadership of Mrs. Ruffin undoubtedly inspired Mrs. Barton to attempt to start a chapter of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club in the city as early as 1897. This first attempt failed but she did succeed in 1900.[39]



In 1908 and 1909, the women of South Bend's St. Pierre Ruffin Club were making a concentrated effort to educate themselves about a government that had refused to recognize their rights as citizens. Denied the right to vote, women were relegated to being only observers of a government that governed them. The women of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club were preparing themselves for the day, which they knew would come, when they would take their rightful place as knowledgeable and competent voters. However, the St. Pierre Ruffin Club did not confine itself to only educating themselves on the fundamentals of political structure of government, but also identified and explored political and racial topics on a local level as well. The topic scheduled for March 14th, 1909, for example, entitled "What Part of Race Development is Most Neglected in South Bend," is indicative of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club's desire to engage the issues of politics and race relations in South Bend.

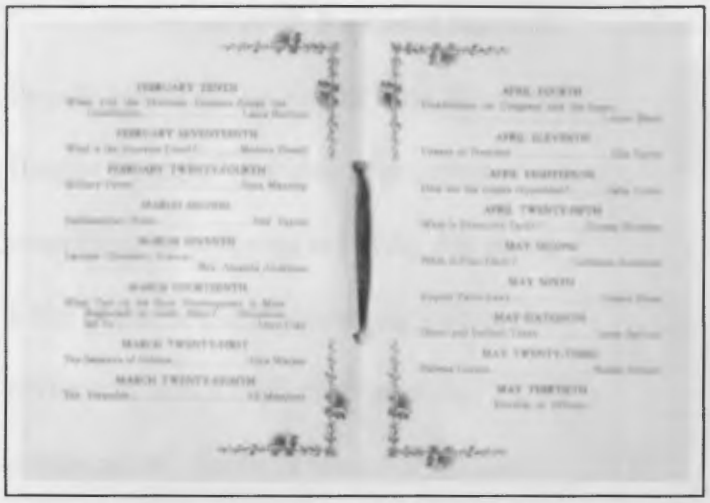


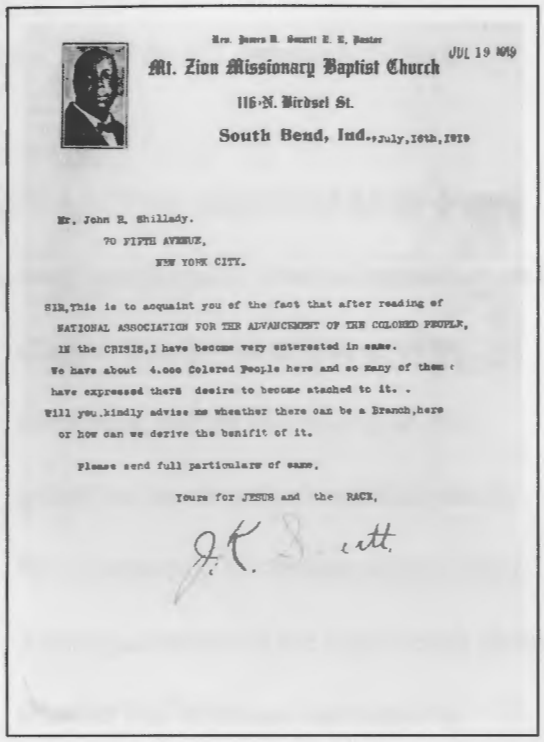
Figure 15 Topics of discussion for the Ruffin Club. **Courtesy of the Center for History**

The women of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club may have been in the vanguard of the process of development of a local black political consciousness in 1909, but on a national level, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was stirring. That organization held its first meeting on February 12 of that same year. In 1910, the NAACP began printing a magazine called *Crisis*, edited by W. E. B. Du Bois. *Crisis* quickly became the voice for many black Americans, expressing their discontent

with the continuing denial of their civil liberties. By 1919, *Crisis* reached a circulation of 100,000.

3.4 *The Organization of the South Bend Chapter of the NAACP*

In July of 1919, Reverend James R. Smartt, pastor of the Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church,[40] decided to act upon something he had read in Crisis. He sent a letter to the NAACP requesting information on how to start a local chapter of the organization. Smartt's vision of having a local chapter of the NAACP was fulfilled on November 1, 1919, when the national headquarters certified the South Bend Chapter of the NAACP.[41]



Rev. James R. Smartt B. D., Pastor

JUL 19 1919

Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church

116 N. Birdsel St.

South Bend, Ind., July, 16th, 1919

Mr. John E. Shillady.
70 FIFTH AVENUE,
NEW YORK CITY.

SIR, This is to acquaint you of the fact that after reading of NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE COLORED PEOPLE, IN the CRISIS, I have become very interested in same. We have about 4.000 Colored People here and so many of them have expressed there desire to become atached to it. . Will you kindly advise me wheather there can be a Branch, here or how can we derive the benifit of it.

Please send full particulars of same,

Yours for JESUS and the RACE,

J. K. Smartt

Figure 16 Copy of original letter, written by Reverend James Smartt, to the National NAACP, requesting information on how to start a local chapter in South Bend.

The formation of a chapter of the NAACP in the city was one of the most important events in the struggle to share political power for blacks. Although the South Bend Chapter would have many difficulties to overcome, including low membership numbers, which periodically placed its charter in jeopardy, this organization has for many years been stalwart in its determination to defend the basic rights of the black American citizens of the city. The NAACP has been instrumental in attracting and encouraging the leadership within the city's black community that led the fight to share political power with the white leadership of South

Bend. In the 1930s, the local chapter challenged discrimination in many ways; it confronted the segregationist policies at the Natatorium, which are discussed in chapter four, and mounted legal lawsuits against the State Theater for requiring blacks to sit in the balcony. In the 1960s, the local NAACP was instrumental in confronting segregation in the South Bend School system with *Copeland v. South Bend Community School Corporation.*

The leadership of the local chapter of the NAACP has maintained a high degree of activity in confronting discrimination. There were occasionally internal squabbles and at times the chapter appeared to be moribund, but for the most part this group has made major contributions to this community for almost ninety years. The organization of the local South Bend Chapter has benefited surrounding communities as well. In the years prior to the Copeland case, the leadership of the NAACP was very visible not only in South Bend but also in Elkhart, Indiana. In 1948, South Bend's black leadership lent their support to desegregating Elkhart Community schools. South Bend's chapter of the NAACP has been a major factor in our city's political, social, and racial history.

Figure 17 July 28, 1948, meeting of the Elkhart School Board notifying the public of the abolishment of segregated schools in the city. Seated at the table are South Bend NAACP chapter representatives, Charles Wills, Zilford Carter, and J. Chester Allen.

3.5 *The Sanhedrin and the Talented Tenth*

Figure 18 Dr. Bernard Streets

On August 22, 1929, Dr. Bernard Streets opened his dental office on the second floor of a pool hall located at the corner of Birdsell and West Washington Streets. Dr. Streets was one of the earliest black graduates of Indiana University's School of Dentistry, and had come to South Bend at the suggestion of a member of the Board of Dental Examiners. His first experiences in South Bend were not very promising. Because he was black, his attempts to rent office space downtown were rejected and local banks refused to provide a business loan so that he could purchase the necessary equipment for a dental office. He borrowed two hundred and fifty dollars from a white dentist friend living in Indianapolis, with which he rented second floor office space from Henry Hill, proprietor of the pool hall occupying the first floor of the building. Although his introduction to the city seemed hostile, he saw in South Bend opportunities. When compared to his own experiences South Bend was the model of civility. Dr. Streets had grown up in Logansport, a small Indiana town in which the Ku Klux Klan held a march every Saturday, led by the town's only police officer riding the city's official police motorcycle. In an interview conducted by the Northern Indiana Center for History in the early 1990s, Dr. Streets said, "Growing up, I felt that I was in constant fear for my life."[42]

Dr. Streets shared his office space with two other recently arrived black professionals, physician Dr. Cassel A. Mott and a young black attorney named J. Chester Allen. The arrival of Streets, Mott, and Allen coincided with the arrival of many other young black professionals who chose to make South Bend their home. They were a few

of the thousands who made that same decision by moving to the Midwest in the mid to late 1920s and early 1930s to seek their fortunes. These men and women represented the black elites and the Talented-Tenth, the black men and women who would provide the leadership so necessary to move the desire for black political power from an idea to a reality. In an interview conducted in 1979, J. Chester Allen provides an explanation as to why the Midwest and, in his case, South Bend was considered the land of opportunity:

> I came to South Bend in July of 1929. During that time, you had to establish residence in the city in which you intended to practice. I intended to come out West here because I thought there would be more opportunity out this way. Because, things were pretty well gelled, in those days, back East, you could say it was built up with prestigious old law firms. I thought that there would be more opportunity, as a young lawyer, where it wasn't so built up and occupied by established law firms.[43]

Dr. Street's decision to come to South Bend led to dramatic changes in the white perceptions of black political power. In 1930, Streets referred to South Bend as being a "Little Piece of Dixie."[44] The city that Reverend Gordon had described in 1923 had changed very little. Notre Dame and Saint Mary's colleges did not admit black students. The only black person allowed on the campus of Notre Dame was Verely Smith, who worked as a trainer for the Notre Dame football team. A trolley line ran along Hill Street into the Notre Dame Campus, but black passengers would exit the trolley several blocks before the campus because they feared being physically abused by Notre Dame students. Dr. Streets made many trips to Notre Dame, protesting to university officials the violent treatment of black South Bend citizens who had the misfortune of getting too close to campus.[45]

Politically there were no blacks holding elected office, and patronage job opportunities were few. Two nefarious individuals, Henry Hill and Clarence Elliot, black

owners of saloons and pool halls, used dollars and whiskey to influence black voters. The payoff was that city hall would look the other way when it came to Hill's gambling activities or Elliott's bootleg whiskey operation.[46] Job opportunities for blacks remained bleak and attaining higher education for black youth after high school was not a high priority of the South Bend school system. Dr. Streets later noted that in 1930 only one black student had achieved the goal of continuing his education beyond high school.[47]

Dr. Streets determined that he would change this situation and in 1930 established the Sanhedrin Club. The club took its name from an ancient Jewish council of elders.[48]

Figure 19 Uncle Bill's "The Big House" located at 133 Birdsell Street. In the front was a lunch counter known for delicious hamburgers, a jukebox for dancing, and in the back large rooms for club meetings. Photo courtesy of Province Archives Center

Streets explained the significant role that the Sanhedrin Club had in the early formation of black political power in the city during an interview conducted at the Northern Indiana Center for History in 1980. He said, "We formed a little club when we came here: we started to change things. We called it the Sanhedrin Club and we met every Wednesday at noon. We decided who would be Republican and Democrat so whichever one-won the election we'd have some voice in both parties."[49]

The Sanhedrin Club was distinctive to South Bend. The club was a men's social club, meeting every Wednesday, usually at the Hering House, a black settlement house located on Division Street, [Western Avenue] or at a local restaurant called Uncle Bill's Big House, located at 133 Birdsell Street.

The Sanhedrin was also a community service club, supporting the college ambitions of local black youth by raising money for scholarships. Their primary role, however, was political. It was an organization dedicated to improving the future of blacks in South Bend by gaining and using political power. The Sanhedrin periodically sent representatives to the Bendix Corporation, asking that the company hire black workers and to Studebaker Corporation, requesting that black union workers have the opportunity to bid on jobs outside the Studebaker Foundry.

The Sanhedrin were part of what W.E.B. Du Bois had come to describe as the Talented-Tenth, or those black Americans who had the talent and the training of a profession that enabled them to lead a race denied opportunities for advancement for generations.[50] Du Bois, in his book The Souls of Black Folks, published in 1901, had championed intellectual ambition and investigation for blacks, challenging the long held beliefs that blacks should not become intellectuals or express ideas or philosophies that may cause conflict with whites, especially in the area of civil rights. As the 1920s progressed, more and more black professionals trained at black colleges and universities throughout our nation began to have an impact upon black America. These young men and women believed in a different kind of future than the one promoted by Booker T. Washington, whose choice of accommodation and appeasement with whites as being the method to gain rights for black Americans was becoming less and less appealing. The Talented-Tenth chose a different path to achieve the goal of equal opportunity.

South Bend was fortunate to be the final destination of so many aspiring young black professionals. Although a conclusive listing of all black professionals living and working in South Bend in the 1920s and 1930s is not yet available, many black

professionals were present in the city by the end of 1930. A partial list includes black physicians, Drs. Mott, Fears, Boyd, and Gibson. Black dentists included, Dr. R.D. Love, Dr. Guy Curtis, and Dr. Bernard Streets. Black lawyers included, John Thomas, (first to arrive), followed by Zilford Carter, Charles Wills, J. Chester Allen, and Elizabeth Fletcher Allen. The first professional black journalist was Jesse Dickinson who wrote primarily for the *Pittsburgh Courier*, but also for the *Indianapolis Recorder* and the *South Bend Citizen*. A complete listing of the Sanhedrin Club does not exist, but it included Dr. Streets, Zilford Carter, Charles Wills, J. Chester Allen, and Jesse Dickinson.

The Sanhedrin did not focus upon the political affiliations of its membership. In the beginning of the development of black political power, being black was much more important than whether or not you were a Democrat or a Republican. The Sanhedrin encouraged black men from both parties to work together for the betterment of their race, rather than advancing one political party over the other. Unfortunately, this circumstance would not continue indefinitely. It is also noted that no evidence has been found that indicates that women were a part of the Sanhedrin Club or that the club ever formed a female auxiliary, as was the norm of many other black clubs and organizations. In this period of a rapidly growing black political awareness, especially for black women with the recent passage in 1920 of the nineteenth amendment giving them the right to vote, the lack of female participation in the Sanhedrin may have had a detrimental effect upon the club's long-term success.

By the election of 1936, fractures along party lines and differing styles of leadership made their presence known. In 1930, however, the Sanhedrin Club was making some headway in establishing black political power in South Bend. Dr. Streets

believed that the election of Republican Colonel George W. Freyermuth as mayor of the city was a benchmark in the development of black political power. He stated that Charles Wills, Zilford Carter, and J. Chester Allen had played a major role in delivering the black vote to Freyermuth, enabling him to defeat his Democratic opponent. According to Dr. Streets, the reward for the black community was the appointment of three to four black men to the South Bend Street Department.[51] It was a small gain, but nonetheless an encouraging sign of things to come. However, not all of the city's black leaders shared the optimism of Dr. Streets. Jesse Dickinson had a much different opinion of the Republican Freyermuth administration. He wrote, "We are still waiting for that increase in the number of Negroes on the city payroll. Could it be possible that the party in power has once again succeeded in hoodwinking us?"[52]

There were other signs that blacks, beginning in 1930, had made some inroads into achieving a semblance of political power. In 1930, South Bend's Democratic Mayor, William R. Hinkle, appointed Lafayette "Dusty" Riddle as South Bend's first black police officer.[53] The year 1930, represents in some ways a "high-water" mark of black Republican power in St. Joseph County. In October of that year, a black woman, Mrs. Claudia Baucom, living at 134 N. Birdsell Street, was appointed to a clerical position in the office of Secretary of State, Otto G. Fifield, in Indianapolis.[54] Prior to being appointed to this prestigious position, Baucom worked in the law offices of Carter & Wills, both influential black leaders in the local Republican Party. Through their efforts and those of black Republicans, Baucom holds

Figure 20 Mrs. Claudia Baucom-1930

her place in history as being the first black to win a political patronage position at the state house from St. Joseph County.

In 1933, J. Chester Allen, Democrat, held the appointed position as South Bend's Poor Attorney, and in 1935 Charles Wills, Republican, was elected Justice of the Peace. Attorney Wills was the first black person to hold an elective office in the city. He succeeded in winning this position a second time in 1938. Dr. Streets, Republican, did have a minor political achievement in 1938 when he was nominated for a seat on the South Bend City Council.[55] In 1935, Republican Mayor George Freyermuth also appointed two black police officers to the South Bend force, Robert Watts and Albert Pope.[56] However, as will be discussed later, the potential that the Freyermuth administration appeared to hold for the employment of black workers quickly evaporated, and along with it, black support for his policies. Unfortunately for Wills and the black Republicans, success was short lived. They would soon be overwhelmed by a political assault led by Franklin D. Roosevelt, the New Deal, and changing black voter preferences

By the middle of the 1930's, South Bend's white population became accustomed to seeing blacks working as members of the street department, as janitors cleaning city offices, as clerks working in the offices of the city administration, as lawyers, police officers and as a Justice of the Peace. These were tremendous gains for blacks and is indicative of the presence of black political power, but it was only a start. The parts and pieces of political identity were present; what was lacking was a cause to unite these parts into a well-organized and cohesive force.

Chapter 4: A Stand is Taken

The Natatorium: Catalyst of Black Political Power

Figure 21 the Engman Public Natatorium opened in 1922 as a segregated swimming facility. Photo courtesy of David Healey and was taken in 2004.

Figure 22 Dr. Franklin R. Carson served as the Republican Mayor of South Bend from 1918-1922

In August of 1921, on a lot at 1044 West Washington, construction began on the Engman Natatorium. It was a community project formed out of the desire on the part of South Bend's citizenry to have an indoor, year around swimming pool available for recreation and the development of swimming skills. The building constructed during the city administration of Mayor F. A. Carson was used by the local high school swimming and diving teams, as well as for providing swimming lessons.

Local architect W. W. Schneider designed the building using a simplified classical revival style. Architect Schneider modeled construction of the Natatorium after the Chicago Athletic Club, built in 1893, and the natatorium at Culver Military Academy.

Mr. Harry Engman Jr., a well-known South Bend executive, had served as president of the South Bend Malleable Range Company, for a number of years, before organizing the Engman-Matthews Range Company located at 405 East Madison Street. His father Harry Engman Sr., Lewis Matthews, and his son Daniel Matthews, completed the management team of this successful business venture.[57] In 1921, the Company relocated to Goshen, Indiana. Prior to moving to Goshen, Harry Engman Jr. and his wife Maude donated the land on which the Natatorium was constructed to the city of South Bend.

Figure 23 Engman-Matthews Range Co. Corporate Officers. Beginning lower left Harry Engman Jr., Harry Engman Sr., Lewis Matthews, and son Daniel Matthews. Image courtsey of David Healey

Had Mr. Engman the ability to foresee the future, perhaps he would have been more reluctant to allow his name to be associated with the Natatorium, for there has existed no other place or structure within the boundaries of South Bend that has caused such a depth of anger, hostility, and humiliation among the local black community. From the Natatorium's opening in 1922 until 1937, the "Nat," its most popular name, practiced a policy of discrimination and segregation. Black citizens of South Bend could only stand on the sidewalk and read the chiseled inscription in stone above the entrance, "Public Natatorium." The word "Public" did not include them. The realization that they

could not enter because of the color of their skin wounded an entire generation of the city's black residents. For fifteen years, the Nat was the formal demarcation line between black and white in South Bend.

The Nat stood as a tangible symbol of the power whites exercised over blacks. Of course, there were many other examples, with discrimination in jobs, housing, education, and many other facets of everyday life. There were many places in South Bend that blacks did not go because they did not want to endure the embarrassment of not being served or admitted. These peculiarities were a part of the life of being black in South Bend.

Figure 24 Attorney J. Chester Allen

However, the Nat was much different: the building itself sat in the black business district on West Washington. Young black children walked by it daily and each time they passed its entrance the message was hammered home that they were second class citizens. They were compelled to suffer the indignity of co-existing with a symbol of oppression that seemed to be omnipotent, and untouchable. However, these things would change; a segregated swimming pool on West Washington Street would become the catalyst , a rallying point, for the first real political activism of black citizens of South Bend.

4.1 The New Politics of South Bend

Attorney J. Chester Allen was the first to organize a challenge to the discriminatory policies at the Natatorium. In May of 1931 Allen, B. G. Smith, director of the Hering House, and local minister Reverend I. K. Merchant, representing the local

chapter of the NAACP, presented a petition to the Board of Park Commissioners of the city. The petition requested the removal of the "existing restrictions in the use of the Public Natatorium with respect to the colored resident of South Bend."[58] At the meeting, Allen argued that the Natatorium was a public facility supported by taxes that all of the residents of South Bend had paid, including the black residents of the city. The South Bend Park Board listened, but ignored the petition and the verbal arguments. After all, separate but equal was the law of the land, which ignored the reality that although the Nat was indeed "separate" the city had failed to provide the "equal" part. To do that would require that another natatorium be build for the black citizens of the city.

After this first defeat, breaking down the racial barriers imposed by a succession of South Bend city administrations became a priority of the black citizens of South Bend. Jesse Dickinson wrote numerous articles alerting the black citizens of South Bend that black youth were at risk because of their inability to learn how to swim. These articles did not appear in the local newspapers but in black newspapers such as the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Indianapolis Recorder*, newspapers to which the black citizens of South Bend subscribed. "Afra-Americans in some cities have made the lack of swimming facilities a political issue," Dickinson wrote in 1935: "sometimes it works."[59] There was another swimming pool in the city; it was located at Playland Park. This privately owned park was only open to the black citizens of South Bend on days specified as being "Negro Day."[60] Since it was not supported by municipal tax dollars, this park was not part of the legal processes focused upon the Nat.

However, making a political stand against segregation was never the intent of the black citizens of South Bend. Similar to the Montgomery Bus Boycott of the 50's, the

black residents of South Bend began by asking for very modest changes at the Natatorium to utilize the pool, not desegregate the pool. Jesse Dickinson reflected this sentiment:

> I will be accused of promoting segregation but there are some things, in this great land of ours, that the race can get the best results from if they are alone, swimming is one of those things. However, it does not matter a great deal to me so long as the boys have the opportunity to learn to swim well. It cuts to the heart to work with and for a young boy and then suddenly have him snatched from your bosom, because he had no chance to learn to swim correctly, this has happened to me more than once in South Bend.[61]

Figure 25 Attorney Charles Wills

This viewpoint indicated a willingness to accept a policy of segregated swimming as long as blacks had access to use the pool, and this was the compromise that eventually was agreed upon. While Jesse Dickinson was writing his articles, keeping the issue alive for the public, others such as J. Chester Allen, Elizabeth Fletcher Allen, Charles Wills, and Zilford Carter continued to pursue possible legal challenges. These lawyers were working with the NAACP and many community leaders such as B. G. Smith, Dr. Bernard Streets, and Reverend H. R. White, in a concerted effort continuing to pressure the South Bend's Park Board to allow blacks to swim at the Nat. Early in 1935 there was an idea presented that the city of South Bend should build swimming facilities just for blacks in keeping with the *separate but equal* law that legalized segregation nationally.[62]

The thought that white people should build a swimming facility just for blacks was more demeaning to some than having only one segregated swimming pool. For Dickinson building another pool was not a valid argument. He observed: "How

insignificant, embarrassed, and humiliated would some of our political leaders, civic leaders, and capable but indifferent parents be, if they were to pick up an evening paper and learn that interested whites had started a push for swimming facilities here for Negroes, this may happen? If it does Sanhedrin', "Civic Leaders," ministers, political workers … should go in quest of a hole to hide their heads." [63]

The possibility of raising funds to build a separate segregated swimming facility for blacks ended because the Natatorium, itself, required major repairs. It was a question of money:

> At the suggestion of the feasibility of building a swimming pool for the race, a member of the park board threw up both hands and said there wasn't a chance to get money for such a project. Now that the so-called public natatorium is condemned, they are leaving no stone unturned in the endeavor to raise from $25,000 to $30,000 to recondition the building.[64]

The Natatorium's structural difficulties would prove to be the opening the black leaders of South Bend required to break the Park Board's continued policy of exclusion. In July of 1936, the Nat closed due to cracks in the swimming pool area. The closing must have prompted some rumors that blacks had something to do with it. "No Negro was responsible for the closing of the Natatorium. The place was closed because there is danger of it falling in," Jesse Dickinson reported.[65]

The closing of the Natatorium caused a degree of consternation among South Bend's white residents. "Local Caucasians have sent a petition to the park board asking for a swimming pool. They say that since the Natatorium has been closed children have no fit place to swim."[66] Dickinson spoke plainly, as he derided this request, noting that the city had failed to provide any safe place for black children to learn how to swim or to

enjoy recreational swimming. He continued to challenge the black community to organize against the Natatorium and support those who were pressing the city to alter its discriminatory policies.

On a September evening in 1936, the South Bend Common Council met to discuss what to do about the Natatorium. The solution was to implement a special tax upon the residents of South Bend raising the estimated $25,000 dollars necessary to repair the facility. This plan almost went unnoticed by the black residents but for the sharp watchful eyes of South Bend's first and only black female lawyer, Elizabeth Fletcher Allen.

Figure 26 Attorney Elizabeth Fletcher Allen

Elizabeth Fletcher Allen, wife of J. Chester Allen, was a remarkable woman. She received her bachelor's degree from Talladega College in 1926, after which she did graduate work at Columbia University in New York City. In 1928, she married J. Chester Allen. After graduating from the Boston University School of Law in 1932, she joined her husband's law practice in South Bend. In 1938, she became a member of the American Bar Association. Mrs. Allen was a member of the NAACP, Black Business and Professional Woman's Association, Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority and the Links. She was also a member of Planned Parenthood Organization, the Urban League, the Hering House, and the Red Cross. She had a reputation for being a competent lawyer as well as having her own political aspirations. She intended to run for political office and declared her candidacy in early 1936. "Attorney Elizabeth Allen will soon declare herself a

candidate for the State legislature," wrote Jesse Dickinson in February of that year.[67] In writing the family history, her youngest son, Irving, said this about his mother's political ambitions and why she failed to pursue them. "She filed to run for the State Legislature, but bowed out when a local black democratic group encouraged Chester to file, feeling that a man had a much better change to win than a women. She accepted that decision."[68]

Although Elizabeth Fletcher Allen accepted the common prejudice that politics was not part of a woman's sphere of influence, she was, in reality, only a few decades ahead of her time. Throughout her life she, as did her husband, challenged racial discrimination wherever she found it. She would, in the future, play a major supporting role in her husband's political successes and used her own persuasive talents to open the doors of economic opportunity for the city's black workers during WWII.

It is unfortunate that Mrs. Allen, a talented lawyer, and a woman who demonstrated much personal courage and leadership, was also a woman who avoided publicity, seldom taking any credit for her own undertakings. She left behind few records with which to document her extraordinary accomplishments. Had it not been for Jesse Dickinson, who recorded the events in the *Courier* and the *Recorder,* the important role Elizabeth Fletcher Allen played in breaking the stalemate at the Natatorium would have been lost. For many years, the Natatorium had remained seemingly impervious to change. Capable lawyers such as Zilford Carter, Charles Wills, and J. Chester Allen had worked diligently to open the facility to blacks, and had joined with the NAACP in the challenge. The black

Figure 27 Attorney Zilford Carter

community was supportive of a generation of black leaders who came of age while rallying opposition to the policies at the Natatorium. For fourteen years, the Natatorium had successfully ignored the pleas of the black residents of South Bend, until Mrs. Allen set into motion a sequence of events that would finally make the word "public" applicable to all.

The white political power structure at city hall took a course of action that, unintentionally, led to major changes in Natatorium policies. At the time, the city administration believed that the black citizens of South Bend were powerless to mount any serious opposition to its planned renovation of the swimming pool. That assumption would prove to be incorrect. The city was no longer dealing with uneducated black people without resources. Times had changed; intellect, persistence, and strategy implemented by a capable black leadership would alter the status quo in South Bend.

An important part of this new strategy was the pivotal role Jesse Dickinson played in the process. Locally white owned newspapers such as the South Bend *Tribune* were not overly sympathetic with the position of South Bend's black community and gave little newspaper coverage to their cause. Jesse Dickinson, using his access to the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Indianapolis Recorder* filled the void. He chided, prodded, coaxed, ridiculed, did every thing in his journalistic power to move South Bend's black community to action.

When in September of 1936 the South Bend Council passed, unopposed, an ordinance to raise $25,000 in new taxes to repair the "Nat," Dickinson was appalled that the black community had not raised even a finger in protest. In his next column, he described the black taxpayers of South Bend as "sleeping" "sipping beer" "chatting" or

"lounging" while the city was appropriating their money to repair and reopen a facility that they were not even allowed to look into.[69]

Dickinson, in addition to being a motivator and conscience of the black community, was also the place to get the latest news. He reported Elizabeth Allen's idea of circulating a petition to challenge this new tax in early October of 1936.

Jesse Dickinson represents a unique factor in the establishment of black political power in South Bend. He does not fit within any theory or scholarly strategy. He was one-of-a-kind, whose talents were many. Dickinson is remembered as being a community leader, professional musician, and political organizer. But, in the 1930s it was his journalistic abilities that the black community came to rely upon. He was able to not only inform but also move the black community into action. While lawyers planned and clubs and committees met, Dickinson was writing a weekly column that was sure to be as biting as it was informative. His contributions to the formation of black political power would be difficult if not impossible to determine. Would Allen, Carter, and Dickinson himself, have been elected to state offices in the ensuing years without their names appearing prominently in the weekly columns written by Dickinson? What impact did his writings have upon the black community? Jesse Dickinson was a journalist who walked his beat, the city of South Bend. He reported what he saw and how he felt. He moved people to action but he represents an intangible element in the drive for black political power that warrants further investigation.

Figure 28 Jesse Dickinson, 1936

4.2 The Petition-A Display of Courage by Ordinary People

Elizabeth Fletcher Allen had discovered a flaw in the city's plan of using taxation as a means of acquiring the necessary funds with which to repair the Natatorium. She realized that this tax could be challenged since the tax dollars came from all the residents of South Bend but not all of the residents could share the facility equally.

Elizabeth and J. Chester Allen were responsible for writing the petition challenging the new appropriation of tax monies for the repair of the Natatorium. They believed that the tax was a violation of their rights as taxpayers because they were being taxed to repair a city facility from which they were barred on the basis of race. The petition was filed with the country auditor on September 21, 1936. Ted Gravely, Guy Weaver, B. G. Smith, George Toodle, Dr. C. A. Mott, P. A. Burns, Ernest Rice, Reverend B. Bowen, Dr. Felix Curtis, Mrs. Luther Pompey, Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Mitchell, O. B. Flowers and Verely Smith, signed the protest. Jesse Dickinson took the responsibility for obtaining the signatures and publishing them;[70] it was an example of American political action at its best. It was also an example of courage, as being a black man or woman and putting your signature on a petition that was going against the white power structure down at city hall was a daring act. I believe that it is interesting to point out that not one of the "leaders" whose names have previously been mentioned in this thesis, persons such as Allen, Wills, or Carter, signed the petition. It was not the leaders who signed but the ordinary black citizens; a few were professionals but the majority was just ordinary people leading ordinary lives. When called upon, however, they did something remarkable; they took a stand and signed a piece of paper for all to see. Often these

efforts are not viewed as they should be seen, as powerful statements of a people resisting oppression. These were important people.

4.3 Never out of sight and never out of mind

Although securing the necessary signatures had been successful, making sure the document remained intact to see the light of day in Indianapolis was doubtful. "There were pretty clear indications that the document might be scrapped before it had passed through the proper channels."[71] Blacks did not possess any real positions of power. The only elected black man was Attorney Charles Wills, Justice of the Peace, not a particularly powerful position. Blacks did possess two important weapons, however, the glaring light of public scrutiny, and black leaders who had close ties with the current Republican administration of South Bend Mayor George Freyermuth. Wills and Dr. Streets, both Republicans, had supported Freyermuth in his election in of 1934, when he defeated incumbent Democratic Mayor William R. Hinkle. Dr. Streets believed that he and Wills had helped secure the election of Freyermuth by delivering the black vote to the Republicans. They made it clear that there would be no toleration of any attempt to tamper with the petition. After some discussion the South Bend City Auditor felt it necessary to make this statement, "No petition will be ditched in this office."[72]

Assured that the petition would not simply "disappear" at the auditor's office, South Bend's black community awaited the announcement of the scheduled hearing with the State Tax Board. It was tangible proof of how blacks now did possess the power to connect with the political infrastructure. Dickinson praised Wills and Streets "for exerting their influence in getting the auditor to carry out his duty as prescribed by law, the complaint will be sent to the state commission along with the appropriation bill."[73]

On October 7, 1936, J. Chester Allen and Charles Wills discussed the Natatorium's discriminatory polices with John Rothrock, the representative of the state board of tax commissioners. Attorney Allen issued a statement requesting that all restrictions of Negroes' use of the Natatorium be removed. Mr. Rothrock countered, "I do not approve of a plan to permit colored persons to use the Natatorium at the same time as white persons, but I do think that a schedule should be arranged whereby the colored persons can use the pool."[74] Mr. Rothrock, however, also had something to say about the city's special tax for repairing the Nat. "This appropriation will be allowed only on the condition that South Bend's colored folk will be given afternoon and evening benefits of your natatorium."[75] Jesse Dickinson who was present at this meeting had a more dramatic take on this eventful meeting. He wrote, "It was truly a momentous occasion for those who sat and watched the representatives of the various governmental branches as they cringed under the withering condemnation of the fair minded criticisms of Mr. Rothrock, the State's representative of the tax board."[76] The official Park Board minutes, however, make no mention of other government representatives being at this meeting or that Mr. Rothrock made any remarks critical of South Bend's local government. Dickinson is the primary source for information. He also indicated those present representing the city's black community were: J. Chester Allen, Elizabeth Fletcher Allen, Charles Wills, Zilford Carter, B. G. Smith, Mrs. Mott, Bennie Curtis, Henry Joyce, Reverend David Bond, and Jesse Dickinson.[77]

After this meeting, victory seemed assured. Mr. Rothrock had issued his judgment; Negroes help pay the taxes that support the Natatorium therefore, Negroes will be permitted to use the facility. Jesse Dickinson wrote,

> Mrs. Elizabeth Allen a lawyer in her own right, will be long remembered here because it was her discovery and foresight that started the old ball to roll until it finally crashed into and destroyed the 25 year old taboo [Exactly why Dickinson makes a reference to 25 years is unknown, the Natatorium was not built until 1922] which prevented race folks from enjoying the pleasures offered by the Natatorium.[78]

Unfortunately, the momentum for change at the Natatorium due to Mr. Rothrock's decision was soon lost. Four months passed, the Natatorium's repairs were completed, and there was no indication that the Park Board intended to honor the commitment made to allow Negroes to swim at the Nat. In February of 1937, Jesse Dickinson was once again writing about the Natatorium.

"Sorry to announce that the park board has not lived up to its agreement with the State tax commission. The Natatorium has not yet opened to race folk but contacts are being made. The park board now seems to work out of the mayor's office. This gives us a new hope because we have influential race men in the party [Republican] of which the Mayor is a member."[79]

Once again, J. Chester Allen led a small but determined group of South Bend's black leadership into a meeting with South Bend's Park Board. He demanded that the Board abide by the agreement reached in October of 1936. He further requested that the pool be opened to the colored citizens of South Bend every Thursday and two hours every Saturday. He also asked that "colored attendants" be hired for those periods. The board voted instead to allow blacks to use the Natatorium on Mondays only. Chuck Dempsey was subsequently hired as the first black lifeguard.[80] The Nat was still a segregated facility, but blacks were no longer excluded; they could now use the pool Monday of each week.[81]

In the years that followed, the actual days the city's black community were permitted to use the pool varied, but they were not allowed open access to the pool nor were they allowed to swim with white patrons. The Natatorium continued to be a source of disrespect for the black residents of South Bend throughout the 1940s. The Park Department finally settled on a schedule that seemed to revolve around pool cleaning. Blacks using the pool on "their" day often commented that they could actually see the water going down as the pool was being drained for cleaning. The assumption was that blacks got the "used" water and whites would not swim in water that had been "used" by blacks.

On February 3, 1950, Attorney J. Chester Allen, accompanied by his long time friends and fellow attorneys Charles Wills and Zilford Carter, represented a revitalized South Bend NAACP in a threatened legal action against the South Bend Parks Board if they did not end discriminatory policies at the Natatorium. At this meeting a motion was made and seconded to the effect that, "there is to be no race, creed or color discrimination at the Public Natatorium and henceforth attendance and classes, private classes excepted, will be open to all alike, consistent with good management."[82] The motion carried. Nineteen years had passed since J. Chester Allen, B. G. Smith and I. K. Merchant had presented that first petition, on May 15, 1931, requesting that the city's black citizens be allowed to use of the pool. The city of South Bend had finally acknowledged that the word "public" is not exclusive but rather inclusive.

The struggle between the city of South Bend and its black residents for acknowledgement of their basic rights as citizens had been lengthy, but eventually successful. Four years later, in the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education of*

Topeka Kansas attorney Thurgood Marshall would argue that separate but equal was unconstitutional and was detrimental to the psychosocial development of black youth. A group of South Bend's black citizens had been fighting that fight for almost twenty years. They had achieved success in defeating a local icon of racial prejudice and discrimination that had existed in South Bend for far too long. Between 1931 and 1937, the black leadership had solidified and rallied around one major issue, the Natatorium. In that six-year span committees formed, planning sessions were initiated, black lawyers examined possible legal maneuvers, ordinary citizens took a stand, and eventually a group of black leaders emerged that would lead South Bend's black community for the next twenty years. The importance of political influence and power were potent lessons learned during the struggle for equality at the Natatorium. These men and women worked together, disregarding personal political affiliations, in the effort to create a better South Bend for all. It is not a coincidence that all of South Bend's future black leaders, those who held or would in the near future be elected to important state government offices, played key roles in ending discrimination at the public swimming pool.

Although the importance of the fight to end discrimination at the Natatorium was vital to the establishment of black political power, the subsequent experience of blacks at the Natatorium shows how resistant white bureaucracies can be to relinquishing power. A case in point is the experience of Mrs. Willa May Butts and her attempt to register her six-year-old daughter in swim classes in the 1950s. Mrs. Butts, wife of a prominent black doctor, and her next-door neighbor, Mrs. Mary Francis Cybulski, a white woman of Polish heritage, went to the Natatorium to register their daughters. Both of the girls were very close friends and playmates. Upon arrival at the Natatorium, the women were told

that there was only room for one additional student, the white child. Mrs. Cybulski interceded, explaining that the girls were playmates, taking swimming lessons together would be helpful for the girls and for the parents as well, for getting the girls there and picking them up. The Natatorium staff reached a compromise with the two mothers, although that compromise was explicit with racial overtones. Mrs. Butts later recalled that when she would take the girls for their lessons, that they were the only children in the pool taking lessons. Two little girls, one black the other white, were taking swimming lessons with no other children in the pool. Mrs. Butts had no success in registering her son in swimming lessons, the following year. She was told that all classes were filled, and upon inquiring further, Mrs. Butts was told by the person supervising the registration, "They haven't given me the okay to enroll any colored kids."[83]

The Natatorium was a success for the black community of South Bend; challenging segregation created cohesiveness, a will, and the determination to end blatant discrimination. The Nat was the catalyst for change and the creation of black leadership that would be a central part of black political power for the future. Nevertheless, the Natatorium remained, in many ways, as it always had been. The power to discriminate still existed, not as transparent as in the past, but still there nonetheless.

Chapter 5: Building a Cultural Identity

The Hering House

Figure 29 Hering House-1925

There were other notable events happening in South Bend which would have a major influence upon black political and social growth, in addition to the formation of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club and the establishment of the NAACP.

Figure 30 R.A.B. Crump, first Director of Hering House

South Bend's segregated swimming pool, the Natatorium, had only been open for five months when one of the most important early leaders of this city's black community arrived; the date was December 1, 1922.[84] His name was Alexander Crump.

Mr. Crump received his college education at Hampton College, Virginia, and at the Virginia Union University. He had a great interest in the education of youth and attended several summer schools for community recreation in Chicago at the Playground & Recreation Association of America and at the

Community Service Inc. of New York. He served in the United States Army during World War I, achieving the rank of Lieutenant of Infantry. After the war, he worked in New York for five years as a member of the Community Service Organization as a social worker. He resigned his position in 1922, moving to South Bend in order to promote social services. Soon after arriving, he founded the Booker T. Washington Community Service Center. The first meeting was held in his home, but the interest was so great that he moved to the Pulaski school auditorium in order to accommodate the growing numbers of people.[85]

Acquiring a facility that would promote social activities outside of church fellowship was a high priority for the city's black citizenry in 1923. Prominent local black fraternal organizations such as the Odd Fellows, the Knights of Pythias, and the Masons, along with their female auxiliaries, had combined their efforts for the planned construction of a community center. Their expectation was to have a building that would serve the multiple uses of an office building, a lodge home, and an assembly hall or lecture room. The location was to be at the corner of Division and Scott Streets.[86] The construction of a new building never took place, but at this location was an old building that had once been the First Church of Christ Scientists.[87] Originally constructed in 1906 at the corners of Main and Madison Streets, the building had been moved across town to its present location. This old building would soon find a new purpose as a community center for South Bend's rapidly growing black population.

5.1 *The Hering House, Paternalistic Segregation or an Incubator for Black Leadership or Both?*

Many of the city's white residents shared a paternalistic attitude toward the emerging black population. Frank and Claribel Hering were prominent leaders of this group.

Frank Hering was a professor at Notre Dame University and had served as the University's first football coach and athletic director. Claribel Hering not only wanted to find a way to help the South Bend's growing black population, but was also an outspoken critic of the city's lack of concern for the welfare of the black population. She wrote in 1924:

> I have been impressed with the utter lack of any institution, which would meet the needs of this growing portion of the populations. The city has generously cared for all other classes of the city. It has done nothing, or nearly nothing, for the colored people.[88]

The need for a place for the black community to be able to meet, to socialize, and find recreation was apparent. The black residents of South Bend had limited access to recreational facilities and no available space for socializing outside of their respective churches. The local YMCA/YWCA were segregated, not open to black participation, a situation that would not change until WWII. In September of 1924, there was a meeting between Claribel Hering and Alexander Crump.[89] The result of that meeting was an agreement between Hering and Crump to begin the process of creating a community center for South Bend's black population. Within a few weeks of this meeting, Claribel Ormsley Hering purchased the

Figure 31 Mrs. Claribel O. Hering

former Christian Scientist Church at 732 West Division Street [Western Ave]. Renovations began almost immediately, but before their completion, Hering donated the building for use by the city's black community that same month. The official opening of the facility was on March 9, 1925, under the administration of the Booker T. Washington Community Service Association. Mr. Crump was selected to be the first Director of Hering House. At the conclusion of its first year of operation, more than 20,000 people had attended activities held there.[90] Mrs. Hering also requested that a board be established to hold title to the property.[91]

The Board of Trustees, formed in 1924, consisted of five white and two black members: A. B. Thielens, W. O. Davis, Samuel Pettengill, Frank Hering, Dr. C.A. Lippincott, William Manning, and R. A. B. Crump.[92] The white members of the board, Thielens, Davis, Pettengill, Hering and Lippincott, represented South Bend's social, moral, and business elite.[93] They shared a common concern for the social advancement of the black citizen, influenced by a sense of paternalism. In the late 1920s, they would have described themselves as being progressive in their attitudes toward blacks. The two black members of the board were Alexander Crump and William Manning. Crump was a Trustee because he was also the Director of Hering House. Why Mr. Manning became a Trustee is unclear. He worked as a waiter at the Hotel LaSalle and did not have the professional standing of many other blacks then living in the city. What ever the reasons he became the second black member of the Hering House board of trustees.

Figure 32 Frank Hering-1913

directors. Attorney Charles Wills, Mrs. J. L. Curtis, Mr. James Higgins, and Reverend B. F. Gordon for example, were members of that first board of directors.[96]

The Hering House was an example of a settlement house patterned in many ways after the famous Hull House, created by Jane Addams in Chicago, Illinois in 1889. In its early stages, the white community considered the Hering House a means of fulfilling the white interpretation of responsible stewardship for the city's growing black community. The facility was equipped with study rooms, music rooms, and a modern kitchen, which served a daily lunch for thirty-five cents.[97]

Figure 33 Interior of Hering House. Portraits of Theodore Roosevelt, Booker T. Washington, and Abraham Lincoln were postioned at the left, center, and right, respectively. Over the stage was an inscription written by Frank Hering, which read, " So live that when you die the poor, the sick, the outcast, will mourn the passing of a friend.

There was also a gymnasium, and in the basement, there were game rooms and a large clubroom where local black clubs held their meetings. On the first floor was a large auditorium, complete with a stage, where over the course of many years, numerous plays and musicals were preformed. The auditorium was capable of seating over three-hundred people and was used often as a banquet facility.

In addition, a reading room that had an assortment of donated books was located adjacent to the office. The organization also offered night classes, focusing upon the principles of citizenship.[98] During the year of 1927, more than one hundred and fifty

meetings of various organizations were held, and fifty scheduled entertainments were given at the Hering house.[99]

Throughout her life, Mrs. Hering continued her commitment to helping the black residents of South Bend. In 1931, she was so motivated after attending an NAACP meeting held at Hering House, that she paid the two-dollar NAACP membership fee for every black pastor in South Bend.[100]

At its inception, the Hering House promised to be more than simply a community center. The facility was also linked closely with finding employment for black workers. As Mrs. Hering said on March 9, 1925, "In this institution it is proposed to conduct an employment bureau which will settle the problem of jobs."[101] Job placement and welfare were part of the responsibilities of Hering House. The white bureaucrats downtown did not administer work assistance and welfare for the black citizens of the city, nor did the various city bureaucracies have any black men or women employees other then those who worked as janitors.

Hering House served as a clearing-house for welfare cases involving colored people. Miss Alvertee E. Seals was South Bend's first black welfare worker.[102] She arrived in South Bend in 1924 to take the position of social service, welfare, and relief department director of Hering House. She remained in that position until the organization became part of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in 1928. She later married black South Bend attorney Zilford Carter.[103]

Figure 34 Miss Alvertee E. Seals

Seals proved to be a capable and diligent worker. During 1927, she handled and disposed of 241 welfare cases, made over 700 visits for welfare and charitable purposes, and found employment for seventy-three individuals. She also distributed used clothing to the needy and offered counseling and guidance to many down and outers, helping them to get back on the upgrade.[104] Seals, was a woman of many other accomplishments. She was a native of Iowa but attended High School in Peoria, Illinois. After graduation, she returned to Iowa to enroll at Iowa State University. She remained there a short time before entering the Nurse's Training School and Sanitarium at Jacksonville, Illinois. She completed a three-year course in nurse's training, after which she furthered her education by completing another three-year course at the Midwest Religious and Social Service school. She was a member of many clubs and organizations, a few of which were the Federated Women's Clubs, House Hold of Ruth, Order of Odd Fellows, and the Francis Willard Women's Christian Temperance Union.[105]

Figure 35 Samuel Pettengill

When the Hering House chose to discontinue its affiliation with the Booker T. Washington Organization, the position of social service and welfare field worker ended. It was at this juncture two influential white trustee board members of the Hering House came to the aid of Seals. W. O. Davis and Samuel Pettengill recommended to the township trustee's office that Miss Seals become an investigator for the department. Although she only worked on a part-time basis, she became the first black professional employee employed by a South Bend government agency. She proved to be a positive addition to the staff: "The trustee's office is glad to say that she

has served with honor and distinction and that all her investigations have been thorough and complete, and at a great savings to the county."[106]

5.3 *A Change in Leadership: Example of Black & White Political Compromise*

On January 22, 1928, the Hering House suffered what appeared to be a major setback. Its director and founder, R. A. B. Crump, resigned effective February 11.[107] The Booker T. Washington Organization had not provided the overall leadership that the Hering House required, and so a new direction in management was necessary. Dissatisfaction with Crump's control must have begun in late 1927 with discussions centered upon breaking the connection with the Booker T. Washington organization. An article printed in the *Tribune* just eleven days prior to Crump's notice of resignation alludes to some of the problems that existed between himself and the Hering House Board of Trustees.

> Naturally and inevitably, the development of this program [Education of blacks in the fundamentals of citizenship] and a settlement house for colored people has brought new problems, financial, administrative, and disciplinary. A new people in a new environment must become thrifty and industrious, happy and independent before real citizenship can be appreciated. Time and patience will be required for working this out.[108]

This paragraph is laden with powerful symbolism of paternalistic thinking used to limit the black citizen's expression of self-determination. The theme of this paragraph is that the black citizen was not a "real" citizen until certain benchmarks were reached such as conformity (expressing an opinion other than what was expected meant that you were undisciplined), and you must be "thrifty" and "industrious" (both terms were a part of Booker T. Washington's own policy of accommodation), "happy"

(according to whom?), and "independent" (difficult when you must first conform). The words that are the most pervasive are the words "real citizen." Obviously, the white residents of South Bend and perhaps the nation still had some difficulty in acknowledging full citizenship rights for blacks. The concept that being an American citizen makes you a "real citizen" had yet to be realized. Being a "real citizen" has nothing to do with being thrifty, industrious, happy, or the color of one's skin, which was the position that many black leaders held in the late 1920s.

After Crump's resignation, the white-led board of trustees made their decision to drop the Booker T. Washington association and to affiliate the Hering House with the segregated YMCA organization. This caused an immediate outcry of disapproval from many of the black members. What ensued was a struggle for control of Hering House.

The proposed changes united the black membership in opposition to the "Y," but also caused a division within the black membership centered upon the question as to which group, the Booker T. Washington association or the Playground & Recreation Association of America, offered the best possible support for the future growth and stability of Hering House. The black membership and the white trustees were on opposing paths, a confrontation was inevitable.

One of the first moves by the black membership was to reorganize the black board of directors, who then appointed Seals as interim director. She assumed management of Hering House. The new board administered the affairs of the Hering House for approximately one month, attempting to regain control over a very difficult financial situation.[109] They also declared their determination to manage their own affairs and dictate their own policies in the operation of Hering House.[110]

Two of South Bend's leading black citizens, Medora Powell and Charles Wills, led the opposition to the Hering House becoming associated with the "Y." On a Wednesday evening, March 2, 1928, during a meeting at the Hering House, 98 of the 103 persons present voted in favor of the resolutions offered by Powell and Wills to continue their support of the Booker T. Washington Community Service Organization. The local chapter of the NAACP was also on record as opposing the affiliation of Hering House with the YMCA, because of that organization's policy of segregation.[111]

Figure 36 Medora Powell

A petition was presented, adopted, and signed by a large number of black Hering House members. It read in part:

> We the undersigned colored citizens, respectfully petition that the operation of activities for civil, social, and recreational development of Negroes in this community be continued at Hering House by the Booker T. Washington Community service; that we perpetuate and maintain said institution as a memorial to the donors, Mr. and Mrs. F. Hering.[112]

At a meeting held five days later, 42 persons pledged their support to the maintenance of Hering House by signing a membership role and raised a substantial amount of money to pay delinquent bills.[113] There also occurred a unanimous vote to extend an invitation to E. T. Attwell, field director of the Playground & Recreation Association of America, to come to the city and present a program.[114]

However, for the white board of trustees of Hering House, the ability to deliver a qualified new Director was much more important than black membership sensibilities.

For them the "Y" offered the reservoir of leadership capabilities and stability that the board wanted. Their decision, on March 22, 1928, was that the Hering House would enter into a joint association with the segregated "Y."

This decision led to a mass rally held at the Hering House on March 23, at which the black citizens proclaimed that they had a very sincere desire to operate Hering House as a community center affiliated with the Playground & Recreation Association of America, and not to fall under the auspices of the segregated YMCA. Leading black citizens demanded an opportunity to demonstrate the ability of the race to manage its own affairs and to affirm its confidence in its own leadership.[115]

On April 3, 1928, the Hering House Board of Trustee's reaffirmed their decision of March 22 and proclaimed the "Y" as their choice. The trustees issued a rather lengthy statement, part of which read:

> Whereas this board has heard reports and recommendation from different colored groups in this city and has obtained information from representatives of the National Playground Recreation Association of America, and the colored division of the National Young Men's Christian association, and has carefully canvassed the entire situation.
>
> Therefore, be it resolved that this board reaffirms its decision of March 22, 1928 to the general effect that we accept the facilities extended by the National and local Y M C A, for finding a director of activities at Hering House and to cooperate in any program adopted by an organization of colored people of South Bend under the leadership of such director and the general affiliation of the National and local Y M CA.[116]

With this the trustees reasserted control of the Hering House and disagreement, at least public disagreement, with the decision ceased. The black leadership had proved impotent, unable to affect the outcome. In June, the *Tribune* announced that in the future the building would be referred to as the Hering House branch of the YMCA. It was also

noted that "The decision of the board of directors of Hering House, whose study of the matter was precipitated by a number of prominent colored residents who wished to have Hering House connected with the YMCA. . . ."[117] It is interesting to point out, that the names of these "prominent colored residents" are never mentioned. This is in sharp contrast with the newspaper reporting during the disagreement, in which the paper listed the names of many black members who were in opposition to the board's course of action.

The trustees moved with great diligence and speed to find an acceptable replacement for Crump. Many interviews were conducted with applicants provided by the colored department of the national council of the YMCA. By May, a successor for Crump had been found.[118]

On June 3, 1928, the board of trustees announced that a new director, Mr. B. G. (Beverly Graustark) Smith had accepted an invitation to become the new director of the Hering House. Within the announcement, the board made this statement:

> The board of trustees, as in the past, will undertake to raise from the white friends of the race in this city sufficient finances to cover the salary of Mr. Smith and his assistant. All other expense of maintenance of the building and the promotion of activities to be borne by the colored people.[119]

The board of trustees was reaffirming that it ultimately controlled the finances and that the black members were dependant upon the generosity of their "white friends" to pay the major expenses, the salaries of the director and his assistant, to keep Hering House open. An unequal balance of power had been reasserted over the black membership of the Hering House.

5.4 From the Crisis A New Leader Emerges

There are few instances when a leadership change of this importance is seamless. Nevertheless, such was the case at the Hering House in June of 1928 when B. G. Smith became the new director of the community center located on Division Street.

Figure 37 B. G. Smith

B. G. Smith arrived in South Bend in May of 1928. He was a native of Missouri and a graduate of Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri. Smith was also a graduate of Western College, Quandero, Kansas. Smith had over eight years of management experience working with other "Y" facilities in East Moline, and East St. Louis, Illinois.[120] Smith's leadership abilities would soon broaden beyond the Hering House. In the years to come, he would be one of the most influential black leaders South Bend would ever have.

5.5 The Hering House: the Importance of, and Lessons Learned

The Hering House was an institution that was unique to South Bend. It began as a joint venture between black and white citizens, in this case a black man, R.A.B. Crump and a white woman, Claribel Hering. Collectively they challenged the stigma of not only race mixing but gender mixing as well. Both showed tremendous courage when they put into motion their vision of a black community center. Undeniably, they were aware that the racial atmosphere had changed in the city. Restrictions and limitations were becoming more and more prevalent. The city's black population was being isolated and the recently implemented policies at the so-called public Natatorium made it clear that a steady erosion of basic rights was now a real possibility. Together, they openly

challenged South Bend's color line sharing a strong belief in the value of the Hering House for the black community. In doing so, they forever cemented the basic attitude of cooperation that was to be a guiding principal in the administration of Hering House.

Unfortunately, many of the same fears that prompted the white community to establish the Natatorium quickly altered what Hering and Crump had envisioned. White control of the purse strings allowed paternalism to claim their dream, and in reality the Hering House became a segregated black settlement house.

The black population did not, however, decide to respond to this external threat of isolation by imposing a form of self-isolation upon themselves. Their answer was to build a strong viable black community center just a few blocks away from the city's experiment with segregation by decree, the Natatorium.

Black clubs and fraternal organizations supported the Hering House because they realized that South Bend needed a place where the city's black citizens could congregate as a group and not as a member of a specific black organization such as a club or church. The formation of the Hering House was based upon a white response to a sense that the black community was being threatened and isolated. In addition, the argument can readily be made that the success of Hering House is an example of the black community compensating for their inability to participate as equals in a white society by creating their own edifice of black society.

However, when all is considered, the importance of the Hering House lies in the words written by Robert Orum in 1966: "Participation in associations thus offers Negroes an opportunity to acquire an understanding for the processes of cooperation and compromise that are the foundations of democratic living."[121] The establishment of

locally based community and social organizations are a necessary component in the process of developing a cultural identity, a social awareness, and a political will.

This basic belief that the Hering House was vital for the black community was the common thread that held the Hering House together when the organization faced its first major crisis, the ending of the connection with the Booker T. Washington group and the new association with the "YMCA." Although emotions were high and the dialogue heated, the Hering House did not dissolve. In the end, all parties came together for the greater good, although the definition of the "greater good" may have been worlds apart for the black membership and the white trustees.

Other conclusions can be drawn from this event. The desire to provide their own leadership was evident on the part of the black community. Decisions were made, a new board of directors was elected, a new director appointed, and an attempt was made to come to terms with the financial problems that plagued the facility. These examples clearly indicate that by 1928, South Bend's black community was ready to match words with action, to push for what they believed to be in their best interest. Although, still confined to the parameters dictated by whites, a black voice had been heard.

The white board of trustees and the black board of directors reached a compromise that saved the Hering House. Perhaps a portion of that compromise was the job Alvertee Seals secured at the welfare office. When her job ended at the Hering House, two prominent and powerful white men were able to find her employment in what had been a "whites" only bureaucracy, which indicates that the color line was not as strong as the segregated Natatorium might imply.

The Hering House was the quintessential element in South Bend for establishing black culture, black society, and a sense of direction and accomplishment that are so necessary in the formation of a black political consciousness. This political consciousness would soon manifest itself by refusing to accept the policy of segregation at the city's indoor swimming pool and by supporting a newly emergent black leadership that would culminate in the election of a succession of local black politicians to important state offices.

Chapter 6: A Missed Opportunity

J. Chester Allen and the Election of 1936-A Missed Opportunity

The election of 1936 should have been a triumph for South Bend's black community. They were in a position to reap the benefits of the foundations laid at the beginning of the century, with the formation of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club and the NAACP. A real sense of community, the creation of a social hierarchy, had been encouraged at the Hering House, and a talented black leadership of trained professionals, first organized under the Sanhedrin Club, had taken significant steps in dismantling the Natatorium's long policy of segregation. The black community appeared to be on the verge of acquiring real political power and influence. Unfortunately, the unity of South Bend's black community was beginning to fracture along party lines and differences of opinion driven by personalities and egos. The cohesiveness of the black community, as envisioned by Dr. Streets when he established the Sanhedrin club, had all but evaporated. Left in its place was a growing unrest within the black community, with their own leadership.

A great irony that is often present in black political power is the application of the label "Uncle Tom" to those black leaders who are in the forefront of the battle for civil rights. Those they were attempting to lead often viewed those trained professionals described previously as being a part of W.E.B Du Bois' Talented-Tenth, with suspicion. An example of this occurred in 1936-1937, when the Sanhedrin Club challenged South Bend's black community to join with them in providing funding for scholarships intended to further the education of black youth after high school. This initiative, however, was unsuccessful and did not produce the desired results. Although it was obviously an

excellent idea, the black community failed to support it. Jesse Dickinson alludes to the reasons why the city's black residents chose not to respond positively to the club's fund raising program: "There is a tendency to steer clear of Sanhedrin projects because the membership is made from the ranks of the school-trained professional men. This attitude is wrong because these same men support many projects of other groups"[122] Dickinson accurately described a truth about higher education: it separates those with it from those without it and those without it tend to become distrustful and suspicious of educated professionals.

The local branch of the NAACP would become the flash point of this growing dissatisfaction between South Bend's emerging black leadership and those they were attempting to lead. The NAACP had never enjoyed real security in South Bend. Declining enrollment, diminished revenues, and a membership that appeared to be not only lethargic, but also apathetic often jeopardized the group's survival. The leadership demonstrated in 1931 has lost its cohesiveness by 1935. In all of the articles written by Jesse Dickinson concerning the struggle to end discrimination at the Natatorium during the mid-1930s, the NAACP was conspicuous by its absence.

In the fall of 1936, Jesse Dickinson was very critical of the local NAACP and its lack of action against signs that read "Negro Patronage Is Undesired" in three locally owned Clark restaurants: "Too bad, we have no organization to fight these discriminations that are gradually creeping into our locality. Our branch of the great NAACP, due to leaders and members, is as near nothing as it can be."[123] The perception among the city's black residents was that the local chapter was weak and ineffective. A

condition which eventually forced the local chapter not only to reorganize in 1941, but also to petition the national organization for reinstatement of its charter.

6.1 The St. Pierre Ruffin Club vs. the NAACP

The difficulties that would cause such division within South Bend's black community had begun innocently enough in December of 1933. The NAACP had launched a "penny campaign," the goal of which was to have each black member of a community donate a penny to the NAACP. At the time, the city had a population of approximately 3400 black residents so the minimum was thirty-four dollars. Of course, the NAACP anticipated raising much more than thirty-four dollars in donations. In order to accomplish this, the national office invited all clubs and organizations to help in the fundraiser. The Penny Campaign was supposed to build cooperation between local chapters and clubs and organizations in their respective communities.

This was an excellent idea, but for some reason, the South Bend chapter of the NAACP did not respond. Without direction from the local chapter, the women of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club stepped in and took charge of the fundraising for the local NAACP. What ensued was a meaningless turf war between two important black organizations. As these two venerable groups lashed out at each other in a display of petty jealousies, the black community was forced to take sides or ignore both groups. Black political power fractured, not along party lines but rather along lines defined by personalities. This conflict was a setback in the development of black political power and was ultimately responsible for the political defeat of J. Chester Allen in his first bid for office in 1936.

The main antagonist in the story is Mrs. Zoie Smith, an officer in the St. Pierre Ruffin Club, community leader, and political activist. She is one of the most colorful

characters in South Bend's black political history. Zoie Smith graduated from New Orleans University in 1918. She and her husband Dr. William Smith settled in South Bend in 1924.[124] She was very active in politics, and organized black voter registration drives. Mrs. Smith founded the first black Democratic Club, at the time called the Colored Women's Democratic Club, on the east side of the city.[125] The name changed to the All-American Democratic Club when it began admitting men and whites.[126] Smith had chosen to broaden her club's appeal by changing its name and actively recruiting not only black males but whites as well, thus expanding her political power base.

Zoie Smith has been described as being contentious, difficult, stubborn, extremely argumentative, and a women who spoke her mind.[127] She lived on the East Side of South Bend in the same voting district as did J. Chester and Elizabeth Allen. During her lifetime, she was also the president of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club and in 1959 was the president of the local NAACP.

Because of her influence, Zoie Smith had some power in determining for which candidates the black vote was cast. Her ability to have some control over the outcome of certain elections made her an important black political leader.

Although no one has ever implied that any money ever exchanged hands the phrase, "she made them pay," referencing the downtown political machine, has been used. She expected that the gratitude of an elected official would materialize at a city counsel meeting when a civic improvement project or jobs benefiting the East Side would get the green light.[128]

Zoie Smith was an uncompromising person, but also a woman who believed deeply in equal protection under the law and equal access to opportunity for black

Americans. For reasons known only to her, Zoie Smith embarked upon a path that created divisiveness within South Bend's black community. A plausible explanation may be that the local chapter of the NAACP was in such disarray, and had been for some time, that it created a leadership vacuum within the black community. This produced a situation that she and the St. Pierre Ruffin Club were more than willing to fill.

In 1934, Smith decided that the women of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club would assist the NAACP in a fundraising project without consulting the local chapter. Her decision would leave the vision of black political accord nurtured by Dr. Streets and the Sanhedrin Club shattered forever. Excerpts from letters written by the protagonists reveal that a growing feud was developing between the St. Pierre Ruffin Club, Zoie Smith, the NAACP, and J. Chester Allen. This letter represents the opening salvo in a test of black leadership that will have far-reaching consequences for the NAACP, J. Chester Allen and the development of black political power in the city:

> December 13, 1933
>
> Dear Mr. Pickens:
>
> In a regular meeting of the South Bend branch, we unanimously go on record opposing your method of appointing some one in this city to direct a campaign, who is not a member of the Association. Had your action been taken several months ago, while our Branch was seemingly dead, we would have had no cause of complaint. This action has been taken since we started to revive.
>
> Your appointee [Zoie Smith] has been approached and asked to work through this branch with our support she informs us that she is not interested in the local branch. She is conducting a penny drive for Mr. Pickens. Some of the people we approach for memberships refuse now feeling that they have satisfied their obligation to the Association by their penny contribution.
>
> Your action sets to work two forces in this city that will not work together. If you believe that you can get better results from a single individual than you can a branch we are willing to let you direct the South Bend branch.
>
> We are planning a public meeting and installation of officers Dec. 31 at one of the churches, to be followed by regular monthly meetings held from church to church.

Yours very truly,

J. Chester Allen, President
James A Higgins Corresponding Secretary[129]

J. Chester Allen's anger is evident in this letter, but he also makes it clear that community interest for the South Bend branch of the NAACP has languished and that as he states, "was seemingly dead." He also states that the chapter had made contact with Smith and that she had declined to work with the local chapter, or perhaps a more apt description, she had refused to take direction from the local chapter.

Secretary Pickens responded to Allen's concerns with this letter:

December 16, 1933

Mr. James A. Higgins
Secretary South Bend Branch
135 N. Birdsell Street
South Bend, Indiana

My dear Mr. Higgins:

Your letter of December 13th protesting against our "appointing someone in this city to direct a campaign" for our twenty-fifth anniversary fund was the first information we have received that anybody is helping us in South Bend. We have appointed no committee, but we will be very happy to have any representative of any organization there to help in this campaign. Of course, we had written all of our branches about it, but we had heard nothing from South Bend until we received this protest indication that somebody else there was interested in our campaign.

Perhaps you are laboring under a mistaken idea: while we expect our branches to take the leadership for us in our 25th anniversary campaign, we are also using every other organization, which we can reach as stated in our literature. But there is one good fortune for every branch, whether the branch is active in the campaign or not, and that is that whatever is secured from any city or locality for the quarter-century fund, even though the branch should have nothing to do with securing the contributions, will count toward the quarter-century quota from that city or locality just the same as if the branch had conducted the campaign. Naturally, some churches or women's clubs or other organizations will form their own committees to collect money from their own memberships and perhaps from others. We could hardly limit them in that since we have announced to the whole country that we want the help of twelve million Negroes and every sort of organization among them. But, as I said in the

beginning, we hope for the leadership of our branches wherever we have branches.

The branch should form a sort of general committee to help in organizing these other committees in other associations. Perhaps this will explain to you what the situation is there, but as I said in the beginning, you were in error that we have appointed any committee there. Perhaps somebody who received our information through their own headquarters, such as a fraternity or church or lodge or women's club has begun to work for us at the suggestion received from their headquarters. That will be entirely regular and proper for them to do so.

I trust that this will inform you that no slight to the branch could possible have been offered from this office inasmuch as the branches were notified before the organizations were notified, and also because the branches still have just as much right to be active in the matter as they had in the beginning.

We are interested that you plan to install officers on December 31. I suppose you have already sent the names and addresses of the new officers to this office;

Very truly yours,
William Pickens,

Field Secretary[130]

There is an obvious tone of chastisement of the South Bend chapter of the NAACP in the Pickens reply. He also added a very telling postscript to the effect that the letterhead the South Bend NAACP was using was out of date by several years, indicating that the local branch had not been actively corresponding with the national offices for quite some time. This probably explains why the local branch had no knowledge of the structure of the Penny Campaign, or that it was open to all organizations and not limited to just NAACP chapters. The conclusion can be made that the South Berd NAACP that Reverend Smartt had guided into existence in 1919 had fallen into disarray by 1933, and that a reorganization attempt was underway, necessitating the election of a new slate of officers.

NAACP Field Secretary William Pickens evidently had little faith that the South Bend chapter was in a position to make the Penny Campaign a success. His

correspondence with Zoie Smith shows that he believed that she and the St. Pierre Ruffin Club were up to the task:

> January 12, 1934
>
> Mrs. Zoie Smith
> 1111 Bissell Street
> South Bend, Indiana
>
> My dear Mrs. Smith:
>
> I wish to thank and congratulate the St. Pierre Ruffin Club for taking up the effort to help us in our 25th Anniversary Campaign for a penny for every Negro in the United States. I am sure your local club can do great service by collecting for the members and their families and by collecting for the colored people in their neighborhood. I wish to say that although we use the colored populations as the measure of the amount to be raised, we are also asking our white friends to contribute to this fund.
>
> I have just learned that our Branch there has organized a 25th Anniversary Committee also. While our campaign invites the cooperation of every Negro organization of every kind wherever we have branches we try to get the other organizations who are helping us to cooperate with our branch people. Any organization can send its report directly to the National Office, or can give its report to the local Branch to be forwarded as it may elect. It is usually more effective, however, if the local Branch and other organizations team together and have an understanding of how and where they are to work. That would prevent some over-lapping and some waste of time and the loss of energy involved in having two people solicit the same person of the same organization.
>
> We wish you to know that we greatly appreciate the fact that you have taken this cause up. We hope a thousand other organizations of men and women throughout the nation will do likewise. We are putting down your club as a member of our 25th Anniversary Campaign with you as chairman of the committee representing the club.
>
> Sincerely yours,
>
> William Pickens
> Field Secretary[131]

The National NAACP had organized their 25th Anniversary around a fundraiser, the Penny Campaign, which was intended not only to raise money, but also to unite all local black clubs and interested white people in a common effort. The concept was to

bring people together, not drive them apart. Pickens must have been appalled when he received this letter from Mrs. Smith:

January 15, 1934

Dr. W. M. Smith
1111 E. Bissell St.
South Bend, Indiana

William Pickens
69 Fifth Avenue, New York

Dear Mr. Pickens:

Your letter came at the crucial moment as I was beginning to become disgusted, not discouraged. Whenever the NAACP calls, I will answer.

The branch here has been dead for four or more years and a few contentious, narrow-minded, fault finding people have written death and destruction to its door. The same few who are trying to hinder this committee from doing this much-needed work, putting over the campaign. The branch here cannot grow nor prosper. It is sad to say but true. I'm telling it to you for I feel you can help us. South Bend wants a branch 2nd to none, and we could have such a branch were it not for petty jealousies.

The St. Pierre Ruffin Club will be happy to get this help from you for last Friday we had communication from the local branch almost demanding that we stop the drive. We are a club of women 54 strong and will do every thing possible to have S. B. go over the top, 100% in this drive for several reasons, because it is our duty to bear for the space we occupy in this community. We must pay. We will pay. Second, because the NAACP is our only weapon of defense has requested us to do so. Third, because every time we think or read of the Scottsboro boys our hearts with revenge burn with injustice and with renewed determination. Again, we say lets make S. B. pay. It is hard though, with the nine persons who include the officers and members of the branch opposing us.

We are planning to close our drive with a mass meeting Sunday the 4th at 3 P.M. We want you to come if possible. We have no funds with which to pay your traveling expenses. Can't you make this an official annual visit? You haven't been here for a long time and the branch died when you stopped coming. You will do a personal favor should you come. Try.

Yours for service
Zoie O. Smith[132]

The elements of this letter speak for themselves. There exists open hostility between the St. Pierre Ruffin Club and the local NAACP; Smith refers to the leadership of the local chapter, which happens to be J. Chester Allen, as being contentions and

narrow-minded and responsible for the demise of the chapter. She implies that the local chapter is actually attempting to undermine the attempts of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club to succeed with the Penny Campaign. Her letter can only increase the growing distrust that the National NAACP has for the South Bend chapter.

There are, however, other more positive elements of this letter. Smith believes in the power of the NAACP, as being a defender of the Negro people against what she undoubtedly believes is a growing hostility on the part of whites toward blacks. She is also firm in her belief that the St. Pierre Ruffin Club women will continue in their efforts, and will be successful, even if the local chapter resents their labors. She intended to proceed no matter what the outcome.

The dream of Dr. Streets and the Sanhedrin has ended. Blacks are no longer working together for the common good of the race. Two important black organizations are engaged in a territorial dispute that was pointless and only served to split the black community and their vote in the future.

Secretary Pickens' reply to Smith came in a letter dated January 18, 1934. His wording was diplomatic; in today's vernacular, we would say that he was politically correct. He did not address any of the highly charged emotional issues that she had mentioned. His letter was an attempt to sooth the situation and perhaps was intended to provide an opening for the start of constructive dialogue between the two groups. He wrote:

> "Many thanks for your letter of January 15th, giving us some explanation of your generous campaign in behalf of this Association. Kindly give my thanks to the members of the St Pierre Ruffin Club for helping us in this campaign. Nothing that the club can do will stand in the way of what any other organizations may do in South Bend. I daresay that after your club and any other clubs, and even our NAACP branch, has done all that it can do there will be

hundreds and thousands of our people there who will not have been reached by this campaign. The field is wide enough for the activity of other organizations that wish to help us."[133]

The women of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club were quick to respond to this letter. The fund raising committee, Mrs. E. P. Gibson, Chairman, Mrs. Ferrell Love, Secretary, Mrs. A. H. Ganaway, Treasurer, and Mrs. Zoie Smith, City Chairman, informed Pickens that they would delay the closing of the Penny Campaign until March so that he could be there.[134] Pickens scheduled March 4th as the date he would be in South Bend and requested that the club raise fifteen dollars to help cover his expenses.[135]

Pickens made yet another attempt at healing the wounds each group had inflicted upon the other. He wrote this letter to the local South Bend Chapter:

February 6, 1934

Mr. Charles Wills
President S. Bend Branch
1210 N. Olive Street
South Bend, Indiana

My dear Mr. Wills:

The St. Pierre Ruffin Club of South Bend has kindly decided to hold a meeting in the interest of the 25th anniversary campaign when I can be there on Sunday, March 4th. I am sure this will be very helpful not only to the National campaign, but to the local branch. I trust that our Branch people will cooperate with this women's club in whatever way possible.

The club sent me the names and addresses of the members of its committee, appointed to see that the clubwomen and others pay up their quotas to our 25th anniversary fund, but I have not yet received the names of any committee appointed by the Branch. I remember also that for several years the South Bend branch has found it inconvenient to have a meeting for any national officer, and it is convenient for us that this club is willing to have its meeting at this time, for whatever they raise will go toward the credit of South Bend and will really be credited on the record of the South Bend Branch. We may get not only donations at this meeting, but also some memberships if the South Bend Branch will get in touch with the club people and make arrangement to have the membership appeal presented after they take up the collection and carry out their own financial program.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the officers of the club, because I am sure they will welcome whatever cooperation they can get from the Branch.

Very truly yours
William Pickens[136]

The frustration with the South Bend branch is evident in this letter. The women of the St. Pierre Ruffin Club have worked hard; they have raised money and invited him to come to South Bend. His own chapter continues to be obstinate and intransient. He again explains that whatever money the St. Pierre Ruffin Club raises will be credited to the South Bend chapter. He does, however, make the point that visits by officers of the NAACP may have been inconvenient in the past for the South Bend chapter to accommodate, but that there would be no excuses this time. He expected the local chapter to make itself available for the meeting.

As for the St. Pierre Ruffin Club, their response to the Pickens's letter was very amicable. Zoie Smith replied:

> Replying to your letter I wish to say the mass meeting on Sunday, March 4th will be held in Pilgrim Baptist Church at 3 p.m. We are planning to make a big affair and are going forward arranging a program.
>
> We thought if you reached here on Saturday, you could hold the meetings with the two groups as stated in your letter. If you do not get here on Saturday, we will have to arrange it sometime Sunday, proceeding or after the program.
>
> Awaiting your further orders, I am
>
> Sincerely,
> Zoie Smith[137]

The obedience and diligent efforts on the part of the Ruffin Club contrast sharply with the combative position of the local NAACP. The hostilities never abated between these two important black organizations. In late 1934, Pickens received this letter, addressed to his secretary, from Charles Wills, commenting upon another proposed visit:

December 14th, 1934

National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People,
69 Fifth Avenue,
New York N.Y.

Attention of Lucille Black

My dear Madam:

By all means Mr. Pickens should visit South Bend before June. His stand against the branch in a dispute over the Penny Drive Campaign when he was here last spring, has done more to destroy the branch here than anything else. Those he supported were never interested in the NAACP and have done nothing since; the active members, at that time, now say "let the Penny Drive Committee support the Association." As a result, I have been unable to revive proper interest in our branch.

I shall present your letter at our meeting, the 18th. Of course, Mr. Pickens is persona non grata to the branch, but I suggest that you offer us a date. By the time the offer comes, I think it will be accepted.

Very truly yours,

Charles Wills
President, South Bend Branch[138]

There is no attempt in the response of Wills to hide his anger and contempt for both Pickens and the Ruffin Club. The splintering of these two important black organizations would have far-reaching political effects on the election results of 1936. The animosity between these two leaders, Zoie Smith and J. Chester Allen, would manifest itself in the May primary of 1936.

Evidently little occurred during the year of 1935 to assuage the ill feeling that had developed between Smith and Allen. In the May primary of 1936 there was a great deal of excitement about J. Chester Allen's bid for the Democratic nomination for State Representative. Allen received the endorsements from the Federation of Teachers, the

Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Anti-Saloon League, and the Townsend Clubs, all of which were predominately-white groups.

Allen's candidacy in 1936 began in a normal fashion. Dickinson wrote: "Attorney Allen and F. Douglas Coker have been placed on the slate of the faction headed by the Democratic County Chairman. This should automatically cause Negro support to lean that direction. The men are running for state representative and delegate to the state convention."[139]

Coker was elected as a delegate to the Democratic State convention, receiving the third highest number of votes of any candidate running.[140] He and Mrs. Emma Gibson attended the Democratic convention held at Indianapolis during the week of June 15, 1936.[141] Although Coker, a local mortician, had been involved in local Democratic politics prior to his election this was his first important post representing the St. Joseph Democratic Party. In June of 1936, he was instrumental in forming the Colored Democratic district organization' serving as the organization's first president. This organization was unique. The association included the entire Democratic district and was not limited to just South Bend. Its purpose was to secure patronage jobs at the state level. The slate of officers represented three local counties. Coker, elected as president, represented St. Joseph County; T. E. Graves, first vice president, represented LaPorte County; J. P. Robinson, second vice president, and Lena Ballard, assistant secretary, were from Elkhart County. Sedocia Riddles, secretary, and Emma Gibson assistant secretary, both from St. Joseph County, completed the number of elected officers.[142]

In September of 1936, Coker continued his rise in local politics when he, as a colored Democrat, was appointed to a staff position at the local Democratic headquarters.

He refused to accept a salary. He believed that it should be the new policy of colored Democrats to contribute as much service and cash as possible to political campaigns, then, if victory came, patronage jobs and a political voice would be the result for black political workers.[143]

Allen did not fare as well as Coker in the 1936 political campaign. Allen lost the primary election by 300 votes, primarily because Zoie Smith refused to support his candidacy. Jesse Dickinson reported:

> This loss can be laid to Mrs. Zoie Smith, prominent in political affairs, who distributed a very effective propaganda, at the psychological moment. Mrs. Smith said, 'I had no intention of doing anything for or against Mr. Allen, but when his organization adopted the slogan, 'A vote for Allen Will Kill Zoie Smith,' I felt that it was my turn to do a little mud slinging.[144]

Nationally, the black vote went decidedly for Roosevelt and the New Deal, an affirmation of Roosevelt's policies. In major metropolitan areas such as Indianapolis, Lake County, and Evansville, an estimated 75% of the black vote supported Democratic candidates[145] However, even with this massive support, only a few Democrats managed election victories in Indiana.

In St. Joseph County, J. Chester Allen's defeat in the primaries of 1936 may have been a part of the larger picture of black minorities in white politics. Nevertheless, not all of South Bend's black leadership was willing to concede Allen's defeat to national politics, but rather to *at home* politics.

In September of 1936, four months after Allen's defeat, Jesse Dickinson reflected upon a very disappointing loss that he attributed to the dissension coming from within the black community:

> What a picnic we could have had if three-fourths of the colored vote would swing in one direction. However, as it stands both major parties have succeeded

> in keeping our sepia vote pretty much divided, thus destroying its effectiveness, and until that back-biting, shadow-lurking, Uncle Tomming creature that is gnawing into the very vitals of our political life is crushed, we need cherish no thoughts of real political power.[146]

In South Bend, the small black vote had been for decades firmly attached to the party of Lincoln, because of Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation and constitutional amendments passed by a Republican Congress during Reconstruction. The seemingly unbreakable alliance between the black vote and the Republicans however, was beginning to weaken because of the Great Depression and a lack of interest from the national party. For the first time blacks were seriously considering changing party affiliations. Blacks were choosing to vote for Democratic candidates.

Jesse Dickinson had accurately described this new attitude of the black voter when he wrote in 1934:

> There was a time when all Negroes voted the Republican ticket. No campaigning or soliciting was done because it was known that most Negroes did not consider the issues of the day. They simply voted straight Republican. If some other party had an issue that some thinking Negro wanted to support he would support the same very quietly and just let folks think that he was voting straight Republican. It was hard to take the blistering criticism that was sure to come from the masses of Negroes if it became known that he did not support the Republican Party. But that day is rapidly passing.
>
> Negroes everywhere are beginning to think about how election results are going to affect him and his family. We are beginning to think about what will happen tomorrow instead of what happened yesterday. We are reading Republican, Democratic, Socialist, and Communistic literature trying to discover where we can get the best deal for ourselves and our posterity.[147]

When Jesse Dickinson wrote these words he was 28 years of age, but already a leader in South Bend's black community and destined to become one of Indiana's most influential black political leaders. He, as were so many other African Americans, was searching for some sort of avenue that led to real political power.

There was also the issue of our nation's gradual involvement in WWII. A vote for Roosevelt meant a continuation of America's close ties with our European allies and acceptance of a potential collision of our foreign policy with that of Hitler's Germany. The possibility of war was very real to the citizens of South Bend in 1938. Although the specter of a major World War was alarming, rapid expansion of manufacturing production would require a massive increase of the industrial work force. Jobs, good jobs, were on the horizon for the black worker. This fact was not lost upon South Bend's local black leadership. For too long South Bend's leading industries had refused to hire black production workers or train blacks for semi-skilled or skilled positions. The opportunity for advancement for the black worker seldom existed beyond the foundries of Studebaker or low paying jobs as a domestic servant in the affluent homes of whites on West Washington Street.

In the late 1930s African Americans were not so willing to offer ready hands and a strong back as sacrifices upon the alter of an American war effort. They wanted much more than a job; they wanted jobs that had security, opportunities for advancement, access to unions, job skills, and training. In order to accomplish these goals, blacks must have political power, but the question for blacks throughout the nation as well as in South Bend was, "What kind of political power?"

The Depression and rapidly changing political spheres of influence and the expanding conflict on the European continent were causing significant stress upon the "business as usual" approach of the Republicans concerning the "Black" vote. Contrary to the situation in the Southern states, in the North, blacks did vote and even a small shift in the black vote could make a difference in the outcome of close elections. For the first

time since Reconstruction, Democrats began to sense that with the "New Deal" and Franklin Roosevelt there was a beginning of a change in black voter allegiance. The black vote was becoming a voting constituency potentially valuable to both political parties

In January of 1930, the *Indianapolis Recorder* had offered this view: "Political unrest and dissatisfaction is growing rapidly among Negro politicians and Republican supporters as President Hoover continues to ignore the claims of this loyal element of the party and promised political plums fail to be forthcoming." The perception that the Republican Party was the "do nothing" party when it came to the advancement of black job opportunities was rapidly becoming an accepted fact. The perception among black voters that the black vote could be parlayed into jobs for blacks was no longer simply a theory. Black voting equates to political power equates to government jobs. By 1930, in Indianapolis and in South Bend, those political "plums" were beginning to fall into the hands of black Democrats. In Indianapolis, for example, "Several Negro Democrats have recently been placed on the city payroll in line with the policy of the new administration to appoint party workers to places hitherto held by Republicans."[148] Newly elected Democratic mayor, Reginald H. Sullivan had rewarded black Democratic Party workers with jobs within his administration. The article continued with optimism that black Democratic workers would be rewarded by the Sullivan administration with even more job opportunities. This process of using political influence to win patronage jobs in contested electoral environments would have its impact widely in Indiana, and more specifically in South Bend

Jesse Dickinson summed up the political change in October of 1934: "I have no illusions about any political or geographical group having any particular love for me. Such is the case with many Negroes. They are lending their support to the party that will offer the most to the Negro of today and tomorrow. And to me this is just as it should be."[149]

Chapter 7: While Titans Battle

J. Chester Allen Waits on the Sidelines and Wins the Prize

On the evening of November 9, 1938, black political power achieved its first major success when attorney J. Chester Allen stood before a microphone at the WSBT radio studios in South Bend, Indiana, and gave his thanks to the voters of St. Joseph County for electing him as State Representative. This was a remarkable event for two reasons. First, J. Chester Allen was the first black person to win an election for state office from St. Joseph County, and second, although Indiana is historically a Republican state, Indiana Democratic voters managed to send two black representatives to Indianapolis that year, Allen of St. Joseph County and George W. Cable of Indianapolis.[150]

The 1938 election campaign in South Bend was very volatile. It was a referendum on FDR and the New Deal and one of the most contentious in South Bend history. At the beginning of 1938, the impending election appeared to be 'humdrum'. It was an off year election; President Roosevelt would not be up for re-election until 1940. Indiana was a state that was firmly in the Republican column. There was considerable discussion about the growing conflict in Europe and the worth of the New Deal, but the local South Bend election began as a normal uneventful election. When the election ended on November 6, FBI agents would be guarding the polls and J. Chester Allen would be the city's first black State Representative.

J. Chester Allen was one of six potential candidates, for three positions, when he filed to run for the office. He had established himself as an honest and competent lawyer. His activities on behalf of the black citizens of South Bend in ending the "No blacks

Allowed" at the Natatorium had earned him at least grudging respect within the white community, which meant that there was no overt hostility to attorney Allen's campaign for State Representative. Allen did not have the reputation of a man who was unable to control his emotions in public, or changed positions on issues. The citizens of South Bend knew where he stood on the issues, especially the issue of civil rights; he had demonstrated his dogged determination to open opportunities for his race numerous times. Allen also had been careful in his relations with the white community. He spoke his mind, but was never accusatory nor inflammatory as Jesse Dickinson's words were on occasion. Allen's words were mirrored by his actions; he was above all else consistent, a remarkable trait which enabled all voters to cast a vote for him with confidence. He was very active in local black Democratic Party politics but did not attend, or perhaps he was not invited to the large white Democratic gatherings held in South Bend. However, the local Democratic Party had recognized J. Chester Allen as a potential black Democratic leader as early as 1934. When President Roosevelt visited Notre Dame that year, attorney Allen and B. G. Smith of the Hering House were the only two South Bend black leaders to be invited.[151]

J. Chester Allen possessed an excellent reputation for honesty and competence as a lawyer and, for the white citizens of South Bend, J. Chester Allen was a safe black candidate to have on the Democratic ticket. He may not have appeared to be an activist, but in reality, attorney/candidate Allen was an activist. He was in the vanguard of a new way of thinking, a new approach to the white power structure that controlled every aspect of a black person's life, with the exception of the time spent in churches or in their private homes. Allen believed, as did W. E. B. Du Bois, that it was imperative that

blacks continue the fight for civil rights and that the battle must be waged in the arena of ideas. Economic power was important, but a job was not enough; intellectual parity with whites would open the doors of economic opportunity, and the acquisition of real political power would keep those doors open.

7.1 Black Political Power Survives in the Midst of White Political Rivalry

Allen's election victory was closely associated with South Bend's mayoral election of 1938. Three of South Bend's political heavyweights, two Democrats and one Republican, entered the race for mayor of South Bend in early 1938. The ensuing battle between the two rival Democratic candidates almost destroyed the party's hopes for a victory in the fall elections.

Figure 38 1938 Democratic Mayoral candidate, Jesse Pavey

Democrats Jesse Pavey and George Mayr opposed each other in the May primary. In the weeks preceding the primary election there developed a vitriolic and personal dislike between these two men that extended beyond the primary and did not end until just weeks before the November election.

In the May primary, the three highest vote totals for State Representative were for Irving Garnitz, 10,622, J. Chester Allen, 9,191, and Thurman C. Crook, 7,139, making these three men the Democratic nominees. None of the other potential candidates running in the Primary, either Democrat or Republican, broke the 7,000 vote plateau.[152] Pavey defeated Mayr after a particularly nasty campaign waged by Mayr. After his loss in the May Primary, Mayr launched a series of personal attacks upon Pavey and County

Figure 39 George Mayr

Democratic Chairman M. Edward Doran that caused a rift in party ranks. He encouraged his followers to create a competing St. Joseph County Democratic Club, which opened its headquarters in August of 1938 at 209 West Colfax Avenue. Posters in the windows proclaimed what Mayr contended were the brazen and selfish acts of Doran and his gang of Democratic cronies. Not only did Mayr attempt to form a rival Democratic Party within the party, but also his attacks on Pavey and the St. Joseph Central Democratic Party continued unabated throughout September and October. The growing internal strife within the regular members of the local Democratic Party became even more apparent when fellow Democrats displayed signs attacking the Democratic Primary winner, Pavey, on their automobiles. For Jesse Pavey and J. Chester Allen this dissension within the party did not portend well. Defeating the incumbent candidate was difficult enough with a united party, but with one as dysfunctional as the Democratic Party was in 1938, the task was daunting. Other factors, however, would come into play that would help both Allen and Pavey.

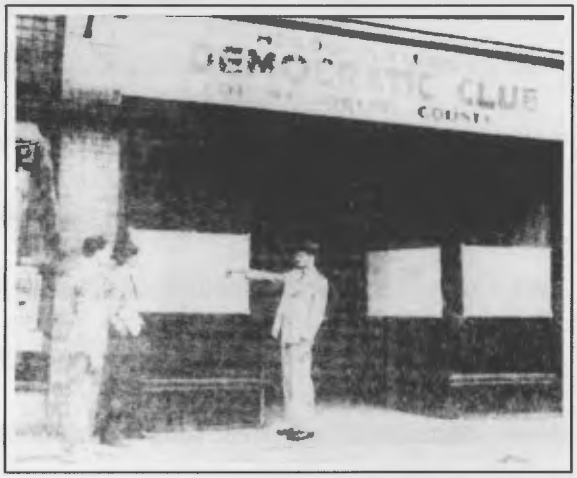


Figure 40 Mayr's attempt to establish a rival Democratic Club

J. Chester Allen was careful to keep his personal opinions concerning the rift within the ranks of the Democrats private. He did not endorse candidate Pavey, nor did

he criticize Mayr. Candidate Allen did continue his speaking engagements with the black Democratic clubs in South Bend and avoided all controversy.

Jesse Pavey also chose not to address the growing division within the Democratic Party directly. He continued his campaign against Republican incumbent Colonel George Freyermuth, arguing that Freyermuth was soft on crime and that South Bend was riddled with vice and a haven for criminal elements. Throughout August and September of 1938, "Straw Polls" conducted by the South Bend Tribune had indicated that Pavey was steadily gaining on Freyermuth.[153] These straw polls were especially significant because the polling procedures used had successfully picked the winning candidates in both the 1934 and 1936 elections.[154]

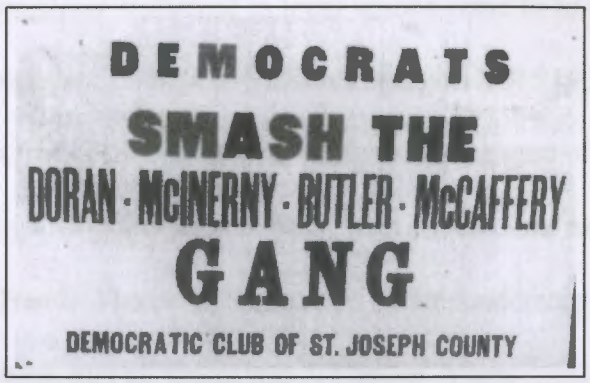


Figure 42 Months after his mayoral primary loss, George Mayr and his supporters continued their attack upon fellow Democrat Jesse Pavey. Signs such as this were displayed in the windows of cars, traveling the streets of South Bend.

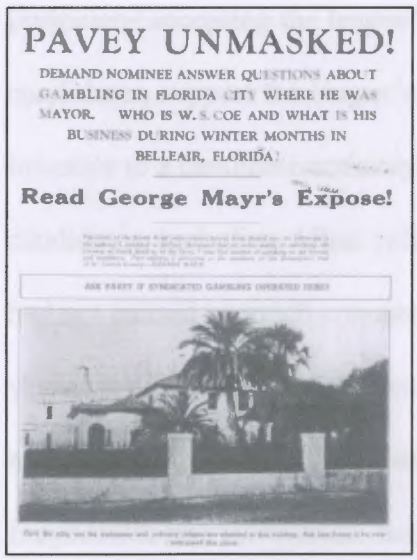


Figure 41 Brochure that George Mayr distributed in an effort to discredit Jesse Pavey

Other factors would favor the Democrats. Voter registration was extremely high. By the Monday deadline, party workers had submitted between 3500 and 4000 new registrations and transfers to the County Clerk's office. An additional 200 people came in on

that last day to register. The office remained open until 11:00 PM to assist all those who wanted to register to vote. Four clerks worked three days to catch up after the voter registration rush.[155]

Traditional Republican influence in local unions came to an abrupt end on October 24, 1938. A convention held at Studebaker union hall 919 swept the union Republican leadership from office in labor's Nonpartisan League of St. Joseph County. Every office vacated by a Republican was filled with a Democrat representing every major union in South Bend. The new Democratic Union leadership promptly endorsed all Democratic candidates, one of which was J. Chester Allen.

The idea that the Nonpartisan League was truly nonpartisan was in fact a charade. The association between politics and unions has always been intimate. What precipitated the change in political leadership of the Nonpartisan League was a requirement that all politicians accepting the league's backing give an oath pledging to support all endorsed candidates, support the league's complete legislative program, and refrain from doing an injustice to a candidate endorsed by the league.[156] The entire Democratic slate of candidates, including Allen, refused to take the oath.[157] In the past, signing the pledge had not caused so much concern, both Democrats and Republicans had done so, but this year was different. The political struggle between Freyermuth, Pavey, and Mayr, was the real issue. The Nonpartisan League had endorsed incumbent mayor Republican Freyermuth and Democratic mayoral candidate Mayr and shunned Democratic mayoral candidate Pavey. To the Democrats this was seen as a political trick designed to swing support of the slated candidates to George Mayr.[158] This would have exacerbated the already growing political rift within Democratic ranks, and aided the re-election of

Republican Freyermuth. Although, the league threatened to withdraw endorsements of candidates that failed to sign the pledge, the Democratic slate of candidates remained defiant and refused to sign such a pledge. They issued a lengthy statement, part of which read,

> We consider that a definite pledge by a candidate for public office to any individual, firm, corporation, society or group of individuals, be that group large or small, that he or she will conduct his or her office for the particular benefit of that individual or group is subversive of the true principles of American democratic government.[159]

The confrontation between Democrats and the Nonpartisan League is illustrative of how intertwined the political fortunes of J. Chester Allen and black political power were in this mayoral election. Allen's decision to not sign the pledge and not to break ranks with the Pavey mayoral campaign made it possible for him to win his own election for state representative. This struggle for power between the Nonpartisan League and Pavey supporters ended with the destruction of Republican power over local unions and the assertion of Democratic political power, which exists to this day. Allen had charted a safe course through a potentially hazardous political situation, and in so doing he had protected his candidacy and increased his viability as a black Democrat.

On Election Day, Studebaker Corporation closed, sending 6300 workers to the polls, and Bendix Corporation allowed its first shift to leave two and a half hours early, sending an additional 1000 workers to the polls. The Oliver Corporation ran staggered shifts allowing its employees adequate time to vote. Many other South Bend manufacturers followed the lead of the big corporations and closed early or provided their employees sufficient time to leave work and vote.[160] The WPA (Works Progress

Administration) granted half-holidays to all of its workers so that they could vote, the time to be made up after the election.[161]

7.2 *Republican Power Slips Away*

It seems inconceivable that incumbent South Bend Mayor George Freyermuth could not find some way in which to benefit from the civil war that had erupted within the Democrat Party, and exploit it to serve his own re-election. His inability to take advantage of the disarray of the Democrats remains a mystery.

Figure 43 Republican incumbent Mayor Colonel George Freyermuth

While Freyermuth dallied, Edward Doran, Democratic Party Chairman, was reshaping the political campaign. Doran's theme was consistent, vote a straight ticket, keep the "New Deal," do not split your vote. Elect all of the Democrats running, including J. Chester Allen.

The difficulty the Freyermuth campaign was experiencing was not totally a result of a Doran/Pavey juggernaut. Many of the political wounds Mayor Freyermuth suffered prior to the election were self-inflicted. On a Monday evening November 7, 1938, just hours before the voting was to begin, a large contingent of FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) agents arrived in South Bend. United States Marshall A. W. Hosinski, as directed by District Attorney James R. Fleming, had requested the agents. In the days preceding the election, Edward Doran had submitted evidence indicating that efforts had been made to bribe Democratic poll workers on the west side precincts. Reliable reports said that the evidence showed that $150.00 dollars had been offered to one man.[162] Early

morning voters arriving at West Side precincts to cast their ballots found themselves under the watchful eyes of FBI agents. Pavey had hammered home the belief that the Republicans were soft on crime, graft, and corruption. The summoning of FBI agents to protect the ballot box appeared to validate his claims. The Republicans also divulged that they intended to challenge those voters who had transferred their registrations. For South Bend that amounted to 15,000 voters. "It is reported that the challenges will number far more than experienced in any previous election," the Tribune noted.[163]

Scores of voters were challenged at the polls and the clerks at the voter registration office were busy attempting to straighten out the confusion. A picture taken the morning of November 8, Election Day, shows four individuals conferring with clerks, attempting to have their votes counted. It may be only coincidental, but of the four challenged voters, three of them were black.[164] The re-election campaign of Mayor Freyermuth had managed to alienate both Republican and Democratic voters.

Colonel George Freyermuth, a veteran of the Spanish American War, was fighting for his political life; he had few allies and his traditional Republican support within the black community was waning. Freyermuth had lost the usual support of the local black voter not only because of a national redefining of political affiliations created by the New Deal, but also due to a sequence of local events that began in 1935. The firing of South Bend's first black police officer and the ghost of a young black youth shot to death on the streets of South Bend had undermined support for his administration among South Bend's black voters.

7.3 *Crossing the Color-Line*

Figure 44 Chief of Police Laurence "Larry" Lane

In April of 1935, South Bend Chief of Police, Laurence "Larry" Lane made a concerted effort to eliminate South Bend's only black police officer, Lafayette "Dusty" Riddle, from the department. Democratic Mayor William R. Hinkle had appointed Officer Riddle to South Bend's police department in 1930. He was assigned to duty in the colored district.[165] Officer Riddle's career was relatively unnoticed until Republican Freyermuth defeated Democratic Mayor Hinkle in 1935, after which it seemed to become a priority to get rid of Lafayette Riddle. Riddle's removal from the police force was blatantly political. As a police officer he was gradually demoted from patrol officer to "common door shaker."[166] The city administration then charged that he did not meet the physical requirements for being a police officer. The black professional community of South Bend immediately hired doctors who were not on the city payroll to perform their own tests to determine whether Riddle met the physical requirements. He passed all of the physical tests required, forcing the doctors employed by the city to concur. The city then accused officer Riddle of falsifying his age on his application. At the hearing, officer Riddle's mother traveled several hundred miles to testify as to his date of birth and proved that the incorrect date entered on his application was due to a typing error by a city physician.[167] The board of safety, however, refused to listen to the evidence and at the end of the hearing terminated Riddle's appointment as a police officer. Riddle then secured the services of J. Chester Allen to argue the case on appeal.

Figure 45 Police Officer Lafayette "Dusty" Riddle.

The appeal took place on May 9, 1935, and did not end favorably for Riddle. The term "railroaded out of his position"[168] appeared in a column written in the *Courier* by Jesse Dickinson on May 11. The Freyermuth administration immediately hired a new black police officer, Robert Watt.[169] However, comments made by Attorney Charles Wills in the days prior to officer Riddle's dismissal fully disclose the scope of what the loss of Officer Riddle would mean to the black community. "If Riddle is dismissed it will be a loss to our people even though he is replaced, because he is five years closer to being eligible for promotion than any other race officer can possibly be in South Bend."[170]

This paragraph points out one of the most important but seldom considered aspects of gaining political power for blacks. Appointments to positions are important, but equally important is longevity on the job. Only by staying on the job can one use seniority to become eligible for promotions, and with promotions will come more power and authority, two very important assets that are required if blacks are to actually utilize political power. The Riddle affair damaged the credibility of Mayor Freyermuth within the black community. The black community had rallied to Riddle's support with local leaders such as Allen, Wills, and Dickinson, but in the end, black political power was ineffective, too weak to overcome Riddle's dismissal. The only tangible result was a growing dislike among the black voters for Mayor Freyermuth.

During that same week as Lafayette Riddle's hearing there occurred an event that would have even more severe repercussions for Mayor Freyermuth in South Bend's black community.

7.4 Blood on the Color Line

The shooting death of 18-year-old Arthur Owens by a white South Bend police officer, Fred Miller, on April 9, 1935, roused the black community to action. Jesse Dickinson helped elevate this shooting to national status in the headlines of the *Pittsburgh Courier.*

The sequence of events leading up to the shooting began when a black youth, Roosevelt Plump, was hired to wash a car. When he finished he decided to take the car for a joy ride and picked up his friend Arthur Owens. The owner of the car reported his vehicle stolen, after which officers Samuel Koczorowski and Fred Miller spotted the car and forced it to the curb at the corner of Liston and Adams Streets. What happened after that is debatable. The officers said that Owens, although he had no arrest record, exited the car and began to run, but other witnesses stepped forward and denied that he was running when shot. Regardless of what transpired before

Figure 46 The shooting death of Arthur Owens as presented by the *South Bend News Times*, front page April 9, 1935, and in the *Pittsburgh Courier* on April 20, 1935.

the shooting, the result was that a young black youth lay dead and a picture of two white South Bend police officers, standing with guns drawn over the body of Arthur Owens, appeared in the evening addition of the *South Bend News Times* and a few days later in the *Pittsburgh Courier*. The *News Times* photograph was taken less than five minutes after the shooting of Owens.[171] South Bend's black community was incensed, and with their anger many other past grievances came to the forefront. Dickinson wrote on April 18:

> This town is seething in anger because of the event. Many who have lived here for a decade or longer recall the days when Negroes had little or no protection from police. It was a common occurrence for Negroes coming off the night shift at Studebakers to be beaten by policemen, who declared 'You have no business to be out this time of night.' No man of color could feel safe after the imaginary curfew hour.[172]

Figure 47 *Pittsburgh Courier* headline of April 20, 1935

The *South Bend Tribune* had a slightly different version of the sequence of events. The *Tribune* reported that there had been several false alarms of sightings of the car during that morning. South Bend police were convinced that the car was a ruse, used by bank robbers intent upon drawing police units from the downtown area in order to rob a bank.[173] This unsubstantiated rumor may provide some explanation as to why the police

used such deadly force. Tensions between the white and black communities of South Bend were extremely high. South Bend was precariously close to violence and rioting.

Figure 48 A small secondary headline appearing in the *South Bend Tribune's* evening addition on April 9, 1935.

A meeting was held at the Dunbar Center (Hering House) on April 10, 1937. It was the largest gathering of white and black South Bend citizens ever held in the city's history, up to that time.[174] A committee composed of James Higgins, Jesse Dickinson, Reverend Nelsen Pryor, Elizabeth Fletcher Allen, and Zilford Carter called the meeting.[175] At this meeting Allen, Higgins, Pryor, and Carter signed a resolution, which was sent to Mayor Freyermuth. It read:

> WHEREAS, Arthur Owen, a youth 18 years of age, was shot and killed by Police Officer Fred Miller in this city, yesterday, under circumstances which seem to us wanton, and unnecessary, while, according to eyewitnesses, he, the said Arthur Owen was in the act of surrendering to constituted authority;
>
> BE IT RESOLVED, that we hereby express our indignation upon this wanton taking of human life. . . That we hereby call upon Chief of Police Laurence J. Lane, the mayor of our city and the board of public works and safety to immediately suspend said Officer Fred Miller from duty pending a full, thorough, and complete investigation of said killing.[176]

A committee consisting of, Dr. Gilbert Cox and Reverend William Zimmerman, (both white ministers) Reverend Nelson Pryor, Mrs. A. T. Stanley and Mrs. Zoie Smith, was named to raise funds for an investigation into the shooting and for obtaining legal remedies.[177]

The Central Committee of Colored Republican voters also circulated a letter of protest, which was signed by Dr. Bernard Streets, Mrs. Nellie Mae Smith, and James Higgins.[178] The letter read:

Dear Sir:

> At the regular meeting of the Central committee of Colored Republican voters, Tuesday night at 135 N. Birdsell St. attention was called to the brutal murder of a Negro youth by Officer Fred Miller. Our investigation supported by 11 eyewitnesses, discloses that the shooting was wholly unnecessary and unwarranted. In that, there was no attempt to resist arrest or escape at that time. The fact that the bullet entered the chest is proof positive that the boy was not running from the officer and further that all the witnesses agree that he was shot as he stepped from the car with his hands raised.
>
> It is resolved that we go on record as condemning the brutal act of Officer Miller, and that the mayor and the board of works and safety immediately suspend Officer Miller pending further investigation.[179]

Mayor Freyermuth assured the Colored Republicans that their charges would be thoroughly investigated.[180]

There is another version of the events surrounding this meeting, and what many in the community believed was the "murder" of Owens by South Bend police, written in an official letter to the National NAACP by Charles Wills, president of the local South Bend chapter, on April 19, 1935. According to Wills, local civic leaders called the April 10 meeting under the auspices of the local branch. Wills does not mention other black leaders such as Elizabeth Allen, Zilford Carter, or Dr. Streets. Wills also gives credit to himself for appointing the committees that would oversee evidence gathering and fund raising. Wills wrote: "Charles H. Wills, President of the local branch, appointed a Citizens Prosecutions committee, composed of Colored Civic leaders and including

Reverend Gilbert S. Cox and Reverend William C. Zimmerman, pastors of leading white churches."[181]

Wills makes it a point to reference the support of white citizens for the meetings as well as white appointees as committee members for investigation of the shooting and for fund raising. Funds were raised, but how much, or what happened to them, is unclear. Although no allegations of impropriety were publicly aired as to the possible misappropriations of the money, it is clear that many in the community, especially Jesse Dickinson, were not comfortable with the fund raising committee's explanation of accounting procedures. In January of 1936, nine months after the shooting of Owens, a report had still not been filed with the public concerning the funds.[182] One month later, there was an accounting but it was not made public, which prompted Dickinson to write: "A report of the money taken in for the Owen Case has been obtained but has not been released for publication. People who handle affairs that belong to the public would do well to give these matters publicity as soon as it is expedient to do so."[183]

The money controversy is symptomatic of the dismal results of this entire affair. The strategy employed in the Wills letter, in an attempt to engage the National NAACP in this local tragedy, failed. His letter to the national headquarters elicited this reply:

> April 26, 1935
>
> Charles H. Wills, Esq.
> President, South Bend Branch
> 1210 North Olive Street
> South Bend, Indiana
>
> My dear Mr. Wills:

> Thank you for sending us the report in your letter of April 19 of the action taken by the Branch in the killing of Arthur Owens by a police officer. The National Office will watch with interest the prosecution of this case and will be ready to lend any advice, which the local branch deems necessary. From your report, however, we judge that you are proceeding promptly and correctly in arousing sentiment and collecting funds to prosecute the case. We know that the local attorneys' familiar with the community and with Indiana laws will be best able to handle this situation. Please keep us advised.[184]
>
> Very sincerely yours
>
> Assistant Secretary

The position of the National NAACP is clear: it will watch from afar, will lend advice if requested, will not provide any funds and will not send any kind of legal support such as a team of experienced lawyers to assist. In other words, the local chapter is on its own. The position of the National NAACP that the South Bend Chapter is left to deal with the Owens shooting, with only its own resources, is interesting. Wills undoubtedly wrote his letter after conferring with other black leaders on how best to proceed; I do not believe that he intended to diminish the effort of any of those who had initiated that first meeting in the aftermath of the Owens shooting, or take credit for the actions of others. His intent was to secure the legal and financial assistance from the national association, support that he knew would be needed if this case was to ever go beyond a local situation.

The National NAACP chose not to become involved with the South Bend police department's shooting of Owens, even though Jesse Dickinson had brought the shooting to national prominence in the *Pittsburgh Courier*. It is possible that the National's position on this case has something to do with the treatment they received from Wills, specifically in the letter dated December 14, 1934, only four months prior to the Owens shooting, in which he used blatant sarcasm to insult the National NAACP, and its field

director. Perhaps the National organization, gauging from its past experience, believed that the local chapter was in such disarray that the group was incapable of defending civil rights, or had the resources necessary, or what is perhaps most important, the community support required to engage in a protracted court proceeding. Another explanation could be that the National NAACP simply did not have adequate financial resources to give at this time. For whatever reasons they opted to not become involved.

From the newspaper accounts of the time, it seems clear that the local NAACP had nothing to do with organizing the meeting, or in the actual selection of the committee members. Charles Wills and J. Chester Allen may have been there, but neither they nor the NAACP is mentioned. The mass meeting was a spontaneous event orchestrated by a few white and black leaders to diffuse a potentially dangerous situation for the community.

Elizabeth Fletcher Allen was the force behind the black community during the early hours following the shooting of Owens. She and perhaps Zilford Carter are most likely the authors of the resolution, which both signed, along with other prominent black leaders, that was sent to the mayor's office. This is the first recorded public display of her leadership potential, when she relinquished her desire for anonymity and became part of a core group of both white and black community leaders who kept a highly emotionally charged situation from becoming a race riot on the city's west side. This event in her life may have provided the impetus for her ill-fated attempt to secure the Democratic nomination for state representative in 1936.

In the days immediately following the Owens shooting, county prosecuting attorney George L. Rulison did request assistance from attorneys Charles Wills and J.

Chester Allen in preparing for the grand jury, which was to meet in May.[185] Both Wills and Allen would eventually represent the NAACP in this case.

The threat of violence slowly ebbed from the streets and homes of South Bend's black community as they waited for justice. When days and weeks went by with no action, anger gave way to frustration within the black community and found outlet in other ways. A white grocer who owned a store on Liston Street close to where the shooting occurred was a witness, but when he did not come foreword and describe what he had seen, many Negroes living on the West Side began to boycott his store.[186]

Bill Harris, who owned a restaurant on Birdsell Street and coached the Sailor Girls softball team, often called "Uncle Bill's All Colored Girls Softball Team," went on record stating that Chief of Police Laurence "Larry" Lane was not welcome in his establishment unless it was on official business. In the past Lane had made derogatory racial comments about Uncle Bill Harris and his wife Della.[187]

In May of 1935, the grand jury met to examine the evidence pertaining to the shooting of Arthur Owens. This particular Grand Jury was very significant because seated as jurors were the first women and the first African American ever to be chosen for a panel. The women were Mrs. Anna Ross and Mrs. Dorothy Gooley, and the African American was Reverend H. R. White, pastor of First A. M. E. Zion church.[188]

Even this new mix of gender and race, however, made little difference. The grand jury chose to take no action. Officer Miller was never charged with the killing of Owens. The legal system of South Bend ignored the protests of its black citizens, doing nothing to diminish their fear of white police power.

Dickinson, in his weekly column, wrote this biting reply to the grand jury's decision:

> "No indictment," these are the words that have been ringing in our ears for the last few days. Portions of our local executive department are getting as putrid as those of the Southland. Down there, a policeman shot and killed an innocent Negro and he was discharged . . . that is more than has happened to Officer Miller. Our County prosecutor, who uses the term "darky," in the presence of Negroes, went so far as to refuse to act on an affidavit that was presented to him. We should remember these things during the next elections.[189]

The Owens case faded from the newspaper but not from the public's memory. Jesse Dickinson would bring up the Owens shooting again in 1937. The Central Committee of Colored Republicans had not forgotten the letter they wrote, and neither had black Democrats. A small fragment of justice would emerge in the election of 1938.

7.5 Whites Defend the Color Line

Figure 49 Headline in the South Bend Citizen, November 2, 1935

Reverend Gilbert Cox, one of South Bend's most respected white ministers, became a victim of white backlash over the Owens case. Many of South Bend's white residents did not appreciate his very public support of the black community and his involvement with the investigation and fund raising committees. His encouragement of South Bend's black community to pursue the Owens case, and the use of his pulpit to encourage racial harmony, was seen as a disruption in the white effort to separate white and black citizens and to keep in check black political and social power. Maintaining and

expanding the color line was part of South Bend's social culture of the 1930s. Justice of the Peace Charles Wills was busy attacking an ever-expanding color line. In one instance, he took a local theater to court over the issue of forcing blacks to sit in the balcony. In 1933, a jury awarded Reverend Mark Gilbert 25 cents restitution for being asked to sit in separate seating reserved for blacks at the Colfax Theater.[190] This decision limited the expansion of this practice in theaters, but in other parts of the city's economy segregation was still accepted.

The Caros restaurant located across from the South Bend courthouse served black customers as long as they sat behind a screen.[191] Wills took this restaurant to court, stopping the practice. South Bend still contained considerable segregation and Dr. Gilbert Cox, pastor of the First Methodist Church, one of the largest and wealthier white churches in the city, was being very vocal with his criticism of how the city was treating its black residents. Reverend Cox had always stood ready to use his time, money, and influence to prevent or right conditions that were unjust to Negroes.[192]

Reverend Cox believed in social justice and was not afraid to preach the idea from the pulpit. He often placed the blame for the disadvantages faced by blacks and the economic problems the nation were experiencing upon white employers and white employees. Members of the church, employers and employees alike, took exception with their minister's position, and sharp differences resulted.[193]

Practicing the beliefs he preached had taken Dr. Cox on a path that had crossed the color line. Neither the color of his skin nor the position he held in the community would be able to salvage his career. In the city, the color line was real: it was not a figment of imagination, and crossing it cost Reverend Cox his position as pastor of the First Methodist Church. He left the city on November 1, 1935. The city's black residents were saddened at such a loss. He had done so much for the black community since his arrival in the city in August of 1929. The Civic League provided a testimonial luncheon in his honor. J. Chester Allen was master of ceremonies. Charles Wills, B .G. Smith, Reverend White, and Josephine Curtis honored Dr. Cox. Grace Wilson Evans, a black leader in the state, provided the keynote address.[194] Dr. Cox made his final remarks, and left the city the following day. In his weekly column Jesse Dickinson provided this commentary: "Words are far too course to give a true description of the atmosphere of the meeting. It was one of those occasions when the soul must be placed in a tangible position with the deep current of beautiful and surging emotions, to be appreciated."[195] Dr. Cox had crossed the line and his punishment came at the hands of his own congregation. In South Bend, the color line may have been anchored at the Natatorium, but elements of discrimination and segregation had obviously found their way into many areas of the city by 1935. Helping black citizens, however, would not have been the only reason. His

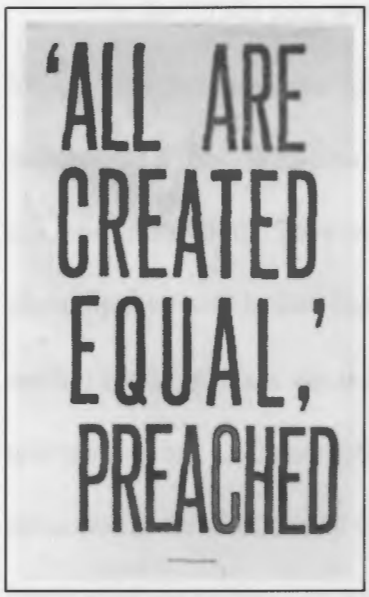

'ALL ARE CREATED EQUAL,' PREACHED

Figure 50 Title headline referencing the sermon Dr. Gilbert Cox preached at the First Methodist Church that led to his ouster as minister, *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 2, 1935

message of social and economic justice may have been seen as sympathy for socialism, by some and could have contributed to the speed with which he left the community.

In the 1930s jobs were at a premium; there was not much that was of greater importance than having a job and keeping a job. The only protection a worker had for his family was a job. White workers were threatened by the increasing numbers of black citizens and with the growing abundance of black labor. W.E.B. Du Bois identified this phenomenon well before the crisis of the Depression. He saw racial prejudice as acute among working-class whites, and as operating in lockstep with their economic interests and ambitions. Du Bois believed that white workers, because of their prejudice, would monopolize new industrial opportunities and at the same time limit the opportunities for black workers to have access to new job technology and training.[196] South Bend was such a city, highly industrialized and technologically advanced for its time. During the 1930s the city had a white work force that was skilled and an over abundance of unskilled labor, both white and black. For many white laborers, business owners, and politicians, controlling black labor and limiting black social and political power was an important priority. Mass meetings of black citizens at the Dunbar Center, threats of possible violence, and a vocal white minister preaching equality from the pulpit, were not situations the white residents of the city found acceptable. The purpose of the color line was to limit minority black citizens from having a voice in the decisions that affected them, an attempt to keep power in the hands of whites.

The black citizens of this city were equally apprehensive. While the color line may often be invisible to whites, it is not to blacks. By the mid-1930s black citizens of the city felt the tightening grip of segregation and discrimination. They responded by

uniting in a struggle against it. They were vocal in their dissent and resisted. Many white residents joined them in that struggle because they believed that a color line could only impede the future success of the city. The color line affected both white and black citizens and had an equally chilling effect on the ability to voice an opposing opinion or take a differing stand on the issue.

For the city's black population, 1935 was a year marked by many low points. A black police officer with the most tenure had been fired, a black youth was killed at the hands of white police officers who went unpunished, beatings of black workers at Studebaker were common, and a most trusted and respected ally within the white community had lost his position. Furthermore, the local chapter of the NAACP was suffering from self-inflicted wounds, and its ability to lead appeared to be questionable.

In July of 1935, the Freyermuth administration, having offended blacks by removing Lafayette Riddle, attempted to placate the black population of South Bend by appointing Albert Pope to join Robert Watt as a second black police officer. Publicly the Freyermuth administration proclaimed that Officer Pope was a Republican; however, the black citizens of South Bend knew that in reality he was a Democrat only pretending to be a Republican.[197]

The black citizens of South Bend were of course pleased that now there were two black police officers on the force. However, placing two black men on the police force did not atone for the absence of an investigation into the shooting death of Arthur Owens, or the very public humiliation of Officer Riddle.

On October 9, 1937, South Bend's black community was stunned with yet another case of white police brutality under the Freyermuth administration. Odessa Alford, janitor for two apartment houses located on opposite sides of the street, was running from one apartment house to the other because he had forgotten to turn off a water faucet. Two South Bend police officers saw a black man running and assumed that he was robbery suspect. Before Mr. Alford could explain, officer Homer Ames struck Alford with the butt of his pistol fracturing his skull. For this act, Officer Ames was given a reprimand and a brief suspension.[198]


VICTIM OF COP'S MISTAKE

Figure 51 Picture and article appeared in the Pittsburgh Courier on Saturday October 9, 1937.

As preparations for the fall elections of 1938 began, Republican Mayor George Freyermuth discovered that the actions of the South Bend police force had alienated white and black voters in the community, and within the ranks of the black Republicans there was little enthusiasm or support for his bid for reelection.

Chapter 8: J. Chester Allen

The Election of 1938

Figure 52 Front cover of an elaborate, twelve-page Democratic campaign brochure.

On November 4, 1938, four days before the election, black Democrats held a major rally at the Pilgrim Baptist Church. Edward Doran, Third District Democratic chairman, presented the slate of candidates, after which J. Chester Allen provided the preliminary remarks. The "Elect Allen" campaign brochure carried this message to black voters reminding them of past injustices at the hands of a Republican administration:

> The Colored voters of South Bend must remove from office the present Republican City Administration. During their term of office one colored boy was killed, a law-abiding citizen was bludgeoned and sent to the hospital with a fractured skull.[199]

Within Allen's campaign brochure, Doran wrote a personal plea for support from South Bend's black community for Allen's election.

> On behalf of the Democratic Central Committee of St. Joseph County, I wish to thank all our loyal colored Democrats … mention must be made of the candidacy of your own J. Chester Allen for the office of State Representative from St. Joseph County.
>
> He is exceptionally well qualified for this position and with such able representation of the colored people in our state legislature, the interests of all colored persons in the State of Indiana will be well guarded and promoted.

> We are proud to have him on our ticket and feel that he will creditably represent all citizens of St. Joseph County in the legislature. We are particularly interested in electing J. Chester Allen to this office and call upon all colored voters of this county to join our own candidates in a concerted drive to elect J. Chester Allen.[200]

Election Day November 8, 1938 was cold and nasty. High winds and intermittent snowfall led some political observers to speculate that the number of voters would drop just like the temperature. However, that was not the case; voters were anxious to cast their ballots and came to the polls in record numbers. The politics of the Pavey-Freyermuth campaign had energized the voters.

> South Bend's mayoralty race has overshadowed that of any other office as far as South Bend voters are concerned. St Joseph County, Democratic, and Republican leaders and nominees have staged a political show lasting many months and including maneuvers and propaganda that has been without equal in previous local elections.[201]

South Bend had six voting districts, three of which had significant concentrations of black voters. Two of those districts were the second and the sixth districts, located on the west side of the city. The remaining voting district that held a larger concentration of black voters was the fourth, located on the east side of the city. The voting population of blacks was small, but in this election, the slightest shift in balloting would have enormous effect on the outcome. At the end of the day South Bend residents would cast 43,663 votes; Jesse Pavey would win by only 427 votes.

8.1 A Second, a Sixth, and a Fourth make Pavey and Allen Winners!

The racial makeup of South Bend's voting is very important. The density of black voters was in the Second, Sixth and Fourth districts. These areas were where the housing was the poorest, the property values the lowest, and the rents the highest.[202]

With all votes in, the Democrats had carried the day. However, it is interesting that of the three Democrats running for the state legislature, attorney Allen had the fewest votes. Mr. Thurman Crook and Mr. Irving Garnitz were white Democratic candidates and received total votes respectively of 36,141 and 35,229. Allen's vote total was 34,441. Of the three Republicans running, not one broke the 32,000-vote plateau. Both Crook and Garnitz gathered more votes than Allen in all of the South Bend districts, including the sixth, which indicates that the black voters of the city were solidly behind the Democratic ticket.

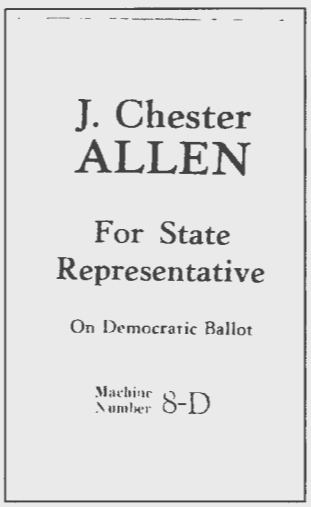


Figure 53 Vote for Allen campaign literature from the 1938 election.

J. Chester Allen had won his first election, the first black State Representative elected from St. Joseph County. The question has been, "How did he do it?" Clearly, Allen won with the white vote; he carried the white voting districts of Mishawaka by over 800 votes, but as his campaign moved from city to rural, his vote margins quickly declined. In the voting districts surrounding the city the margin of victory was less than two hundred votes. Straight party voting, in these areas played an instrumental role in his first political victory. His winning margins, especially in the poorer neighborhoods of South Bend, were higher aided by a black vote that remained relatively united in its support of him and the Democratic Party. Party loyalty, however, was not the only reason he had won this election. J. Chester Allen had established himself as a leader. He was a graduate of Brown University and had earned a Bachelor of Laws degree from Howard University. He was a member, supporter and a past president of the local chapter of the NAACP. Appointed to the position of St. Joseph

County Poor Attorney in 1933, he had served in that capacity until 1936. As Poor Attorney, he represented those who were unable to hire other legal counsel; this fact undoubtedly furthered his political support among the working poor. His legal work in desegregating the Natatorium had made him a visible lawyer and citizen of South Bend in both the white and black communities. Allen was active in civic affairs, committee member of Boy Scout Troop 42, member of the Hering House Board of Management, and chair of the advisory board of the St. Joseph County Colored Democratic Club. His support of Lafayette "Dusty" Riddle and his role in the Arthur Owens case had increased his stature within the black community. His association with other black leaders of both parties furthered his reputation as a man of character and honesty. Attorney Allen also benefited from excellent press coverage provided by Jesse Dickinson, reporter for the *Pittsburgh Courier.*

Being a staunch supporter of the local Democratic Party and of Roosevelt and the New Deal helped, but Allen had also learned a valuable lesson from his defeat in the 1936 primary. His loss had been due to an internal conflict within the ranks of black Democrats, a division that he could not reconcile. In 1938, he was careful not to open any old wounds or engage in any kind of demeaning political rhetoric, even though the contentious mayoral race undoubtedly made that challenging. He, instead, chose to say little, and limited his campaigning to the black voter areas of South Bend. He caused not a ripple of controversy during either the hotly contested primaries or the general election process of 1938.

Nevertheless, while there is a temptation to portray J. Chester Allen as a noteworthy political leader in 1938, the truth is that the election of 1938, for state representative, held little importance for the voters of St. Joseph County. Their attention was riveted on the local political drama generated by Freyermuth, Pavey, and Mayr. Allen was very careful not to bring any negative attention to him or to take any risks that might have inhibited his election. Essentially, the candidacy of J. Chester Allen went unnoticed in the election of 1938, and he rode the crest of a Democratic wave to victory.

Figure 54 Mayor Jesse Pavey seated at a table with state representative J. Chester Allen

Allowing victory to find him rather than to risk loosing that victory to overzealous campaigning, is a testament to his political maturity. With his election, black political power had fulfilled the aspirations of those who had begun the process decades before. It was not the type of political authority that could dominant an election, but rather a political power that had the ability to sway the outcome of an election, especially when working in concert with the more influential white political power. Allen was the first to unite a small but important black vote, and at the same time bridge the gap between white and black voters, so as to find acceptance from both groups. Allen established the basic winning formula for a succession of black political candidates. The black candidate, in order to win, must have the solid support of the black voter and be "acceptable" to the white voter. Whites voted for Allen either because they considered him a "safe" black to

vote for or because he had given them no reason not to vote for him. In South Bend politics, no one labeled as a radical has ever been rewarded with a political victory.

Allen had a history of actively pursuing civil rights and confronting white abuses of power, i.e. the Natatorium and the Owen case. The white community, however, was able to acknowledge his abilities as a lawyer, but did not equate his advocacy of civil rights as a threat. During the 1938 election, Allen practiced a strategy of accommodation with the white controlled Democratic Party, a strategy that worked. This does not mean that he had abandoned his agenda of civil rights and equality of opportunity. If he were to pursue his agenda outside of the city limits of South Bend, he had to win this election and acquire the political power to do so. However, winning his first election was only a beginning. His political power as a freshman representative in the Indiana General Assembly would be limited. He had to learn the procedures, make alliances, formulate a plan, and place himself in a position to execute that plan. He would do all that he could to learn, he would bid his time, and he would wait for what he hoped would be a successful reelection campaign in 1940; then he would act.

Chapter 9: Allen and House Bill 445

Hitler has a "third term."
Mussolini has a "third term."
Stalin has a "third term."
Roosevelt WANTS a third term![203]

With the 1940 election fast approaching, Representative Allen was campaigning for re-election. His first term had been uneventful. Daylight saving time and the dangers of fireworks were issues that generated some heated conversation among the legislators. Allen spent his time learning the craft of being a state legislator; his agenda remained, as it had always been, the extension civil rights and increased job opportunities for blacks.

On March 23, 1939, Indiana Governor M. Clifford Townsend had signed into law legislation introduced by Allen. The new law provided for the perpetual membership of a black citizen on the State Board of Education. This action meant that the long held Indiana custom of running the state's schools with exclusively white representatives had ended.[204]

Representative Allen had also introduced bills that would create a position on the IHSAA (Indiana High School Athletic Association) for blacks and end discrimination against blacks in the selection of juries. Unfortunately, much of Allen's civil rights legislative agenda met with little success. The bills he introduced were often given a favorable recommendation, but were then assigned to committees for further study and subsequently never heard from again. This was a common fate experienced by most civil rights legislation in the Indiana General Assembly during the 1940s. Although Allen's successes were few, the legislative contacts and the experience he was acquiring would

prove invaluable. Allen's hard work and spotless reputation for honesty had won him many friends at the state legislature. He felt confident that South Bend voters would send him back to the state legislature for a second term.

Allen continued with his support of the Democratic Party as he did in the 1938 election: no controversy, supporting Roosevelt, and keeping his message to the political center. He praised the local WPA (Works Progress Administration) for hiring black workers, encouraged voting a straight ticket, and cautioned black voters about the dangers of becoming "slaves to the tradition of the Republican Party."[205] He also warned voters that the Republicans real agenda was dismantling all of the social programs, namely Social Security, that the Roosevelt administration had enacted. Allen wrote:

> Standing upon my record as a citizen interested in the security of my people, I unqualifiedly recommend the policies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as the most beneficial to colored citizens of any administration in the country's history.[206]

There were, however, a few distractions at home. Elizabeth had written a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt a few weeks earlier requesting her assistance in establishing decent integrated housing for blacks. Mrs. Roosevelt apparently replied, stating that she believed the races should live separately.[207] Mrs. Allen was so incensed over this remark that she promptly resigned her membership in the St. Joseph County Women's Democratic club, became a Republican, and began campaigning for Republican Presidential nominee Wendell Willkie! She wrote:

> I unreservedly urge my race without regard for personal aggrandizement to support the national republican ticket in 1940 and I volunteer my services to the national Republican committee to do all in my power to aid the debunking of the Roosevelt idealism in the minds of the Negro people whom I touch.[208]

Elizabeth Fletcher Allen's decision to leave the Democratic Party and publicly support the Willkie/Republican ticket, while at the same time her husband was running for re-election as a Democrat and supporting Roosevelt, must have made for some very interesting dinner conversations at the Allen house. Their youngest son, Dr. Irving Allen recalled, "Conflict was open and frequent in the Allen household, and for the most part, was philosophically welcomed."[209] That is probably an understatement.

However, if there was conflict between the two, none of it ever became a campaign issue. In St. Joseph County, it was a landslide election in favor of President Roosevelt, the New Deal, and all of the local Democratic candidates. In the all-important Second and Sixth districts the vote was eight to one in favor of the Democrats.[210] It was a record vote, with over eighty-one thousand voters going to the polls. Every Democratic nominee was elected in the county. The rampaging democratic voters recorded less than 2,000 split votes.[211] The election of 1940, however, was a dismal failure for most Indiana Democrats. Republicans reasserted control of the General Assembly. The Democrats did manage to win the Governorship with the election of Lieutenant Governor Henry F. W. Schricker. His election would have enormous impact upon Allen's advocacy of securing equal employment opportunities for black workers.

Figure 55 Democratic winners in the 1940 election for state representative, Thurman C. Crook, J. Chester Allen, and Edward Olcazk.

Allen's successful re-election as state representative set the stage for the most significant political challenge he would ever face. He was about to introduce into Indiana's General Assembly a sweeping civil rights agenda for black workers.

Legislation that he envisioned would at last throw open the doors to job opportunities for the black worker, House Bill 445.

9.1 House Bill 445

J. Chester Steps Out of the Shadows

Within weeks of his re-election J. Chester Allen made a dramatic and forceful legislative effort to change the status quo for Indiana's black citizen workers. He introduced House Bill 445 in February of 1941, just days before Valentines Day. The thrust of this legislation was jobs for blacks. He had the support of the only other black Representative in the Indiana General Assembly, James Hunter of East Chicago.

In the Senate newly elected Republican Robert Brokenburr, representing Indianapolis, awaited HB 445. Senator Brokenburr was the only black member of the Senate at that time. Obviously, one black Senator and two black Representatives was not an overwhelming display of black political power, but with the support and cooperation of other white legislators and the surprise and speed with which he introduced the legislation, J. Chester Allen anticipated passage of HB 445 before any opposition could be assembled to stop it.

As has been witnessed in South Bend, Indiana was not a state that had moved with tremendous forcefulness in respect to protecting or extending the rights of its black citizens. In 1881, a constitutional amendment changed the phrase "every white male citizen" to "every citizen," thereby granting blacks the right to vote. In 1885, blacks were given the right to serve on a jury and in that same year an equal accommodations law was passed. This last piece of legislation, however, was easily circumvented. It was not until 1961 that even minimal penalties for disregarding this law were enacted. The year 1909

had been notable because for the first time blacks were allowed to join the Indiana National Guard, although they could only serve as members of an all colored infantry battalion. In 1933 there was an amendment passed stipulating equal employment on public works projects. However, there were no substantive measures enacted to enforce this legislation, leaving only vague references to cancellation of contracts if it were proven that a contractor had knowingly discriminated in the hiring of workers.

House Bill 445 was a bold attempt to rectify these past weaknesses of prior civil rights legislation. The significance of House Bill 445 cannot be overstated. It would have forced the Indiana business community to stop the discriminatory hiring practices that were prevalent during the late 30's and 40's. If this bill had passed the General Assembly, Indiana's Commissioner of Labor would have been the recipient of far-reaching new powers that would have linked the employment of blacks with the awarding or the continuance of lucrative government defense contracts.

The opening paragraph of house bill 445 began:

> A Bill for an Act concerning employees or persons, firms or corporations engaged in the fulfillment of war defense contracts of the federal government, making it unlawful to discriminate against employing any person on account of race, color, or creed and providing penalties therefore.[212]

Monetary fines for failure to comply ranged from $100 to $500 dollars if it was a provable offense that a person had been denied employment because of his race, color, or creed. Cases generated by allegations of discrimination in hiring practices would fall under the jurisdiction of Indiana's court system. Also contained within the bill were extensive regulations requiring the filing of detailed records and reports with the state labor commission. For example, business owners would be accountable for maintaining

records of all applicants and the disposition of their application. A standardized system of measuring the qualifications of each applicant would be created with each applicant given a rating of how he/she was or was not qualified for the job. Lists of those qualified for jobs would be generated with positions filled by the first person on the list with the highest rating. House Bill 445 also provided that the state labor commissioner had the power to issue new regulations and procedures, as he deemed necessary. All manufacturing involved with government defense contracts let within the State of Indiana would come under the jurisdiction of the Indiana Commissioner of Labor. HB 445 would create a bureaucracy that would have scrutinized the ability of Indiana business to hire, fire and promote employees.[213]

There were two other notable requirements written into House Bill 445 that make it very clear that the intention of this bill was aimed directly at what, in terms that are more modern, would be called "leveling the playing field." These two stipulations were: 1) Giving public notice that all applications for employment would be received which "shall not include any requirement as to the race, color or creed of the applicant," and 2) making available application forms "which forms shall not include any inquiry or make provision for any notation as to the race, color or creed of the applicant."[214] Eventually, due to national civil rights legislation, these ideas would become part of standard hiring practices.

Passage of HB 445 would radically alter the hiring policies of Indiana business. The intent of this bill was to force open the doors of business and industry so that black workers, for the first time, would have an equal opportunity to secure jobs that paid well

enough so that the black worker could begin the process of achieving economic parity with his fellow white worker.

9.2 The Genesis of HB 445

Allen and Frank J. Evans, a white Republican representing Hamilton County, introduced House Bill 445. Representative Allen was primarily responsible for the introduction of HB 445, but the lineage of this bill can be traced to a report submitted to the New York State Temporary Commission on the condition of the Urban Colored Population, and subsequently presented to the state legislature of the state of New York in 1938.[215] Representative Allen acknowledged this fact in an article dated March 22, 1941, which appeared in the *Indianapolis Recorder*. Representative Allen wrote,

> From the provisions of a bill recommended to the New York Legislature . . . for the alleviating of discrimination against Negroes . . . the writer drafted the mechanics of House Bill 445 to which he attached a preamble setting forth the ideals of American Democracy as being the right of every citizen to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and its necessary corollary, the right to earn an honest living.[216]

Representative Allen further stipulated that the New York Commission generated this report because of the Harlem race riots of 1935. Allen confirms that he had contacted the legislative bureau of New York and had received two bi-annual reports from this commission.

Allen's introduction of HB 445 predated President Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802, which prohibited government contractors from using race, color, or national origin to discriminate in hiring workers, by several months.

Allen also became interested in promoting such a bill as the result of a luncheon meeting held in South Bend in November of 1940. Allen had called for the meeting to discuss what he referred to as the "mockery of democracy" created by asking blacks to fight and die for a country that refused to provide equal access to jobs.[217] He also expressed the viewpoint that by not taking advantage of the abundant numbers of unemployed black workers the nation itself was imperiled. Those in attendance were the manufacturing division of the South Bend Chamber of Commerce and St. Joseph County legislators. There were no real tangible results from the meeting, as Representative Allen suggests when he wrote in March 1941, "To my knowledge nothing has been done about the matter by that organization."[218] His frustration with the status quo of blacks not having equal access to work opportunities, even with the impending crisis of a world war, prompted him to look for other ways in which to use his political power to open the doors of job opportunities for blacks.

9.3 House Bill 445 Sees the Light of Day

Allen introduced legislation referred to as House Bill 445 into the House of Representatives of the Indiana General Assembly on February 10, 1941. The bill was referred to the Judiciary B committee, of which Allen was a member. The bill was not delayed long in committee, as Representative Allen and his fellow committee members returned the bill to the house floor for a vote almost immediately with a recommendation for passage, an auspicious beginning. Shortly thereafter, the bill was printed and copies made available to all representatives on February 14, 1941. At the request of a committee of distinguished colored citizens of Indianapolis, the bill received a second

reading on February 19.[219] That same day the bill received a third and final reading and passed out of the House of Representatives with a vote of 91-0.

9.4 Ambush in the Senate

The amicable treatment HB 445 received in the House was not to continue in the Senate. Indiana's only two black representatives, J. Chester Allen, and James Hunter, had worked diligently for passage of this bill. Many white representatives, especially Representative Evans, assisted them. There had been no opposition to the bill and its final passage in the Senate appeared to be very favorable. Senator Robert L. Brokenburr would lead the way.

Figure 56 In the Indiana General Assembly, Representative Allen confers with Senator Brokenburr and Representative Hunter, concerning passage of HB-445.

In the days prior to HB 445 arriving in the Senate, however, strong opposition forces were beginning to manifest themselves. The Indiana State Association of Chambers of Commerce mobilized quickly and became the main opponent of the bill, led by executive vice-president of the State Chamber of Commerce, Clarence A. Jackson. The Association's core disagreement with the bill was the amount of power given to the Indiana State Commissioner of Labor. It was their opinion that it was excessive. The Association used every maneuver at its disposal to keep HB 445 from passing. Regrettably, one of those tactics was to link HB 445 with the Communist Party, a common ploy, playing upon the fears of Indiana residents.

The Chamber's attack on HB 445 was supported by individual local Chamber of Commerce organizations statewide. The Elkhart Chamber of Commerce, for example, sent a petition signed by all of its members to all of Indiana's state senators, urging that the bill fail to pass. The letter was later printed in the *Indianapolis Recorder*. Within two short paragraphs, L. G. McIntire, Elkhart executive secretary, made several statements that are representative of the stereotypical thinking of that period, stereotypes that had created harsh barriers to black employment:

> For goodness sake, maintain your courage and continue to hold in your committee House Bill 445. I am sure you will agree with me that the white people of the state of Indiana are not yet ready and willing to have a small number of colored people start dictating to the whites as to whom they shall employ. I am quite sure too, that if I were a factory employee I would not relish having a Negro working along side and I know that this must be the attitude of all the good citizens of Indiana employed in industry or on national defense jobs.
>
> It seems equally inconceivable that the white people of the state are forced to exert themselves in an effort to ward off the encroachment of the Negroes. I am sure that your efforts will be appreciated by every good white citizen of the state of Indiana."[220]

The underlying fear presented in this letter is the fear of sharing power with blacks. The association between blacks having access to jobs and the eventuality of blacks coming to some kind of "power" to dictate to whites is clear. If blacks linked black political power with the acquisition of jobs, then whites connected jobs for blacks with the creation of a competing political force that threatened the white monopoly of power and control.

Blacks had been coming to Indiana in large numbers since the first great migration of WWI. The educational and living advantages of residing in Indiana, as opposed to the South, were what brought them here. Unfortunately, access to a relatively

better education did not necessarily lead to job opportunities. Discrimination in Indiana was not as all encompassing as in the South, but it was actual nonetheless.

> It is true that the crude signs so evident in southern states were usually missing from public places, but such appearances were deceptive. Indiana's anti-Negro prejudice, in some instances, took a form so subtle that only the highly intelligent and well-educated Negro could fully appreciate the ingenious means used to carry out a policy of segregation, which differed principally in method, rather than in degree of purpose, from that of the South.[221]

Another difficulty that HB 445 encountered was that not all black leaders in the State of Indiana supported its passage. Mrs. Grace Wilson Evans, president of the Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, strongly objected to enactment of the bill.[222] Mrs. Evans believed that labor unions, and not business, were the real impediment to the employment of blacks. In an article dated March 27, 1941, after the demise of HB 445, she provided a partial explanation as to why she did not support its passage. She wrote:

> When I asked the author of the bill [Allen] if he would add the following amendment to the bill, that any union of organized labor that refused the admit Negroes into their unions be fined no more than five hundred dollars nor no less than a hundred dollars, he said that he could not do that because organized labor was with the bill. It was then that I knew that my people were being used as a cat's paw to put over a program of disturbances as the labor racketeers are putting over all over the United States where there are large industries.[223]

Equating J. Chester Allen and HB 445 with labor racketeering is an exaggerated viewpoint, but it does represent the transition in black political beliefs. Prior to the politics of the New Deal, black political thinkers had made attempts to deal with the overpowering strength of the white political system. Attempts such as creating islands of black economic self-rule, as found in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, or Nicodemus, Kansas,

had failed, as had the Back to Africa movement proclaimed by Marcus Garvey. The political policy of accommodation championed by Booker T. Washington and his followers had had much more success as far as appealing to the black voter. However, accommodation and supporting the Republican Party, in the view of many black Democrats had not provided for blacks the dramatic gains in fulfilling the promises of equal rights and unbiased treatment supposedly guaranteed by our own nation's founding documents.

Many blacks, however, failed to support J. Chester Allen and passage of HB 445 because they were fearful of how the white establishment might react. Evans and those who supported her views were following a long established path, one of accommodation and an unwillingness to challenge white supremacy directly, a position evident in this statement written by her:

> I believe that the American white man, the best friend that the American Negro ever had, and the American Negro the best friend the American white man has ever had, can get around a conference table and work out a program that will give employment to all people, regardless of race, creed, or color.[224]

For a growing majority of blacks, Roosevelt and the New Deal represented an opportunity for real change for the future of the black worker. The New Deal and the realigning of the black vote supporting Democratic Party lines attracted new leaders of black political thinking. These were the men and women W. E. B. DuBois described as the "Talented-Tenth," those with the education and leadership necessary to lead the multitude of unskilled, untrained, and an educationally ill-equipped black work force. Men such as J. Chester Allen were representative of this new way of addressing an old problem, denial of opportunity.

Representative Allen responded to his critics from within the black community for his unwavering support of HB 445, even in the face of so much white opposition:

> As the writer scans the headlines of the newspapers with their screaming messages of unrest among the people both at home and abroad, he is convinced that it is vitally important that the Negro citizen continue his unbroken record of loyalty to America and at the same time militantly insist that he be given his full rights of American citizenship. In this way, he will keep intact the bridge of Democracy over which America will safely cross the treacherous floodwaters of present worldwide social and economic disorders.[225]

With this statement, J. Chester Allen clearly affirms his loyalty and patriotism to his country and at the same time reaffirms his commitment to the pursuit of equal opportunity and civil rights for his race.

The strength of the traditional political policy pursued by black Americans, the "let us not confront white folks directly," attitude was weakening. However, this approach was old and well established. It would not be until the 1960s when the "lets get along with white folks" would be replaced with the "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired" approach.

Using its considerable influence in the Indiana Senate, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce forced HB 445 back to committee for amendments. These delaying tactics proved to be successful; the amended bill eventually returned to the Senate, but by that time opposition to its passage was well organized and the bill was once again sent back to committee for further study, where it eventually died. The Senate had successfully circumvented the uncomfortable position of actually taking a vote and making a public disclosure of each senator's position on this legislation. Black Republican Senator Brokenburr wrote,

> The bill is dead but the cause is not and never will be. The Negro citizen is entitled to jobs and training in connection with the United States defense program on an equal basis with white citizens. If war comes, he will have to die for his country like his white brother, and for this reason and many others, he should be given an equal chance to earn a decent living.[226]

House Bill 445 failed to become law, but as Senator Brokenburr indicated, the cause was not. As the impending crisis of WWII edged closer, Indiana's black work force was left without an advocate, waiting for leadership and job opportunities.

Governor Henry F. Schricker would provide a plan and J. Chester Allen would lead the way. The black worker would soon be the beneficiary of job opportunities throughout the state of Indiana. A new strategy would challenge the invisible and apparently permanent "No Blacks Allowed" sign that had always been on the front door of Indiana businesses.

Chapter 10: A New Approach

The Indiana Plan of Bi-Racial Cooperation

After the defeat of HB 445, events on the national scene took the attention of Indiana's black work force. A. Phillip Randolph was organizing a march on Washington demanding that blacks have opportunities for employment in the expanding defense industry. President Roosevelt decided that it was politically expedient, and in the best interest of the nation, to reach a compromise with Mr. Randolph. Thousands of marching blacks, demanding jobs and fair treatment, would have been a propaganda windfall for our enemies abroad. President Roosevelt convinced Randolph, and the Committee for the Mobilization of Negroes, not to march on Washington by issuing executive order 8802, banning discrimination in defense industries because of race, creed, color, or national origin, which was the main and vital aim of the March on Washington.[227] A Fair Employment Practices Commission was also established. Roosevelt's executive order, one of the most important ever issued by a President, became law on June 25, 1941.

Figure 57 Governor elect Henry F. Schricker

J. Chester Allen's attempt to join the need for black labor with worker rights, House Bill 445, had predated Roosevelt's executive order by several months. In addition, Indiana Governor Henry F. Schricker had made a pledge during the 1940 election campaign that he would strengthen Indiana's program of national defense and at the same time consider the plight of black workers. The Governor's office had remained neutral on the question of HB 445 in February/March of 1941, but with Roosevelt's executive order,

Governor Schricker moved quickly to implement a plan that he had been developing, called the Bi-Racial Committee. The purpose of this committee was to create an organization that could achieve with voluntary cooperation what HB 445 would have done by law. Success depended upon old rivals coming together to work for a common goal, securing an adequate labor force to defend the nation on the home front. Governor Schricker, after consultations with two of his advisors, former Assistant Attorney General Willard R. Ransom and W. Chester Hibbitt, managing editor of The *Indianapolis Recorder,* agreed that South Bend Representative J. Chester Allen should fill the position of Special Aide to the Civilian Defense Council.[228] Governor Schricker also chose Mr. Clarence Jackson, Executive Secretary of the Indiana State Chamber of Commerce to be the State Civilian Defense Director.[229] If the Governor had any reservations concerning appointing Allen and Jackson to such important posts, given their history, he never mentioned it. He believed that both of these men were patriots and that they would never jeopardize the nation's ability to fight a war by placing a personal belief ahead of the country's welfare. On that, he would be right.

Figure 58 Clarence Jackson opposed Allen and the passage of HB-445, was now working with Allen to find jobs for black workers.

10.1 Old Opponents Form a Coalition

Governor Schricker had chosen the two men who had the leadership capabilities necessary, the energy, and the organizational skills that were essential to the task. The fact that his choices had only a few months previously opposed each other over the issue

of HB 445 did not make any difference. Two men who had battled so furiously in the past now would be working together for jobs for blacks.

Early in June of 1941, Governor Schricker began to implement his plan to create the Indiana Bi-Racial Committee. Leadership, both black and white, would be drawn from Indiana's eleven Congressional districts. On June 20, 1941, Governor Schricker appointed a 16 member black committee to work with the Indiana Chamber of Commerce on the problem of providing jobs for black workers. Representative James Hunter, Chester Hibbitt, and South Bend resident Reverend Gerald Hayden were members of this committee.[230] The State Chamber Committee consisting of 23 white industrialists chose as their leader Stowel C. Wasson, of the National Malleable & Steel Castings Company, Indianapolis. John Campbell, of the Campbell Box and Tag Company, in South Bend was also asked to join this committee.[231] The two committees that would become the Bi-Racial Committee were now in place.

On June 27, 1941, in the library of the State Chamber of Commerce, Governor Schricker opened the first meeting between the white Committee of Industrialists and the black committee members. The Indiana Bi-Racial Committee was now operational. In his opening remarks, he stressed the importance of including the black worker as an integral part of the planned industrial expansion made necessary by the war effort. When he ended his comments, he offered this sentence as a possible theme, which the Bi-Racial Committee could use to signify its commitment to securing equal job opportunities for the black worker: "God has made us neighbors, let justice make us friends."[232]

The Governor's remarks were probably overly optimistic, these men had few things in common. The white Committee of Industrialists represented Indiana's elite, the

captains of industry, or in other words, the white power structure personified, complete with its social and economic advantages, status, and prestige. These were the men who had succeeded in derailing Allen's HB 445, just months before, because they preferred a gradual approach to blending black workers into the labor force, rather than being compelled to do so by the state. However, the black committee members also represented something, an acknowledgement that black labor was crucial to the state's ability to produce the war materials necessary to defend the nation. The abundance of black labor joined with the growing strength of black political power, had brought the white power structure to the bargaining table, it was imperative that a meaningful dialogue be initiated between these two very separate groups, if either group was to have any success.

J. Chester Allen was willing to listen, but not to wait. Black labor was idle; a war was coming, and the nation needed an adequate trained labor force ready to produce the war material necessary to win. Allen believed that now was the time to couple that need with black civil rights and decent jobs and fair wages.[233] There was only one resolution that would come out of this first meeting, but it was a very important action. During his remarks to the committee, Chester Hibbitt argued that one of the main obstacles to the hiring of blacks was that there were no blacks working in State Employment Services as interviewers for job placements. Hibbitt believed that white workers in the State Employment Service had an unsympathetic attitude toward the black worker. At this point in the meeting, Clarence Jackson suggested the drafting of a resolution expressing the committee's stand on the question of black interviewers in the employment offices. F. F. Massey, Borg-Warner Corporation, Muncie, made a motion to draft such a resolution,

and I. H. Freeman, General Electric Corporation, Fort Wayne, seconded. A resolution was submitted and committee members gave their unanimous approval.[234] The resolution read:

> The Bi-Racial Committee respectfully petitions the Indiana Employment Security Board to give serious consideration to placing colored interviewers in the employment offices located in districts with a heavy Negro population. The Committee feels that such action would be very helpful in utilizing our full man-power during the emergency created by our national preparedness program in addition to rendering a worth-while aid to Negroes seeking work.[235]

Positive response to the resolution came almost immediately. Colonel Everett L. Gardner, Director of the Indiana Employment Security Division, relayed to the Committee his desire to cooperate. He assured the committee that in addition to janitors, elevator operators, messengers, and clerks, the Indianapolis office had recently appointed two black interviewers. He indicated that he hoped that black interviewers would soon be sent to other cities to determine the extent of discrimination in other cities.[236]

Eventually this resolution produced the desired effect; the Indiana Employment Office did hire black personnel to do job placement interviews with black workers. The change in procedures may seem small, but it was, nonetheless, an important step toward employment opportunities for the black worker.

The committee also agreed upon two other key points. First, the individual state chambers of commerce would be encouraged to actively participate and all chambers of commerce throughout the state would have timely communication of all decisions made by the committee, Second, that individual bi-racial committees would be established in cities that had a Negro population of sufficient size to warrant it.

10.2 Selling the idea of jobs for blacks

Eventually there existed twenty local Bi-Racial Committees throughout Indiana. These committees were comprised of three representatives from the A F L (American Federation of Labor) and C I O (Congress of Industrial Organizations) councils, three employers, and three blacks.[237]

As newly appointed Negro Activities Coordinator of the State Defense Council, J. Chester Allen moved quickly to enlist the support of organized labor for this new initiative for the black worker. Perhaps the criticisms leveled at him and HB 445 by Grace Wilson Evans during February and March had created a sense of urgency. She had made very public her belief that the real obstacle to black employment was the discriminatory practices of the big labor unions and not manufacturers.

Whatever his reasoning, J. Chester Allen immediately initiated a strategy to gain formal acceptance of the proposals of the Bi-Racial Committee with the AFL and CIO. HB 445 would have mandated open access to defense jobs for blacks, but with that bill's defeat, Representative Allen was now going to have to sell the idea of jobs for blacks. Allen wrote: "Essentially, the Indiana Plan of Bi-Racial Cooperation is a job of salesmanship being carried forward on the three-way basis of mutual cooperation between the employer, labor and the Negro."[238]

A commitment on the part of organized labor was the first item on J. Chester Allen's promise to unlock job opportunities for blacks in Indiana. On September 19, 1941, Allen spoke at the annual state convention of the Indiana State Federation of Labor, (AFL) held in Evansville. The theme of Allen's remarks was jobs for blacks. The title of his speech was "Termites of Democracy."[239]

After Allen's speech, the Indiana Federation of Labor convention delegates passed AFL Resolution No. 49. For the first time the Indiana AFL was on record supporting jobs for blacks:

> The defense of the nation requires the mobilization of all skilled workers; Negroes have been denied the opportunity to make their full contribution; the National Executive Board of the AFL resolves to make every effort to solve this problem; the AFL encourages employers to abide by Executive order 8022; and "The State Federation of Labor will establish representative group that will work with the Indiana Defense Council to solve the problem of job discrimination. [240]

The CIO followed with a statement issued on September 23, 1941:

> Mr. Allen, the CIO opposes discrimination you will bring to our attention any instances of Negroes being denied employment by the refusal of CIO men to work with them, and we will certainly see to it that that situation is corrected. The CIO has definite, strict policy on this; its constitution forbids discrimination on account of race, creed, color or nationality.[241]

The CIO proved that its word and its actions were one in the same. When Negro delegates of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America were denied rooms at the Claypool Hotel in Indianapolis, the convention was moved to Cleveland, Ohio. The Indiana CIO issued a statement denouncing the Claypool for its, "vicious Jim Crow policies."[242]

Meanwhile, the State Committee of Industrialists, which was a part of the Bi-Racial Committee, sent a letter to all of the principals in the 92 counties of Indiana urging the enlargement of defense training opportunities for Negro workers in all of the public schools having defense training. Moreover, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce produced pamphlets and questionnaires in 1941, 1942, and 1943, and sent them to its members encouraging them to hire black workers and to solve problems with black unemployment.

As 1941 drew to a close the prospect of finding a job in an Indiana defense plant, if you were black, was improving. HB 445 had brought to the forefront the problem of discrimination against blacks in the hiring of workers. Its defeat had stimulated a partnership between government and the Indiana Chamber of Commerce to solve this problem. However, the salesman who sold the program of "Jobs for Negroes" was Representative J. Chester Allen. He was a man determined to create job opportunities for his race. Allen turned the words spoken by government officials and the presidents of boards into meaningful action. Without the sacrifices and the driving energy of this one man, the future of black employment throughout the state would not have looked as favorable.

He gave a speech wherever he was invited, to conventions, service clubs, civic groups, and churches. He was tireless in his efforts to talk with both black and white groups about the "Negro's role in the war." He would give a speech and then have to drive many miles to find a room for the night, because he was often denied overnight accommodations because of the color of his skin.

Allen drove an average 1800 miles per month for seventeen months. He applied for numerous additional gas rationing cards. Allen was guest speaker at events in Gary, East Chicago, Logansport, South Bend, LaPorte, Elkhart, Fort Wayne, Kokomo, Terre Haute, Vincennes, Evansville, Jeffersonville, Richmond, Muncie, Indianapolis, Bloomington, New Albany, Anderson, Marion, Shelbyville, Franklin, and Columbus.[243]

As the black leader of Indiana's Bi-Racial Committee, Allen was also responsible for the establishment of, and being the principle advisor for, each Bi-Racial Committee in each city. The success of many of these individual committees was due to his steadfast

and capable leadership. He did all of this, not for himself, but for a future he envisioned in which members of his race would be able to apply for a job and get that job because of qualifications that person possessed, and not be denied because of skin color.

10.3 Jobs in the City

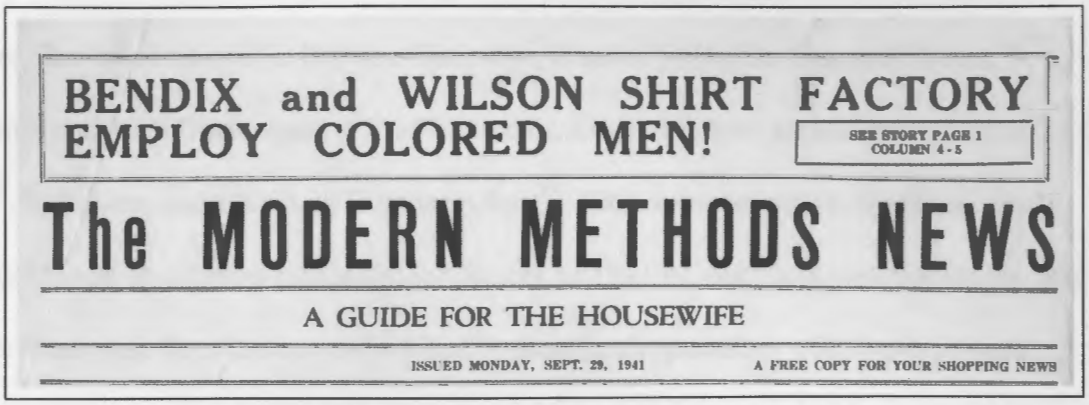
Throughout World War II, South Bend never enjoyed an over abundance of available labor. There were 2,000 job openings listed early in 1944, causing the South Bend area to lose defense contracts because of its "critical" labor shortage classification from October 1943 until May 1945.[244] South Bend's black leadership believed that the shortage of skilled labor was the ally they needed to break the barriers of job discrimination and job training.

By May 1944, there were only 24 registered unemployed workers in the four counties served by the South Bend office, with 87,932 workers in the same region, and an unemployment rate of 0.027 per cent.[245] Only at the end of the war did labor availability meet the demand. This was due in part because South Bend business was beginning to reduce output in 1945 as the war reached its now obvious conclusion.

Although WWII did have a major impact upon lowering the number of unemployed black workers, the city also had a substantial history of circumventing any efforts on the part of its black citizens to obtain a job requiring anything other than a strong back and willing hands. Securing a job was possible; securing a job with a future was another matter.

On January 25, 1941, as J Chester Allen prepared to introduce HB 445, a headline in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, declared "None of South Bend's Fifty Million in National Defense Contracts for Negroes." Bendix Corporation, known as a company that

consistently refused to hire black workers, had recently procured several defense contracts totaling between ten and fifteen million dollars. The Studebaker Corporation, meanwhile, was building a new plant for the manufacture of aircraft engines, a building that would encompass fifteen acres of land, but had no plans to hire black workers. These rapidly expanding defense industries required skilled workers, especially machinists, capable of operating industrial lathes. Training men how to operate lathe equipment was a high priority. The Central High School machine shop became an important training center for lathe operation, holding classes during the day as well as in the evenings. Black students were refused admission to this training or charged a fee to enroll, that the public [white students] did not pay. The reason given was that South Bend industry did not employ Negroes in craft positions.[246] For example, Arthur Madison, the only black person in a WPA program training men in lathe operation had graduated first in his class, but could not find a job in South Bend as a lathe operator. He was later transferred to a sewer project.[247] A "catch 22" existed!



BENDIX and WILSON SHIRT FACTORY EMPLOY COLORED MEN!

SEE STORY PAGE 1 COLUMN 4-5

The MODERN METHODS NEWS

A GUIDE FOR THE HOUSEWIFE

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Figure 59 Big news for the city's black community in 1941

On April 12, 1941, B. G. Smith, director of the Hering House, managed to obtain a meeting with a highly placed Bendix official. That man was probably Marvin Heidt, personnel director of the Bendix Products Corporation. Dr. Bernard Streets had made several attempts to persuade Bendix officials to hire black workers in the 1930s, but had had no success.[248] However, WWII, Executive Order 8022, and the presence of the Bi-Racial and Defense Committees had changed the thinking of Bendix management. Although, there were no public announcements of any positive movement toward the hiring of blacks at Bendix, it was acknowledged that a working relationship was now present between Bendix and the black leadership of South Bend.

In late September or early October of 1941, J. Chester Allen, with the approval of the black District Chairman [Reverend Gerald L. Hayden], appointed additional members to South Bend's local sub-committee of the Bi-Racial Committee. The sub-committee was to work in cooperation with local white committees to be set up under the white District chairman.[249] As in the past blacks, were denied autonomous power. They were

still without the political power to direct a bureaucracy whose policies directly affected their ability to find meaningful employment. The South Bend sub-committee members were Reverend Gerald L. Hayden Chairman, Charles Wills, Dr. Bernard Streets, B. G. Smith, and John Davis, local A F of L director, Edgar Winters, local director of the C I O, J. P. Robinson, and Elizabeth Fletcher Allen.[250] This sub-committee, working closely with Marvin Heidt, was successful in October of 1941 of making it possible for the first five black men from the city to be hired by Bendix Corporation. All five men were assigned to the foundry department. They were Jesse Dickinson, and South Bend Central High School graduates Dewight Smith, John Bell, Weldon Pope, and Morman Weatherspoon.[251]

Jesse Dickinson later reported that he was one of those who worked on the selection committee that picked the five men who would report to Bendix to take their pre-employment physicals. Being physically fit was only one of the criteria; a high school education and the ability to manage one's temper was also mandatory because, as Mr. Dickinson stated, "We expected trouble."[252] Unable to find a fifth applicant that met all of the criteria, Jesse Dickinson accompanied the four men selected to the Bendix physical. He anticipated that he would fail the exam due to high blood pressure, but he passed and became the fifth black to be hired at Bendix.

Union affiliation was a critical part of being a Bendix employee: you had to belong. Jesse Dickinson noted that the man leading the union meetings was obviously from the South because of his Southern manner of speech. Dickinson, latter made it a point to ask this man what his views were on blacks joining the union:

> "I know just from listening to your speech that you're from the South, and I know the attitude you have about people of my group. I just wanted to know if there was any use for me to bother with it [the union]. Shall I just pay my dues and forget it, or can I be like any other member?" He said, "Well, Dickinson, I'll tell you. I'm a CIO man. Now it's true, my daddy was a small town country lawyer down in Mississippi and we feel just about like you know we feel; but I'm a CIO man now, and the CIO says that there ain't gonna be no discrimination, Dickinson; so you come right on and give us whatever you got, because there ain't gonna be no discrimination."[253]

The C I O and Bendix management supported the black worker and made tremendous efforts to end discrimination. Bendix supervisors had the authority to terminate any white employee who objected to working with a black co-worker. This was unprecedented. Blacks were readily accepted into the Bendix unions, and many, such as Jesse Dickinson, rose to positions of union leadership.[254]

Figure 60 Sandblasting operations at Bendix. ***Bendix Battleline*** **June 8, 1943.**

During the war, the Bendix Corporation made a special effort to employ the wives of the company's workers that were called into the service. That policy was extended to its black employees as well. Mrs. Helen Pope stated in an interview that she got a job at Bendix because her husband had to leave Bendix to serve during the war. "I got mine [job] by virtue of my husband who was sent to Uncle Sam's service, from Bendix. So I got into Bendix, and when my husband came home, I was released. I had no job."[255]

By November of 1941, Bendix employed nineteen black workers. Their assimilation into the Bendix work force had been uneventful. By the fall of 1943, Bendix

had two hundred blacks in its employ, although this represented only half the number that had been employed several months earlier.[256] Bendix had lost workers due to higher wages offered at other factories. In September of 1943, approximately fifty black workers had threatened a strike if they did not receive a seven cent per hour increase. Bendix management was unable to resolve this problem. Marvin Heidt requested assistance from Negro Activities Co-coordinator, J. Chester Allen. After visiting the Bendix plant and talking with the workers, Allen concluded that the issue of pay was not the real reason for the dissatisfaction among the black workers, but rather the opinion that there was little chance for advancement. He felt that this perception was largely the result of ignorance of procedures. Allen noted that black workers neglected to attend union meetings and did not know how to file a grievance or notify the union of their concerns. Allen was able to communicate his findings to the black workers and appealed to their sense of patriotic duty. The crisis was averted and the black workers returned to work. A few lost some seniority but no one lost any pay. For his efforts, J. Chester Allen was given a citation of merit from the Indiana State Defense Council.[257]

Figure 61 A. Machison, Tom Hill, Joe King, Abraham Dorsey, Odell Brooks, and Otis Brooks, pledged 10% of their earning to buy war bonds. ***Bendix Battleline*****, October 30, 1942**

Once blacks had entered the work force at Bendix, there was a ripple effect in South Bend. On March 30, 1942, for example, Bantam Bearing Company, located on Sample Street, hired its first black workers. Company officials had contacted both

Bendix management and J. Chester Allen as to the possibility of joining in the "Experiment of hiring black Workers,"[258]

Unfortunately, acquiring training for skilled positions was still very difficult for the black worker. Unable to attend the Central High School machine shop lathe operator curriculum, several young men journeyed to Indianapolis to take machine shop training at the NYA (National Youth Administration) school. After completing the course and returning to South Bend, they discovered that there were still no jobs available for them, even though the Indiana State Defense Council was touting the success of the program as, "turning out much needed skilled Negro Workers."[259] The Bi-Racial Committee was busy making contacts with labor unions and the management of local industry to find job placement for these men. There also existed a growing sense of frustration with the black workers who had jobs at Studebaker and Bendix for not being more helpful in finding jobs for others of their race. Jesse Dickinson would write, "the men at Studebaker and Bendix receive good wages and they may feel smug, but the future of the Negroes' economic status in this city may depend on how much is done now while the iron is hot."[260]

Figure 62 Bendix Department 141C, third shift departmental meeting. ***Bendix Battleline*****, April 13, 1943**

In addition to Bendix, the other long-term icon of discrimination in South Bend was Wilson Brothers Shirt Factory. Persuading Wilson Brothers to hire its first black female employees in its power sewing departments was a challenge the Bi-Racial

Committee pursued. As with lathes, training was the issue. Helen Pope recalled that young white high school girls were given the opportunity to attend power-sewing instruction courses at Washington High School. Wilson Brothers also provided power-sewing instruction on site at the company headquarters for white female high school students. Black female students were denied access to these sewing programs.[261] As a result of these "whites only" training centers, Wilson Brothers was in the enviable position of having a steady supply of fully trained young white women ready for immediate employment in the years leading up to WWII.

In July of 1941 South Bend resident and African American Mrs. Pearl Wright began teaching a course on how to operate power-sewing equipment. Several women enrolled in the course with the hope of getting a job in one of South Bend's several clothing factories. None of these women succeeded in breaking into the power-sewing job market. Jesse Dickinson wrote: "They hoped to get jobs in some of the several factories at the completion of the course, but South Bend's policy of 'No Negroes in industry' was too firmly established."[262] Unable to find work their talents languished, and eventually they became volunteers, sewing for the Red Cross.

The monopoly that Wilson Brothers Shirt Factory had on power-sewing was finally broken in June of 1942. Smoler Brothers, a factory making women's dresses in South Bend, was making a bid for the production of garments for the Navy. Smoler Brothers opened a factory on East Colfax to accommodate the increased production. J. Chester Allen had a meeting with Jerry Smoler to discuss the government contracts and the number of employees the company was planning to hire. Exactly what was said at that meeting will never be known. However, J. Chester Allen had no qualms about using

Executive Order 8802 as a club over the head of the employer.[263] Allen likely informed Smoler that with government contracts came the obligation not to discriminate and that the local Bi-Racial Committee was ready to assist Smoler Brothers in finding trained black workers.

Allen contacted Mrs. Pope, requesting that she locate twenty-four women that could be trained on power-sewing equipment. It would be a two-week intensive course held at Central Junior High School. In June of 1942, these black women began their training at Central, before Smoler Brothers announced that they had government contracts. After two weeks of training, these women relocated to Smoler Brothers. As Mrs. Pope remembered, "When we moved over to Smoler Brothers, the white girls didn't want to work with the black girls, and probably for more reasons than one, because we had no experience. So they moved upstairs and we took the first floor."[264]

The experience for the female black worker at Smoler Brothers cannot be characterized as a clear success. Garment manufacturing was at the low end of the wage scale. Workers at Smoler Brothers averaged eighteen dollars per week, having a base rate of approximately $3.20 per day, and a piece-rate over a fixed production amount. A skilled worker could manage to take home $5 to $7 dollars per day. Mr. Albert Pols, general manager of Smoler Brothers said, "Some of our colored girls are equal in every way to the best of the group upstairs" [meaning the white girls], but investigation showed that that there were few black women capable [black women were at a disadvantage due to lack of training and experience] of earning that kind of income, on a daily basis.[265] Nevertheless, black women had finally become a part of garment manufacturing in South Bend thanks to the war and the work of Allen. What they found, however, was low

wages and the stigma of forced separation from white workers, a repeat of events that had occurred to their predecessors in the 1930s.

The NYA opened a training center in South Bend in January of 1943 for girls between the ages of 16 and 25. Girls from throughout the state were eligible. In February of 1943, seventeen colored and fourteen white girls arrived in South Bend to begin their training in war production. This program was remarkable not only because discrimination was not used in selecting the girls, but also because the staff that did the training was mixed as well.[266]

Lucille Sneed enrolled in the NYA training classes and discovered that this attempt at interracial training was still tainted with discrimination. Again, Central High School was the location of the training of young women for employment in the private sector. Sneed chose the power-sewing class as being her best chance at finding meaningful employment in South Bend's rapidly growing defense industry. The instructor was white, and the class was interracial. The instructor did not teach the black women how to use the machines. She told her black students, "There's no need to teach you how to use these machines because you're not going to get a job."[267]

Sneed remembers that the white women found jobs at Singer Manufacturing and Studebaker Corporation after completing only a week of training. Sneed recalled "But, for us there was nothing, we felt that they should teach us, we should have the ability to learn this type of operation. We went to Hering House, B. G. Smith was director, and we went to him and talked to him about it."[268] Mr. Smith, a member of South Bend's Bi-Racial Committee must have applied some influence upon the teacher, because soon afterward she began instructing the young black women as well. This training proved

invaluable when Sneed was hired that same year at Studebaker's new aviation plant located on Chippewa Street in South Bend. She operated a power-sewing machine, one of only two black women in a sewing department which employed a hundred women. As the conclusion of the war drew near, black workers grew more and more anxious. A headline in the *Indianapolis Recorder* read, "Millions of Negro Workers May Lose Jobs as War Ends."[269] Statistically the future did not look particularly good for the black worker. A report from the War Manpower Commission detailed those industries that employed the greatest numbers and employed the largest proportion of blacks. Those industries were aircraft, shipbuilding, and ordinance manufacture, all of which would suffer immediate cutbacks of production once victory was accomplished.

Figure 63 Wilson Shirt factory workers, gluing and assembling rain gear for combat troops during WWII. Image courtesy of the Center for History

Japan, surrendered on August 15, 1945, and the impact of V-J Day upon South Bend and Mishawaka was forceful and immediate. On August 16, all production stopped at the Bendix Aviation Production Division, Studebaker released 2,700 workers, and the U. S. Rubber Company's Ball Band division at Mishawaka had all of its military contracts cancelled.[270]

As devastating as this would appear South Bend recovered quickly. V-J Day was not a surprise, South Bend industries were prepared, and switching from war production to peacetime production was not overly complicated. Many plants were immediately

able to switch over to non-military production with little or no delay.[271] Women, however, bore much of the actual burden of layoffs in anticipation of returning husbands.

On March 19, 1942, J. Chester Allen announced that he would not run again for the Indiana General Assembly. In an interview in 2004, his youngest son, Dr. Irving Allen, indicated that within the family it was believed that his father had given up his political career because his wife Elizabeth wanted him to spend more time at home and concentrate on improving the family's financial prospects.[272] Although he did not publicly elaborate as to the reasons for his decision, it is obvious that Allen's last term must have drained him both physically and emotionally, and perhaps he believed it was time for others to step forward and lead.

What were the accomplishments of the Bi-Racial Committee? There are varying opinions. In 1945, J. Chester Allen wrote a recap of his political successes. He believed his involvement with the Bi-Racial Committee was a high-water mark in the opening of job opportunities for Indiana blacks:

> In retrospect, the Indiana Plan of Bi-Racial Cooperation in the two and one-half years has accomplished more for the Indiana Negro's permanent economic improvement than had been done in the preceding history of the state. Furthermore, the program in Indiana since June 1, 1941 is without parallel in any other state in the country.[273]

For whatever reasons, Elizabeth Fletcher Allen and her husband J. Chester chose to leave Indiana politics. For over a decade, this husband and wife team of lawyers had demonstrated extraordinary leadership on behalf of the black community. J. Chester Allen in the forefront and Elizabeth, no less active but operating out of the public eye, had played crucial roles in transforming black political power from a goal to a reality.

Together they had used a variety of methods to confront discrimination and promote the welfare of their race.

Elizabeth Fletcher Allen would never again enter the realm of politics; she continued being a lawyer and supported many women's issues. J. Chester Allen was a member of the school board and re-entered local politics in 1959 winning a seat on the Common Council of South Bend. He served several terms and became very influential in city politics, but neither he nor his talented wife would ever again venture into politics on a state or national level.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

The development of black political power is not the result of one particular period, or an event, or even the work of one person. However, the development of black political power does tend to follow an orderly formula. The success of that formula is in turn dependant upon the presence of a number of components. Geographic location, density of population, development of a black perspective based upon a cultural identity fostered by the ability to socialize, a proactive leadership, and a contingent of ordinary citizens willing to follow and stay committed to the pursuit of their civil rights are representative of the most necessary ingredients.

Over the past one hundred years, many ingredients in that formula have been present in the city of South Bend. As Dr. Anthony Orum has pointed out, the ability of black Americans to be able to socialize and to participate in their own clubs, churches, and associations is essential for the development of black political power. It is here, within the framework of a multitude of groups, associations, and organizations that the principals of democratic living are learned. Within the span of the last century, there have been numerous illustrations of black social clubs and organizations present in South Bend. The establishment of the black church, creation of women's clubs such as the St. Pierre Ruffin club, men's fraternal organizations with their companion female auxiliaries, and the early establishment of the NAACP, have all played a significant role in the development of local black political power.

The geographic location, as Dr. Nicholas Danigelis has noted, has a great deal to do with the degree to which black citizens are successful in the creation of political power. South Bend, located in the north, was free from the stigma of the oppressive

racial caste system associated with the South, a system that succeeded in destroying the resolve to create political power for blacks living there. That type of racial bigotry has never been commonplace in the city of South Bend. That is not to say that the city is a pristine example of racial harmony. Over the course of that same century that saw the establishment of black political power, the city employed various measures, preferring to use "custom" rather than "law," to limit black economic, political, and educational opportunities.

In addition to its northern location and a generally tolerant attitude demonstrated by whites toward blacks, the city possessed several other attributes that facilitated black political power. South Bend was a city that moved rapidly from an agrarian to an industrial based economy. The city became an industrial source of economic power whose success depended upon both skilled and unskilled labor. South Bend became a beacon of opportunity for the undereducated and unskilled black worker anxious to leave the caste system of the south for the land of opportunity in the north. Unfortunately, the echoes of the words uttered by W.E.B. Du Bois more than a century ago accurately described the reality of the city's job market for these newly arrived black workers. Du Bois believed that the prejudice displayed by whites was pervasive and undeniable, and that such prejudice would always manifest itself in the restriction of employment for the black worker to the most menial of jobs, and the denial of the right to obtain job skills training. The inability of the black worker to climb the economic ladder of opportunity denied the black worker the possibility of achieving even a semblance of economic parity with the white worker. Unfortunately, the city of South Bend followed the Du Boisian script to the letter. Whites monopolized the skilled worker positions and made access to

advanced training difficult to obtain, leaving working blacks always vulnerable to job loss and low pay. From 1900 to 1930, the black worker was as powerless to resist white dominance as were other black residents of the city. The expanding black population, however, also had a positive effect. Beginning in the mid 1920s and extending into the 1930s, South Bend was the final destination for many of the Talented-Tenth. A new black leadership was walking the sidewalks of South Bend by the late 1920s. They arrived in the city from Rhode Island, Texas, Louisiana, Missouri, and from all points in between. Even though they came from different places and had vastly different life experiences, they did have several things in common. They possessed a college or university degree and a desire to make a difference. These men and women had a different philosophy about being black. They did not believe in the old view that blacks must find a way to get along with the whites; they believed that blacks must find a way to resist, challenge, and earn, if only grudgingly, the respect of whites.

When blacks first arrived in the city in the years prior to WWI, their numbers were so few that the white residents considered their presence inconsequential. By the 1920s, faced with increasing numbers of blacks, whites began to consider various tactics that could be implemented that would limit the potential of black political and economic power. Some white residents of the city desired a written policy of "separation" of the races, such as the policies implemented at the city's indoor swimming pool, the Natatorium. Another group of white South Bend residents, perhaps believing themselves to be more "enlightened" or "progressive," chose a slightly different approach to achieving "separation" of the races. Using a sense of "paternalism," this style of white sentiment successfully created a "blacks only" settlement house called the Hering House.

Both of these approaches aspired to either intimidate blacks by demonstrating the power of whites to discriminate, or as at the Hering House, attempted to limit the development of black political power, or if that proved impossible, to at least restrain its influence.

As demonstrated in this thesis, both of these approaches ultimately failed, and in fact the policies of the Natatorium and the structuring of the Hering House, as a predominately "blacks only" establishment, actually promoted the development of black political power. It is here that one of the inescapable truths relating to the development of black political power becomes apparent. The standardized formulas of Orum and Danigelis will only move the development of black political power to a certain level, but how far that power rises above or sinks below that level is dependant upon forces that are exclusive to each city, such as specific events, one of a kind organizations, or examples of extraordinary leadership. In other words, each northern city that had a significant black population during the 1920s and 1930s produced a type of black political power that is unique to that city. How potent a particular strain of black political power was, depended upon factors relative to that city. The potency and use of black political power will vary from city to city. One could theorize, for example, that black political power was much more active in South Bend than in Elkhart, but probably not as active as in Gary. For this reason, both the Natatorium and the Hering House figure prominently in the development of black political power in South Bend, because they represent one of a kind situations which made their influence upon the development of black political power in South Bend both dramatic and unique.

The Natatorium and the Hering House have several things in common. First, they were constructed in the 1920s, the Natatorium opening in 1922, and the Hering House in

1925, at a time when black political power was non-existent. Second, both structures, separated by only a few city blocks, were located in neighborhoods that were transitioning from white to black residents. Third, both had a purpose of limiting black recreational opportunity. At the Natatorium, it was a policy of black exclusion, and at the Hering House, it was a policy of black separation to the point that those taking part in the activities there were almost exclusively black. There were also several major differences: the Natatorium was owned and operated by a government bureaucracy, funded with tax money. The Hering House was privately owned and totally dependant upon white benefactors to meet the financial needs of the organization.

The most striking similarity is that the policies of both of these facilities represent an experiment, conducted by the white community, an attempt to maintain a racial inequity more favorable to whites than to blacks. The Natatorium was an experiment in segregation decreed by policy, which subsequent city administrations chose not to expand, thus making the Natatorium an island of city-supported segregation, the lone outpost defending the color line with a written policy. Why the city chose not to segregate other local government owned and operated facilities remains unknown. Perhaps overall white support for an enlarged program of segregation was not sufficient. In any event, the Natatorium's policies became more and more difficult to defend when attacked by the growing strength of a black political force that was guided by competent black leaders implementing a solid strategy for victory. This undoubtedly also had a dampening effect upon other white leaders who entertained ideas of mandating the segregation of other city facilities, even though the Supreme Court decision, *Plessey v. Ferguson* was in place at this time.

An organized black response to the city's attempt to "separate" the races did not happen immediately. The Natatorium was in operation for almost a decade before the black community registered its first dissatisfaction with the policies at the supposedly "public" swimming pool. When the Natatorium opened in 1922, the black city residents had no alternative but to accept the segregationist policies practiced there, simply because they were virtually powerless to oppose them. Black residents had no voice in local political affairs or at least no voice that whites were willing to acknowledge. The harsh reality was that black social organizations and black churches carry very little weight in the political decision making of whites. Only a political voice raised by black people would accomplish this. Remarkably, only nine years latter, in 1931, a team of black lawyers representing the black community of South Bend was petitioning the Parks Board to change the policies at the Natatorium. In the span of one decade, the black community had transcended from a position of being leaderless to having a core of dynamic, energetic, and above all else, determined black leaders. The black community was no longer powerless.

The rapid influx of black leaders, between 1922 and 1935 was responsible for this monumental change in how blacks perceived themselves relative to whites. The degree to which black leadership is proactive in the early developmental stages of black political power will determine the future growth and strength of black political power. Perhaps the first manifestation of this new black leadership occurred at the Hering House in 1928, when the black community was united in its opposition to the Hering House becoming part of the segregated "YMCA" organization. Although unsuccessful, it was a positive step in the process of developing black political power. Black leadership, for the first

time, had challenged white supremacy, a situation that could not have happened in the early 1920s. Although, South Bend's black community clearly expressed their desire to operate the Hering House without the oversight of whites and also demonstrated their managerial capabilities, they met with defeat because the Hering House was a privately owned facility, totally dependant upon white benefactors, making it immune from outside intervention. Such was not the case at the Natatorium. Since it was a government facility, its policies could be challenged, and they were.

Although the issue of the Natatorium was important for the black community, it was not a consuming one. Jesse Dickinson, for example, believed that the Natatorium issue was a "minor disagreement." At the time, those so closely associated with this protracted legal effort did not fully comprehend the significance of this "minor disagreement," or that changes to the Natatorium's racial policies would have far-reaching effects upon the city's black community. This struggle was a demonstration of the black community's desire to resist what they believed to be an injustice, one that could not be ignored or condoned. This challenge to white political power proved to be a tribute to the city's black community. It was a disagreement marked by civility and adherence to following procedures of law. The black community did not at any time display any hostility toward the white community over the policies of the Natatorium, but rather maintained remarkable patience as they continued to resist, non-violently, the city policies that they believed to be morally wrong and legally incorrect. Eventually, the black citizens of the city won this battle, but in reality it was a victory in which all shared. The city was finally able to divest itself of what had proved to be an embarrassment, the

association of the city with racial segregation, and the black community had shown how resilient and determined it was in continuing the struggle for equal treatment.

The confrontation at the Hering House and the struggle to end segregation at the Natatorium aided the development of black political power. Between 1928 and 1931 the black community, and its leaders, learned valuable lessons on how to resist an over reaching white bureaucracy. The events that took place at the Hering House and the Natatorium indicate that by the late 1920s, the Talented-Tenth had made a tremendous impact upon both the black and white communities. The black community had found its political voice, and the white community was listening.

The road leading to black political power in South Bend had been difficult to traverse. There had been numerous setbacks and disappointments, not always at the hands of the white majority, but often self-inflicted. However, these disappointments were a part of a necessary learning curve, from which the black community did benefit. By the late 1930s, the black community appeared to be on the cusp of realizing political power. Even with the winds of political change becoming more favorable, the task was daunting. A succession of city administrations had been unwilling to share political power with its black citizens, and practiced defacto segregation in the areas of housing, recreation, jobs, and education. Although the city did not attempt to limit the rights of blacks to vote, or physically intimidate the black citizens generally, neither had it encouraged the development of black political power. That does not disallow the fact that the black residents of the city had not experienced physical violence at the hands of the city's white citizenry. It could be argued that there are instances when members of the South Bend police force may have been an instrument of violence and intimidation,

but there is no evidence that those who were responsible for these aggressive acts were organized, or that their acts were sanctioned either by the city administration or by upper echelons of the police force. Violence perpetrated upon the black citizens of the city was more likely the result of individuals operating on their own volition. However, this violence both of a physical and an economic character, had a positive consequence in creating a union between the black and white Democratic voters, uniting in opposition to Republican politics, a unification that remains intact to this day. The reasons why black political candidates have been successful are not totally explained by the theories of either Orum or Danigelis, not to diminish their importance, but only to point out that black political success in this city is also dependant upon factors that may only be applicable to the city of South Bend.

One of the most important variables in the formation of political power for blacks is the question of leadership. Great leaders require equally great followers. The single most important requirement necessary to move black political power to a higher level was a black political leader capable of bridging the gap between the white and black voter, a man capable of forging his own formula for success. However, voter support for a political candidate in South Bend is always dependant upon the bedrock principle that a seeker of a political office does not stray too far afield from accepted behaviors or acknowledged political positions. Black candidates seeking a political office have always faced this perplexing proposition, how to straddle this white political fence, while at the same time gathering a consensus of black voter support, encouraging the implementation of a civil rights agenda, and convincing the white voter that a black candidate is non-threatening to the white way of life. This is a task of Herculean proportions. J. Chester

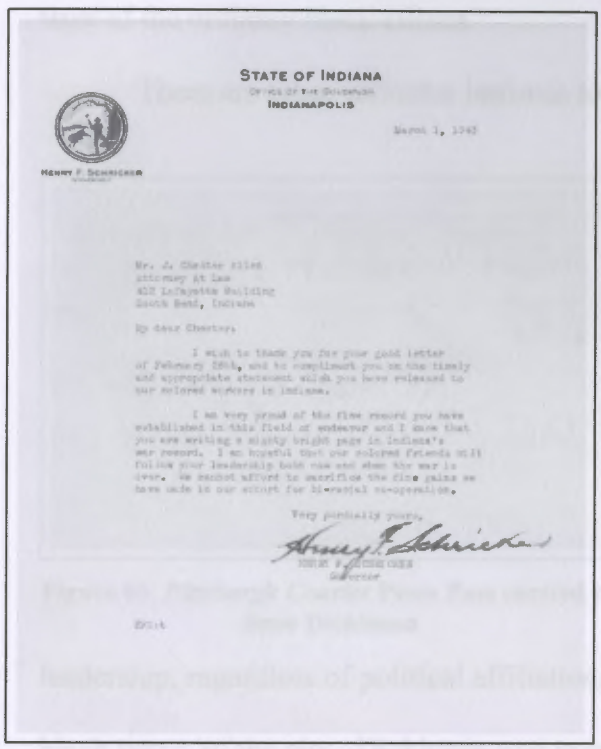
Allen was the embodiment of all of these requirements, and his election as State Representative in 1938 moved him to center stage in the political theater of South Bend.

Allen's contribution to the development of black political power in the city is significant. He united the black vote and at the same time convinced the white voter that voting for a black man for state office was acceptable. With Allen's political victory in 1938, the level and success of black political power rises dramatically. For Allen, however, issues confined to South Bend, such as the Natatorium, was only the "dress rehearsal" for black political power. His attention was fixed upon solving what he considered a much more pressing problem for blacks: how to apply a growing black political power to the issue of opening job opportunities for the black worker. The pursuit of equal job opportunities and access to job training was at the top of the list of the black political activists of the 1930s and 1940s. Changing attitudes within the black community, dissatisfaction of the black voter with the Republican Party, the severity of the Great Depression, the larger than life persona of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the implementation of the New Deal, and an impending world war, provided this new type of black leader the opening necessary to push an agenda of job opportunity for the black worker.

Figure 64 J. Chester Allen-1946

Allen's strategy to accomplish open job opportunities for the black worker was his HB 445. Unfortunately, Allen's attempt failed, and he was forced to face the realization that black political power was not capable of pushing an agenda of job

opportunities for black workers without the support of white political power brokers. However, failure to achieve passage of HB 445 was balanced by his success as Negro Coordinator of the Bi Racial Committee. In this capacity, Allen was able to blend his "jobs" agenda with the art of compromise and succeeded in opening many doors of economic opportunity that had hitherto remained closed. It was not the victory he had once envisioned, black workers continued to face barriers of discrimination, but there had been major advances. Gaining a half loaf of bread was better than no bread at all, a political reality that black leadership had to face during the 1940s. By the end of WWII, the black worker was sharing in the economic prosperity that was driving the nation.



STATE OF INDIANA
INDIANAPOLIS

HENRY F. SCHRICKER

Mr. J. Chester Allen
Attorney At Law
422 Lafayette Building
South Bend, Indiana

My dear Chester:

I wish to thank you for your good letter of February 28th, and to compliment you on the timely and appropriate statement which you have released to our colored workers in Indiana.

I am very proud of the fine record you have established in this field of endeavor and I know that you are writing a mighty bright page in Indiana's war record. I am hopeful that our colored friends will follow your leadership both now and when the war is over. We cannot afford to sacrifice the fine gains we have made in our effort for bi-racial co-operation.

Very cordially yours,

Henry F. Schricker

Governor

Figure 65 Letter of commendation written to J. Chester Allen from Governor Henry F. Schricker.

Allen had taken his political defeat in the first months of 1941 and turned it into a semblance of a political victory by the end of 1941. Allen demonstrated that black political power hinges upon the ability to gauge accurately when to challenge or resist, how much pressure to apply to the white power structure, and when to compromise, in order to achieve its ultimate goal.

There are also some important aspects of the development of black political power that fall outside of any formula for success. The Sanhedrin Club is one such nonstandard development. One individual, Dr. Bernard Streets, created this club for the

sole purpose of organizing black politics, not along party lines, but rather along the lines of color. He wanted the black citizens of the city to have a voice in the political apparatus that governed them. Whether the Sanhedrin achieved any great success is debatable. However, this club did attract important individuals representing the black leadership of the city and for a short time was able to unite that leadership and direct it in a way that benefited the entire black community. The Sanhedrin represents an innovative idea and method to build black political power. Its weakness was its inability to gain the trust of the ordinary black citizen.

There are other variables intrinsic to South Bend that have influenced the development of black political power. News reporter Jesse Dickinson is one such example. His "to the point" articles, his often harsh criticism of his own black community, his ability to keep issues alive for the reading public, and his stalwart support of the city's black leadership, regardless of political affiliation, must have made a deep impression upon the black voters of the city. Dickinson was much more than simply a reporter; he was a community leader whose influence upon the early development of black political power in this city cannot be overlooked.

Figure 66 ***Pittsburgh Courier*** **Press Pass carried by Jesse Dickinson**

The white community certainly had an impact upon the development of black political power, either by enacting policies that the black community united against, or by providing the black community visible support. Examples include persons such as

Claribel Hering and Reverend Gilbert Cox, both of whom courageously confirmed their support for South Bend's black community with money, words, and deeds.

The contribution of M. Edward Doran, Third District Democratic chair for St. Joseph County, is much less definable, but nonetheless, he did make contributions. Doran was the architect of the Democratic political victory in the 1938 election, an election in which Allen emerged as a newly elected state representative. Doran was present, supporting Allen's candidacy, at the black political rally held at the Pilgrim Baptist Church, just days before the election. It could be argued that Doran made that appearance and supported Allen just to get the black vote, and that is precisely why his outreach to the black community was so important. Doran was a white politician who recognized that black political power could no longer be ignored, but that the black voter had the power to deliver a victory in a close election. Doran realized this and included Allen and the black vote in his strategy for a political victory for the Democrats of St. County and of the City of South Bend. His instincts proved correct; Pavey won that election by 427 votes, sending Allen to the Indiana General Assembly. From that point on, J. Chester Allen was in the vanguard of a number of black politicians who would follow the path that he had established as representatives of St. Joseph County. Only Marion and Lake Counties have elected more.

The formation of black political power follows a formula, but that formula provides only a basic structure. Black political power must be able to empower the black citizen. To do that, it requires great leadership and great leadership demands the sacrifice of great followers, those ordinary, everyday people who choose to accept the risks, to make a better future for their children. South Bend had an abundance of both.

Throughout the pages of this thesis, the reader has traveled from the 1900s into the 1940s. In the course of that reading, a glimpse of a history that has all but been forgotten has been revealed. It is a history populated with stories of importance, events that shaped a generation of black residents, and leaders whose efforts created the foundations upon which the modern civil rights movement is based. I hope that the reader now has an awareness of the personalities of those men and women whose time has passed, but who made such incredible contributions to the evolution of black political power in this city.

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Vitae

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David Healey completed his Bachelor of Arts Degree, in the field of History, in 2001. In 2000, he accompanied Dr. Les Lamon and fifteen fellow students on a two-week civil rights study course of the South. Upon the completion of the course, Dr. Lamon, Amy Selner, Candice Leuthold, and David Healey began the Civil Rights Heritage Center at IUSB. In 2001 Mr. Healey was the recipient of a Smart Grant, which enabled him to return to the South for an additional two weeks of study of the civil rights movement. In 2001, Mr. Healey was appointed student director of the Oral History Project. The purpose of this first phase of collecting oral histories was to answer the question, "Was there a civil rights movement in South Bend." As student director, he conducted numerous taped interviews with local residents, collecting the civil rights history of the city. His responsibilities included training IUSB students in the techniques of how to conduct an oral interview and to accompany the students on their first oral history interview. During this first phase, which concluded in 2005, over seventy-five oral histories were collected, demonstrating that the residents of South Bend have worked diligently to preserve and extend the civil rights of all the citizens of this city.

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Healey's contributions hailed

He was one of the co-founders of the Civil Rights Heritage Center at IUSB.

By LES LAMON

Ordinary citizens can make an extraordinary impact on the lives of folks around them. It sounds trite, but it is true.

The Michiana community recently lost one of those immensely valuable and important ordinary folks. Printer by training, Vietnam veteran by experience, historian by choice, David Healey died Friday.

In May 2000, Healey joined 18 other students and faculty at Indiana University South Bend on the original Freedom Summer academic program. His vision broadened. He soon graduated as the outstanding history major at IUSB, and immediately began a master's program which would give structure to his new passion -- African American history.

David and a half dozen other members of the Freedom Summer experience founded the Civil Rights Heritage Center at IUSB, a student-led program of community commitment based upon the ideals of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Healey and his colleagues realized that change does not come "top down," but from the ordinary people themselves. They make the commitment; they take the responsibility; they make the sacrifices so that change comes.

For David Healey, it became paramount that the history of this kind of local activism, this empowered and empowering citizenry, not be lost. As a student, he gave leadership to the Oral History project of the Civil Rights Heritage Center. He garnered important support in the community, especially among African Americans, for preserving the history of those whose roles were all but lost from the local historical record. He spent time in basements, in garages, in dusty archives and even on eBay gathering artifacts, photographs, letters, scrapbooks, and other evidence of the rich but rapidly fading record of South Bend's diverse past.David and one of his student colleagues rediscovered and gave light to the now familiar story of racial exclusion and discrimination at the Natatorium. He wrote a master's thesis focusing upon the black attorney J. Chester Allen and the general role of African Americans in local politics. In 2009, Healey edited a new edition of the first and virtually only previously published study of blacks in our community, Buford F. Gordon's "The Negro in South Bend" (1922). This new volume is, appropriately, one of the first two books in the On Their Shoulders series published by IUSB's Wolfson Press.

David Healey left his mark on our community. His footprints and fingerprints will not always be visible, but African American history in our town will never be relegated to attics, basements, garages and fading memories again. He was an ordinary citizen who did some very extraordinary things.

We will be standing on his shoulders from this time forward. He made a difference and I am grateful that I was his friend and colleague.

Les Lamon is a retired professor of history at IUSB and was the first director of the Civil Rights Heritage Center.

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Historian David Healey dies

He's credited with advancing knowledge of South Bend's black history.

By HOWARD DUKES *Tribune Staff Writer*

David Healey loved history and he loved doing research.

His commitment to conducting interviews and scouring through library stacks or attics in search for material was so consuming that Les Lamon, his professor and friend, had to give Healey friendly reminders.

"I always told him to remember to write it down," Lamon says about Healey, who died of cancer on Friday. "And he did write, but he carried a lot of information in his head."

The work that Healey did in a little less than 10 years greatly increased the knowledge about the history of South Bend's black community.

Healey was among a group of students who participated in the first civil rights history tour of the South that Lamon organized in 2000. Those students returned to Indiana University South Bend and founded the Civil Rights Heritage Center.Healey and several other students did their master's theses on various aspects of South Bend's black community.

Healey eventually ended up spearheading the center's oral history project, and played a key role in the successful effort to save the Natatorium. That building is being renovated and will become the Civil Rights Heritage Center's headquarters later this year.

During the process, Healey conducted hours of research and worked with people like John Charles Bryant and Gladys Muhammad to uncover information such as the struggle that resulted in the Natatorium being integrated.

The work done by Healey and others will make it easier for future scholars to conduct research on South Bend's black community, according to Lamon.

"Prior to 2000, there was almost no record (chronicling black history in South Bend) except for Rev. F. Gordon's book ('The Negro In South Bend')," Lamon said.Healey edited that book and wrote an introduction to the book, which was reissued by IUSB's Wolfson Press in 2009. It was Healey's last project.

Healey didn't become a historian until late in his life. He worked as a printer for many years after returning from Vietnam.

He returned to school in the late 1990s, according to Lamon.

Monica Tetzlaff, a history professor at IUSB, had Healey as a student. Tetzlaff says Healey was a serious and committed student, and the Freedom Summer trip served to increase his dedication.

Healey met Bryant after participating in the initial Freedom Summer trip."When he met John Charles, he met a key figure in the (community)," Tetzlaff said. "And John Charles introduced him to other people who had knowledge."

Bryant said Healey was a thorough historian, and he agreed that one legacy of Healey's work will be to make it easier for other scholars to conduct research on South Bend's black history.

Sara Lowe said she was impressed by Healey's commitment to detail and accuracy.

"That may sound dry to some people, but it is very important to me," she said.

Lowe conducted the center's oral history interview of Healey, which took place in January.Lowe said the interview touched on Healey's work with the oral history project, his work on editing "The Negro in South Bend," and the efforts to save the Natatorium.

"He was really humble and modest," Lowe said.

Bryant agreed, adding that Healey had a placid spirit.

Verge "Brother Sage" Gillam said that humility coexisted with his vast knowledge.

"I think that David Healey knew more about African-American history in South Bend from 1900 until the present than anyone else," Gillam said."This is a tragic loss."

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