The Dilemma of School Integration in the North:  
Gary, Indiana, 1945-1960

Ronald D. Cohen*

On August 27, 1946, the Gary, Indiana, school board adopted a perhaps unprecedented policy: that children shall not be discriminated against “in the school district in which they live, or within the schools which they attend, because of race, color or religion.” Integration leader Reuben Olsen was particularly ecstatic. “Last night the Board of Education, in solemn session, enacted the non-discrimination policy long fought over, and much feared,” he reported to the National Urban League. “History was written last night.” The future for civil rights looked bright indeed. Sixteen years later, however, in a law suit filed against the Gary school board, the plaintiffs charged that the city’s schools, now over 50 percent black, were rigidly and systematically segregated. Whether by intent or accident, by 1961, 90 percent of the schools were segregated. What had happened to dash the high hopes of Reuben Olsen and his civil rights colleagues? Why were their dreams blighted? 1

Public school integration has been one of the cornerstones of the civil rights movement in the United States since World War II. The 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision marked

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* Ronald D. Cohen is professor of history at Indiana University Northwest, Gary, Indiana. An initial draft of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, Cincinnati, April, 1983. The author is indebted to William Reese, Edward McClellan, and Michael Home1 for their astute comments.


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the beginning of a new era in the struggle for racial equality by undermining Jim Crow and insisting that separate schools meant inherently unequal schools. The prime battleground between segregationists and integrationists was initially in the South; conflict in the North was muted until the 1960s. Northern segregation, however, was more subtle and elusive, and perhaps more insidious. It was clearly more persistent. An examination of school segregation and integration in Gary, Indiana, between the war and the beginnings of a national civil rights struggle enables us to comprehend more readily the historical forces that both promoted and resisted the expansion of civil rights to all citizens in the North and across the nation.

There is no general study of postwar northern school segregation, but bits and pieces of the story have begun to appear. In Chicago, for example, public schools became increasingly segregated during and after the 1920s. Michael Hornel found that, “In 1965, 89 percent of Chicago’s black pupils were enrolled at schools with 90-100 percent black enrollments, a figure slightly above the level of the 1930s.” The Brown decision had seemingly little influence. Vincent Franklin, in his study of black education in Philadelphia, concluded that “many northern school boards revealed that through various quasilegal maneuvers, such as the shifting of school boundaries within the districts, school officials were able to create separate [and inferior] black and other minority public schools.” What frustrated any attempt to change conditions, however—and there were scattered active and passive protests—was the essentially de facto nature of northern segregation. In many cities school boards did indeed pursue a policy of separating black and white children. But with or without these efforts—and the lack of interventionist measures, such as busing—school segregation would have occurred, for neighborhoods, more than deliberate policies, fostered separate schools. Such was certainly the case in Gary.²

The Dilemma of School Integration in the North

The first northern city to champion school integration publicly was an unlikely choice for the honor. The public school system of Gary began in 1906 when the city was founded on the southern shore of Lake Michigan by the United States Steel Corporation. Within a few years the city would boast the world's largest integrated steel mill and a multiethnic, multiracial population; by 1960 the population would reach 178,000, 40 percent of whom would be non-white. Its school system, once considered one of the most innovative and "progressive" in the country, would drop from the limelight by the eve of World War II, although it still maintained much of its original organization and program. By 1960 these, too, would be in shambles. The enrollment would be 22,000 in 1950 and over 41,000 in 1960, of whom half would be black.3

Gary's schools always had been essentially segregated by residential boundaries and school board policy. In 1927, responding to a strike by white students at the Emerson school, the board decided to reinforce the existing *de facto* segregation by transferring the few black students out of the Emerson school and deciding to build the all-black Roosevelt school. Only the Froebel school, in the midst of the city's crowded ethnic and black south side, thereafter had a racially mixed student body. While about 40 percent of the school's more than 2,000 students in grades K-12 were black in 1945, there was only one black teacher. Social and recreational activities were routinely segregated.4

White community leaders and school officials had taken little notice of the segregated nature of the schools until the Detroit race riots of 1943, which frightened the Chamber of Commerce into appointing a fifteen member committee to study the city's pervasive segregation. Composed of the mayor, the editor of the local newspaper, the superintendent of the U.S. Steel plant, the school superintendent, and six blacks, the committee

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drafted a code on race relations which deplored segregation and discrimination. Other organizations, including the local Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), supported these sentiments. In October, 1944, school officials sent representatives to a conference on intergroup education sponsored by the Rosenwald Foundation. Subsequently, the superintendent requested that the Bureau for Intercultural Education provide a consultant to the schools, and late in the year Gary became one of three cities to obtain such assistance. By August, 1945, school administrators and teachers had attended three conferences in the city which explored the use of intercultural activities in the classrooms. But talk was not enough. As Theodore Brameld of the Bureau wrote at the time, "The real task of breaking the steel ring of discrimination and segregation now gripping Copperberg [Gary] so malevolently will require all the strength of ordinary citizens as well as the finest kind of schools." The test came soon enough.5

"A nationwide strike consciousness manifested itself in Gary this morning as white grade and high school pupils of Froebel school walked out of class in protest against Negro pupils in that institution," the Gary Post-Tribune informed its readers on September 18, 1945. The Froebel strike garnered national headlines and ran sporadically for the next three months. It was a disturbing experience for all concerned, coming on the heels of the great victory over fascism and amid a national labor strike fever. From the beginning community leaders, including the superintendent and a united all-white school board, opposed any concessions to the strikers. As the local daily paper editorialized, "approximately one fifth of Gary citizens are Negroes and their needs and rights and privileges must be given equal consideration with all others."


* Gary Post-Tribune, September 18, 21, 22, 1945; James Tipton, Community in Crisis: The Elimination of Segregation from a Public School System (New York, 1953). From August, 1945, to August, 1946, there were a record 4,630 strikes nationwide, with 5,000,000 strikers compiling a total of 120,000,000 days off. The Froebel strike took place in this context. See Foster Rhea Dulles and Melvyn Dubofsky, Labor in America: A History (4th ed., Arlington Heights, Ill., 1984), 334-41.
According to Noma Jensen of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the strike and its counterparts in schools in Chicago and New York were excellent examples "of how Fascists can use and are using our children to foment strife between our racial and religious groups." The city's recent immigrant population seemed particularly susceptible to such machinations. A report by the school system's social welfare director, Mark Roser, noted that virtually all of the strikers did not "have what might be loosely called 'An American Background.'" Moreover, they were below average academically and exhibited a "lack of status." In his detailed study of the strike, Community in Crisis, James Tipton reaffirmed that "these boys who initiated the Bartow [Froebel] strike and who chose the anti-Negro goal were ones whose lives, both at home and in school, had been largely unhappy and difficult. One or two of them were badly maladjusted, the majority were mildly so, and one or two were fairly well adjusted." He also noted that "they were driven to become attention-seekers, 'zoot-suiters,' extremists in behavior, speech, and appearance."

It was easy at first to blame seemingly fascist parents and maladjusted children for starting the strike, but as it progressed the issues became more complicated. Initially the strikers, a majority of the white high school students joined by some of the younger students, demanded removal of all black students and the school's principal. On October 1 the strikers returned to classes upon the school board's promise to investigate "charges of maladministration" by the principal. In late October, with the principal exonerated by an outside review board, the strike resumed, lasting from October 29 to November 12. The students now demanded, not the transfer of blacks out of Froebel, but the integration of all of the city's schools. The strikers' new goal went to the heart of the city's and the school board's long-standing segregation policies. Slowly civic leaders recognized the depth of the problem foretold in Brameld's recent warning. The strikers and their parents, their hostility to the city's elite lying just below the surface, led the way in forging an integration plan. "We are asking that all the schools be opened to all students, both white and Negro," the Parents' Committee announced when the strike resumed. "We are asking that all the public parks and beaches be opened to all citizens of the community, both white

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7 Noma Jensen, "What's Behind These School Strikes?" The Nation's Schools (December, 1945), 24; [Mark Roser], "Some Conclusions From the Study of the Personalities in the Strike," manuscript in the Guy Wulfing Papers (Calumet Regional Archives); Tipton, Community in Crisis, 68-69.
and Negro. By standing behind us in these demands, the responsible members of other communities in Central City [Gary] can show unequivocally their sincerity when speaking of the 'democratic process.' " Three days later Frank Sinatra, "The King of Swoon," arrived in the city "to croon Gary bobby-soxers and their boy friends into a democratic attitude on the race relations problem." Sinatra charmed the girls, denounced the strikers, then quickly left town. Less than two weeks later the defeated strikers returned to their classes, having obtained no satisfaction.8

While the white establishment—business, political, civic, religious, and labor leaders—quickly rallied to oppose the strike, the black community's response was weak and divided. A central problem was the initial absence of a strong civil rights organization. The local chapter of the NAACP, founded three decades before, had become inactive. In late September National Secretary Walter White urged local chapter president Alfred Hall to contact the superintendent, "making it known to him your opposition to separate schools for Negroes." A month later, with still no action, White arrived in the city, meeting with the editor of the paper and other community leaders. They reaffirmed their commitment to integration and planned a mass rally, which never transpired, to feature Supreme Court Justice Frank Murphy and entertainer Paul Robeson. White also urged William Hastie, an attorney with the national office of the NAACP, to press the justice department concerning possible federal action, but this also produced no results. In mid-December Assistant Secretary Roy Wilkins lamented that "the recent school disturbance revealed that our branch was haplessly weak and ineffectual." The following spring Director of Branches Ella Baker was again urging Hall to do something, particularly since the National Urban League (NUL) had established a branch in Gary and was making a frontal attack on the Gary school dilemma. "That the community had to wait for a new organization to be established before the school situation was energetically attacked is a definite reflection upon the NAACP," Baker complained. And indeed it was.9

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8 Gary Post-Tribune, October 1, 29, November 1, 1945; Tipton, Community in Crisis, 109.

A highly critical 1944 study by the National Urban League of racial conditions in Gary had paved the way for the league's arrival the following year. Organized in early fall the local chapter was in no position to intervene during the strike's initial stages. In early October J. Harvey Kerns, a representative from the national office, advised the small group against "participation in the highly controversial school strike" because "the League was too new—the organization was really not a going concern and had not been given an opportunity to demonstrate its usefulness on many non-controversial issues." Kerns did meet, however, with School Superintendent Charles Lutz and representatives of the Bureau for Intercultural Education, who were still in the city. The league became more directly involved with the arrival of Joseph Chapman, its first executive secretary, later in the month. In December it joined with other organizations to form a coordinating agency on interracial problems.\textsuperscript{10}

Although they had returned to their classes, Froebel's white students were still not satisfied and by early February they were threatening a renewal of the strike. As the school board began considering a citywide integration plan, the local NUL chapter began playing a central role in bringing Froebel whites and blacks together. Chapman informed the national office in February that "we have established a relationship, that is, the local League and these dissatisfied parents, and we are talking over very frankly racial issues. Through this same group the Executive [Chapman] has established a relationship with a small group of Negroe [sic] students and White students (former strike leaders), and through the two we believe the League is going to make a significant contribution in solving the Froebel problem and prevent a strike." He was correct. In early March six student leaders, black and white, having met in Chapman's office, issued a public statement "declaring a permanent truce" and urging the board of education to pass a general integration policy. The community was relieved. "Froebel high school is once more the scene of light-hearted bobby soxers, whose main concern these days is the chance of Froebel's thinlies in the Spring track events," the Gary American, the city's black weekly, announced. "The spectre of race hate, suspicion, and mutual distrust between Negro and white students, has been dissolved." Mark Roser, who had strongly opposed the strike, commented "that

\textsuperscript{10} J. Harvey Kerns to Eugene Kinckle Jones, October 12, 1945, Container 25, Gary, Indiana, Research File, VI, C, NUL Papers; Gary Post-Tribune, December 21, 1945.
the students of Froebel school are becoming the most tolerant in the whole city." As events would demonstrate he was probably correct.11

By late spring pressure was mounting to integrate the schools and generally improve race relations. Organized and unorganized intercultural activities flourished. In April, when the school board created an intercultural scholarship foundation in order to send teachers to intercultural workshops, the school superintendent reluctantly confessed, "race relations is Gary's major problem." Finally, on August 27, 1946, the school board adopted an integration policy stating that children "shall not be discriminated against in the school districts in which they live, or within the school which they attend, because of race, color or religion." The Urban League's Manet Fowler later wrote that "with this step, the board not only raised a proud standard for democracy, but soundly and courageously stuck its spade against the root of all future strikes." Implementation was to begin in September, 1947, when all children, black and white, in grades K-3 (later changed to K-6) would have to attend their neighborhood school. Older children would be allowed to finish in the school they had been attending.12

Gary was one of the first northern cities to officially integrate its schools. Why did this happen? Foremost, the city's elite was united on the need for promoting racial harmony. They had first tried educational programs and token measures, but when faced with unruly working-class students and parents whose protests were tinged with overt racism, they decided to take a harder line. Moreover, their resolve to integrate was reinforced by the city's more progressive organizations, such as a civil liberties committee, the CIO, Anselm Forum, and the League of Women Voters. The school board's membership reflected the interests of the city's elite. Among its five members were a druggist, a U.S. Steel production planner, a Presbyterian minister, the retiring president of the Chamber of Commerce and executive of the local power company, and a civic leader who was the only female on the board. Three of the members were Democrats, one was a Republican, and one was an Independent (the minister), but all five were connected to the city's close-knit power

structure. Their integration plan reflected enlightened liberal thinking, yet when implemented it obviously would not seriously disrupt the community. It was safe. It also served as an important symbol of cooperation among community, business, and labor leaders who were otherwise divided along economic and political lines. James Tipton has stressed the growing national climate for integration as a general cause of integration in specific cities, but this does not seem to have been of much importance given the continued segregation in other northern cities. Also of little importance were the efforts of the black community which, aside from the belated activities of the NUL, played a minimal role throughout the controversy. Although committed to supporting equality through integration while retaining pride in the all-black schools, the black community lacked organizational unity and forceful leadership.\footnote{Tipton, Community in Crisis, 101-11.}

An integration policy had finally been adopted, but implementing it would not be easy. Particularly difficult was the situation at the Emerson school, the city’s second oldest, situated in a predominantly middle-class neighborhood on the north side—the area most susceptible to integration. Many believed that the Froebel strike had been partially fueled by the memory of the success of the Emerson strikers in 1927. The predominantly white neighborhood was now as opposed to integration as it had been nineteen years earlier. In November, 1946, the school board received a petition from purportedly 90 percent of the taxpayers of the district protesting enrollment of “any persons other than members of the Caucasian race” in the Emerson school. The petition was immediately “branded as undemocratic, un-American and un-Christian” by the city’s establishment, according to the Gary Post-Tribune. School authorities, strongly supported by the teachers, moved slowly ahead to insure peaceful integration the following year. By June, 1947, it was evident that only a handful of black children, dispersed among six previously all-white schools, would be directly affected and that no white children would be transferred to any all-black schools. Hopes brightened in the spring when the antidiscrimination candidate for mayor won the Democratic primary by a slim margin against a man opposed to integration, and black doctors were finally allowed to practice in the city’s Methodist and Catholic hospitals.\footnote{Gary Post-Tribune, November 13, 1946; Tipton, Community in Crisis, 112-32. Emerson, similar to Froebel and Gary’s other major schools, still included grades K-12. The establishment of separate high schools would come in the late 1950s. On the 1927 Emerson strike, see Cohen and Mohl, Paradox of Progressive Education, 138-40. On intercultural policy in 1946 and 1947, see also Dana Philip Whitmer, “Proposed Extension in the School and Classroom Programs of Intergroup Education in the Public Schools of Gary, Indiana” (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1949), 31-34.}

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EMERSON SCHOOL STUDENTS' STRIKE, 1947

Courtesy of the Calumet Regional Archives, Gary, Indiana
The rest of the city was apparently prepared for the inevitable. However, when school opened in September and 116 black children cautiously entered the doors of six previously all-white schools, a storm broke at Emerson as about 200 students walked out to protest the 38 newcomers to the elementary grades. The next day they were joined by another 600 or 700, mostly from the high school. School authorities, having learned their lesson, did not hesitate to threaten retaliation. Students under sixteen who did not return to classes were to be considered truants, while students sixteen and over were to be suspended and made ineligible for athletics. The strike lasted ten days. Again most of the community rallied behind school authorities, and there was no trouble at the other newly integrated schools. "What have the people of Emerson district accomplished by standing out against the democratic policy of the school board," the local paper editorialized. "They have lost a week's schooling for their children. They have stirred up a cauldron of ill-will which can become a lasting poison if it is not countered with a realization they have made a mistake. For they are trying to turn backward the democratic process in an age in which that process is being accelerated everywhere." The strikers were also condemned by the Catholic church and other religious organizations, the CIO, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Gary Bar Association, to name but a few. The black community again took a back seat, however. The NAACP national office wrote to local president Hall, "we expect that the NAACP leadership in matters of this kind would be in the thick of the fray working with various groups and with our own membership urging them to take a dynamic and aggressive part to alleviate the basic problems which confront our citizenry." But nothing happened. Similarly, the Urban League stayed in the background, confident that the white establishment would satisfactorily handle the situation.\textsuperscript{15}

The principle, if not necessarily the substance, of integration was firmly established in the Gary schools by late 1947. Some had resisted, others had argued that more should have been accomplished (particularly the integration of the all-black schools and the high school grades), but most were satisfied. "The tremendous job of allaying tensions, of reestablishing good will and of educating the public to a proper acceptance of the Negro's rightful position in the community remains to be done," S. An-
Dhil Fineberg reported to the Bureau for Intercultural Education in late September. "These things can be done better, however, now that the system of segregation in Gary schools has ended.” In early 1948 Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt presented Superintendent Charles Lutz a citation from the Bureau for Intercultural Education for the Gary schools’ "contribution to the democratic cause."16

It was now necessary for Gary leaders to build upon the gains that had been made. Representatives from the bureau temporarily remained in the city to offer advice and establish networks within and between the schools to promote intercultural activities. A City-wide Democratic Living Committee, composed of representatives from each school’s Building Committee on Democratic Living, organized the previous year, discussed ways of promoting better democratic living and brought in consultants to meet with the teachers. By 1949, however, a shortage of funds forced the bureau to withdraw, and the lack of an overall strategy to promote equality by the school board and school administrators continued to produce mixed results. In his 1949 dissertation on the Gary school system, Dana Whitmer applauded how much had been accomplished, but also warned: "there has been no planned program through which the majority, or even a large number, of teachers have worked toward common ends in integroup education. The programs of intergroup education which have been developed . . . have depended largely on the individual interest, initiative, and enthusiasm of the principals and teachers in the schools.” He also noted that “with the exception of two schools, pupils in Gary Schools have complete equality of opportunity in regard to school curricula, activities, and services.” In the Froebel school there was full integration in the lower grades, but in grades eight through twelve discrimination persisted in athletics, the band, swimming facilities, theater, social activities, and class offices. A few black teachers had been hired, however, as well as a black school psychologist.17

Although disturbed by continuing inequalities, the black community focused its attention on having the mayor appoint a

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17 Whitmer, Proposed Extension in the School and Classroom Programs,” 36-40, 244-45. For information on an intercultural unit at the Emerson school, see Gladys Pierce, “Intercultural Relations, Gary, Indiana” (Master's thesis, Indiana University, 1950).
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black member to the school board. “Many individuals not living in the Central District are of the impression that the citizens south of the Wabash tracks are not too concerned over the present school board appointment that is to be made in the near future,” the Gary American editorialized in August, 1948. The whites could not be more wrong. “We’re quiet, but we’re not asleep in the Central District.” Success came the following year when, after months of delay, Mayor Eugene Swartz appointed the Reverend J. Claude Allen of the Colored Methodist Episcopal church to the school board. The Gary American was jubilant, commenting that this “has won the respect for the mayor of nearly every citizen in the Central District.” This appointment and the passage of a statewide desegregation plan were flickers of hope as the troubled decade ended.14

While hope remained, conditions deteriorated. By 1951, 85 percent of the schools were segregated, and 83 percent of the 8,406 black children were attending all-black schools. Ten years later 90 percent of the schools were highly segregated, and 97 percent of the 23,055 black pupils were in eighteen predominantly or exclusively black schools, with primarily black teachers and administrators. The ever worsening problem of school overcrowding was particularly galling. All five schools in the black district were over capacity; by 1949 the Roosevelt school was bulging at the seams with 3,800 in a building built to hold no more than 2,711. Half-day classes, rented facilities, and overflowing classrooms soon became common at Roosevelt and many other schools.15

Gary entered the 1950s as one of the most segregated cities in the North. While a 1955 Urban League study by Warren Banner argued “that the Board of Education and school administrators [should] be lauded for their zeal in attempting to provide sufficient building facilities for the school population and for their efforts in eliminating discriminatory practices in the school system,” all were not satisfied. The local Urban League, for instance, was concerned about six issues: the segregation of school districts, the integration of teaching staffs, equal access for blacks to all school facilities, the hiring of additional black employees in the school system, the expansion of vocational programs, and attention to the employment opportunities of high school graduates. Furthermore, Clifford Minton, director of the local NUL, felt that Banner had gone too far in praising school officials. “It

is commonly known and generally agreed that the initiation and progress on integration in the Gary School System came as the direct result of a 'crisis,'” he wrote to Banner in New York. “Further that in the main, the gradual changes which have taken place from year to year came almost in spite of rather than because of interest and leadership on the part of top school administrators. In most cases positive changes have been effected in proportion to the extent they were warranted by expediency.” Minton believed the best tactic for obtaining action on the local NUL’s concerns was through “communication and negotiation with the superintendent and his staff and members of the [school] board rather than formal pronouncements and I think we got a heck of a lot more done that way.” He was particularly proud of the role he played in replacing School Superintendent Lutz with Alden Blankenship in 1956. “We remained in the background,” he informed Urban League Executive Director Lester Granger, “but to put it mildly, our interest and influence on this development was significant.” A member of the advisory board to select Lutz’s successor, he believed his personal knowledge of Blankenship through NUL connections was a decisive factor.20

Lutz was fired by the school board in September, 1955, following the publication of a very critical survey of the schools conducted by the Public Administration Service (PAS). The survey reported that the schools were overcrowded, the curriculum inadequate, finances in disarray, and “student achievement ... low and in great need of improvement.” The responsibility for these faults, the survey concluded, lay with the superintendent: Lutz’s weak leadership served to “undermine completely the morale and confidence of the board and of teachers, principals, parents, and students in those persons and institutions which are supposed to provide positive and responsible leadership in public education.” Although virtually complete in its examination of Lutz and the school system, the report ignored any signs of racial segregation or discrimination. It mirrored the official line that denied there were any problems. Following the Supreme Court’s Brown ruling the previous year, the Gary Post-Tribune had crowed that the decision had come more than seven years after the Gary School Board had laid down

the policy that had eliminated such segregation from the Gary school system, and quoted Superintendent Lutz's optimistic evaluation, "The program of eliminating gradually segregation in the city's schools has now been completed." Such self-deception was easy when there were the more pressing problems of overcrowding and funding. A few, however, did not share the prevalent optimism. "Local citizens have and are raising many pertinent and constructive questions about progress on carrying out the Gary school integration policy," Minton noted in May, 1955. "It seems that the consensus is that after the pressure of the incidents that lead [sic] to the '1946 Policy' subsided, that school administrators have not been consistent or given much or effective leadership to this matter." 21

Blankenship was quickly embroiled in questions of segregation and integration. The situation at two transition schools was particularly acute, prompting Minton to inform the new superintendent in March, 1957, that there was "evidence of subtle and overt teacher-pupil resentment to the increase of Negro enrollment in the school population [that] has not and is not being met with positive leadership." Moreover, questions were "raised about evident methods by which school district boundaries are regulated and the apparent plans to maintain as high a degree of racial segregation in the schools of the area as possible through illogical or unnatural manipulation of school boundaries." In December Blankenship assured the Urban League director: "we are making progress in the schools even though we do not have all of the answers. In our school curriculum, we are emphasizing the likenesses of people of different races and creeds and the fact that it is the individual rather than his race, color or creed which is important. . . . We still have some schools with an all-white or an all-Negro population. . . . Changes will come slowly in certain areas of the community. Nevertheless, we feel that we are making progress on a sound basis." Two days later Minton informed the national office that while some progress had indeed been made, particularly in the few integrated schools, there remained many problems. "A major proportion of the new schools constructed during recent years are located in areas almost totally inhabited by Negroes," he noted. "Generally, due to the placement of these schools, they will have little, if any, influence on the integration process." He preferred, however, to stress the

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“progress” that had been made in order to “realistically enhance our city’s prestige.”

Segregation, so pervasive, was difficult to reduce, but more specific grievances were easier to confront, if not redress. The black community, desiring to broaden the students’ opportunities, continually sought more vocational courses and counseling. In a 1949 editorial the Gary Post-Tribune related that the “Gary American [sic] has hammered away for years for more shops, better equipped. Maybe one day the head of the institution will see the need for teaching for the masses instead of the classes.” The problem, simply, was the elitist principle. The PAS survey listed the Roosevelt school, still the largest all-black school, as having one of the three best vocational programs in the city. This, however, was within the context that the “entire industrial arts program in the Gary schools is poorly developed and has been neglected by the administration both centrally and in the individual schools.” The previous year a group of black ministers had queried the school board regarding the employment opportunities for black high school graduates who did “not meet standards normally expected of individuals with high school education.” They particularly lacked English, typing, and shorthand skills. In his official reply Assistant Superintendent Whitmer related that school officials were color-blind regarding vocational courses and guidance. “Our experience indicates that membership of a student in any religious, ethnic, or racial group does not determine his needs, interests, and potentialities. These are determined by factors of heredity and environment,” he concluded. “Consequently, we have not set up special programs in guidance activities for Negro students.” Still, complaints continued. In 1959 Minton reported to the Urban League that black youth still had difficulty obtaining clerical jobs because of inadequate school training. He echoed the old charge “that while possibly not more than 25 percent of the graduates of some Gary schools enter college, . . . high priority is placed on college preparatory training.” As the decade ended the curriculum issue remained clouded.

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22 Minton to Alden Blankenship, March 5, 1957, Gary Urban League Papers (University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Chicago, Illinois); Blankenship to Minton, December 3, 1957, ibid.; Minton to R. Maurice Moss, December 5, 1957, ibid.

Another source of friction was teacher segregation. The large year-by-year jump in school enrollments created periodic shortages and required continual recruitment and placement of new teachers. The Urban League supported integrated faculties. But in 1955 four schools had all-black teaching staffs, thirteen schools had all-white staffs, and another eight schools had integrated staffs. Eleven of the twenty-five schools had no black students. Overall, 42 percent of the pupils were nonwhite, but only 25 percent of the teachers. Minton recognized that some teachers might not be comfortable in integrated classrooms, but integration, he felt, had to be the goal. Two years later Blankenship assured Minton “we base our selection of staff members on the person best qualified for the job.” The meaning of this statement became clear in November, 1959, when the league discovered that in an advertisement of current teaching vacancies certain positions were secretly designated as being for white applicants while others were for blacks. In an interview with the director of personnel, he “admitted that this was the first occasion on which ‘apparent racial designations’ were used to describe the location of specific vacancies.” He added “that no subsequent announcements with such ‘connotations’ had been, or would be, used.” Such a blatant policy was probably dropped, but integration remained elusive.24

Occasionally there were events which provided a glimmer of hope for the advancement of school staff integration. For example, when the first black supervisor was appointed in 1956 the Gary American believed the appointment would “mean much toward bettering race relations in the city.” But in late 1959 the Midtown Citizens’ Committee, an interracial group, reported that aside from supervisory personnel, there had been little progress. “There is little if any evidence to show that systematic efforts are being made to encourage or to implement a policy of teacher integration in the majority of our public schools,” the committee noted. One glaring problem was “that the majority of the school principals have a passive or reactionary or negative attitude toward teacher integration,” black as well as white. The committee found only six or seven schools with token teacher integration, and they were ones with predominantly black student bodies; the remainder of the thirty-six schools were either all white or all black. The superintendent and the school board, meeting with

URBAN LEAGUE DINNER, 1958

Left to right, Clifford E. Minton, executive director of the Gary Urban League; H. B. Snyder, president of the Gary Urban League and publisher of the Gary Post-Tribune; Winthrop Rockefeller; and Peter Mandich, mayor of Gary, Indiana

Courtesy of the Calumet Regional Archives, Gary, Indiana.
Another somewhat clearer problem was school overcrowding. The rapid increase of students, particularly in black and white working-class neighborhoods, put a great strain on school buildings and finances. By mid-decade new schools were being built at a rapid rate, but this rate continued to lag behind the increase in demand. The black community continually demanded new classrooms. In 1950 hundreds of Roosevelt school students were either in rented facilities or attending half-day sessions. Two years later the Gary Post-Tribune boasted, “For the first time in more than 20 years Roosevelt School will operate with all children on full-time schedules.” Of course, almost two hundred were still housed in the American Legion hut or in the basement of the local Lutheran church. The opening of six new elementary schools in 1958 finally allowed for the conversion of Roosevelt and three other unit (K-12) schools to upper grades only. While conditions eased somewhat at Roosevelt, elementary students at Froebel, now a predominantly black school, experienced half-day sessions or attended classes at the Galilee Baptist Church, First Hungarian Reform Church, Gary National Guard Armory, and the local branch library. Overall some 2,000 students citywide were taught in similar facilities in 1958.

While new schools were greatly needed and welcomed, their location could cause controversy. In 1957, Minton wrote: “a major proportion of the new schools constructed during recent years are located in areas almost totally inhabited by Negroes. Generally, due to the placement of these schools, they will have little, if any, influence on the integration process.” During the decade Minton attempted from time to time to raise the issue of grouping new schools with school officials, but, as he later admitted, “we just simply didn’t have the horses—we could have made a stronger protest but that’s just about what it really added up to.” Finally, in 1962 the NAACP entered a lawsuit on behalf of 100 black plaintiffs. In Bell v. School City of Gary the plaintiffs made three charges: that the school board and superintendent had a “constitutional duty to provide and maintain a racially integrated school system”; that segregation was deliberate; and

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26 Gary Post-Tribune, September 8, 1952.
GATHERING OF GARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS, CA. EARLY 1950s. DANA WHITMER IS ON THE FAR RIGHT. COURTESY OF THE CALUMET REGION ARCHIVES, GARY, INDIANA.
that black schools had "unequal facilities in all respects, including, but not limited to over-crowded and larger classes, and unequal recreational facilities." The suit, one of the first in the North, although lost, capped the twenty-year struggle to achieve equal schooling in Gary.27

In 1962, eighteen of the forty-two schools had an essentially all-black student body, twenty were all white, and only four were mixed. According to one authority 97 percent of the 23,000 black students attended segregated schools. The school board's decision in March to build another high school in the predominantly black Central District touched off a protest in the black community, which preferred a site further west to insure greater integration. A month later the board backed down. Now committed to challenging the board, the rejuvenated local NAACP decided to file a general discrimination suit against the board. School authorities, while admitting racial imbalance, denied this was intentional or that the black schools were in any way inferior. The trial in federal court began on September 10 and lasted four days. Robert Carter, chief counsel of the NAACP, orchestrated the plaintiffs' case, which hinged on the testimony of an expert witness, Dr. Max Wolff.28

The plaintiffs lost because they could not prove that Gary's school segregation was designed by the school board. High school boundaries essentially had not changed since 1941, a time when racial segregation was permitted under state law as well as official school board policy. While elementary school construction had continually altered attendance boundaries, these boundaries could be explained on the basis of natural barriers and conditions—railroad tracks, roads, and rivers. There was no written or oral evidence that race had been a factor in boundary selection; indeed, school authorities had plausible explanations for the building of various schools and their attendance patterns. New schools were grouped together because of population congestion and the availability of land, often land already owned by the school system. Particularly damaging to the plaintiffs' case was the testimony of the black school board president and a white prointegration member that race had never been considered in drawing district boundaries. The judge ruled that the plaintiffs had failed to prove the school board had "deliberately or pur-

posely segregated the Gary schools," although there was legal precedent for putting the burden of proof on the defendants in such cases.  

The absence of school board reports and inadequate board minutes, combined with a scarcity of supporting documentation, make it very difficult to corroborate either the charges of the NAACP or the findings of the court. What seems clear is that the five-member school board, composed through the 1950s of essentially middle-class businessmen, union leaders, and a black minister—eight men and one woman—gave little thought to school integration. Responding to pressures from various neighborhoods to eliminate overcrowding, their primary goal was to build new schools. They did what they thought was expedient. That their decisions encouraged segregation, and that they ignored methods of promoting integration were matters of little concern to them. Gary's persistent school segregation can be said, therefore, to have been essentially _de facto_.

As for the charge that the black schools were inferior and grossly overcrowded, and that their students displayed poorer academic achievement, the judge ruled that in building ten new schools in the Central District the school board had shown good faith in trying to cope with the population explosion. The plaintiffs could have emphasized the almost complete segregation of teachers, which did appear contrived, but "they carefully avoided implying that the Negro schools might be made in any way inferior by their predominant number of Negro teachers." Since the courts had not ruled that _de facto_ segregation necessarily meant academic inferiority, the charge used by the plaintiffs was weak. Busing and its controversial justifications were still in the future. In fact, the judge argued that transferring students miles from their homes in order to promote integration "would in my opinion be indeed a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment." The judge was upheld by the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. It ruled that there was no legal remedy for _de facto_ school segregation, which the plaintiffs had now practically admitted was the form of segregation existing in Gary schools. The Supreme Court never heard the case.

Following the _Bell_ case, as the city was becoming more black, there was an increasing commitment in Gary to foster school
The Dilemma of School Integration in the North

Integration had become a political and social, rather than a legal, issue per se. Although most whites remained unconvinced of the need to promote integration, most blacks felt that further integration was necessary for black academic performance to improve; this despite continuing black pride in all-black schools, Roosevelt in particular. Still, there were indications that there were troubles in the few mixed schools. In 1957 Minton alerted the superintendent to ways of preventing friction at two newly integrated white schools where there was "evidence of subtle and overt teacher-pupil resentment to the increase of Negro enrollment in the school population [which] has not and is not being met with positive leadership and planning." More serious problems erupted at the previously troubled Emerson school in 1960. Black parents charged some of the (all) white teachers and students, supported by the principal, with violence and intimidation. The superintendent reported to the school board "that he and his supervisory staff have investigated the charges and are continuing to seek a solution to the school's human relations problems." Unfortunately, such difficulties would continue as blacks moved into other previously all-white neighborhoods and schools.31

In the two decades following World War II Gary, with a large black population, remained one of the main battlefields in the North over school integration. The Froebel strike, the school board's integration plan, the Emerson strike, galloping de facto segregation, attempts to promote intercultural education and teacher integration, and finally a lawsuit kept Gary in the headlines and made it a focal point for the dreams and aspirations of those who supported civil rights. The role of the black community in this struggle was generally low-key, except in the earliest years when the Urban League was instrumental in healing the wounds at the Froebel school and bringing about an integration plan. Nevertheless, the league never abandoned the dream of educational equality and opportunity, normally working with and through the city's white power structure. A key factor was the league's long-time president H. B. Snyder, publisher of the Gary Post-Tribune, whom Minton attributes with much behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Minton well expressed his dilemma, "you're in the middle in the Urban League, you're suspect by many whites of being too liberal or too radical and you're right

31 Minton to Blankenship, March 5, 1957, Gary Urban League Papers; Gary Post-Tribune, April 27, 1960.
in the middle and you have a tight line to walk.” And walk it he did.\textsuperscript{32}

Gary accomplished much on paper but little in practice. One problem was that \textit{de facto} segregation, in the years before the relief of busing, successfully prevented substantial school integration. The black community, growing rapidly, spread outward from its base in the Central District, providing little chance for mixed neighborhoods. In the \textit{Bell} suit the NAACP tried to prove deliberate school segregation but was unsuccessful and even dropped this line of argument in its appeals. To be sure there was white resistance, both overt and subtle. This, combined with natural demographic changes, successfully frustrated any real integration. After the Emerson strike in 1947 the battle between integrationists and segregationists was essentially muted: the former claiming victory, the latter uneasily awaiting the future. Following the \textit{Brown} decision the city’s elite congratulated themselves on solving Gary’s problems and with their fellow Northerners turned their eyes to the South. They were also confident that school integration would be limited to the working-class schools, which was essentially true until the 1960s. Gary was an early leader among northern cities in recognizing the obvious dangers of blatant racism and segregation, but it chose to settle for paper solutions and token satisfaction, a northern trait of the period. Such acquiescence was directly challenged in the 1960s in Gary and elsewhere, again with mixed results. The dilemma of discrimination and segregation in the land of democracy would continue to plague everyone concerned.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{32} Interview with Minton.

\textsuperscript{33} On integration attempts in the 1960s, see, in addition to the works cited above, Allen Matusow, \textit{The Unravelling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s} (New York, 1984), 60-96, 180-216.