
Latecomers to the Industrial City: African Americans, Jobs, and Housing in Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1940–1960

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The African-American population of Fort Wayne, Indiana, grew from 2,517 in 1940 to 5,294 in 1950 and 11,645 in 1960. By the end of this period blacks constituted 7.2 percent of the city's total population, compared with 2.1 percent twenty years earlier. This expansion typified the experience of smaller industrial cities in the North, most of which had relatively few black inhabitants before World War II.¹ In his classic study of prewar racial issues, Gunnar Myrdal observed that these cities represented "the most important of all community groups to which the Negro has yet to gain access."² Earlier black migrants from the South, particularly during the great exodus of World War I, settled largely in the big cities of the North. These metropolises received another huge influx of African Americans during World War II, but the manpower needs of the "arsenal of democracy" also brought blacks in sizable numbers to many smaller industrial centers. Between 1940 and 1950 the black population doubled in cities such as Albany and Syracuse, New York; Fort Wayne and South Bend, Indiana; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Peoria, Illinois; and Springfield, Massachusetts; it grew by nearly as much in Bridgeport, Connecticut; Canton, Ohio; Elizabeth and Paterson, New Jersey; and other similar places. In the following decade the black population in most of these cities continued to expand at a much faster rate than the white population. As a result racial issues took on new significance in the lives of these communities.

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¹In 1940 only nine of the thirty-three northern and midwestern cities with populations between 100,000 and 250,000 had over 5,000 black inhabitants: Gary, Indiana (20,394), Dayton, Ohio (20,273), Youngstown, Ohio (14,615), Camden, New Jersey (12,478), and Akron, Ohio (12,260) had the largest numbers, while Trenton, New Jersey; Hartford, Connecticut; Flint, Michigan; and New Haven, Connecticut, had between 5,000 and 10,000 African-American citizens. By 1950 twenty-four of the thirty-four cities of this size had in excess of 5,000 black residents.

²Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944), 386, 182–201.

It is hardly surprising that research on African Americans in northern cities during World War II and the postwar era has concentrated on the big metropolises.³ The black population in places such as Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia continued to expand at a far greater rate than in cities with under 250,000 inhabitants. Nevertheless, the experience of African Americans as latecomers in the smaller industrial centers of the North in the two decades after 1940 is an important part of their urban history. A case study of Fort Wayne during this period, for example, throws light on black struggles to secure jobs and decent housing in smaller industrial cities. It also illuminates the interrelationship of race with the other major forces of urban change, namely, the beginnings of the transition from the industrial to post-industrial city, the growth of suburbanization, and inner-city decline.

Situated in northeastern Indiana within the industrial heartland of the upper Midwest, Fort Wayne was an important manufacturing center for electrical products, trucks, pumps, and metals in the mid-twentieth century. Gaining entry into the city's industrial labor market between 1940 and 1960 was a significant advance for African Americans, one that contrasted with the false start of the World War I era. Labor shortages in 1917 and 1918 and postwar strikes had induced a number of manufacturers in Fort Wayne to recruit black workers from the South. As a result, the city's black population, 572 in 1910, rose to 1,454 in 1920 and to an estimated 2,200 within another two years. This expansion ceased abruptly after the labor unions' defeat in the final wave of postwar strikes in 1922. Thereafter only a handful of firms hired new black workers. Many of the black newcomers were dismissed from jobs in industry, leaving them to choose between taking poorly paid service work or looking for employment in other cities such as Gary, Chicago, or Detroit. Those who continued to work in manufacturing were confined to foundry and laboring jobs that were unpopular with whites.⁴

Fort Wayne's experience during this earlier period contrasted with development in Gary, Indiana, one of the few northern cities of

³ For a broad overview see Kenneth L. Kusmer, "African Americans in the City since World War II: From the Industrial to the Post-Industrial Era," *Journal of Urban History*, XXI (May, 1995), 458-504. For particular cities see Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996); John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974* (Philadelphia, 1987); and Henry L. Taylor, ed., *African Americans and the Rise of Buffalo's Post-Industrial City, 1940 to the Present* (Buffalo, 1990).

⁴ Tom Lewandowski, "The Warm Weather of 1919: The Bowser Lock-Out and the Bass Strike" (unpublished paper in author's possession); Charles S. Johnson, "A Survey of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne, Indiana," National Urban League Department of Research and Investigations, 1928, copy (Fort Wayne-Allen County Public Library).

under 250,000 population with a large black community before 1940. Gary's black population grew from 340 in 1910 to 5,500 in 1920 and 18,000 in 1930. During World War I African Americans displaced eastern European immigrants as the main source of cheap labor in the steel industry. Immigration restriction laws enacted in the 1920s insured the continuing importance of black labor in the local market. Gary millowners aimed at stabilizing black workers at around 10 to 15 percent of the work force in order to maintain ethnoracial diversity as a safeguard against class solidarity. Although African Americans in the main were confined to unskilled jobs, the growth of the steel industry in the 1920s sustained the expansion of black employment.⁵

Fort Wayne's business and civic leaders, by contrast, hoped to stem the black influx as part of their strategy to attract new industry to the city. In the 1920s, after local union militancy had been curbed, the Chamber of Commerce launched a campaign that drew truck, pump, and electrical manufacturers to Fort Wayne. Lighter industries of this kind were thought to require more skilled and intelligent workers than heavy industries such as steel. Accordingly, Fort Wayne boosters regarded the social composition of the city's labor force, in which people of German, Irish, and British extraction were predominant, as one of their greatest selling points. Promotional publicity boasted that Fort Wayne's old-stock work force was more reliable, enterprising, and hardworking than labor in big cities where immigrants from eastern and southeastern Europe and blacks were more numerous.⁶ Unsurprisingly, the booster campaign attracted firms with a conservative racial outlook. Of the fifteen businesses that located in Fort Wayne between 1925 and 1932, only the International Harvester Corporation was willing to hire blacks, a small number of whom were employed at its new truck plant. As a result, African Americans experienced either marginalization or displacement during the local boom of the 1920s. By 1940 Fort Wayne ranked as Indiana's second largest city in total numbers but only eighth in black population.

⁵ Edward Greer, *Big Steel: Black Politics and Corporate Power in Gary, Indiana* (New York, 1979), 72-87; Neil Betten and Raymond Mohl, "The Evolution of Racism in an Industrial City, 1906-1940: A Case Study of Gary, Indiana," *Journal of Negro History*, LIX (January, 1974), 51-64. For further contrasts between Fort Wayne and other Hoosier cities see Darrel E. Bigham, *We Ask Only a Fair Trial: A History of the Black Community of Evansville, Indiana* (Bloomington, Ind., 1987), and Jack S. Blocker, "Black Migration to Muncie, 1860-1930," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XCII (December, 1996), 297-320.

⁶ John Clark, "Keeping Up With Jonesville," *Saturday Evening Post*, CC (September 10, 1927), 184; Fort Wayne Chamber of Commerce, *Industrial Survey of Fort Wayne, Indiana* (Fort Wayne, 1930), 56-58. See, too, the memoir of prominent booster Albert H. Schaff, "The Chamber of Commerce Takes a Bow" (Quest Club paper, October 10, 1947, copy, Fort Wayne-Allen County Public Library).

Because of their precarious position, African Americans were more vulnerable to the ravages of the Depression than any other group in Fort Wayne. Local unemployment persisted at high levels throughout the 1930s. Promising signs of economic recovery in 1935 and 1936 were abruptly halted by the further recession of 1937–1938, which hit Fort Wayne particularly hard. African Americans had to operate on the margins of a devastated local economy rather than in the prosperous one of the 1920s. In 1940 the unemployment rate among blacks was 38 percent compared with 11 percent among whites. Out of a total black male employment of 455, the census of that year recorded only two men working as semiskilled operatives in manufacturing and forty-eight holding laboring jobs in factories. Nor did African Americans receive an equitable share of federal and state work relief from agencies such as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Civil Works Administration, and the Works Progress Administration (WPA). This disparity was typical of the situation throughout Indiana, but in some cities—notably Indianapolis—a vocal black political leadership used its influence to secure better treatment of African Americans, particularly after all work relief was placed under federal control with the creation of the WPA in 1935. In Fort Wayne, however, the black middle class was very small, lacked influence, and had no tradition of political involvement with the Democratic party. Indeed, it was hard pressed to protect its own position. Many of the sons and daughters of the city's black bourgeoisie, who might have provided the African Americans with a new generation of leadership in the era after World War II, moved in the 1930s because they could not find decent jobs in Fort Wayne. One woman, who came from one of the city's longest-established black families, pleaded with R. Earl Peters, an influential state politician and native of Fort Wayne, to help her daughter, a graduate of Fisk University, to find employment as a teacher elsewhere in Indiana. "Fort Wayne," she complained, "doesn't have anything to offer a Negro in the school system."⁷

As happened throughout Indiana, where total manufacturing employment doubled between 1939 and 1943, war production revitalized the local economy. The number of jobs in the Fort Wayne–Allen County area rose from 26,000 in April, 1940, to 56,600 in June, 1943. So rapid was this expansion that local industries faced the threat of

⁷ U.S., Census, *Sixteenth Census, 1940*: Vol. II, part 2, *Population*, 972; Freeman B. Ransom to Louis McHowe, May 1, 1935, Box 460, Indiana, Federal Emergency Relief Administration State Files, 1933–1936, Record Group 69 (National Archives, Washington, D.C.); Marjorie Wickliffe to R. Earl Peters, June 5, 1934, Box 1, Earl Peters Papers (Allen County–Fort Wayne Historical Society). For Fort Wayne in the 1930s see Iwan W. Morgan, "Fort Wayne and the Great Depression: The Early Years, 1929–1933," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXX (June, 1984), 122–45; Morgan, "Fort Wayne and the Great Depression: The New Deal Years, 1933–1940," *ibid.* (June, 1984), 348–78.

labor shortages; consequently, several firms began to hire black males in late 1942 and black females in mid-1943.⁸ These developments prompted renewed black in-migration from the South, particularly from Alabama and Mississippi. With need for labor at its most acute in mid-1944, Fort Wayne's African-American population reached a wartime peak, estimated at over six thousand, but declined to around five thousand within a year as defense production slowed. International Harvester, which experienced high turnover among its black workers throughout the war, reported an intensification of this trend in the first half of 1945 as many African Americans chose to return home to the South or moved to other northern cities to look for peacetime jobs.⁹ In contrast to the experience of their Great War forebears, blacks who remained in Fort Wayne after World War II did not have the factory gates slammed in their faces. The wartime breakthrough into industrial employment, however, prefaced slow and tortuous progress rather than a steady advance toward occupational mobility.

Occupational distribution among African Americans was a significant indicator of limited racial change from the 1940s through the 1960s (see Table 1). Black employment in the skilled trades lost momentum after the war, remaining static in the 1950s and 1960s. The strongest advance was recorded by semiskilled operatives, a wide-ranging occupational category that encompassed operators of basic machinery from industrial presses to elevators and laundry equipment. On the other hand, low-paying service work remained the single largest category of black employment until the 1960s. In 1940 service workers and unskilled laborers constituted three-fourths of the gainfully employed African Americans. The numbers in these categories declined proportionally over the next twenty years but still accounted for nearly half of black jobs by 1960. Significantly, African Americans made slower economic progress than whites during the so-called "long boom" that the United States enjoyed in the quarter century after World War II. In 1969 the median income of black families in Fort Wayne was 68 percent of that of white families, compared with 71 percent twenty years earlier.

In Fort Wayne's case the nature and process of racial change in the workplace during World War II had important implications for the postwar economic progress of African Americans. The necessity

⁸ Hugh M. Ayer, "Hoosier Labor in the Second World War," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LIX (June, 1963), 96; United States Employment Service (USES), "Resurvey of the Fort Wayne Market, October 10, 1942," Box 274, Fort Wayne File, USES Records, Record Group 183 (National Archives); USES, "Labor Market Development Report for Fort Wayne, August 1943," *ibid.*

⁹ Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, January 8, 1950; Dale Cox to Donald F. Carmony, June 18, 1945, in "A War History and Review of the Fort Wayne Works, International Harvester Corporation," Box 74, Economic Changes, Indiana War History Commission Records, (Archives Division, Indiana Commission on Public Records, Indianapolis).

of finding new sources of labor rather than commitment to racial equality dictated the employment policy of local businesses. The limited and largely symbolic governmental initiatives to combat racism were of little significance. Neither the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), a federal agency created by presidential order in 1941 to investigate racial discrimination in industries with defense contracts, nor the Indiana Plan of Bi-Racial Cooperation, a state body established in 1941 to help win the war through promoting cooperation among business, black, and labor leaders in defense industries, had much impact on Fort Wayne.¹⁰

The first companies to hire African Americans in sizable numbers in 1942–1943 were General Electric, which had hitherto barred them, and International Harvester. Significantly, these firms operated the largest factories in the city, and their corporate headquarters determined manpower policies. A number of smaller local businesses also began to hire blacks, but others did not. Although there were exceptions, companies engaged in brewing, pump manufacture, and precision tools—the industries longest associated with Fort Wayne—continued to bar blacks, in some cases until the early 1960s. Many of these firms were engaged in war work but did not fall afoul of the federal and state antidiscrimination watchdogs largely because African Americans did not protest against them. The Indiana War Manpower Commission admitted in 1946 that Fort Wayne had received more war contracts than its labor supply actually merited. As a result, blacks could easily find industrial work, usually in the larger factories, which offered the best wages and seniority prospects. Significantly, the FEPC dealt with only one serious complaint of racial discrimination in Fort Wayne's defense industries. Despite a reputation for treating workers well in pay and seniority, the Studebaker Corporation, which opened a new plant in the city during the war, refused to employ blacks other than as janitors and common laborers. In marked contrast to their toleration of discrimination by smaller firms, African Americans issued a chorus of complaints about Studebaker at a time of an intensified local labor shortage. As a result, in mid-1944 the FEPC negotiated an agreement in which the company promised to mend its ways.¹¹

¹⁰ For discussion of the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) see Louis Ruchames, *Race, Jobs and Politics: The Story of the FEPC* (New York, 1953); and Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War* (London, 1976), 48–51. For state antidiscrimination efforts see Max Pavin Caves, *The Hoosier Community at War* (Bloomington, Ind., 1961), 115–19, and James H. Madison, *Indiana through Tradition and Change: A History of the Hoosier State and Its People, 1920–1945* (Indianapolis, 1982), 384–89.

¹¹ J. Harvey Kearns, "A Study of the Social and Economic Conditions of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne, Indiana," Department of Research and Community Projects, National Urban League, 1949, 11–22, copy (Fort Wayne–Allen County Public Library); John K. Jennings, "The War Manpower Commission in Indiana, 1943–1945," pp. 73–76, mimeograph, Indiana War History Commission Records;

Although spared the kind of displacement experienced in the early 1920s, Fort Wayne's African Americans encountered many obstacles to their advancement in the workplace after World War II. When demobilized white workers returned from war to reclaim their jobs, black employees were "bumped down" in level of employment—a practice common in Gary and other Hoosier cities in 1945 and 1946.¹² Federal antidiscrimination regulations would have effectively prohibited mass layoffs of African American workers, but Fort Wayne business leaders had no such plans. The lesson that many of them had learned from World War II was that blacks constituted a useful pool of surplus labor that could be taken on or laid off in accordance with the needs of the local economy.¹³ African Americans were thus condemned to a prolonged period of economic insecurity in a city that showed early signs of deindustrialization during the decade and a half after 1945.

In spite of national prosperity, a report in 1962 described the postwar trends of Fort Wayne's manufacturing economy as "less than favorable."¹⁴ In common with many older industrial cities, Fort Wayne experienced a number of structural economic changes in the aftermath of the war: the beginnings of plant relocation to suburban and rural areas; greater reliance on automation in manufacturing processes; a loss of defense contracts to the rising sunbelt cities of the South and Southwest; the increasing use of overtime by employers to avoid hiring additional workers with full benefits; and the growth of service and retail business.¹⁵

In view of its dependence on a relatively narrow range of hard goods manufacturing, Fort Wayne was particularly vulnerable to the postwar recessions of 1949, 1953–1954, and 1957–1958. Its difficulties were compounded by industries that, with the major exception

"Excerpts from the Fort Wayne Conferences, May 31 to June 1, 1944," Box 725, Presidential Fair Employment Practices Committee Records, Record Group 228 (National Archives).

¹² Kearns, "A Study of the Social and Economic Conditions of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne," 14; Howard Minier, former United Automobile Workers official and vice-president of Fort Wayne Industrial Union Council in the 1940s and 1950s, interview with author, Fort Wayne, Indiana, May, 1980.

¹³ For nationwide trends see Matthew A. Kessler, "Economic Status of Non-white Workers, 1955–1962," *Monthly Labor Review*, LXXXVI (July, 1963), 782–86; and William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers since the Civil War* (New York, 1982), 123–33.

¹⁴ Hammer & Co. Associates, *Downtown Fort Wayne: An Analysis of its Economic Potential* (Washington, D.C., 1962), 41, copy (Fort Wayne–Allen County Public Library).

¹⁵ For a general discussion of deindustrialization see Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York, 1982), 111–39. For useful big-city comparisons see Gregory D. Squires, *Chicago: Race, Class and the Response to Urban Decline* (Philadelphia, 1987), 25–29; Thomas J. Sugrue, "The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race, Industrial Decline, and Housing in Detroit, 1940–1969" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1992), 94–148; and Carolyn T. Adams *et al.*, *Philadelphia: Neighborhoods, Division and Conflict in a Post-Industrial City* (Philadelphia, 1991), 30–39.

of International Harvester's heavy trucks division, specialized in manufacturing component parts rather than finished products. The first recession, paradoxically the most shallow of the three in national terms, had the worst effect on Fort Wayne, particularly in the tool and wire industries. In 1949 11 percent of the local labor force was unemployed, but the jobless rate for African Americans was twice as high.¹⁶ The local economy enjoyed a dramatic revival during the Korean War but fell back again during the postwar recession. By March, 1954, employment in the Fort Wayne area was nearly six thousand less than its Korean-era peak (66,324 in June, 1953) and a thousand below its 1948 level. Thereafter, the growth in local jobs occurred outside the manufacturing sector, where the number of jobs experienced a decline of 2.8 percent compared with an expansion of 14.6 percent in total employment between 1950 and 1960. These fluctuations hit African Americans, latecomers to the industrial city, much harder than whites. Not only were blacks prone to suffer the "last hired—first fired" syndrome but recurrent layoffs compelled many of them to take work where they could get it, thus preventing the acquisition of seniority within one particular firm. In a tight labor market blacks were also hurt because they lacked special skills and educational qualifications. Trapped in the ranks of unskilled laborers, they were vulnerable to layoffs and replacement when plants automated.¹⁷

To counter the effects of manufacturing decline, Fort Wayne launched another booster campaign in the mid-1950s to attract new business. On this occasion the city sought firms tied to the nation's booming consumer economy, notably trucking, warehousing, and retailing. By 1958 Fort Wayne was home to four major truck lines; warehousing activity that had started in the 1920s had undergone a huge expansion; and four new shopping centers were in operation—the first major retailing enterprises to be built outside the downtown district. This success did not spell good news for African Americans. Retail jobs in particular were not a promising source of employment for them. The downtown department stores did not employ blacks as sales assistants until the late 1950s for fear of alienating white customers. The new shopping centers, which were almost wholly dependent on a white clientele, took even longer to follow suit. For African Americans, however, the main problem with the new businesses was their suburban location. Warehousing and, to a lesser degree, trucking were industries with a tradition of hiring blacks, but the new

¹⁶ Manager's Report, June, 1949, Box 274, Fort Wayne File, USES Records, Record Group 183.

¹⁷ For Fort Wayne's postwar economy see Indiana Economic Council, *Growth and Characteristics of the Fort Wayne Economy* (Indianapolis, 1954); Allen County Plan Commission, *Population and Economic Trends of Allen County* (Fort Wayne, 1957); Hammer and Co., *Downtown Fort Wayne*; and Fort Wayne City Planning Department and City Planning Associates, Inc., *Fort Wayne from Past to Present: Community Renewal Program* (Fort Wayne, 1972).

firms were located on the southwest edge of the city close to the Baer Field airport. Travel to this area from the east-central district of the city where almost all blacks lived was difficult because of poor public transport.¹⁸

African-American women were somewhat less adversely affected than men in the early stages of Fort Wayne's transition from industrial to post-industrial city. In 1949 the average annual income of black workers in Fort Wayne was \$1,750, a figure marginally higher than the average of \$1,697 for the urban Midwest. Nevertheless, black males had a lower income than in nearby Gary and South Bend (respectively \$2,196, \$2,598, and \$3,114), but the reverse was true for black women (respectively \$1,000, \$862, and \$873). The reason for this difference lay in the industrial structures of the cities. Gary's steel mills and South Bend's automobile plants offered males, black and white, better wages and prospects than Fort Wayne's diversified industries and smaller factories. Automobile manufacturing also proved less vulnerable to recession, hence the high income level in South Bend. By contrast, women of both races had fewer opportunities in the heavy industries of Gary and South Bend. United States Steel, for example, drastically reduced its female work force after the war, but General Electric in Fort Wayne continued to employ sizable numbers of women, whom it deemed highly suitable for light manufacturing work. Significantly, women constituted 36.6 percent of the total number of black operatives employed in manufacturing in Fort Wayne in 1950.¹⁹

In the 1950s black women also progressed further than black men in certain categories of white collar work. This advance reflected national trends during this decade and the next. As white collar jobs grew more significant both within the national and local economies, black women found relatively greater work opportunities in sectors that had a tradition of female employment. They also benefitted from access to better schools in the urban North than the rural South. In the case of Fort Wayne, women constituted 49 percent of black professionals and 60 percent of black clerical workers in 1960 compared with 41 percent and 43 percent in 1950. This gain also reflected the fact that black women tended to stay longer in school than men. From 1944 to 1948, for example, women constituted three-fifths of black high school graduates in Fort Wayne. These advances, however, should not be exaggerated. Black females in professional and clerical jobs numbered only 46 and 144 respectively in 1960. This contrasted with 875

¹⁸ Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel*, "Progress Edition," May 27, 1958; Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, "Black Fort Wayne Edition," November 25, 1979; R. Sommerfeld Associates, "Report of a Study of the Socio-Economic Circumstances of Negroes in Fort Wayne, Indiana," 1963, pp. 4-6, copy (Fort Wayne-AlLEN County Public Library).

¹⁹ U.S., Census, *Sixteenth Census, 1950*: Vol. II, part 14, *Population*, 280-82; Field Report, August, 1948, Box 274, Fort Wayne File, USES Records, Record Group 183.

employed in service work and private households, the occupational categories that had by far the largest concentration of black women workers in Fort Wayne.²⁰

Another consequence of the early transition from the industrial to post-industrial city was the intensification of racial animosity on the part of white workers. More often than not organized labor was a barrier to black advancement. With few exceptions the Fort Wayne locals tended to be less progressive on race than their national bodies. In 1946, for example, one International Ladies Garment Workers local contravened national policy by threatening strike action in response to a textile firm's decision to employ African Americans for the first time.²¹ Although management's persistence overcame this opposition, few employers were willing to risk confrontation with labor over racial issues. Except for locals of the Hod Carriers and Laborers and the Plasterers and Cement Finishers, both of whom supported fair employment, craft unions exhibited the strongest opposition to black advancement. In 1952 only nine of the thirty-nine affiliates of the Fort Wayne Federation of Labor (FWFL) had black members. Most of the others openly opposed the hiring of African Americans. A survey commissioned by the Fort Wayne Urban League (FWUL) noted that these unions displayed the traditional attitudes of skilled labor on racial issues. Also, many of their members still resented blacks for their strike-breaking activities after World War I. Nevertheless, the report rated the racial record of the FWFL locals as being much worse than their big-city counterparts' and concluded that Fort Wayne's economic difficulties after World War II were the cause.²²

African Americans generally received better treatment from affiliates of the Fort Wayne Industrial Union Council (FWIUC). By 1948 several held elective offices in locals of the United Automobile Workers (UAW), the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (UERMW), and the United Steel Workers (USW). Nevertheless, the influence of blacks within these unions was limited because they did not constitute more than a tenth of any local's membership. Not surprisingly, the UAW and UERMW locals at the International Harvester and General Electric plants, which had the largest number of black workers, had the best record on race.²³

²⁰ U.S., Census, *Eighteenth Census, 1960*: Vol. XLIX, *Population and Housing*, Census Tracts, 33. High school graduate figures are from Kearns, "A Study of the Social and Economic Conditions of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne," 44. For national trends of black female employment see Alan L. Sorkin, "Education, Occupation and Income of Nonwhite Population," *Journal of Negro Education*, XLI (Fall, 1972), 344-48.

²¹ Fort Wayne Urban League (FWUL), "A Survey of the Racial Policies of Organized Labor in Fort Wayne, Indiana," February, 1953, p. 11, copy (Fort Wayne-Allen County Public Library).

²² *Ibid.*, 7, 10-15, 32.

²³ *Ibid.*, 8; Kearns, "A Study of the Social and Economic Conditions of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne," 22-23.

United Automobile Workers local 57 usually acted in accordance with the liberal policy of its international body. In 1940, despite the opposition of many white members, it became the first industrial local in Fort Wayne to negotiate a contract with a nondiscrimination clause. Four years later it set up its own Fair Employment Practices Committee. In reality, however, the local defended racial equality more in principle than in practice. Divided leadership was a problem during World War II. The local president, who was reputed to be a former Ku Klux Klansman, held more liberal officials in check. The more progressive leadership that gained power in the late 1940s proved cautious on racial issues, recognizing that the downswing of the local economy had intensified the hostility of white workers to black advancement.²⁴

The UERMW's record in Fort Wayne was more impressive than the UAW's, especially in view of the international body's lack of real commitment on racial issues.²⁵ Local 901 was similarly uninterested until General Electric began hiring blacks in 1942; thereafter it developed a firm commitment to fair employment. It had the best record of any FWIUC affiliate in supporting African Americans over seniority rights and encouraging them to be active in union affairs. In the postwar era local 901 also mounted a campaign to educate its membership on equal rights for blacks. With the enthusiastic support of district leader John Gojack, other UERMW locals followed its lead. At Magnavox the union backed up its pledge "to work our part" in support of the wartime FEPC. It also won a major concession from the United States Rubber Company, which took over the premises of the former Studebaker defense plant in 1946. In spite of this firm's poor national record on black rights, the management yielded to local 902's insistence on a nondiscriminatory seniority clause in the union contract.²⁶

The UERMW's communist sympathies made it vulnerable to the postwar Red Scare. In 1949 it was ousted as the collective bargaining agent at General Electric by the rival International Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (IERMW). Interviewed thirty years later, a veteran labor activist claimed that this defeat was attributable not only to the communist issue but also to the local leadership's being too far ahead of its rank and file on race issues. There is little evidence to support this contention. Other factors were certainly

²⁴ FWUL, "A Survey of the Racial Policies of Organized Labor in Fort Wayne" 21-23; Howard Minier interview.

²⁵ Donald Critchlow, "Communist Unions and Racism: A Comparative Study of the Responses of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers and the National Maritime Union to the Black Question during World War II," *Labor History*, XVII (Spring, 1976), 238-44.

²⁶ FWUL, "A Survey of the Racial Policies of Organized Labor in Fort Wayne," 19-21, 29-31; W. A. Ives to John D. Barnhart, March 1, 1944, Box 70, "Economic Changes," *Indiana War History Commission Records*.

important, but rather than race, chief among them was a growing concern that some local 901 officials were corrupt. Significantly, UERMW's downfall at General Electric did not have negative consequences for African Americans employed in Fort Wayne's electrical industries. The response of other UERMW locals was to step up efforts to hold the loyalty of existing members, particularly women and African Americans. Moreover, the new IERMW local sustained its predecessor's racial policy, as evidenced by the election of a black vice-president and a number of black shop stewards in 1950 and 1951.²⁷

The progressive racial positions taken by some locals contrasted with the collective position of the industrial unions in Fort Wayne. Largely because of UAW pressure, the first black member was elected to the executive council of the FWIUC in 1945, but this body was unable to agree on a united front against racism. Its most high-profile action was to join with civil rights organizations in challenging Jim Crow restrictions in downtown hotels and restaurants prior to the state IUC convention that was held in Fort Wayne in 1949. The outcome was a temporary lifting of the ban, but the FWIUC turned a blind eye to the reimposition of the restrictions once the convention was over.²⁸ On the industrial front, FWIUC shied away from conducting a fair employment education program allegedly for fear of offending rank-and-file members but also in reality to avoid splits within its own ranks. In the early 1950s over half the FWIUC affiliates openly maintained discriminatory practices. In particular, four locals belonging to the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the United Brewery Workers, and the USW (two) colluded with management to prevent the employment of blacks. As one report concluded, Fort Wayne's labor organizations had "a long way to go" before they could claim to practice what they preached about the elimination of discrimination.²⁹

There was, however, some credibility in the claims of many local union leaders that their hands were tied by rank-and-file hostility. There is evidence that the racial prejudice of union members grew stronger in the 1940s. Fort Wayne did not experience wartime "hate strikes" such as those that occurred in nearby Michigan, but the Ku Klux Klan was active at several plants from 1943 through 1945, including

²⁷ FWUL, "A Survey of the Racial Policies of Organized Labor in Fort Wayne," 29-31. Howard Minier, former UAW and FWIUC official, claimed the significance of racial issues in an interview with the author in May, 1980; however, local historian Tom Lewandowski made available to the author the findings of a series of interviews conducted in 1978 with longtime General Electric workers that offer no support for Minier's view.

²⁸ FWUL, "A Survey of the Racial Policies of Organized Labor in Fort Wayne," 8; Minier interview.

²⁹ FWUL, "A Survey of the Racial Policies of Organized Labor in Fort Wayne," 19, 23, 26-28.

International Harvester.³⁰ Race relations in the workplace deteriorated as the local economy began to experience difficulties after the war. In 1949 one survey reported: "The competition for jobs since World War II has brought about organized efforts by white workers, both unorganized and labor union members, to prevent Negroes from acquiring employment, especially as production and skilled workers." The upgrading of black workers was a particular bone of contention. Often shop stewards did not sympathize with the progressive intentions of their local and did nothing to protect black rights. After the war white workers reportedly formed unofficial committees to lobby against the promotion of black colleagues. Many World War II veterans also resented changes that had taken place in their absence.³¹ In these circumstances local civil rights organizations by the early 1950s regarded the racial attitudes of white workers rather than those of management as the principal impediment to the economic advancement of African Americans in Fort Wayne's factories.³²

In addition to jobs, decent housing greatly concerned African Americans in Fort Wayne between 1940 and 1960, and they made even less progress on this front. Before World War II blacks had lived in well-defined but racially mixed areas of the inner city. By 1960, however, a process of ghettoization had taken shape based on black population expansion, formal and informal restrictions on black settlement in other neighborhoods, and the exodus of white residents. The black in-migrants of the World War I era had clustered in two areas, in the east-central district between downtown and the railroad yards and in the Westfield housing development, but low-income whites constituted a large majority in both places. Economic circumstance dictated the pattern of African-American settlement because the newcomers could not afford housing elsewhere, particularly after the imposition of discriminatory employment practices in the early 1920s.³³ Since cheap housing was plentiful in both districts, racial competition for dwellings did not provoke serious problems, but the general standard of accommodation was low and deteriorated still further in the depression era. In 1940, 20.1 percent of black housing units in Fort Wayne were in need of major repair compared with 5.9 percent of white dwellings. Overcrowding was also a serious problem, estimated by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to affect two-fifths

³⁰ Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel*, November 27, 1943.

³¹ Kearns, "A Survey of the Social and Economic Conditions of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne," 11, 22-25.

³² FWUL, "A Survey of the Racial Policies of Organized Labor in Fort Wayne," 34-35. The situation in Fort Wayne was by no means out of step with national trends, even in liberal industrial unions. For shop floor conflicts over racial issues such as upgrading and seniority within the UAW see Kevin Boyle, "There Are No Sorrows That the Union Can't Heal: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the United Automobile Workers, 1940-1960," *Labor History*, XXXVI (Winter, 1995), 5-23.

³³ Johnson, "A Survey of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne," 8.

of black inhabitants in 1938, because many families “doubled up” to save on rental costs.³⁴

African Americans’ better economic circumstances in the 1940s and 1950s did not lead to a comparable improvement in their housing. In spite of rising home ownership, increased racial concentration went hand in hand with substandard housing. The number of dwelling units owned by blacks rose from 228 in 1940 to 656 in 1950 and to 1,477 in 1960, by which time almost one-half of all black housing units were owner occupied. Except for the small enclave in Westfield, the vast majority of the African Americans continued to reside in the east-central area during this twenty-year period. By 1960 blacks made up 40 percent of the population of the five census tracts that covered most of this district; ten years later they constituted a small majority of 53.6 percent. Although in the intervening period the number of Fort Wayne’s African-American inhabitants grew to 18,921—10.6 percent of the city’s population—there was hardly residential segregation on a big-city scale. As one observer commented in 1960, there was no street in the east-central area “where black and white don’t live as neighbors.”³⁵

Although many African Americans could have afforded to move elsewhere in the city, they were initially prevented from doing so by the use of restrictive covenants. These deed clauses preventing the conveyance of a property to blacks came into widespread use in Fort Wayne in the 1940s. With some justice, a Fort Wayne Urban League official adjudged the Fort Wayne Real Estate Board (FWREB) “one of the most conservative [realtor organizations] in the country.” Immediately after the war the board took action to insure that planned suburban developments were closed to African Americans and colluded with community associations to prevent black dispersion into established neighborhoods.³⁶ Two United States Supreme Court judgments, *Shelley v Kraemer*, 1948 (decreeing judicial enforcement of these clauses as discriminatory “state action” prohibited by the Fourteenth Amendment) and *Barrows v Jackson*, 1953 (prohibiting legal damages for violating such clauses), undermined the effectiveness of the restrictive covenants but did nothing to improve residential mobility in Fort Wayne. A report in 1963 noted that the white neighborhoods’

³⁴ U.S., Census, *Housing, 1940*, 2nd Series, *Indiana* (Washington D.C., 1942); Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel*, June 11, 1938.

³⁵ U.S., Census, *Seventeenth Census, 1950*: Vol. I, part 3, pp. 14-18; U.S., Census, *Eighteenth Census, 1960*: Vol. XLIX, *Population and Housing*, Census Tracts, 33, 42; U.S., Census, *Nineteenth Census, 1970*: Vol. LXXIII, *Population and Housing*, Census Tracts, 30; Robert Wilkerson to Reginald Johnson, April 7, 1960, Affiliates File 54, Housing Activities Department, National Urban League Records (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

³⁶ Robert Wilkerson to Reginald Johnson, April 7, 1960, Affiliates File 54, Housing Activities Department, National Urban League Records; Kearns, “A Study of the Social and Economic Conditions of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne,” 31.

strong antipathy to open housing acted as a powerful informal deterrent to the sale of homes to blacks. Although claiming to have no official position on such matters, members of the FWREB invariably referred black purchasers to houses in the east-central district. In the two decades after World War II only a handful of well-off black families slipped through the net. The resentment of their white neighbors generally faded away within a few months when it became clear that the African Americans' presence did not presage full-scale black penetration of the neighborhood. There was never the kind of violent response encountered by the first black families to move into Chicago's Trumbull Park Homes project in the mid-1950s. The most notorious incident in Fort Wayne occurred in 1963 when a cross was burned outside the home of a black doctor who had moved into a white neighborhood.³⁷

By 1949 only a ten-block area on Hugh Street adjacent to the east-central district had been opened up to new black settlement. This extension afforded wealthier African Americans the opportunity to purchase one- and two-story homes of moderate quality from whites but at prices well above their normal market value. During the 1940s and for most of the 1950s, however, black families for the most part took over houses in the original zone of black settlement from upwardly mobile whites who profited from postwar prosperity to move into neighborhoods with better housing. But housing demands from an expanding black population eventually required the opening of new areas. In April, 1960, 41.5 percent of African-American dwellings were occupied by families or individuals who had moved in after January, 1958. In the 1960s, therefore, the line of black settlement was allowed to extend beyond the east-central district to the adjoining neighborhood flanked by Calhoun Street on the west, Drexel Avenue on the south, and Anthony Boulevard on the east. Because housing stock in this district ranked among the oldest in Fort Wayne, many of the dwellings were in need of major improvements.³⁸

³⁷ R. Sommerfeld Associates, "The Report of a Study of the Socio-Economic Circumstances of Negroes in Fort Wayne," 32-33, 69; *Report of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1959* (Washington, D.C., 1959), 527; Kearns, "A Study of the Social and Economic Conditions of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne," 67. For violence in Chicago see Arnold R. Hirsch, "Massive Resistance in the Urban North: Trumbull Park, Chicago, 1953-1966," *Journal of American History*, LXXXII (September, 1995), 522-50.

³⁸ Kearns, "A Study of the Social and Economic Conditions of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne," 31; U.S., Census, *Eighteenth Census, 1960*: Vol. XLIX, *Population and Housing*, Census Tracts, 42; U.S., Census, *Nineteenth Census, 1970*: Vol. LXXIII, *Population and Housing*, Census Tracts, 30. Black demographic movement bore out the predictions of the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC). In the 1930s this federal agency had made a detailed real estate appraisal of every sizable American city, including Fort Wayne. It assessed the district south of the east-central area as being in the third category (out of four), defined as "definitely declining" partly because of the age of housing stock and partly because low prices for houses and rentals were deemed likely to attract settlement from "undesirable elements" such as blacks, whose presence would reinforce the downward trend of real estate values.

Forced to operate in such a restricted housing market, African Americans ended up paying inflated purchase or rental prices, often for substandard and old housing. According to the 1960 federal census, 91 percent of black-occupied dwellings in Fort Wayne had been constructed before 1940; and only 3 percent had been built after 1950, compared with 66 percent and 20 percent of white-occupied units. Also, 48 percent of black-occupied housing was in a deteriorating or dilapidated condition compared with 12 percent of white-occupied units. In a 1959 survey the United States Civil Rights Commission had painted an even bleaker picture of black housing conditions, reporting that between 65 and 70 percent of all dwellings were substandard. Many blacks lived in four-room bungalows that were little better than shanties. Common problems included dampness, overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, and poor ventilation.³⁹ In the late 1940s civil rights groups joined with FWIUC and church groups in a campaign to reform local housing codes and compel improvement of slum housing. As a result of strong opposition from owners of rental property, it was not until 1954 that the city government approved a watered-down code reform. Lax enforcement, however, insured that there was little improvement in housing conditions in the east-central district over the next five years.⁴⁰

Public policy, both federal and local, acted as a further constraint on the improvement of black housing conditions. In common with cities throughout the land, federal housing policy in Fort Wayne served to subsidize newly developed suburban areas at the expense of the inner city and whites at the expense of blacks. In spite of the *Kraemer* decision, the FHA sustained its long-standing prohibition against insuring private mortgages on older, rundown homes as unsound actuarial risks. The newly created Veterans' Administration was similarly wary of making loans on inner-city property.⁴¹ Accordingly, the net effect of the iron curtain that the FWREB had

The HOLC's prophecies tended to be self-fulfilling, since its appraisals made local banks reluctant to lend on housing in low-rated neighborhoods. Moreover, the Federal Housing Administration used the appraisals to red-line those parts of America's central cities in which it would not insure mortgages. For HOLC appraisal see Kenneth T. Jackson, "Race, Ethnicity and Real Estate Appraisal: The Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration," *Journal of Urban History*, VI (August, 1980), 419-52. HOLC's evaluation of Fort Wayne real estate is in HOLC City Survey File, 1935-1940, Federal Home Loan Bank Records, Record Group 195 (National Archives).

³⁹ *Report of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1959* (Washington, D.C., 1959), 394; *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, January 8, 12, 1950; Robert Wilkerson to Reginald Johnson, April 7, 1960, Affiliates File 54, NULR.

⁴⁰ FWUL, *Annual Report, 1951-1952*, pp. 6-7; *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, November 4, 1951, November 23, 1953; *Fort Wayne News-Sentinel*, November 4, 1953, February 24, 26, 1954, September 1, 1959.

⁴¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, 1985), 190-230.

drawn over the local housing supply prevented blacks from purchasing homes eligible for federal loan assistance.

Influential within both parties in local politics, the real estate lobby also worked to restrict the scope and openness of public housing in Fort Wayne. Out of eighty-two cities surveyed by the American Municipal Association, Fort Wayne was one of nine that decided not to apply immediately for federal funds to promote public housing following the passage of the Federal Housing Act of 1949. A decade later the city had only three public housing projects, two of which—Miami Village and Edsall Homes—were closed to African Americans. Open housing was sanctioned only in the inferior Westfield Village project, parts of which had lacked a sewer hookup until 1951. In 1954 Miami Village tenants banded together, with support from the adjacent Indian Village private housing development and the FWREB, to maintain the racial homogeneity of their project. Originally constructed with federal funding to accommodate veterans, Miami Village was deeded to the Fort Wayne Housing Authority (FWHA) by the United States Housing Authority in July, 1953, on condition that it should be operated as a low-income project. To comply with federal terms the FWHA sought to evict forty families whose income was deemed adequate for private rental. This aroused fears that African Americans would be moved into the project to occupy vacant units. Under intense pressure from the alliance of white tenants, owners, and realtors, the housing authority decreed that the color bar would be sustained in spite of Miami Village's new designation as a low-income project.⁴² In 1959 African Americans occupied 60 out of Fort Wayne's 275 public housing units, a number that fell far short of black need. The United States Civil Rights Commission bluntly and accurately concluded: the FWHA's public housing program "is segregated and discriminates against Negroes." In response to such unwelcome publicity and to pressure from local civil rights organizations, the city government approved construction of a further forty units in the Westfield area for black occupancy, but this increase did not substantially alleviate the housing problems of low-income blacks.⁴³

In conjunction with reinforcing residential segregation, public policy fostered racial concentration in the school system. Before 1945 the Fort Wayne Board of Education had not operated racially separate schools because the black population had been too small. Racial attitudes had been most relaxed toward the few African Americans within the high school system. By and large the board allowed blacks the same right as white students to attend the high school of their

⁴² Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel*, July 13, 1949; Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, January 10, 1954.

⁴³ *Report of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1959*, p. 478; Julius Thomas to NUL Administration, "Field Report of Fort Wayne Visit," May 23, 1960, Affiliates File, Vocational Services Office, NULR.

choice, even if they lived outside the immediate catchment area. In 1951, however, the board's refusal to permit the transfer of two black basketball stars from Central High School to North Side, the city's top school for sports, highlighted a new policy of promoting racial concentration. In line with this policy, small but significant changes were made in school boundaries after the war. As a result, 75.5 percent of black elementary school pupils were concentrated in three schools by 1949 compared with 53.4 percent twenty years earlier, and 85.1 percent of black high school students attended Central High. Local civil rights organizations feared that Central would eventually become an "all-negro" school. In 1940 African Americans constituted an insignificant proportion of Central's students, but they made up a third by 1960. Although the school was refurbished and remodeled in 1958, its enrollment of white pupils underwent dramatic reduction. By 1959 Central had only 1,300 pupils, 400 fewer than in 1955, and many classrooms were underutilized at a time of overcrowding in the other Fort Wayne high schools. In 1960 the decision to amalgamate Central with the nearby junior high school, which also had a large black enrollment, intensified fears about the school's future, particularly because the decision was contrary to the Board of Education's usual policy of rigidly separating these two levels of school.⁴⁴

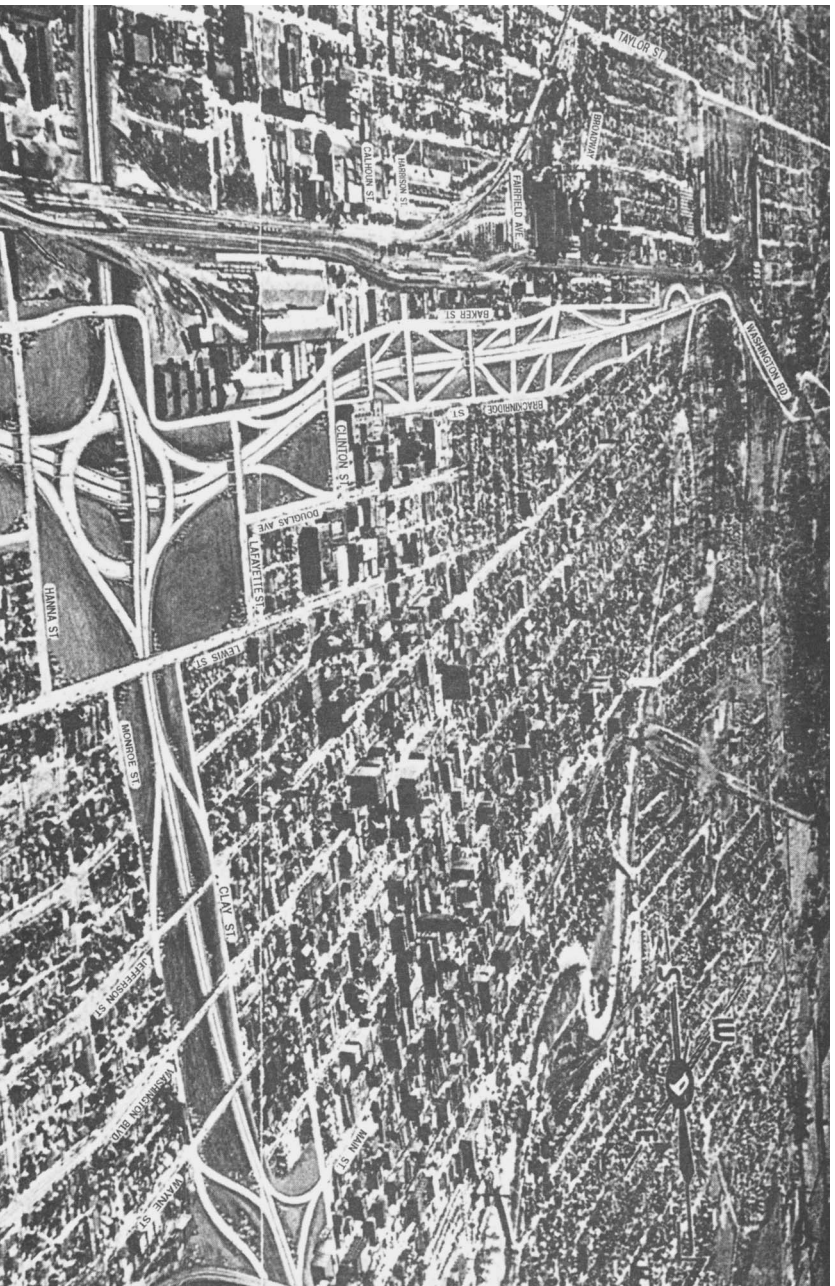
The economic decay of Fort Wayne's central city in the postwar era intensified the social problems of slum housing and ghettoization. Much of the substandard property in the east-central district was owned by whites, including influential members of the Fort Wayne community, who were holding it as an investment in anticipation of downtown redevelopment.⁴⁵ They had no incentive to improve their properties in the face of the continued decline of the central city. Between 1946 and 1958 four-fifths of all new housing units were constructed in the suburbs, which were also home to almost every new business enterprise that located in Fort Wayne during this period. Significantly, racial issues had a crucial bearing on the most important local initiative to reverse the decline of the inner city in the two decades following the war.⁴⁶

In mid-1946 civic leaders conceived a plan to construct intersecting expressways across the heart of the city as part of a campaign to revive the economic potential of the downtown business district and make it a more attractive location for new enterprise. With rapid road communication a strategic necessity for every busi-

⁴⁴ Kearns, "A Study of the Social and Economic Conditions of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne," 43; Robert Wilkerson to Reginald Johnson, March 14, 1960, Affiliates File 54, Housing Activities Department, NULR. For an interesting analysis of school segregation in another Hoosier city see Ronald D. Cohen, "The Dilemma of School Integration in the North: Gary, Indiana, 1945-1960," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXII (June, 1986), 161-84.

⁴⁵ Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel*, August 2, 1948.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, "Progress Edition," May 27, 1958.



ARTIST'S CONCEPTION OF PROPOSED EAST-WEST EXPRESSWAY IN FORT WAYNE, 1949

From Fort Wayne, *Municipal Review*, X (September, 1946),
courtesy of Fort Wayne & Allen County Public Library

ness with a regional or national market, Fort Wayne's narrow roads and numerous railroad intersections had become the metaphorical equivalent of hardened arteries for the central city. The Anthony Wayne Parkway, as the expressway project became known, was seen as the only solution to the daily hazard of traffic congestion.⁴⁷ Chicago, Detroit, Louisville, Milwaukee, and other cities were considering similar schemes as panaceas for downtown revitalization. Fort Wayne's Republican administration and the Chamber of Commerce were eager to be in the forefront of this development to symbolize their city's enterprise and initiative, but popular opinion did not reflect their enthusiasm. In late 1946 expressway opponents formed the Property Owners and Taxpayers Association (POTA) to lobby against the project.⁴⁸

Many people complained that the parkway project necessitated massive demolition of existing housing units that would displace 15 percent of the city's population at a time when local housing was in short supply. Owner-occupants and businessmen whose properties were likely to be razed to make way for the new roads expressed concern that they would not receive market-value compensation. Other citizens predicted that the project would impose a long-term debt on local taxpayers because Fort Wayne had to bear 15 percent of total project costs, officially estimated at \$27 million but expected by expressway opponents to be far in excess of this figure.⁴⁹ Racial factors, however, were the principal cause of opposition. Because the east-west expressway would run through the heart of the east-central district, black residents would have to be relocated elsewhere. White working-class and lower-middle-class property owners feared for the values of their homes if their neighborhoods were subject to black settlement. Although POTA's leaflets, advertisements, and other printed statements made no mention of race, the anti-expressway movement conducted a "whispering campaign" that planted this fear firmly in the heart of the white community.⁵⁰ Local supporters of the project tried to dispel such anxiety with a counter-campaign, but statements by federal officials provided their opponents with ammu-

⁴⁷ State Highway Commission of Indiana, "Highway Plan for Fort Wayne, Indiana," July, 1946, copy, Box 1, Henry Branning Papers (Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society).

⁴⁸ "Fort Wayne Forward," *Highway Highlights*, 1947, pamphlet (Fort Wayne-Allen County Public Library); Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, August 27, 1946, October 6, 1947.

⁴⁹ See antihighway advertisements by the Committee of Citizens in Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel*, November 11, December 7, 1946; and report of City Council meeting on the project in *ibid.*, November 13, 1946.

⁵⁰ In interviews conducted by the author in March, 1980, veterans of the 1947 election/referendum campaigns—E. Ross Adair (Fort Wayne Republican party chairman), Paul Mike Burns (Democratic candidate for councilor-at-large), and Charles Westerman (Democratic precinct committeeman)—all agreed about the significance of the race issue. For editorial comment on the whispering campaign see Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel*, September 22, 27, 1947.

dition. In a speech at Fort Wayne's Wheatley Center, for example, William Hill, Chicago race relations adviser to the Federal Housing Administration, urged the city authorities to relocate displaced blacks on an open housing basis.⁵¹

In spite of popular opposition, the Republican-controlled City Council approved the expressway scheme on December 10, 1946, but the POTA carried the battle to the state legislature. Primarily as a result of lobbying by the taxpayers' association, the Indiana Senate rejected a bill creating a special taxing district to pay the city's share of project costs. The only alternative was a general increase in local property taxes. Nervous about the political repercussions of such an increase, Fort Wayne's administration decided to submit the expressway project to a referendum, to be held at the time of the 1947 local elections. It was hoped that this would give supporters the opportunity to mold public opinion in favor of the scheme.⁵²

The regular Democratic organization, led by businessmen and lawyers who backed the project, agreed to remain neutral on the issue, but their candidate was surprisingly beaten in the mayoral primary. Seeing the expressway controversy as a means to regain control of the local party, old-line Democrats who had been ousted from power in the factional battles of the 1930s backed the candidacy of Henry Branning, a realtor who was a strong opponent of open housing and a critic of the Anthony Wayne Parkway. Branning's nomination insured that the issue remained in the forefront of local politics. Realizing that the highway controversy was the key to an election victory, Democrats used their precinct organizations to keep neighborhood concern about black relocation at a strong pitch and spread the word that the Republicans could not be trusted to abide by the outcome of the referendum.⁵³ This strategy neutralized the efforts of Fort Wayne Forward, a nonpartisan group created in July, 1947, to win over public opinion by focusing attention on the economic benefits of the scheme, including new job creation. In November, 1947, voters rejected the expressway project by an emphatic majority of 24,786 (61.7 percent) to 15,364 (38.2 percent). Opposition was heaviest from the precincts in the pathway of the planned roads, but only seven precincts, all representing high-income suburban neighborhoods, returned a majority for the scheme. At the same time, the Democrats gained their only municipal victory in the thirty-year period between 1929 and 1959, winning the mayorship with a 59.6 percent share of the popular vote and making their first-ever clean sweep of city offices.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel*, December 3, 1946.

⁵² Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, December 11, 1946, March 6, 7, April 22, 1947.

⁵³ Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel*, May 5, 7, October 2, 1947. Author's interviews with E. Ross Adair and Paul Mike Burns provided confirmation of Democratic tactics. The former avowed, "It [the highway controversy] made Henry Branning mayor."

⁵⁴ Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, November 5, 1947; Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel*, November 5, 1947.

African Americans voted overwhelmingly against the project. Black property owners, several of whom were active in the POTA, feared that the financial compensation they would receive for their east-side homes would be inadequate to allow them to buy a house elsewhere in the city. Black tenants worried that they would end up with nowhere to live because white landlords would not rent to them in other neighborhoods.⁵⁵ By election day there was widespread anxiety within the African-American community, encouraged by POTA propaganda, that half its members would be made homeless. The best that could be hoped for, one black resident warned, was “to be herded onto any unwanted land that is available,” where conditions would be far worse than in the east-central district.⁵⁶ This comment referred to half-baked plans by Fort Wayne Forward to relocate displaced African Americans in a separate new “model” housing development. In a desperate effort to quash the issue of open housing, Fort Wayne Forward set up the Better Homes Foundation under white realtor E. H. Kilbourne to plan black relocation. Known among the black population for his involvement with the Phyllis Wheatley social center, Kilbourne promised that property owners would be compensated two-and-a-half times the assessed value of their dwellings and that the east-side clearance would not take place until 1954. Black critics of the highway scheme placed little credence in these reassurances, pointing out that the Better Homes Foundation lacked capital and had no concrete plans about relocation.⁵⁷ Judging from the effect of highway construction programs on African Americans in other cities, notably Detroit, such skepticism was well justified. By and large black neighborhoods ended up paying the price of physical devastation without the compensation of better housing for what civic leaders regarded as urban progress.⁵⁸ By supporting the rebellion of white property owners, African Americans avoided this fate in Fort Wayne. However bad conditions were in the east-central district, blacks rightly considered them preferable to the consequences of massive urban reconstruction.

One paradoxical consequence of the racially loaded anti-expressway campaign was the belated entry of Fort Wayne’s black voters

⁵⁵ For typical comments see *Fort Wayne Weekly Carrier*, October 25, 1947, a newsletter produced by two black members of POTA, copy, scrapbook, Box 1, Henry Branning Papers.

⁵⁶ James Nash, letter to the editor, *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, October 6, 1947.

⁵⁷ *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, October 16, 1947; *Fort Wayne News-Sentinel*, October 21, 1947; *Fort Wayne Weekly Carrier*, October 25, 1947.

⁵⁸ Beginning in the late 1940s, the most densely populated sections of black Detroit were devastated by highway construction that wiped out many of the city’s black institutions, including jazz clubs and the Saint Antoine branch of the YMCA. The problem of expressway displacement continued through the 1950s. Public officials did little to assist families forced to relocate—particularly hard hit were low-income renters—and downplayed the high human costs involved. See Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 47-48.



YOUNGSTERS AT FORT WAYNE'S PHYLLIS WHEATLEY CENTER

Photo courtesy of Allen County Fort Wayne Historical Society

into the Democratic coalition. In contrast to the trend among black voters in big northern cities, Fort Wayne's African Americans had not turned Abraham Lincoln's portrait to the wall in the New Deal era. Following its narrow victory in the 1934 municipal elections, the local Republican party made a special effort to broaden its political base in the 1938 contest. Party members appealed to the traditional GOP loyalties of black citizens, who had shown signs of deserting to the Democrats in gratitude for New Deal efforts to alleviate mass unemployment. The Republicans mended fences by nominating William Briggs, the first black candidate in the city's history, as justice of the peace for Wayne Township and promising to build a new

community center in the black district.⁵⁹ With national trends turning against the New Deal, however, the GOP carried its whole ticket with ease and so had no further need to court the black vote. Although Briggs continued to hold office until his death in 1950, he was powerless to negotiate significant racial change. During the 1940s local Republicans supported segregation of communal facilities, temporized over the construction of the community center, and restricted black patronage to a bare minimum.

African Americans gained scant reward for their partisan conversion since their support had been less than crucial to the Democratic victory of 1947. Branning, the new mayor, was an avowed opponent of open housing and public housing. His administration also colluded in the reimposition of segregation in downtown hotels and restaurants after the 1949 state industrial union convention. Not until the enactment of a strong state civil rights law in 1963 did segregation of downtown public accommodations end in Fort Wayne.⁶⁰ Almost the only improvement in regard to racial issues during Branning's term of office occurred in patronage politics. In 1949–1950 the Fort Wayne police department took on five black patrolmen—hitherto there had only been one “colored” officer—and the Public Welfare Department appointed its first black social worker. In addition, the municipal utilities and the school board began to hire blacks as laborers and cleaners. Not until 1952, however, was the first black school teacher appointed; only under a Republican administration in 1956 did the municipal utilities employ a black meter reader; and employment in the fire service remained closed to blacks until the 1960s.⁶¹ In spite of such limited rewards, blacks became progressively more active as Democratic party workers in the east-central district throughout the 1950s. Eventually, in 1959, barber John Nuckols was elected Fort Wayne's first black councilman by the first district, winning easily over his Republican opponent after carrying the Democratic primary against a white rival by two votes. Over the next twenty years this district became something of a political island ruled over by black elected officials, but their influence within the broad polity remained limited.⁶²

In response to the wartime stirring of civil rights activism in many parts of the nation, some blacks sought to challenge racism

⁵⁹ Morgan, “Fort Wayne in the Great Depression: The New Deal Years,” 376.

⁶⁰ For this legislation see Emma Lou Thornbrough, “Breaking Racial Barriers in Public Accommodations in Indiana, 1935–1963,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXIII (December, 1987), 301–43.

⁶¹ Kearns, “A Study of the Social and Economic Conditions of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne,” 12–13; FWUL, *Annual Report, 1951–1952*, p. 4; Julius Thomas to NUL Administration, “Field Report of Fort Wayne Visit,” May 23, 1960, Affiliates File 54, NULR; Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, “Black Fort Wayne Edition,” November 25, 1979.

⁶² See Nuckols interview in Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, “Black Fort Wayne Edition,” December 2, 1979.

through channels outside party politics. A local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was established in 1946, about half of whose members were white. One of its black founders avowed, "We do want to wake this very reactionary city to its often unrealized discriminations." The NAACP spearheaded the challenge to segregation in Fort Wayne, seeking through words, deeds, and legal actions to put pressure on private and public facilities that practiced Jim Crow. The association earned respect among African Americans for its forthright stand but achieved only sporadic success before the enactment of the state civil rights act of 1963.⁶³

Freed from its main task of organizing the recreational program of the Phyllis Wheatley social center by the opening in 1948 of the biracial McCulloch community center, the Fort Wayne chapter of the Urban League (FWUL) became increasingly involved in seeking to improve housing and employment conditions for African Americans. The organization's activism was constrained, however, because it remained tied to the white power structure through financial dependence on the city's United Fund. Good relations with local elites enabled it to win small but well-publicized successes in opening up new employment opportunities. In 1949, for example, Robert Wilkerson, the executive secretary, persuaded Fort Wayne's largest department store to hire its first black clerical worker. Nevertheless, the FWUL was broadly perceived by blacks as a "white organization" that was allowed occasional successes to keep racial trouble from brewing.⁶⁴

But the mass of black citizens showed little inclination to unite in challenging discrimination until the national civil rights revolution of the 1960s. Several factors limited the potential for protest, notably the absence of a sizable middle class, the continuing influence of the black clergy who eschewed social activism and whose congregations formed subgroups among the African-American community, and the view of recent newcomers from the South that racial conditions in Fort Wayne were tolerable. In 1963 one survey of the black community concluded that it was "an amorphous mass that is not geared to the accomplishment of much of any political or social end."⁶⁵

⁶³ Joyce Humphrey to Ella Baker, January 7, 1946, Group 2, Branch Files, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers (Library of Congress); R. Sommerfeld Associates, "The Report of a Study of the Socio-Economic Circumstances of Negroes in Fort Wayne," 41-42.

⁶⁴ Kearns, "Report of Fort Wayne Field Trip, June 20-22, 1950," Affiliates File, NULR; Indianapolis *Recorder*, September 9, 1950; R. Sommerfeld Associates, "The Report of a Study of the Socio-Economic Circumstances of Negroes in Fort Wayne," 44.

⁶⁵ R. Sommerfeld Associates, "The Report of a Study of the Socio-Economic Circumstances of Negroes in Fort Wayne," 39-42, 49-50, quotation on 41; Kearns, "A Survey of the Social and Economic Conditions of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne," 68-69; FWUL, *Annual Report, 1950-1951*, p. 5.

Another five years elapsed before blacks were aroused into mass protest, and the issue that ignited opinion was school segregation.⁶⁶

From 1940 to 1960 jobs and housing were the main concerns of African Americans in Fort Wayne. Their experience on both these fronts replicated developments in big cities in some respects but differed in others. Like metropolitan blacks, they found their employment opportunities constrained by a combination of discrimination and structural change, but their status as latecomers to the industrial city made their situation more precarious. The Fort Wayne factory gates were only half open to them, and those who got inside lacked job security and promotion prospects. In contrast to the post-World War I era, the opposition of white labor constituted a greater obstacle to black occupational mobility than the racial prejudices of management. In terms of housing, the process of black ghettoization was not as far advanced in Fort Wayne as in large cities. According to historians Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, at the end of the 1960s "the average black city dweller lived in a neighborhood where the vast majority of his or her neighbors were also black."⁶⁷ As late as 1970, however, Fort Wayne's African Americans lived in racially mixed neighborhoods. Nevertheless, formal and informal mechanisms to control black settlement had been in operation since the early 1940s. Black Fort Wayne may not have been a ghetto in the accepted metropolitan sense, but blacks were confined to the most run-down parts of the inner city where substandard housing was widespread. At least African Americans in this Hoosier city escaped the ravages of urban reconstruction visited on black communities in many big cities, but it was significant that they were delivered from this evil by the racism of white Fort Wayne in the 1947 highway referendum. Overall, however, the case of Fort Wayne attests more to the universality than to the diversity of the black urban experience in the North in the mid-twentieth century. By 1960 racial discrimination in jobs and housing was as firmly established in its own form in this Indiana industrial city as in the northern metropolises where African Americans had settled in large numbers long before 1940.

⁶⁶ In 1968 around six hundred people marched on City Hall for six days to demand African-American representation on the Fort Wayne school board and desegregation of Central High. At the start of the 1969 school year, black parents boycotted two elementary schools for eight days in an effort to compel their desegregation. Some 1,300 children were registered in alternative "freedom schools" in six churches. Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel*, February 28, 1980.

⁶⁷ Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Black Underclass* (New York, 1993), 57.

Table 1
Occupational Distribution of African Americans
in Fort Wayne and Allen County, 1940–1970

Occupation	1940	1950	1960	1970
Professionals	4.0	2.2	2.5	5.5
Managers	2.5	2.8	2.1	2.1
Sales and clerical	4.0	4.2	7.7	11.0
Skilled workers	2.8	8.1	8.4	9.0
Semiskilled operatives	11.1	25.3	30.9	36.3
Laborers	17.1	19.8	12.5	7.9
Service workers	58.1	37.5	36.1	28.2

* Figures are in percentages and are for Fort Wayne in 1940 and 1950 and for Allen County for 1960 and 1970

Source: U.S., *Sixteenth Census, 1940*: Vol. II, part 2, *Population*, 972-76; U.S., *Census, Seventeenth Census, 1950*: Vol. II, part 14, *Population*, 240-42; U.S., *Census, Eighteenth Census, 1960*: Vol. XLIX, *Population and Housing*, Census Tracts, 33; U.S., *Census, Nineteenth Census, 1970*: Vol. LXXIII, *Population and Housing*, Census Tracts, 30.