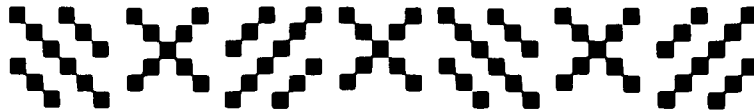


The Political Realignment of Black Voters in Indianapolis, 1924

William W. Giffin*



Election statistics would seem to support the view that Afro-American voters were remarkably devoted to the Republican party from the Civil War until 1936 when, for the first time, a majority of black voters in the United States cast their ballots for a Democratic presidential candidate. Many historians and other writers have implied that the alienation of blacks from the Republican party came suddenly after 1932, explaining the transfer of the black vote to the Democrats in terms of changes occurring during the early New Deal period.¹ Actually the shift in black political allegiance did not occur abruptly in the first term of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Black disaffection with the Republican party originated long before 1936 and was clearly evident in election campaigns during the 1920s, although the general black voting pattern was not basically altered before the New Deal.² The 1924 election in

*William W. Giffin is professor of history at Indiana State University, Terre Haute.

¹ John A. Garraty, *A Short History of the American Nation* (New York, 1977), 428; T. Harry Williams, Richard N. Current, and Frank Freidel, *American History: A Survey* (2 vols., New York, 1979), II, 669, 674; John M. Allswang, *A House for all Peoples: Ethnic Politics in Chicago, 1890-1936* (Lexington, 1971), 205-206; Lewis M. Killian, *The Impossible Revolution? Black Power and the American Dream* (New York, 1969), 37; Rita Werner Gordon, "The Change in the Political Alignment of Chicago's Negroes During the New Deal," *Journal of American History*, LVI (December, 1969), 584; David Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism: The Democratic Party in Transition, 1918-1932* (New York, 1968), 237; Harold F. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (Chicago, 1966), viii; Samuel Lubell, *White and Black: Test of a Nation* (New York, 1964), 52-61; Henry Lee Moon, *Balance of Power: The Negro Vote* (Garden City, N.Y., 1948), 17-19.

² Some historians have discussed black dissatisfaction with the Republican party prior to the New Deal, but detailed studies of black Republican insurgency in northern cities during the 1920s are lacking. See Richard B. Sherman, *The Republican Party and Black America: From McKinley to Hoover, 1896-1933* (Charlottesville, Va., 1973); Lawrence Grossman, *The Democratic Party and the Negro: Northern and National Politics, 1868-92* (Urbana, Ill.,

Indianapolis provides an example of the antecedents of the defection of black voters from the Republican party in 1936. The Indianapolis study illustrates three factors that were characteristic of black voting by 1924: many blacks were strongly motivated by their interest in the principle of equality before the law; a significant number of blacks were alienated by the Republican party; and black political campaigns were structurally complex.

The 1924 election results in Indianapolis show an extraordinary departure from the national black voting pattern. The majority of blacks in the United States had voted for Republican candidates in every national election since the Civil War and also in almost all local and state elections throughout the country. But in Indianapolis in 1924 the Democratic state and national tickets carried almost every predominantly black precinct.³ Why did the black voters of Indianapolis bolt the Republican party twelve years before the national defection of blacks from that organization? Did the circumstances and issues causing the alienation of black Republicans in Indianapolis in 1924 foreshadow those bringing about the national shift in the black vote in 1936?

If one accepts that black voters were primarily influenced by party and candidate attitudes toward racial issues involving fundamental principles, it is apparent that the 1924 Indianapolis election results presaged the later shift in the black vote nationally. The principle of equality before the law without regard to color had been more closely identified with the Republican than with the Democratic party in the minds of blacks since the Civil War. The Republican party was associated with Abraham Lincoln, the Emancipation Proclamation, and support for the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments to the Constitution; the Democratic party was yoked to the white South, which had defended slavery, and to opposition to the postwar constitutional amendments. But the distinct perception

1976); Emma Lou Thornbrough, "The Brownsville Episode and the Negro Vote," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLIV (December, 1957), 469-83; Arthur S. Link, "The Negro as a Factor in the Campaign of 1912," *Journal of Negro History*, XXXII (January, 1947), 81-99; August Meier, "The Negro and the Democratic Party, 1875-1915," *Phylon*, XVII (Summer, 1956), 173-91; William Giffin, "Black Insurgency in the Republican Party of Ohio, 1920-1932," *Ohio History*, LXXXII (Winter-Spring, 1973), 25-45.

³ Lionel F. Artis to Walter F. White, June 18, 1926, Branch Files, 1913-1939, Indiana, Indianapolis, container G-63, Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

of one party as the champion of the citizenship rights of blacks and the other as hostile to them was blurred during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. During the 1870s the Democratic party took a "new departure" and thereafter moderated its racial policies, and the Republican party, particularly after the 1876 presidential election, steadily retreated from its earlier strong position in defense of the legal rights of black people. During the 1920s the Republican party almost completely abandoned the cause of black rights. Meanwhile, a small minority of Afro-Americans voted Democratic, and some leading blacks urged Afro-Americans to liberate themselves from the Republican party by becoming political independents.⁴ Yet nothing occurred to reverse the traditional perception of the majority of blacks that the Republicans were more sympathetic to them on principle than the Democrats, and they voted accordingly. The alteration of this perception among blacks in Indianapolis in 1924 explains the shift to the Democrats that year.

In 1924 Indianapolis blacks associated the Republican party of Indiana with supporters of racially discriminatory views and practices, particularly with the Ku Klux Klan, which had been organized in Indiana after World War I. The rise of the Klan in Indiana accompanied the extension of segregation of blacks in Indianapolis during the 1920s. An image of a Klan-dominated Republican party of Indiana grew out of the primary campaign and primary election of 1924. The Klan endorsed a slate of candidates for Republican nominations for local and state offices. These candidates included Secretary of State Ed Jackson, who was seeking the Republican gubernatorial nomination. Jackson made only a minimal effort to attract black voters, who had traditionally constituted a significant bloc of the Republican voter support in Indianapolis. The Klan-backed candidate employed the usual Republican means of appealing for black votes, including political advertisements in black newspapers and campaign activity by a small cadre of black patronage workers. Jackson's black campaign workers stressed the secretary of state's appointments of blacks to patronage jobs, and his advertisements in the black press carried a statement supporting just law enforcement without regard to race.⁵

⁴ See note 2.

⁵ Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Since Emancipation: A Short History of Indiana Negroes, 1863-1963* ([Indianapolis, 1963]), 31-32; idem, "Segregation in Indiana during the Klan Era of the 1920's," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVII

In central Indiana, Jackson's principal opponent for the Republican gubernatorial nomination was Indianapolis mayor Samuel Lewis Shank, who had assumed the leadership of the local anti-Klan forces. Mayor Shank launched a vigorous campaign for the black vote, making the Klan his central issue. The Shank for Governor Campaign was initiated at a meeting of black precinct committeemen of Indianapolis. Marion County (Indianapolis) Republican Chairman William M. Freeman stated: "The real purpose of this meeting is to decide whether the Republican party shall be a party founded upon the principles laid down in 1776" or on those of the Klan. "So the question tonight is not," he added, "are you a Democrat or Republican. This campaign is based upon the question 'Are you a KKK or not?' There are two leading candidates for Governor in Indiana. They are Ed Jackson, the leader of the KKK and Samuel Lewis Shank."⁶ Appealing further to blacks, the Shank administration slated a black man in every ward and precinct in the city, a first in the history of Indianapolis. The Shank campaign was supported by black committeemen; by black patronage workers of the city administration, such as Henry A. Fleming; and by some black clergymen, including the Reverend Benjamin F. Farrell of Mt. Paran Baptist Church. Also working in Shank's interest were the local black candidates for state representative and state senator on the Republican ticket, Thomas B. Dexter and Dr. James R. Norrel respectively. Shank closed his statewide campaign in Indianapolis at a meeting of some 1,500 black persons, during which he again vigorously denounced the Klan.⁷

The results of the Republican primary election in Indianapolis kept the Klan issue alive. Jackson and almost the entire Klan slate of candidates on the Republican ticket were nominated. The two local black candidates for nominations for state offices were defeated. In the predominantly black precincts there were large majorities for anti-Klan candidates, but the voter turnout in black areas was at best average while the vote in white areas was heavy. A daily newspaper explained that the Jackson workers tried to keep the black vote to a minimum because Shank was expected to be a heavy favorite among

(March, 1961), 594-618; Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York, 1967), 144-60; *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 5, 1924; *Indianapolis World*, May 2, 1924; *Indianapolis Star*, May 7, 1924.

⁶ *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 5, 1924.

⁷ *Indianapolis Star*, May 4, 1924; *Indianapolis News*, May 5, 1924; *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 12, 1924.



ED JACKSON

Courtesy Indiana State Library.



SAMUEL LEWIS SHANK

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society.

blacks. Also, in most black precincts many voters were turned away from the polls having arrived too late.⁸ In reference to the primary results a black newspaper concluded:

In the first place it was demonstrated . . . that the Ku Klux Klan has captured boot and breeches, the Republican party in Indiana and have [sic] turned what has been historically an organization of constitutional freedom into an agency for the promotion of religious and racial hate. Nobody now denies the Ku Klux Klan is the dominating power in Indiana Republican politics. In fact, the Republican party exists in Indiana today only in name. Its place has been usurped by the Klan purposes and leadership and issues. The fight in the future will be purely a contest between the Klan and anti-Klan forces.⁹

The primary results indicated to blacks that the Republican party of Indiana was less likely to defend the principles that were of concern to them than was the Democratic party in the state. In addition, during the primary period and the weeks following it the Democratic party in Indiana moved cautiously to build an image of the state party as an opponent of prejudice and discrimination on grounds of race as well as nationality and religion. In the primary the winner of the Democratic gubernatorial nomination was Carleton B. McCulloch, an Indianapolis physician. McCulloch had made a low-key appeal to black voters, including a political advertisement in the black press of Indianapolis. He had announced that he was not and had never been a member of the Ku Klux Klan, in contrast to the Republican gubernatorial nominee, who had not denied accusations that he was a Klan member.¹⁰ Also, the Democratic organization had slated a black man, John Bankett of Indianapolis, for state representative. Bankett's victory in the primary made him the first black man nominated for that state office by Marion County Democrats. The local black press observed that most of the white Republicans in the city voted for Klan-endorsed candidates, thereby defeating the black candidates for Republican nominations for state offices, while most of the local white Democrats voted for Bankett.¹¹ Following the primary the Democratic state convention unanimously adopted a platform containing an anti-Klan plank, although the words Ku Klux Klan were not used. The "Freedom and Liberty Plank" reaffirmed the party's devotion to the nation's funda-

⁸ *Indianapolis News*, May 6, 7, 1924; *Indianapolis Star*, May 7, 8, 1924.

⁹ *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 17, 1924.

¹⁰ *Indianapolis World*, February 22, 1924; *Indianapolis Freeman*, April 19, 1924; *Indianapolis Times*, November 1, 1924.

¹¹ Thornbrough, *Since Emancipation*, 32; *Indianapolis Freeman*, May 17, 1924.

mental principles and stated: "the Republican party of our state has, for the time being, retired from the political arena, having been delivered into the hands of an organization which has no place in politics and which promulgates doctrines which tend to break down the safeguards which the Constitution throws around every citizen, and repugnant to the principles of government advocated by Lincoln and [Indiana Civil War Republican governor] Morton." The plank also stated: "We will not permit the issues to resolve themselves into a fight either for or against any race, creed or religion."¹²

The 1924 Indiana primary results concerned Afro-Americans throughout the nation. The nomination of the Klan-endorsed gubernatorial candidate in Indiana was seen as an egregious example of the regressive racial policy of the Republican party, which had already alienated many blacks. By 1923 many black leaders had a list of grievances against the Republican party; of particular concern was its failure to effect the enactment of federal anti-lynching legislation.¹³ In consequence, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had advocated black political independence from the Republican party by proposing "a new political emancipation" in 1923.¹⁴ Thus in 1924 the national office of the NAACP did not hesitate to criticize the Republican party of Indiana regarding the Ku Klux Klan. Almost immediately following Jackson's nomination the national press service of the NAACP issued a press release advising Indiana blacks "to make the Klan the paramount issue" and to vote against the party or candidates not repudiating Klan support.¹⁵ At the same time, NAACP Secretary James Weldon Johnson wrote to an executive officer of the Indianapolis NAACP branch inquiring about the Klan situation and black opinion regarding it.

¹² Indianapolis *World*, June 13, 1924.

¹³ During the early 1920s the national Republican party adopted platform planks on civil and political rights that were more vague than before; attempted to reduce the participation of blacks in the affairs of the national party; was generally indifferent to the issue of federal protection of the right to vote; did not discontinue racial segregation of federal employees; and gave fewer federal appointments to blacks than it had before the 1920s. The national Republican party's relationship to blacks during the decade is thoroughly discussed by Richard B. Sherman, "Republicans and Negroes: The Lessons of Normalcy," *Phylon*, XXVII (Spring, 1966), 63-79, and idem, "The Harding Administration and the Negro: An Opportunity Lost," *Journal of Negro History*, XLIX (July, 1964), 151-68.

¹⁴ NAACP, *Fourteenth Annual Report, 1923* (New York, 1924), 40-41.

¹⁵ Press release, May 12, 1924, Administrative File, Subject File, 1910-1940, Politics—general, 1924-1929, C-390, NAACP Records.

Johnson also asked for advice about how the national office might cooperate with blacks in Indiana "to secure the very best results."¹⁶ The branch officer replied that "the Negro and the Republican party have come to a parting of the way. . . ."¹⁷ The reply included clippings from Indianapolis black newspapers which formed the basis of an NAACP news release stating that Indiana blacks "are prepared to throw off their traditional allegiance to the Republican Party and vote the straight Democratic ticket in the coming national election, unless the Republican Party repudiates its Ku Klux Klan allies."¹⁸

The NAACP also began to use "the situation in Indiana" to pressure the national leadership of the Republican party to take a stand against the Ku Klux Klan. The NAACP privately and publicly requested the resignation of United States senator James Watson of Indiana from the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections then investigating the contested election of a Klan-endorsed candidate for the United States Senate from Texas. The NAACP made the request upon learning that Senator Watson had endorsed Jackson for governor of Indiana. The NAACP press release regarding Watson was "carried big in western and southern newspapers."¹⁹ NAACP Secretary Johnson then attempted to induce President Calvin Coolidge to take a public position regarding the Klan. In a letter sent to the president and subsequently released to the press, Johnson stated:

Colored people throughout the United States, but especially in the North, are waiting for an unequivocal statement from you as head of the Republican Party on the Ku Klux Klan. . . .

The N.A.A.C.P. is moved to make this request in view of the situation in Indiana where the Republican Nominee for Governor was given and publicly accepted the endorsement and the votes of the Klan forces and where, furthermore, Senator James Watson from that State, an acknowledged administration leader, not only offered his support to the Klan candidate but did so without by any word or phrase depreciating the nature of that candidate's backing.²⁰

¹⁶ James Weldon Johnson to Freeman B. Ransom, May 14, 1924, *ibid.*

¹⁷ Ransom to Johnson, May 16, 1924, *ibid.*

¹⁸ Indianapolis *Recorder*, quoted in a press release headed "Indiana Negroes Threaten to Vote Democratic Ticket in Next Election," May 19, 1924, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Johnson to Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections, May 14, 1924, *ibid.*; press release, "N.A.A.C.P. Active in Anti-Klan Fight," May 16, 1924, *ibid.*; Johnson to White, May 20, 1924, Administrative File, Special Correspondence, 1912-1939, Johnson, James Weldon, 1918-1938, C-66, *ibid.*

²⁰ Johnson to Calvin Coolidge, May 29, 1924, C-66, NAACP Records; Indianapolis *Freeman*, June 7, 1924.

President Coolidge did not respond to Johnson's letter.²¹ In June, 1924, shortly after Coolidge's nomination by the Republican national convention, the fifteenth annual conference of the NAACP met in Philadelphia. At this conference the NAACP passed a resolution criticizing the Republicans for many shortcomings and urging blacks to vote independently without regard to party labels. Addressing the NAACP conference, Secretary Johnson stated: "The biggest single political issue before him [the American Negro] is that of the Ku Klux Klan." After outlining the situation in Indiana, Johnson concluded:

It has been left for the Democrats in that State to denounce and disavow the Klan. It is, therefore, the plain duty of all colored voters in Indiana to vote against the Republican candidate for Governor and against every other Republican candidate in that state who is touched with the tar brush of the Ku Klux Klan.²²

The summer and fall campaigns to win the votes of the black electorate of Indianapolis in the general election of 1924 were complex. Participants in the campaigns included newly formed political associations, old-line political organizations, nonpolitical associations, experienced politicians, political novices, and newspapers. Participants with national and state connections as well as local elements were involved in the campaigns. Among the campaign activities were voter registration drives, meetings, speeches, posters, parades, advertisements, and other political tactics, fair and foul.

The organized local black opposition to the Republican party in Indianapolis during the 1924 campaign included the Independent Voters League and the Indianapolis branch of the NAACP. The Independent Voters League was formed during the campaign as a black "ANTI-KLAN ORGANIZATION," as its letterhead stated. The objective of the league was to eliminate the Klan's political influence by contributing to the defeat of the Republican county and state tickets by urging blacks to vote Democratic in the county and state elections. In pursuance of the objective, plans were made to obtain a full registration of black voters and to see that they turned out on election day. With an office on West Michigan Street, telephone service, and stationery with letterhead, the Independent Voters League was

²¹ It was speculated that the alliance between the Republican party and the Klan in Indiana explained Coolidge's failure to criticize the Klan during the campaign. Thornbrough, *Since Emancipation*, 32; Johnson to Coolidge, September 15, 1924, C-66, NAACP Records.

²² Indianapolis *Freeman*, July 12, 1924.

evidently well financed. The league also was impressively organized from its inception. The organizational meeting in August followed a period of preliminary work earlier in the summer. The structure of the organization included a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and sixteen directors. In addition, an executive organizer and assistant were in charge of daily administration. The league planned to have a committeeman and committeewoman in every precinct in the city.²³

The Independent Voters League was broadly and enthusiastically received within the local black community. At the time of its organization the league claimed to represent fifteen local black civic associations and over two thousand members.²⁴ The league officers, all of whom were black, included a selection of successful and respected local leaders. Among the officers were three lawyers, four physicians, five clergymen, and one businessman. Also among the officers were two former Republican candidates for office, a former Republican patronage worker, and a current Republican precinct politician. Most of the officers had actively supported the Republican party in the past.²⁵

The NAACP branch in Indianapolis was alarmed by the influence of the Ku Klux Klan in the Republican party as evidenced by the spring primary results. The NAACP branch had actively fought the Klan earlier, successfully opposing the use of a public hall by the Klan in 1922, and it readily joined the fight in 1924. Apparently deciding to concentrate its efforts in one major "show of force," the NAACP branch organized a mass anti-Klan demonstration shortly before the general election. Cooperating with its national headquarters in New York City, the local NAACP requested the advice and presence of

²³ The record indicates the existence of two other local black organizations opposed to the Republican party and the Klan—the Indiana Democracy League and an organization of first voters—but does not reveal their campaign activities, if any; *ibid.*, July 12, August 23, 1924; *Indianapolis News*, August 19, 1924; Henry A. Fleming to Johnson, August 27, 1924, C-390, NAACP Records.

²⁴ *Indianapolis News*, August 19, 1924.

²⁵ Specifically, William E. Henderson (league president), William S. Henry and Freeman B. Ransom were lawyers; H. W. Armistead, Mark D. Batties, Abraham J. King, and James R. Norrel were physicians; Benjamin F. Farrell, Henry L. Herod, Nathaniel A. Seymour, Charles S. Williams, and Frank F. Young were clergymen; Herbert C. Willis was a businessman; Thomas M. Dexter and James R. Norrel were former candidates; Henry A. Fleming (league executive organizer) was a former patronage worker; and Beverly Howard was a precinct politician. These occupations are listed in the *Indianapolis City Directory, 1924* (Indianapolis, 1924). See also Fleming to Johnson, August 27, 1924, C-390, NAACP Records; *Indianapolis Times*, November 5, 1924.

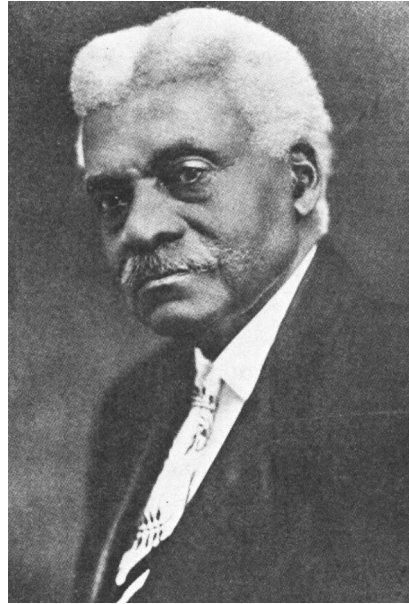
some of its national officers during the political campaign. While ostensibly nonpartisan, the Indianapolis branch of the NAACP had the same political objective as the Independent Voters League—the defeat of Klan-backed Republican candidates. Although they were separate organizations, the NAACP branch and the league were in obvious sympathy with each other and were allied on one project, the October 19 mass demonstration which they jointly sponsored.²⁶

The Democratic party of Marion County also participated in the anti-Klan campaign in black Indianapolis. The press reported that for the first time in history the Democrats had an efficient and hard-working organization in the black precincts. The speakers' bureau of the county Democratic committee sent black and white speakers to political meetings in the black precincts. The Democratic committee promised to help the Indianapolis NAACP branch in its anti-Klan fight. The NAACP branch declined to accept financial contributions from the Democratic party in order to remain officially independent of political parties; however, in view of the foregoing, it seems likely that the Democratic organization helped finance the activities of the Independent Voters League.²⁷

The organized forces fighting the influence of the Ku Klux Klan in the Republican party of Indiana had strong backing from four of the five black newspapers in Indianapolis. The Indianapolis *Freeman* had urged black voters to be politically independent even before the advent of the Klan issue. The publisher of the *Freeman*, George L. Knox, had long been a Republican politico, but, gradually alienated by the racial stands and policies of the state party, he became a black Republican insurgent. By 1920 Knox advocated black loyalty to the Republican party in national elections but independence in state and local contests. In the Klan election of 1924 the *Freeman*, Knox's voice, urged blacks to vote the straight Democratic ticket nationally and locally. Knox also participated in

²⁶ Three of the twenty-two officers of the Independent Voters League were also officers of the local NAACP branch; they were Abraham J. King, Freeman B. Ransom, and Lucas B. Willis. See Indianapolis *Recorder*, November 26, 1921 (clipping), G-63, NAACP Records; Harry D. Evans to White, March 18, 1922, *ibid.*; O. W. Langston [Indianapolis branch president] to Robert W. Bagnall, September 11, 1924, *ibid.*; Johnson to Langston, September 15, 1924, *ibid.*; Langston and R. B. H. Smith to William Pickens, September 25, 1924, *ibid.* See also note 25.

²⁷ Indianapolis *Times*, November 4, 1924; Indianapolis *News*, October 20, 21, November 1, 1924; Langston to Bagnall, September 11, 1924, G-63, NAACP Records; Johnson to Langston, September 15, 1924, *ibid.*



GEORGE L. KNOX

Reproduced from Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., ed., *Slave and Freeman: The Autobiography of George L. Knox* (Lexington, Ky., 1979), frontispiece.

the meetings of the Independent Voters League.²⁸ The Indianapolis *Recorder*, published for twenty-seven years by George P. Stewart, had also supported the Republican party in the past, but in reaction to the Klan-dominated Republican party, the *Recorder* approved of blacks voting the straight Democratic ticket in 1924.²⁹ The Indianapolis *Informer* seems to have been the house organ of the NAACP branch and the Independent Voters League, because it boldly featured the activities and viewpoint of the organized anti-Klan forces. The *Informer* began publication during the 1924 campaign, one of many

²⁸ Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Slave and Freeman: The Autobiography of George L. Knox* (Lexington, 1979), 24-31; Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 6, 1924.

²⁹ Indianapolis *World*, September 5, 1924; Indianapolis *Recorder*, quoted in press release, May 19, 1924, C-390, NAACP Records.

short-lived black newspapers created during election campaigns for political purposes.³⁰ The Indianapolis *World* reflected the Democratic viewpoint of its publisher, Alexander E. Manning, who was a veteran of local and national black Democratic politics. The assistant editor of the *World*, John C. Bankett, was a Democratic nominee for state representative in 1924.³¹

Most of the leaders of the black campaign against the Klan-backed Republican party of Indiana were highly educated professionals and businessmen who were accustomed to civic leadership in the black community. For example, Freeman B. Ransom, a lawyer, was a member of the Board of Directors of the Independent Voters League and an executive officer of the Indianapolis branch of the NAACP. Ransom, a graduate of Walden University of Nashville, Tennessee, was the manager and attorney of the Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Corporation, perhaps the most successful black business enterprise in the United States. Oscar W. Langston, a dentist and graduate of Indiana Dental College, was president of the local NAACP. Abraham J. King, a physician, was treasurer of the Independent Voters League and an executive officer of the Indianapolis NAACP branch. King had received his degree from Indiana Medical College. Clergyman Henry L. Herod was a director of the Independent Voters League. Herod was pastor of the Second Christian Church and a graduate of Hiram College of Ohio. These men had a record of participation in local black social, civic, professional, and religious associations.³²

Although they were not generally representative of the leadership, a few of the leading figures of the fight against the Ku Klux Klan and the Republican party were black professional politicians, in that they had derived at least some of their income from their political activities. The outstanding case in point was Henry A. Fleming, the vigorous executive organizer of the Independent Voters League. Fleming had held various Republican political patronage jobs, such as deputy

³⁰ Indianapolis *Informer*, October 11, 1924, G-63, *ibid*.

³¹ Thornbrough, *Since Emancipation*, 11, 74; *idem*, "American Negro Newspapers, 1880-1914," *Business History Review*, XL (Winter, 1966), 480; Indianapolis *World*, February 22, June 13, 1924; Indianapolis *News*, November 1, 1924.

³² *Who's Who in Colored America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Persons of Negro Descent in America, 1927* (New York, 1927), 115; *Who's Who in Colored America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Persons of African Descent in America, 1930-1931-1932* (Brooklyn, 1933), 208, 255, 261, 350.



FREEMAN B. RANSOM

Courtesy of Stanley Nelson.

sheriff and superintendent of the division of ash collection. In 1924 Fleming managed a cafeteria and worked as a city hall custodian, a patronage job dispensed by the anti-Klan Republican mayor.³³

Locally organized efforts to retain the support of Indianapolis black voters for the Republican party in the 1924 general election were made largely within the framework of the regular Republican organization of Marion County. In 1924 the organization attempted to use its customary campaign devices in black Indianapolis, including campaign activities by a phalanx of black patronage workers organized within the party ward machines typically headed by white ward bosses aided by black lieutenants; expressions of support by black newspapers; and endorsements by black civic leaders, particularly clergymen. Charles H. Brown, a black Civil War veteran and experienced

³³ Indianapolis *News*, October 20, 1924; Indianapolis *Freeman*, April 5, 1924; Indianapolis *City Directory*, 1924, p. 683.

political campaigner, was chosen to serve as the black political organizer at the county level, working out of the office of George V. Coffin, Marion County Republican chairman.³⁴ Brown organized a black Republican county association, of which he was elected president at an organizational meeting attended by about thirty-five black political job holders. Brown's political bailiwick was the Indianapolis Fifth Ward, one of the largest wards in the state. Brown's Fifth Ward was almost solidly black, but its Republican boss, Frank Brattin, was white.³⁵

The black Republican alienation created by the Klan issue compelled the Republican party, according to the *Freeman*, "to use in the field a group of Negro workers inexperienced in organization work, and of very doubtful ability."³⁶ In fact, with the exception of Charles Brown, the black politicians who played the most prominent roles in the Republican campaign to retain the black vote in Indianapolis were connected not with the local Republican ward machines but with state politics (for example, Joseph Broyles, a black patronage worker in the office of Secretary of State Ed Jackson) or with politics in other Indiana cities (as was Mrs. Grace Evans, a black political figure in Terre Haute). Similarly, William H. (Big Jack) Jackson, noted as the "main [black] speaker" of the Republican campaign in Indianapolis, had not been among the front-line black political leaders of the city in the past. He had been defeated for Republican precinct committeeman in the Sixth Ward in 1922 but was at the forefront of the 1924 Republican campaign in black Indianapolis, serving both as a speaker and as publisher of the *Ledger*, the single black newspaper in the city supporting Ed Jackson and the rest of the Klan-endorsed Republican ticket.³⁷ Indeed, it was reported that the *Ledger* was financially backed by the Ku Klux Klan.³⁸

³⁴ Coffin had been elected county chairman with Klan backing over the anti-Klan candidate at the county convention following the primary election. Indianapolis *Freeman*, April 5, September 20, 1924; Indianapolis *Times*, October 6, 1924; Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 152.

³⁵ Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 20, October 11, 1924.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, September 27, 1924.

³⁷ Indianapolis *Star*, May 7, 1924; Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 27, 1924; Indianapolis *Ledger*, October 25, 1924 (clipping with typed heading mistakenly spelled *Leader*), G-63, NAACP Records.

³⁸ Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 27, 1924; Thornbrough, "Segregation in Indiana during the Klan Era of the 1920's," p. 612.

Denied the bulk of the black newspaper support, the Republican county organization was also resisted by the majority of the black business and professional class in the city, only a few of whom were willing to go on public record as endorsing the Klan-backed Republican ticket. Among those who did stand up for the Republican party were attorney J. Weldon Smith and the Reverend Charles H. Johnson of the Ebenezer Baptist Church.³⁹

Campaign activities by the local forces on both sides of the Klan issue were most intense during the two months prior to the 1924 general election. The anti-Klan organizations, particularly the Independent Voters League, were extremely active from the end of August to election day, maintaining a high degree of awareness about Klan influence in the Republican party and promoting a bandwagon psychology among blacks in favor of the Democratic ticket. The Independent Voters League regularly issued press releases and held public meetings on almost a weekly basis. League press releases announced that thousands of Indiana blacks were leaving the Republican party, urged blacks to register to vote, and publicized recruitment successes, perhaps with some exaggeration. League membership claims were two thousand in August and five thousand in early September. The league announced that it had recruited seven thousand members during a ten-day period at the end of September. Notaries registered black voters at the league office. The political rallies of the league were highly publicized and well attended, usually by hundreds of reportedly enthusiastic persons. A different roster of speakers, largely composed of influential local black personalities, appeared at each meeting. For example, eight black clergymen of Indianapolis were scheduled to speak at the league's October 13 anti-Klan rally. Collections taken at these rallies partially defrayed league expenses.⁴⁰

The most dramatic and successful event in the anti-Klan campaign was the October 19 mass demonstration initiated by the Indianapolis NAACP branch and cosponsored by the Independent Voters League. The thoroughly planned, much-publicized and well-executed rally began with a parade composed of marching bands, an automobile caravan, and marchers

³⁹ Artis to White, June 18, 1926, G-63, NAACP Records; Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 20, 27, 1924.

⁴⁰ Indianapolis *Freeman*, August 23, September 6, 20, October 4, 1924; Indianapolis *News*, November 1, 3, 1924; Indianapolis *Informer*, October 11, 1924, G-63, NAACP Records.

carrying anti-Klan placards. The main program was held in Tomlinson Hall, a huge public auditorium, and featured black speakers of national reputation. The sponsoring organizations succeeded in turning out a crowd estimated to be as large as seven thousand persons.⁴¹ The national office of the NAACP had aided and advised both the NAACP branch and the league in their separate preparations for the demonstration.⁴²

By September, 1924, Democrats in Indianapolis were in the political fight against the Ku Klux Klan, expecting to make significant inroads into the city's black vote by criticizing the Republican party and the Klan. In September some white Democrats, including Hoosier author Meredith Nicholson, a candidate for the state senate, made speeches in black neighborhoods. White Democratic candidates spoke at some of the political meetings of the Independent Voters League, and Democratic gubernatorial candidate Carleton B. McCulloch spoke at the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. In October the speakers' bureau of the Democratic county committee scheduled both black and white speakers, among them state legislature candidate Bankett and former Indianapolis mayor John W. Holtzman, for appearances in black precincts. On the eve of the election in November the Democratic candidate for governor spoke to two black crowds, one at a meeting of the Independent Voters League and the other at a gathering at Douglass Park.⁴³

Republican leaders were alarmed by the increasing evidence of black defection from the party from mid-September through October. They observed the successful political rallies

⁴¹ The nationally known speakers were William H. Lewis, Ferdinand Q. Morton, and William Pickens. Indianapolis *Freeman*, October 4, 18, 25, 1924, in G-63, NAACP Records; Indianapolis *Informer*, October 11, 1924, in *ibid.*; Richmond (Virginia) *St. Luke's*, October 24, 1924 (clipping), in *ibid.*; *Shining Star*, October 25, 1924 (clipping), in *ibid.*; Pittsburgh *Courier*, October 25, 1924 (clipping), in *ibid.*; Pickens to Johnson, October 20, 1924, Administrative File, Publicity (Speakers Bureau) 1920-1939, Pickens, William, 1923-1925, C-181, *ibid.*

⁴² Langston to Bagnall, September 11, 1924, G-63, NAACP Records; Johnson to Langston, September 15, 1924, *ibid.*; Langston and Smith to Pickens, September 25, 1924, *ibid.*; Fleming to Johnson, August 27, 1924, C-390, *ibid.*; White to Fleming, September 3, 1924, *ibid.*; Eulalia O. Proctor (league assistant organizer) to White, September 9, 1924, *ibid.*; Fleming to White, October 4, 1924, *ibid.*; White to Fleming, October 8, 1924, *ibid.*; Proctor to White, October 11, 1924, *ibid.*

⁴³ Meredith Nicholson to Maxwell E. Perkins, September 9, 1924, Meredith Nicholson Papers (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis); Nicholson to Robert Bridges, September 9, 1924, *ibid.*; Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 6, 20, October 4, 1924; Indianapolis *News*, September 8, October 20, 21, November 1, 3, 1924.

of the Independent Voters League and the difficulties experienced by the Republican ward machines in turning out black audiences for Republican meetings. The *Freeman* reported that the same faces were repeatedly seen at the Republican rallies, those of Republican "payroll workers and their political job-holding dependents."⁴⁴ At the same time the leadership of the Ku Klux Klan sought to maximize the white Protestant vote for the Republican ticket in order to counterbalance the possible loss of the black Republican vote, although the Klan hoped that the latter would not occur.⁴⁵ The Republican leadership recognized that the Klan issue was the basic factor in the disaffection of black Republicans. Referring to the rise of the Klan issue in a speech before Republican party leaders, the black director of the state Republican campaign bureau for blacks, Ernest G. Tidrington, declared: "This little thing that has happened has frightened the colored man. The heart of the colored man is with you but his mind is confused."⁴⁶ During the remainder of the campaign the Republicans tried to minimize the effects of the Klan issue, charging that it was an unfair political device created by the Democrats in order to seduce black Republicans and hold the votes of other minorities.⁴⁷

The local Republican organization launched a drive in October to stem the Democratic tide in the black areas of Indianapolis. Press releases were directed to black voters; one carried a statement of county chairman Coffin asking blacks not to believe Democratic "voodoo propaganda." The speakers' bureau of the county committee scheduled speakers, largely white Republican candidates, for several meetings in the black precincts, where audiences were urged to remain loyal to the party of Lincoln.⁴⁸ Also during the fall, Republican gubernatorial candidate Ed Jackson attended public and private meetings with blacks in Indianapolis. He avoided discussion of the Klan at an Emancipation Day political rally sponsored and attended

⁴⁴ Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 27, 1924.

⁴⁵ Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Official Document Number Twenty-one Issued from the Office of the Grand Dragon, Realm of Indiana, Indianapolis, Indiana, October 20, 1924, Harold Feightner Papers (Indiana Division, Indiana State Library); Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Proclamation, Grand Dragon, Realm of Indiana, November, 1924, G-63, NAACP Records; Thornbrough, "Segregation in Indiana during the Klan Era of the 1920's," pp. 614-15.

⁴⁶ Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 20, 1924.

⁴⁷ See Ed Jackson's keynote address, Indianapolis *News*, September 29, 1924.

⁴⁸ New York *Times*, October 22, 1924; Indianapolis *Freeman*, October 11, 1924; Indianapolis *News*, October 15, 18, 20, 29, 1924.

by black Republican organization men and their associates. However, Jackson discussed the Klan during a private meeting at Ebenezer Baptist Church, which was attended by black clergymen invited by the church's pastor, Charles Johnson, a regular black Republican. Twenty-seven of the forty black Baptist clergymen in the city were present. Jackson asked them to endorse his candidacy publicly and attempted to dissociate himself from the Klan, which he did not do in public before or after this meeting behind closed doors. The clergymen, a number of whom were openly skeptical about Jackson's remarks regarding the Klan, made no formal commitments during the meeting.⁴⁹

As with local organizations, the campaign activities of national groups were most intense in Indianapolis during the two months preceding the 1924 election. The probable defection of the black voters from the Indiana Republican party because of its association with the Klan was a matter of national interest, covered by the national press.⁵⁰ National leaders of the NAACP, the Republican party, and the Democratic party were particularly interested in the black vote in the state. As early as August an NAACP executive officer, Robert W. Bagnall, was in Indianapolis, where he made a political speech before an audience of local black businessmen attending a luncheon at the black YMCA. Also present at the meeting was Benjamin J. Davis, a black Republican politician from Georgia.⁵¹ The Republican party had sent Davis to Indianapolis, Bagnall reported:

to secure interviews from leading Negroes endorsing the Republican party, to stampede the luncheon, to arrange a dinner endorsing the Republicans and to give out press stories saying that Negroes in Indiana would vote Republican. At the dinner [i.e., the luncheon] I spoke on the political situation that in Indiana where the Klan was the Republican party, Negroes must vote solidly against every Republican candidate in the state. This met hearty approval. Davis followed with a speech urging that the Negroes of Indiana stand by the Republicans regardless of everything. He was so heckled and hooted that he, at length, about faced. . . .⁵²

In the report to the national office of the NAACP Bagnall also

⁴⁹ Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 27, October 11, 1924; *Indianapolis City Directory*, 1924, p. 51.

⁵⁰ New York *Times*, October 16, 22, 28, 1924.

⁵¹ Bagnall to Langston, August 6, 1924, Administrative File, Publicity (Speakers Bureau) 1920-1939, Bagnall, R. W., 1920-1927, C-174, NAACP Records; Bagnall to Pickens, August 8, 1924, *ibid.*; John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York, 1967), 524.

⁵² Report of July-August, 1924, Tour of Robert W. Bagnall, C-174, NAACP Records.

stated: "We shall have to send speakers into Indiana in the fall to counteract the professional Negro politicians who will stump the state [for the Republicans]." ⁵³

As Bagnall expected, the Republican national committee did send a column of nationally known black politicians to Indianapolis in the fall. Among them were Henry Lincoln Johnson of Georgia and Perry Howard of Mississippi. Johnson was a black member of the Republican national committee and a former recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia. Howard was a black delegate to the Republican national convention in 1924 and a former assistant to the United States attorney general. ⁵⁴ In regard to the activities of the out-of-state black Republican politicians before the Tomlinson Hall anti-Klan rally, an executive officer of the NAACP reported:

a whole hired host of Republican Party slaves had been here for weeks meeting the colored people in every church, hall and corner, lying, slandering the N.A.A.C.P., assassinating local leaders and doing their best to break up the success of the coming [Tomlinson Hall] meeting, which their bosses feared. They had spent plenty of money. —The result— The greatest anti-Ku Klux and anti-Republican demonstration ever put on in Indianapolis. ⁵⁵

The NAACP sent Bagnall and William Pickens, executive officers, to Indianapolis to organize and speak in support of the anti-Klan forces fighting the Republican party. In September, Bagnall, director of branches, helped the local NAACP plan the October 19 mass demonstration and the October 20 state NAACP conference to be held in the city. Pickens, field secretary, was one of the featured speakers at the Tomlinson Hall meeting. On the day following this meeting, Pickens formed the first permanent Indiana state conference of NAACP branches at a meeting attended by representatives of NAACP branches from ten Indiana cities. Bagnall and Pickens informed the delegates to the state conference that the NAACP, while non-partisan, was advising blacks to vote against the Republican state ticket as a means of fighting the Klan in Indiana. ⁵⁶

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *New York Times*, October 16, 1924; *Indianapolis News*, October 20, 1924; Proctor to White, October 11, 1924, C-390, NAACP Records; Sherman, *Republican Party and Black America*, 152-53, 167, 204; John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Urbana, Ill., 1977), 37, 93-94.

⁵⁵ Pickens to Johnson, October 20, 1924, C-181, NAACP Records.

⁵⁶ *Indianapolis Freeman*, October 4, 25, 1924; Bagnall to Johnson, September 19, 1924, C-174, NAACP Records; Pickens to Johnson, October 20, 21, 1924, C-181, *ibid.*; Report of Midwest Trip of Robert Bagnall, October 27, 1924, Administrative File, Special Correspondence, 1912-1939, Bagnall, Robert W., 1919-1931, C-62, *ibid.*

Democrats with national reputations also visited Indianapolis in October, 1924, attempting to influence black voters. At the invitation of the Independent Voters League, Ferdinand Q. Morton of New York City and William H. Lewis of Boston were featured speakers at the Tomlinson Hall anti-Klan rally. Morton was in charge of the Colored Division of the eastern Democratic headquarters. He also held a Democratic appointment as a municipal civil service commissioner and served as head of Tammany Hall United Colored Democracy. While Morton had been a black Democrat before 1924, Lewis, a former assistant United States attorney general under a Republican administration, had recently converted to the Democratic party. Lewis was the most important of several prominent blacks who defected from the Republican party in 1924 when Democratic leaders, attempting to capitalize on black discontent with the Republican party, made a greater effort than usual to win the black vote.⁵⁷ Although handicapped by the failure of his party's national convention to pass an anti-Klan plank, Democratic presidential candidate John W. Davis openly campaigned for black support. Davis made an anti-Klan statement that was more forthright than the comments upon the Klan by either of his major opponents, Republican Calvin Coolidge and Progressive Robert M. La Follette. Davis further promised that as president he would make no distinctions based on race or creed. Also, the Democratic candidate met black audiences in several states, including Indiana. During a campaign trip to Indianapolis Davis met a large delegation of blacks headed by George L. Knox, who represented the Independent Voters League.⁵⁸ In a short talk Davis assured Knox and the others that he was against "the Ku Klux Klan or any other organization which sought to intrude religion or race into politics."⁵⁹

There was apparently only one face-to-face debate between Republicans and Democrats in the black precincts of Indianapolis before the 1924 election. Late in October several representatives of the two parties addressed a meeting of the Universal Negro Political Union, evidently affiliated with Marcus

⁵⁷ Indianapolis *Freeman*, October 18, 1924; Indianapolis *Informer*, October 11, 1924, copy in G-63, NAACP Records; Langston and Smith to Pickens, September 25, 1924, *ibid.*; Sherman, *Republican Party and Black America*, 210-11; see also note 41.

⁵⁸ Sherman, *Republican Party and Black America*, 210-11; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 524; Indianapolis *Freeman*, October 11, 18, 1924; New York *Times*, October 14, 1924.

⁵⁹ Indianapolis *Freeman*, October 18, 1924.

Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association.⁶⁰ These addresses, however, were part of a larger debate carried on through the meetings, pamphlets, press releases, and newspaper columns of each side. The basic question of the debate in the larger arena was which party would be most likely to uphold principles, particularly equality before the law, of fundamental importance to black people. In regard to these principles the basic argument in support of the proposition that blacks should vote Republican was embodied in the old maxim of Frederick Douglass, "The Republican party is the ship, all else is the sea." According to this argument, the black voters owed the Republican party a debt of loyalty because it had been responsible for the application of these principles to black people, with examples ranging from Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the post-Civil War constitutional amendments to statutes against racial discrimination. Furthermore, the Democratic party was historically hostile to the extension of these principles to blacks, as evidenced by the lynching of blacks, racial segregation statutes, and disenfranchisement of black voters in the Democratic states of the Solid South. Instances of racial discrimination practiced by former Democratic city administrations in Indianapolis also were cited.⁶¹

The major argument in support of the position that blacks should vote Democratic was that the Republicans had abandoned the principles of the party of Lincoln, as indicated by the party's retreat from its earlier position of strong opposition to racial discrimination. The overriding evidence of the Republican regression was the nomination of the Klan-endorsed ticket by Indiana Republicans. The Ku Klux Klan stood for the antithesis of equality before the law, urging instead discrimination based upon race, religion, and national origin. Furthermore, the Indiana Democratic leaders condemned the Klan and promised to oppose racial discrimination.⁶² Summarizing the basic argument, the *Freeman* stated:

The Negro is fighting for his Constitutional rights as an American citizen. Those rights have been attacked by the Ku Klux Klan working thru the present misguided Republican party. The Democratic party in Indiana has

⁶⁰ The debate was held at the address of the UNIA Liberty Hall. See *Indianapolis News*, October 21, 1924; *Indianapolis City Directory*, 1924, p. 75.

⁶¹ *Indianapolis News*, September 29, October 15, 21, 29, 1924; *Indianapolis Freeman*, October 18, 1924; *Indianapolis Leader [Ledger]*, October 25, 1924, G-63, NAACP Records.

⁶² *Indianapolis Freeman*, September 20, 27, October 11, November 1, 1924; *Indianapolis News*, October 21, 1924.

taken its stand for the rights and privileges of all the citizens here, without regard to race, creed or place of birth. The Negro will support it because it supports him on the issues of American principles.⁶³

The Republican rebuttal regarding the Klan and the state party was muted, with the issue played down and characterized as a Democratic artifice. The Democratic party, it was noted, had been associated with the Klan in the South following the Civil War and still was. All white people were Kluxers, and one might as well vote for one as another. Furthermore, the Indiana Klan was not against black people but was "trying to down the Jew and the Catholic."⁶⁴ The response in turn for the Democrats was that the Klan should be condemned on principle for discriminating against Catholics and Jews, that the Indiana Klan was clearly hostile to blacks as shown by its statements and actions favoring white supremacy, and that, while the Klan influenced the Democratic party in the South, it dominated the Republican party in Indiana.⁶⁵

The rebuttal to the argument for black loyalty to the Republican party was as follows. Black voters had repaid any debt to the Republican party with their almost unbroken support of it in local and national elections since the Civil War. Regardless, black voters were not deserting the Republican party because the party had deserted them when it sided with the Klan. Furthermore, black voters could express loyalty to the Republican party by voting Democratic in 1924 as a means of defeating Klan candidates and rescuing the state party from the hands of an organization opposed to the principles of Lincoln. In addition, black support of the Democratic ticket would be an expression of political independence which might ultimately enhance black political power by requiring the political parties to compete with each other for black votes. Finally, black votes for the Democratic ticket would at least be an expression of protest against the Republican party's desertion of principles important to black people.⁶⁶

The opposing forces contesting the Klan issue in black Indianapolis before the 1924 general election engaged in reasonable debate and used fair campaign methods, but the contest was marred by kinds of skulduggery not peculiar in American

⁶³ Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 27, 1924.

⁶⁴ Indianapolis *News*, October 18, 22, November 3, 1924; Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 20, October 11, 18, 25, 1924.

⁶⁵ Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 20, October 11, 1924.

⁶⁶ Indianapolis *News*, October 21, November 3, 1924; Indianapolis *Freeman*, August 9, September 6, 20, 27, October 11, 18, 25, November 1, 1924.

political history, including the use of political tricks, unfounded propaganda, charges of political corruption, and political intimidation. The regular Republicans produced and distributed a "trick circular" signed "Democratic Negro Committee" and claiming "We do not want any more rights than we have in the South."⁶⁷ The anti-Klan group circulated a pamphlet luridly depicting the burning of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Chicago on October 18, implying the culpability of the Klan for the fire and urging blacks to vote the straight Democratic ticket.⁶⁸

Each side in the contest charged that some of its opponents had been corrupted by political bribery. For example, one of the most outspoken black critics of the Klan and the Republican party, the Reverend Charles Sumner Williams, was called "the French Lick donation seeker," the reference being to a favorite meeting place of the state Democrats. At the invitation of Williams, the Democratic gubernatorial candidate had made a speech criticizing the Klan during a political and educational rally at the Indianapolis Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The meeting had been called for the purpose of raising funds for Wilberforce University of Ohio. Only church members had made contributions, but later William H. Jackson, editor of the Klan-backed *Ledger*, charged that Williams had mixed politics and religion and that the Democratic organization had donated one thousand dollars to his church. Also, black organization men supporting the Republican party failed in an attempt to pressure the pastor's bishop to reassign him to a church in another city.⁶⁹ In retort, the *Freeman*, a voice of the anti-Klan movement, observed that the Republican party sought the support of black churches, noted that the Republican gubernatorial candidate mixed religion and politics in seeking the endorsement of the local black Baptist ministerial alliance, and referred to black clergymen supporting the Klan-endorsed ticket as "Judas preachers."⁷⁰ The *Freeman* apparently singled out for special criticism the Reverend Benjamin F. Farrell of Mt. Paran Baptist Church. Farrell was a director of the Independent Voters League and one of its speakers during its series of pro-Democratic rallies, but late in October he publicly en-

⁶⁷ Pickens to Johnson, October 20, 1924, C-181, NAACP Records.

⁶⁸ Pamphlet headed, "Do You Think the K.K.K. Burned Down This A.M.E. Church in Chicago?" G-63, *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 27, October 4, 25, 1924; Indianapolis *News*, September 8, 1924; Indianapolis *Leader [Ledger]*, October 25, 1924, G-63, NAACP Records.

⁷⁰ Indianapolis *Freeman*, September 27, October 11, 25, 1924.

dorsed the Republican party. The *Freeman* charged that the black Baptist preacher had been "converted not by reason but by the practical methods of the notorious ward heeler."⁷¹

Political intimidation was used as the election drew near. One hundred fifty black postal workers, clerks and mail carriers, were approached by Charles H. Brown, the black organizer associated with the office of the Republican county chairman, and warned that their jobs would be in "grave danger" if they did not "get right with the Republican State ticket." The postal workers subsequently sought the aid of the Independent Voters League, and the *Freeman* referred to Brown's statement as a Republican edict: "Kick in or get out."⁷² Also, Henry Fleming, executive organizer of the Independent Voters League, was arrested and indicted on the day following the Tomlinson Hall rally and arraigned on the day before the election. It was alleged that Fleming had embezzled money from a Chicago woman. The *Freeman* reported that black Republican organization workers had been informed a few days before the Tomlinson Hall rally that Fleming would go to jail if the mass anti-Klan demonstration were not called off. The *Freeman* referred to this as another Republican edict: "Be for us, or go to jail."⁷³ The Independent Voters League and several important white Democratic leaders came to Fleming's legal defense.⁷⁴

The high level of interest in the election and the lively political enthusiasm stimulated by the anti-Klan forces during the campaign continued through election day in black Indianapolis. Black political workers opposed to the Klan worked hard and efficiently on election day. Emphasizing his appeal for the black vote, the Democratic gubernatorial candidate visited several black precincts. McCulloch had become an outspoken critic of the Klan and was warmly welcomed by crowds of poll workers and voters. The high level of black interest in the election was indicated by the long lines of voters at polls in the morning. The bulk of the votes were cast before noon in the black precincts, although in past elections most black voters had customarily gone to the polls late in the afternoon. Further-

⁷¹ See note 25. Indianapolis *Informer*, October 11, 1924, G-63, NAACP Records; Indianapolis *News*, November 3, 1924; Indianapolis *Freeman*, October 18, 1924.

⁷² Indianapolis *Informer*, October 11, 1924, G-63, NAACP Records; Indianapolis *Times*, October 6, 1924; Indianapolis *Freeman*, October 11, 1924.

⁷³ Indianapolis *News*, October 20, 1924; Indianapolis *Times*, November 3, 1924; Indianapolis *Freeman*, October 25, 1924.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

more, the black vote was heavy, the vote total being higher in black precincts than in previous elections.⁷⁵

The anti-Klan movement in black Indianapolis succeeded to the point that most of the blacks going to the polls voted against the Klan-endorsed ticket and for Democratic candidates. Both Davis and McCulloch, Democratic candidates for president and governor respectively, were given majorities in black areas. According to contemporary estimates, 70 to 80 percent of the black vote in Indianapolis went to the Democrats.⁷⁶ This was true in many of the black precincts. In fact, McCulloch obtained 84 percent of the votes in one heavily black precinct (the eighth in the First Ward). A tabulation of the total votes in the city's twenty-one predominantly black precincts showed that McCulloch received 69 percent of the votes in those precincts.⁷⁷

The anti-Klan campaign failed, however, in that Coolidge and the Klan-backed county and state ticket won a majority in Marion County. The losses incurred by the Republicans in the black areas were more than offset by a heavy Republican vote in white districts of the county that were normally Democratic. Ed Jackson and most of the Klan-endorsed ticket in Indiana were elected in the Republican landslide of 1924 which kept Calvin Coolidge in the White House.⁷⁸ Shortly following the election, black anti-Klan leaders averred that they were not disappointed by the election results, claiming that the Ku Klux Klan had been defeated notwithstanding the Republican victory in Indiana. They noted that Governor-elect Jackson ran more than 100,000 votes behind President Coolidge in Indiana and that Jackson obtained significantly fewer votes than some of the Republicans elected to Indiana state offices without Klan support. These facts, according to the Indianapolis *Times*, indicated that "the Klan label was a liability rather than an asset"

⁷⁵ Indianapolis *News*, November 4, 1924; Indianapolis *Times*, November 4, 1924; Indianapolis *Star*, November 5, 1924; Thornbrough, *Since Emancipation*, 32.

⁷⁶ Indianapolis *Times*, November 4, 1924; Memorandum, White to W. E. B. DuBois, November 6, 1924, C-390, NAACP Records.

⁷⁷ Percentages are based upon calculations made by the author. The predominantly black precincts were numbers 8 and 9 in the First Ward; 7 in the Third Ward; 16-18 in the Fourth Ward; 1-8 in the Fifth Ward; 2, 3, 4, 6 in the Sixth Ward; 3, 4, 7 in the Seventh Ward. See vote for president and governor by precincts and wards in Marion County as listed in Indianapolis *Star*, November 6, 1924.

⁷⁸ Indianapolis *Times*, November 5, 1924; Indiana, Legislative Reference Bureau, *Year Book of the State of Indiana for the Year 1924* (Indianapolis, 1925), 50.

and that, if he had not been tied to the Klan, Jackson would not have run behind Coolidge.⁷⁹ Also viewing the election results optimistically from the anti-Klan standpoint, NAACP Director of Branches Bagnall wrote:

I believe that the fight in Indiana by our people was well worth while, even though Jackson was elected. The fact that the Negro will fight and not submit to oppression without protest will cause his enemies in the future to be more careful. . . .⁸⁰

Actually the Ku Klux Klan gained substantial political power as a result of the Republican victory in Indiana in 1924. Regardless of the political fortunes of the Klan, however, the significant fact was that the majority of the city's black vote went to the Democrats in state and national elections for the first time in history.⁸¹

What caused the transfer of the traditionally Republican Indianapolis black vote to the Democrats in 1924? The determining factor did not involve the general merits of the candidates in the opposing parties. This was suggested, for example, by the fact that the Indianapolis black vote had been against the Democrat McCulloch in the 1920 gubernatorial election.⁸² Nor was the contest significantly influenced by the economic status of blacks. The Republican years of the early 1920s were relatively prosperous ones for blacks in the North; employment and income figures were higher for blacks as a group in the North from 1917 to 1927 than before.⁸³ And the enormous disparity in the economic status of blacks and whites, which was a constant historical element in American society, was not made an issue in the 1924 election. The Ku Klux Klan was the overriding and almost exclusive issue for blacks in Indianapolis in 1924. Thus, the determining factor involved a matter of principle. Both before and after 1924 blacks tended to vote for the party perceived as being more sympathetic to the principle of equality. In this regard, there was a reversal of the perceptions of the two parties among blacks in Indianapolis in 1924.

⁷⁹ New York *Times*, November 6, 1924; Indianapolis *Times*, November 7, 1924.

⁸⁰ Bagnall to Olivia Taylor, November 5, 1924, G-63, NAACP Records.

⁸¹ Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 156; Artis to White, June 18, 1926, G-63, NAACP Records.

⁸² The Democratic candidates for governor and president not only lost the traditionally Republican wards containing the black precincts but also several normally Democratic wards in Marion County in 1920. Indianapolis *Star*, November 3, 1920; Indianapolis *News*, November 3, 4, 5, 1920.

⁸³ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 493-96; Thornbrough, *Since Emancipation*, 75.

As the Republican image became negative through association with the Klan, the Democratic image became more positive: the state party platform included the "Freedom and Liberty Plank," Marion County Democrats nominated a black man for state representative, the Democratic candidate for governor forthrightly criticized the Klan, and other Democratic candidates spoke against the Klan and in favor of the principle of equality.

The transfer of the Indianapolis black vote to the Democrats in 1924 was a manifestation of the developing black rebellion against the Republican party that occurred throughout the United States during the 1920s. Black political figures, organizations, and newspapers across the country were increasingly critical of the Republican party on matters of racial equality. The mounting criticism suggested a growing alienation of black voters from the Republican party, but this was rarely evident in the election statistics.⁸⁴ However, on a few occasions black voters did bolt the Republican party in local and state elections, even during the early 1920s. For example, the majority of the Harlem black vote was Democratic in the 1921 New York City mayoral election, and most of the black voters in the city's twenty-first district (Harlem) supported the Democratic candidate for state representative in 1922 and 1924. Black wards in Kansas City, Missouri, went Democratic in the April, 1924, mayoral election. Also, scholars agree that many black voters in the United States bolted the Republican party in the presidential election of 1924, although the majority continued to vote Republican.⁸⁵ By 1924 an increasing number of prominent blacks were convinced that black voters had to exhibit independent voting habits, supporting friends and opposing enemies of racial equality regardless of party affiliation. This trend foreshadowed the general black departure from the Republican party in 1936.⁸⁶

As previously noted, the national office of the NAACP had advocated black political independence even before 1924. NAACP Director of Branches Robert W. Bagnall, in commenting on the 1924 election results in black Indianapolis, wrote: "It will take sometime to teach the race as a whole independence in politics, but I believe we have gone quite far this year in teaching the lesson."⁸⁷ Walter White, NAACP assistant secre-

⁸⁴ Sherman, *Republican Party and Black America*, chapters 6-10 *passim*.

⁸⁵ John G. VanDeusen, "The Negro in Politics," *Journal of Negro History*, XXI (July, 1936), 269, 272; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 524.

⁸⁶ Sherman, *Republican Party and Black America*, 213.

⁸⁷ Bagnall to Taylor, November 5, 1924, G-63, NAACP Records.

tary, assumed that blacks in Indiana had broken free of the old one-party tie and remained so in 1926. White apparently hoped that Indiana might serve as a model for teaching the independent voting habit to blacks in other states. In this regard, White asked Lionel F. Artis of the Indianapolis NAACP to describe and explain the political realignment of black voters in Indianapolis as a speaker on the program of the 1926 NAACP annual conference in Chicago. Artis declined the request in a pessimistic letter explaining in detail that blacks in Indiana were "in a sorry position politically" and concluding that Indiana had nothing "to offer as a solution to difficulties being experienced in other places."⁸⁸

The pessimism expressed in Artis's letter was related to the 1925 election results, which seemingly indicated the return of black Indianapolis to "one party slavery status." Republican candidates endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan were victorious in the 1925 Indianapolis municipal and Marion County School Board elections. The majority of blacks going to the polls voted for the victorious Republican municipal and county tickets.⁸⁹ Still, the bare election statistics very likely concealed substantial alienation of blacks from the Republican party in Indianapolis in 1925. Circumstances prevented blacks from expressing their disaffection at the polls. The city's black voters and political figures were evidently demoralized politically by the 1924 election results and their aftermath. Despite the large anti-Klan black vote, the 1924 election enhanced the Klan's power in Indianapolis.⁹⁰

After the 1924 election the Republican party did not improve its negative image among Indianapolis blacks, making no concessions regarding the Klan. Through a combination of threats and political inducements, the Republicans succeeded in drawing some of the black anti-Klan politicians back into the party fold by 1925. Shortly after the 1924 election, the press reported that Republican politicians who had worked against Jackson would be relieved of their political jobs. This included black politicians who had worked at the polls in favor of Coolidge for president and McCulloch for governor. Some black politicians probably returned to the Republican party in order to stay on its payroll. According to a white Republican boss,

⁸⁸ Artis to White, June 18, 1926, *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*; Thornbrough, "Segregation in Indiana during the Klan Era of the 1920's," 615-16.

⁹⁰ Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 156.

some black precinct committeemen supported the party ticket in 1925 in return for a bribe of \$25 each. But the Republicans did not make a strong effort to get out the black vote in 1925, and only a few black politicians worked for the party ticket.⁹¹

To further complicate matters, the Democratic party lost its positive image among Indianapolis blacks following the 1924 election. In the first instance, the Democrats developed no permanent alliance with the black constituency while courting the black vote in 1924. Indeed, the Democrats assumed an attitude of indifference to the city's black vote after 1924. The party was apparently not interested in exploiting its opportunity to hold Indianapolis black voters after its bitter experience in the 1924 contest, in which the party won the black vote but lost the election. Not surprisingly, the Democrats were accused of making "covert attempts to secure some of the Klan support" in 1925.⁹²

Circumstances after 1924 were not conducive to the success of black insurgent political leaders in Indianapolis, and in fact there was an absence of such leadership in 1925. Black politicians who assumed the role of political leadership were Republicans of the "old school," as Lionel Artis described them, politicians who would be "satisfied when they themselves are 'taken care of', meaning a clerkship . . . or custodianship of the courthouse or City Hall or given the privilege of running a gambling house."⁹³ Recognition of such leaders either by the Republican party or by black voters was "almost nihil [sic]." The association of the Republican party with the Klan, which had created the anti-Klan black constituency for black insurgent leaders in 1924, still existed, but black voters were demoralized and could not be induced to support the Democratic party in the face of its recent attitudes and actions affecting blacks.⁹⁴

Among the mass of black voters in Indianapolis there apparently remained a substantial amount of disaffection with the Republican party. This was revealed in the 1925 city and county election statistics. The city's black vote in this election was "extremely light," with most black voters staying away

⁹¹ Artis to White, June 18, 1926, G-63, NAACP Records; Indianapolis *Times*, November 7, 1924; Indianapolis *Star*, November 5, 1924; Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 278n; Thornbrough, "Segregation in Indiana during the Klan Era of the 1920's," 616.

⁹² Artis to White, June 18, 1926, G-63, NAACP Records.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

from the polls because of political malaise or in protest against the absence of a reasonable choice on the ballot as far as they were concerned.⁹⁵ Alienation from the Republican party was probably greater among young blacks than among older ones who had lifetime ties to the party.⁹⁶ Artis concluded that "the great group of ordinary [black] voters" were dissatisfied with the existing political situation but were not politically articulate. Artis held that a "complete change" could be "easily accomplished" if "dynamic leadership were supplied."⁹⁷ He might have added that such a change could have come if black voters had been given an acceptable alternative to the Republican party.

The national movement for independent voting by blacks, which accelerated during the 1920s, continued during the 1930s. Black voters in the United States were lectured about the shortcomings of the Republican party and its presidential candidates by a growing body of noted black men, newspapers, and organizations in each presidential election after 1924. To paraphrase Bagnall, black Americans were being taught the independent voting habit. During this period the black image of the Republican party as the sacrosanct party of Lincoln substantially eroded. Yet the majority of black voters in the United States stayed with the Republican party in presidential elections, although sometimes in declining numbers, down to 1936. Black alienation from the Republican party was offset by the negative black image of a national Democratic party controlled by white Democratic leaders from southern states where blacks were legally segregated and disenfranchised.⁹⁸

Black disaffection from the Republican party was manifested to a greater extent in Indianapolis than in the country at large in the presidential elections of 1928 and 1932. The results of these elections reveal that Artis was unnecessarily pessimistic in 1926 when he assumed that the departure of a majority of the Indianapolis black voters from the Republican party was an anomaly (Table I). In the 1928 presidential election 53

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ In the 1924 election many young people had voted the straight Democratic ticket while older people had tended to split their tickets, voting for Coolidge and McCulloch. As a result of the split-ticket voting Davis received 61 percent of the vote in twenty-one largely black Indianapolis precincts, against 69 percent for McCulloch; see note 77 above; *Indianapolis Times*, November 4, 5, 1924.

⁹⁷ Artis to White, June 18, 1926, G-63, NAACP Records.

⁹⁸ Sherman, *Republican Party and Black America*, chapters 9-10 *passim*; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 527.

Table I: Percentages of the Two-Party Vote for Democratic and Republican Presidential Candidates, 1920-1936, in Predominantly Black Wards of Indianapolis

Election	Democratic	Republican
1920*	25	75
1924*	64	36
1928**	53	47
1932**	49	51
1936***	75	25

SOURCES: Ward returns were published in *Indianapolis News*, November 5, 1920, November 7, 1928, November 9, 1932, November 4, 1936; *Indianapolis Star*, November 6, 1924.

NOTE:

*Fifth Ward

**Fifth and Sixth Wards

***Twelfth Ward (New ward boundaries, drawn after the 1932 election, placed the new Twelfth Ward on the city's near northwest side where the old Fifth and Sixth Wards had been located.)

percent of the vote in the black wards of Indianapolis went to the Democratic candidate, Al Smith. Many blacks who voted for Smith identified with him as a candidate of the underdog because he was opposed by the Ku Klux Klan, which objected to his Roman Catholic faith. But the political alternatives regarding the issue of racial equality were not as sharply drawn for Indianapolis blacks in 1928 as they had been in 1924.⁹⁹ This probably explains why the Democratic majority was smaller in 1928 than in 1924. The options for blacks were even less distinct in the presidential election of 1932 than in 1928. On the one hand, Herbert Hoover, the Republican candidate, was criticized for continuing the regressive racial policy of the Republican party during his presidential administration. On the other hand, Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democratic candidate, was regarded as indifferent to the principle of racial equality

⁹⁹ Sherman, *Republican Party and Black America*, 229-32; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 524; Andrew Buni, *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier: Politics and Black Journalism* (Pittsburgh, 1974), 178.

and as susceptible to manipulation by the southern wing of his party.¹⁰⁰ Consequently, the Democratic share of the vote in the black wards of Indianapolis again declined in 1932, with Roosevelt receiving 49 percent of the total.

Viewed in retrospect, the results of the presidential elections from 1920 through 1932 show that the 1924 election was a point of departure in a historical process of political realignment in black Indianapolis (Table I). In presidential elections prior to 1924 most Indianapolis black voters were Republican. In keeping with this tradition, the Republican presidential candidate won 75 percent of the city's black vote in 1920. However, during the period 1924-1932 Republicans were the minority of the city's black constituency, with the majority consisting of Democrats and independents. The percentage of the black vote for the Democratic candidate varied in elections from 1924 through 1932 because there was a considerable body of black independents who sometimes voted Democratic. The fact that the Democratic candidate obtained the majority of the Indianapolis black vote in two of the three presidential elections prior to 1936 indicates that the total number of black Democrats and black independents exceeded the number of black Republicans throughout the period 1924-1932.

That black Americans, especially young voters, were prepared to leave the Republican party is indicated by the events of the 1920s and early 1930s. Nevertheless, the majority of blacks in America saw no political alternative supportable on principle until 1936, when the Democratic presidential candidate received most of the nation's black vote, including 75 percent of the black total in Indianapolis. By that time President Roosevelt and the New Dealers had, in a variety of ways, presented a Democratic image more favorable to the principle of racial equality than that of the Republicans. New Dealers had included blacks in their federal economic programs, and President and Mrs. Roosevelt had developed reputations for amicable relationships with black individuals and groups. President Roosevelt had recognized the political interests of blacks by creating a "Black Cabinet" and by seeking the advice of a group of astute black political observers, including Freeman B. Ransom, who had supported the Democratic party in 1924 as a leader of the Independent Voters League. During the 1936 campaign black political activists and black newspapers sup-

¹⁰⁰ Sherman, *Republican Party and Black America*, 253-55; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 527.

porting Roosevelt mainly stressed equal rights issues rather than economic matters.¹⁰¹ The result in the 1936 presidential election was the same as it had been in Indianapolis in 1924 when the image reversal occurred there. There was a political realignment of blacks in favor of the Democrats, but this time on a national basis.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ In 1936 Henry A. Fleming, who had been the executive organizer of the Indianapolis Independent Voters League in 1924, was chairman of the Democratic state bureau for blacks, and Freeman B. Ransom was in charge of Roosevelt's national campaign among blacks in Indiana. Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 527; Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (1 vol. to date, New York, 1981), I, 95-97; Indianapolis Recorder, November 7, 1936.

¹⁰² Proportionately more black voters left the Republican party in 1936 in cities that had experienced vigorous black political independence movements during the 1920s than in cities lacking that experience. For example, in 1936 Roosevelt received 75 percent of the black vote in Indianapolis and 80 percent in Harlem, but only 49 percent in Chicago and 43 percent in Columbus, Ohio. Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 95-97; Giffin, "Black Insurgency in the Republican Party of Ohio, 1920-1932," 44-45.