The Road to Freedom Is Long and Winding

Jewish Involvement in the Indianapolis Civil Rights Movement

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On Saturday afternoon, May 1, 1948, Wilson Head, executive secretary for the Indianapolis NAACP, went to the Esquire Theater to watch the Italian movie Shoe Shine. He knew that he would almost certainly be turned away because of his race, but the NAACP leader had gone to the Esquire that day to test an Indiana law which ostensibly gave him the right to buy a ticket and enter the theater. As the Indianapolis Recorder later reported, Head “was refused admittance. The manager, James Morehouse, was quite frank in stating that it was because of his race.” Head filed affidavits against Morehouse and against Morris Cantor, the operator of Cantor Amusements, which owned the Esquire and other Indianapolis theaters. He claimed that the management had violated the 1885 Indiana Civil Rights Law, which barred discrimination on the basis of race. The case attracted the Recorder’s attention as “the first criminal prosecution under the Indiana Civil Rights Law in the history of Marion County.” Although affidavits had been filed in the past
against managers of whites-only restaurants, "no defendant had yet been
hailed into court" as the "prosecutor's office professed inability to find
the restaurant managers in order to bring them in."1 Included in its
series of articles on the case against the Esquire, the influential African
American newspaper noted that Charles Posner, executive director for
the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), was working to
resolve the case. Because the manager and the owner of the theater were
Jewish, Posner stepped in as the mediator between the theater and the
NAACP, resolving the situation on July 9 of the same year. The Esquire
ceased its discriminatory stance, and the NAACP subsequently dropped
the lawsuit. The Recorder noted that "Doors... this week swung open to
patrons without regard to color, as the local branch NAACP scored a
major victory in its fight against jimcrow policies."2 An internal JCRC
report also referenced a victory: "The mediation. . . developed a fine
esprit de corp [sic] and will make for much better relations between
Negroes and Jews. . . had this suit gone through there would have devel-
oped very bad working relations between the Negro and Jewish
Community because of the adverse publicity."3 While the Recorder never

1Indianapolis Recorder, May 15, May 22, 1948. For more details on the trial, see June 5, June 19,
July 17, 1948. If the Esquire case was not the first, it was certainly one of the first criminal pros-
ecutions under the 1885 Civil Rights Law. Historian Emma Lou Thornbrough notes two cases
in 1888 and 1890 which were heard before a justice of the peace in Marion County; an 1894
case in which an Indianapolis plaintiff sought to appeal a decision of a city police court but was
stymied by his white lawyers who filed a civil appeal instead; a 1900 case in which an
Indianapolis hairdresser was refused the use of a hotel elevator and lost her case in Marion
County Superior Court; and a 1920 case in Marion, Indiana, lost by the plaintiff when an ice
cream shop was ruled not to be a restaurant and thus not subject to the law. See Emma Lou
Thornbrough, The Negro in Indiana Before 1900: A Study of a Minority (1985; Bloomington,
Ind., 1993), 259-65; Thornbrough, "Breaking Racial Barriers to Public Accommodations in
Indiana, 1935 to 1963," Indiana Magazine of History 83 (December 1987), 304; Thornbrough,
Since Emancipation: A Short History of Indiana Negroes, 1863-1963 (Indianapolis, Ind., 1963),
86; Thornbrough and Lana Ruegamer, Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century (Bloomington,
Ind., 2000). 6, 123-26. James Madison does not reference any lawsuits but does note the
NAACP effort to fight discrimination in public areas. James H. Madison, The Indiana Way: A
State History (Bloomington, Ind., 1986), 244. Likewise, Richard Pierce does not discuss the
legal options available to African Americans in this regard. Richard Pierce, Polite Protest: The

2Indianapolis Recorder, July 17, 1948.

3Report of Segregation in Neighborhood Theatres, Indianapolis, Folder 6 "Segregation-
Indianapolis, 1948-1954," box 171, Series II: Jewish Community Relations Council, Jewish
Welfare Federation of Indianapolis Records Collection, M0463, Indiana Historical Society,
Indianapolis. Thornbrough also mentions the Esquire case and the JCRC intervention in
noted a reason for JCRC intervention, the council's internal memo indicated a desire to maintain a positive image in the black community.

This intervention marked the beginning of a productive and amicable relationship between the two communities, evidenced by the ongoing support of many Indianapolis Jews—especially members of the JCRC—for civil rights in situations dealing with school segregation, housing and employment discrimination, and the segregation of public facilities. The JCRC disseminated press releases to the local daily newspapers, including the Indianapolis Star and the Times, which both highlighted and managed the image of Jewish involvement in civil rights issues, often invoking an ideological rationale for intervention and emphasizing the positive, community-oriented aspects of the Jewish religion that were likely to appeal to a wide audience. Beyond this concern for presenting a positive public image, the actions of the JCRC (like...
those of many other Jewish organizations and individuals) were informed by both Jewish faith and liberal politics. Historians of Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement have emphasized one or the other motivation. In one view, scholars have applied the Jewish religious commandment of tzedakah, which means “righteousness” and calls for doing good works for Jews and non-Jews alike. Other historians have applied the secular ideology of liberalism, with its egalitarian push toward tolerance and inclusion in a pluralist society. In this model, Jews promoted government intervention to achieve a diverse society that included all citizens in the American dream of freedom and equality. In Indianapolis, however, religious and political ideology came together, as both religious doctrine and liberal ideas motivated Jewish support in the struggle for freedom and equality. By the 1960s, as national and global events shifted the priorities of American Jews and African Americans, so too did Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement undergo significant changes.

Writing for the Indiana Jewish Chronicle in 1950, Evansville rabbi Martin I. Douglas brought together the ideological and religious underpinnings of the Jewish obligation to improve the treatment of all Americans:

> It is hard to believe that people who are native American citizens cannot eat in certain places and ride in certain trains because of the color of their skin. . . . our attention should be brought to the responsibilities which we have in working for the welfare of mankind. . . . The road to freedom is long and winding. . . . But with our eyes to the future, with trust in our hearts that the principles of Judaism regarding freedom and brotherhood are sound, the path will lead us to bright sunlight and a secure life.

Douglas touched on several points that American Jews would emphasize throughout their involvement in the civil rights crusade—especially

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"brotherhood"—and made a clear connection between classic Judaic religious principles, the ideology of liberalism, and the nation's struggles for civil rights. In Indianapolis, religious and political ideology coalesced as Jews frequently worked to help African Americans make progress along that long and winding road to freedom.6

In addition to revealing the political and religious motivations behind the civil rights crusade, a study of Jewish efforts in Indianapolis also highlights the importance of a small but vocal group of individuals in both the black and Jewish communities in spurring forward the movement. Notable African American leaders—including William T. Ray, Willard Ransom, Henry J. Richardson Jr., and Wilson Head—regularly joined Jewish ones in this common cause. Through the efforts of JCRC executive directors Charles Posner, Irving Levine, and David Goldstein, the organization became a leading proponent for equal rights. Posner, as the council's first director, set the stage for Jewish intervention in civil rights issues, especially school segregation and employment discrimination. In the late 1950s, Levine extended the council's sphere of interest, still carrying on the fight for fair employment practices, but also advocating for open housing and the elimination of segregation in public areas. Goldstein, JCRC director during the height of the civil rights movement, continued the push in Indianapolis and also became an active contributor in the national movement with the March on Washington and the Selma march. While other JCRC directors and presidents supported civil rights initiatives, these three leaders most often melded the religious and political leanings of the city's Jews in support of equal rights for all.

To study these leaders without looking as well to the organizations through which they worked would be to miss the significance of both. The JCRC worked with the NAACP, the Indianapolis Community Relations Council (ICRC), the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the Church Federation of Indianapolis, the Catholic Interracial

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Council, and the Human Rights Commission to accomplish shared goals. The leaders had the support of their respective organizations and the members that comprised them; the organizations, and the movement as a whole, needed the strong leadership of such individuals. Sometimes tensions between Jews and African Americans—at both the individual and the organizational levels—plagued the push for civil rights. Some Jews wondered why they should be concerned with rights for other minority groups. Sometimes anti-Semitism, racism, and suspicion of outsiders created problems. Nevertheless, leaders strove to keep the peace as they addressed racial, ethnic, and civil rights issues in the Hoosier capital.

Most scholarship of the struggle for black civil rights in Indiana has neglected the role of Jewish individuals and organizations. The contributions of the NAACP and other black organizations and leaders rightly remain central to the historical account, but highlighting the ways in which black organizations cooperated with other groups sheds added light on the context in which African Americans operated and reveals the complexity of their work. African Americans at the time recognized and availed themselves of Jewish assistance. The Indianapolis Recorder frequently discussed Jewish efforts; the NAACP called upon the JCRC for legislative support; and African Americans asked for help with discriminatory issues at amusement parks and in employment. Jewish efforts centered on all of the primary areas of civil rights abuses—education, housing, employment, and public accommodations. Whatever the issue, it seemed that one could always find Jews working for equality.

While never monolithic, Indianapolis's Jewish community moved closer to unity during the 1920s and through the Great Depression in

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7 Press release, n.d., Folder 2 “Press Releases, 1959-1964,” box 173, series II, Jewish Welfare Federation of Indianapolis Records Collection; Julian Freeman, “Jewish Community of Indianapolis” manuscript, ca. 1977, p. 171, folder 1, box 2, Julian Freeman Collection, 1932-1978, M0356, Indiana Historical Society. Freeman noted 1956 as the year the JCRC joined with the NAACP and other groups, such as the American Friends Job Opportunity Program, the CIO Labor Organization, and the Indiana Civil Liberties Union, to form the Indianapolis Human Relations Council. The CIO was also involved with lobbying to strengthen the Fair Employment Practices Commission. Indianapolis Recorder, October 21, 1950.

8 For example, Marschall, Jews in Nevada, emphasizes individual leaders. Many other cities had Jewish Community Relations Councils which also supported civil rights causes. Greenberg, Troubling the Waters, 96-100. Greenberg counters other interpretations that emphasize animosity between the two groups. See Leonard Dinnerstein, Antisemitism in America (New York, 1994), 210-11; Taylor Branch, At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68 (New York, 2006), 617-19.
the 1930s. In the 1920s, as millions of African Americans continued to move from the South to Indianapolis and other northern cities, many Indianapolis Jews began to move from the south side of the city to northern sections of the Meridian Street neighborhood. The primary focus of the more established and prosperous northside Jews. Indianapolis Jewish leaders sought to "Americanize" and reform these new immigrants, while retaining vestiges of uniquely Jewish culture. The Jewish Welfare Federation (JWF), the city's principal Jewish agency at the time, wanted to temper the orthodoxy of Eastern European Jews, fearing discrimination that might be brought on by visible signs of traditional Judaism. Federation leaders, for example, would not allow Yiddish theatre productions in their communal building. Jewish leaders sought to improve the lives of all the city's Jews but also strived to maintain a good image, a motivation that remained important even years later during the mediation of the Esquire Theater case. Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, then, the Jewish community looked inward to solve its own problems. This habit masked some of the internal disagreements and differences that continued to divide Indianapolis Jews as many of them became involved in civil rights issues.

On the national level, Jews first became noticeably involved in civil rights issues with their assistance in the formation of the NAACP in 1909. By the 1920s, a reciprocal, friendly-yet-tentative relationship between blacks and Jews was apparent: African American newspapers publicized the escalating violence against European Jews, and American Jews donated money to establish better schools in the South.

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9 Jews "remained between 1 and 2 percent" of the population of Indianapolis. By 1932, estimates indicate that 65 percent of the city's Jews lived on the north side, 25 percent resided to the south, and 10 percent were scattered elsewhere in the city. Judith Endelman, The Jewish Community of Indianapolis, 1849 to the Present (Bloomington, Ind., 1984), 4, 114-16; Carolyn S. Blackwell, "Jews," in Peopling Indiana: The Ethnic Experience, eds. Robert M. Taylor, Jr., and Connie A. Mcbriney (Indianapolis, Ind., 1996), 316.


11 Moss, "Creating a Jewish American Identity in Indianapolis," 57, 64.

involvement in civil rights struggles may have begun sporadically, but by the 1940s Jews played a key role in supporting African American efforts. This national experience was mirrored in Indiana, especially with the creation of the JCRC in 1947.

Because the JCRC was so central to Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement, some organizational history is necessary. Two branches existed—an Indiana and an Indianapolis council. While the delineations between the two were not always clear, the Indianapolis council appears to have been more active. Norman Sider, JCRC executive director from 1968 to 1974, noted that the Indianapolis organization tended to be far more active than the state organization but that each had different purposes. The council’s mission was to “promote racial and religious understanding, as well as to develop an intelligent and effective understanding of Jewish problems and interests.” Their objectives included “fight[ing] anti-Semitism, discrimination and other forms of bigotry and intolerance by an affirmative program of social action and education in the principles of humanity and democracy.” Sally Cook, daughter of JCRC president David Cook (1951-1954), reflected that some in the Jewish community were concerned that the new group would detract attention from events in the Middle East, especially issues pertinent to the formation of Israel. While most of the founders of the JCRC were Reform Jews—who as a group tended to be anti-Zionist—the board of directors comprised representatives from each local congregation and Jewish organization and tended to represent the Jewish community as a whole.

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Greenberg, Troubling the Waters, 12.

 Thornbrough briefly mentions Jewish involvement, including that of the JCRC, but does not include specifics. Thornbrough and Ruegamer, Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century, 122, 129; Thornbrough, Breaking Racial Barriers to Public Accommodations,” 331. Pierce argues that Indiana blacks lacked the radicalism found in other parts of the country. He mentions Jewish involvement in passing, but this collaboration serves to underscore his argument. Pierce, Polite Protest, 34, 94. Greenberg emphasizes that both groups acted out of self-interest. Greenberg, Troubling the Waters, 96-100.

The acronym “JCRC” will refer to the Indianapolis Jewish Community Relations Council, unless otherwise noted.

Norman Sider, telephone interview with author, August 1, 2011.

Indiana Jewish Chronicle, February 20, 1948.

Sally Cook, telephone interview with author, July 30, 2011, and email correspondence with author, October 24, 2011. Her parents, she noted, were both Zionists and Reform Jews.
As the organization’s first executive director and president, Posner set the stage for initiatives in the years to come. A 1953 article, entitled “JCRC Fights Discrimination on Every Front,” reflected the council’s early priorities, describing several instances in which members had fought discrimination against African Americans. Although not all in the Jewish community were pleased with the group’s liberal politics, the JCRC worked to fulfill what they believed to be the broader tenets of Judaism.

The group’s rationale for intervention combined self-preservation, devotion to Judaic principles, ideological commitment to liberalism, and a moral compulsion to act. Anti-Semitism in Indianapolis was seldom overt, but rather manifested itself in exclusion from social clubs and employment discrimination. Still fearing that discrimination might escalate, Jewish leaders attempted to maintain a positive image of Judaism in the city. At the same time, the doctrine of tzedakah, which held that more pressing needs were to be attended to first, dictated that they turn their attention to the global Jewish community, in particular to the newly formed nation of Israel, and then to the plight of their non-Jewish neighbors.

The focus on nearby racial problems reflected the political and social context of the post-World-War-II era, when the Truman administration began to study systematically civil rights issues such as discrimination in employment and college admissions. After witnessing the atrocities of the Holocaust, American Jews felt obligated to address injustices in their own country, and they turned to civil rights issues. Anti-Semitism in the nation had also decreased in the aftermath of the war, creating a sense of security that allowed more Jews to become active in their larger communities.

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9 Indiana Jewish Chronicle, July 3, 1953.
20 Endelman, The Jewish Community of Indianapolis, 217.
21 Endelman notes only sporadic local discrimination in the 1920s and 30s, when anti-Semitism peaked in other parts of the United States. She cites the influence of a stable Jewish population and a long history of residence in Indianapolis, but also documents that local Jews faced a “more subtle social form” of discrimination, including being barred from social clubs and discriminated against in hiring. Ibid., 3-6, 171-77. Moss argues that Jewish leaders hoped to minimize negative publicity to prevent more overt anti-Semitism. Moss, “Creating a Jewish-American Identity in Indianapolis,” 64-65.
22 Dinnerstein, Antisemitism in America, 152.
23 Ibid., 150-52. Anti-Semitism declined throughout the state during the post-war era. Madison, The Indiana Way, 238.
Belief in the advisability of Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement split American Jews along sectional lines. Southern Jews worried that working for black equality would increase anti-Semitism, threatening their safety and economic security. Some northern communities eschewed civil rights work as well, especially if Jews thought that it threatened their position in society. Jews in Cincinnati, Ohio, began to enact racial barriers as they became a part of mainstream society. For instance, a Jewish playground association, against their earlier stance, began to discriminate against blacks. In other northern cities, such as Indianapolis, Jews felt sufficiently secure in their social and economic position to risk a possible backlash from the wider community.

The connections between federal civil rights initiatives and Jewish actions were evident from the early years of the Indianapolis JCRC. In 1949, the local B'nai B'rith and the JCRC cosponsored an essay contest for Indianapolis public schools that inspired other B'nai B'rith organizations across the country to hold similar competitions. Based on “To Secure These Rights,” the recently issued report of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, the contest called on students to write about liberty, equality, and democracy. John Wilson, a Crispus Attucks student and one of the winners, wrote in his essay: “We, the youth of America, are looking to Civil Rights: for, when they prevail, the truly democratic feeling will exist among people and not a so-called democracy.” The essay contest, which continued throughout the 1950s in both public and religious high schools, encouraged Indianapolis youth to think about civil rights issues in terms of the liberal ideology that pervaded American society and politics. Progressive liberalism urged Americans to live up to their ideals, and in this post-World-War-II con-
text, Indianapolis Jews set to work ameliorating the disparate treatment of blacks.

African Americans in Indiana had little recourse for addressing civil rights violations. Analysis of state NAACP records during the early decades of the century shows the organization's relative lack of action. Under the leadership of Willard Ransom, the group became more active in pushing for civil rights legislation in the late 1940s. Nevertheless, it continued to draw on the work of interracial, interfaith coalitions to achieve the passage of most such legislation in Indiana; collaborative endeavors also helped to ensure enforcement of the laws. Albert Cherin, JCRC executive director in the mid-1950s, noted of the previous decade that “in those years we all worked very closely together.” Although the coalition groups were composed mostly of whites, several influential African American leaders also joined. State and local governments formed civil rights commissions, but officials' support was often tentative or symbolic. Indianapolis did not appropriate funds for full-time staff for the city's Human Rights Commission (also called the Mayor's Commission on Human Rights) until 1963. The commission was somewhat active throughout the 1950s, however, and had the distinction of being directed by Rev. Jim Jones, then a recognized figure in local civil rights causes.

The Indianapolis Community Relations Council, while not principally concerned with civil rights issues, did become involved in such matters during the 1940s. Established in 1946 after a race relations clinic held in the city the preceding year, the ICRC served as a forerunner to

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"Albert Cherin, telephone interview with author, August 3, 2011. Dollinger notes that interfaith work was important elsewhere in the country in the late 1940s. Dollinger, Quest for Inclusion, 61-66.

"Thornbrough writes: “The Indianapolis Jewish Community Relations Council and other Jewish organizations gave active support to civil rights measures in Indianapolis,” but gives little indication of what that support entailed. Thornbrough and Ruegamer, Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century, 122.

"Thornbrough, Since Emancipation, 46.

"Indianapolis Human Rights Commission,” in Encyclopedia of Indianapolis, eds. David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows (Bloomington, Ind., 1994), 785. The Indianapolis Recorder listed Jones, then minister of the People’s Temple Full Gospel Church, on their Human Relations Honor Roll and also reported that he was the first white lifetime member of the NAACP “in Indianapolis and probably in Indiana.” Indianapolis Recorder, January 5, February 16, 1957.
later civil rights agencies, but it dealt mostly with school desegregation. Several individuals who were or would become influential civil rights leaders first came together in this organization. Henry J. Richardson Jr., Martin Larner, C. Oliver Holmes, Maurice Goldblatt, Louis P. Greenberg, Willard Ransom, and Charles Posner got to know one another during their work with the ICRC. The JCRC and ICRC were closely linked: Posner concurrently served as executive director of both organizations, and the JCRC allowed the ICRC to use its office space. The president of the JCRC noted that since both organizations were “vitally interested in developing better community relations,” such an arrangement was most acceptable. When the Recorder recognized Posner in its Race Relations Honor Roll in 1949, they noted that he was instrumental in “improving relations between minority groups and serving to unite the tolerance forces of Indianapolis.” Posner’s successor in the ICRC, David Sawyer, would also later become an executive director of the JCRC.

In 1948, the ICRC commissioned Max Wolfe from the National Community Relations Advisory Council, a Jewish organization, to conduct a pilot study on segregation in Indiana schools. The commission asked Indiana University to conduct a full study, but the school declined to participate. The ICRC was also unable to secure funding to support the full survey. Posner and Holmes met with Paul Ross, the director of the Indianapolis Foundation, in an attempt to secure a grant but were unsuccessful. Despite its inadequacies, the partially completed study proved that Jews and blacks could work together for a common cause; collaboration in failed attempts only served to unite leaders of the two communities for future efforts.

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33Indianapolis Recorder, April 5, 1947. Thornbrough notes that the Indianapolis NAACP played an important role in the organization. Thornbrough and Ruegamer, Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century, 112-13.

34Indianapolis Recorder, December 30, 1950.


36Indianapolis Recorder, January 8, 1949.

37Ibid., September 9, 1950.

38Paul M. Ross to C. Oliver Holmes, February 7, 1949, Folder 25 “Indianapolis Community Relations Council, 1948-1949,” box 63, Indianapolis Foundation Records, MS 49, Ruth Lilly Special Collections & Archives, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.
Levine was another executive director of the JCRC whose leadership proved vital to the civil rights movement in Indiana. The Recorder also included him on one of their yearly Human Relations Honor Rolls, writing that his "sincerity and tact have done much to bring about better understanding between minority groups, and [his] civil rights leadership is like a breath of fresh air in his adopted state." While Posner integrated the JCRC's work with that of the ICRC, Levine worked with other civil rights organizations, most notably the Mayor's Commission on Human Rights, offering important assistance in furthering the city commission's goals. Levine was concerned by local officials' disregard for the commission, which extended so far that the city neglected even to appoint a full-time executive director. Such disinterest, he believed, stood as a symbol of the city government's general lack of support for civil rights. Levine wrote to the editors of the Indianapolis News and Indianapolis Times in an effort to publicize the fact that "in a growing metropolitan center such as Indianapolis... a City Council could vote against what is, at best, a very minimal program of municipal responsibilities in combating racial and religious tensions." The Recorder credited the influence of the JCRC and Levine in publicizing the inattention bestowed upon the Mayor's Commission: "The lion's share of credit for organizing the dramatically successful campaign, The Recorder learned, goes to Irving Levine and his staff of the Indianapolis Jewish Community Relations Council." Such contributions led the Recorder to place Levine on their honor roll.

While specific Jewish leaders labored on behalf of the civil rights movement in Indiana, drawing conclusions based upon only a few individuals' actions minimizes the support of the Jewish community at large. A broad cross-section of that community lent its voice to the JCRC's work. In Indiana, one of the most egregious types of racial discrimination was the segregation of public schools. With the increasing number
of African Americans moving north during the Great Migration, Indiana began to segregate its public schools. Crispus Attucks, the first black high school in Indianapolis, opened in 1927; several other Hoosier cities established all-black schools during the same decade. Between 1946 and 1948, the Indianapolis NAACP focused on ending school segregation. The JCRC and other religious groups, along with major city newspapers the Indianapolis Times and Indianapolis Star, joined the effort.

The JCRC took up the crusade shortly after its inception. During the group’s first few meetings, members discussed the merits of supporting school desegregation. While the issue remained controversial, the JCRC decided to endorse officially school desegregation at its May 12, 1948 meeting, a year before Indiana law mandated desegregated schools and while the lawsuit between Head and Esquire was ongoing: “It is the consensus of this Board that we are opposed to segregation in the public schools, both elementary and high schools in Indianapolis, and that we take all necessary steps, as may be effective in accomplishing the abolition of segregation.”

The members present debated how precise the resolution should actually be, an indication that not everyone was in favor of it. Posner motioned to conduct a pilot study on public school segregation; as discussed earlier, the closely linked ICRC actually conducted the study. Five months later, the JCRC went a step further, resolving to petition the Indianapolis School Board to end segregation. By March 1949, the council could note in its records that the legislation it had supported—House Bill 242 to end segregation in schools—passed “except that the period of integration was extended.”

The black community recognized Jewish involvement in ending school segregation. The Recorder emphasized the JCRC’s assistance and later credited Posner for his work, noting that he was “one of the spearheads in the movement which resulted in the enactment of the 1949 integrated school law by the Indiana General Assembly.”

Richardson, an African American attorney influential in education reform, also

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"Indianapolis Recorder, February 12, 1949, September 9, 1950."
thanked Posner for his role in passing House Bill 242. Despite this legislative success, African Americans still faced de facto segregation throughout Indiana.\(^{46}\) Indiana schools were able to circumvent desegregation throughout the 1950s, largely because students went to school in the districts in which they lived, and most neighborhoods in Indianapolis and other cities were able to prevent African American residence. While other supporting organizations failed to confront the problem, the JCRC supported an amendment intended to help implement the 1949 law.\(^{46}\)

While school segregation was one obvious form of racism in Indiana, employment discrimination also persisted through the mid-twentieth century. Franklin D. Roosevelt had established the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices in 1941, and individual states began to establish their own Fair Employment Practices Commissions thereafter.\(^{49}\) Shared efforts in establishing these commissions marked the beginnings of Jewish and African American cooperation. By 1947, the National Council for a Permanent FEPC included a bevy of Jewish and black organizations—the National Council of Jewish Women, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the National Community Relations Advisory Council, and the National Urban League, among others.\(^{50}\) In Indiana, the Fair Employment Practices Act created the state commission in 1945. The new agency's purpose was to ensure that businesses did not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, or national origin. The FEPC ostensibly protected against discrimination, but blacks continually criticized it as being "without teeth," and Jewish groups called for its strengthening. Although the law prohibited employment

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\(^{46}\) Pierce, Polite Protest, 26-27, 30-31, 47-48; Thornbrough and Ruegamer, Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century, 142-50. Thornbrough states that "The enactment of the law was the result of what was probably the most significant effort at interracial cooperation in the history of the state." Thornbrough, Since Emancipation, 60.

\(^{49}\) Aram Goudsouzian, "Ba-ad, Ba-a-ad Tigers: Crispus Attucks Basketball and Black Indianapolis in the 1950s," Indiana Magazine of History 96 (March 2000), 14.


\(^{50}\) Greenberg, Troubling the Waters, 125.
discrimination, plaintiffs often could not provide the facts necessary to prove their claims. While most supporting groups ceased their activities with passage of the initial law, Jewish support continued in the form of lobbying for further legislation. The 1949 fair employment law was the first step in strengthening the commission. The NAACP and JCRC joined together to lobby on behalf of this bill, as both groups recognized that working together would help accomplish their shared goal.\(^5\)

A stronger FEPC had stood foremost on the agenda of a local conference on civil rights held in 1948. The conference elected Louis B. Greenberg, state JCRC director, as the temporary chairman of its steering committee, which also included Posner and Ransom.\(^2\) In early 1949, these same men testified before the Indiana House labor committee in support of the bill to strengthen the FEPC.\(^5\) Calling for government support to further individuals' rights was a natural extension of liberal ideology, but as JCRC director Norman Sider later remarked, “The prophetic teachings of Judaism informed their politics. . . . They learned their liberalism from their religious teachings.”\(^3\) Throughout the early 1950s, the FEPC remained weak, but support for equal employment remained strong in both the Jewish and African American communities.\(^5\)

Throughout the 1950s, while racial discrimination in the South began receiving wider public attention, the JCRC continued working with other groups on fair employment issues in Indiana. Greenberg and NAACP board member Robert Risch served together on a television panel for the FEPC advocating “enforcement measures by legal procedures.” Both men also worked with the Indiana Committee for Fair Employment Practices Legal Drafting Committee for the 1950 Indiana General Assembly.\(^5\) Charles Decker, the director of the commission, frequently corresponded with David Sawyer of the JCRC about employ-

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\(^5\)“Civil Rights,” in Encyclopedia of Indianapolis, 438-41; Thornbrough and Ruegamer, Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century, 110-11; Pierce, Polite Protest, 94-96, 100.
\(^2\)Indianapolis Recorder, December 18, 1948. Greenberg was the first executive director of the state JCRC. Endelman, The Jewish Community of Indianapolis, 212.
\(^3\)Indianapolis Recorder, January 29, 1949.
\(^4\)Norman Sider, telephone interview with author, August 1, 2011.
\(^5\)Indianapolis Recorder, December 23, 1950. A stronger FEPC was a top priority on the NAACP's 1951 agenda.
\(^6\)Indiana Jewish Chronicle, July 11, 1952.
ment issues. Recognizing Sawyer's commitment to equal rights for blacks, Decker asked him to serve on the advisory committee for the FEPC. Sawyer became involved in a variety of cases of possible employment discrimination, inquiring into the hiring of African Americans at a predominantly white high school and at the Indiana Bell Telephone Company. The JCRC also became involved in fighting Indianapolis Railways, which refused to hire five African American drivers. The Indiana Jewish Chronicle noted that “It is fairly certain that few if any Jews will apply as drivers for the Indianapolis Railways. Yet, the JCRC fights discrimination on every front.” Other liberal organizations did not want to be associated with this particularly controversial form of equality, believing that intervention in privately owned businesses was too intrusive.

Beginning in 1953, the JCRC also addressed the related issue of hiring practices, bringing to the forefront the practice of discriminatory employment advertising. In one instance, Martin Larner, affiliated with the ICRC, called the Indianapolis Star to place a job advertisement. When asked if he wanted to restrict the position based on race, he declined. Larner contacted David Sawyer at the JCRC to inform him of what had transpired. Sawyer contacted the FEPC's Charles Decker to inform him of the ongoing discriminatory practice; Decker met with the acting director of the Star's classified advertising division to demand that the paper discontinue its restrictive and illegal questions; finally, Decker wrote to Sawyer, expressing his thanks for informing him of the issue.

This series of interactions typified the importance of personal networks in the push for civil rights in Indianapolis. Unfortunately, in the years that followed, local newspapers, including the Star, still occasionally ran discriminatory advertisements—even as Paul C. Schulz, the newspaper's

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7Indiana Jewish Chronicle, July 3, 1953. The Recorder covered the Indianapolis Railways case but did not mention the JCRC, suggesting that Jewish support was not always publicized within the black community. Indianapolis Recorder, April 11, May 2, May 16, 1953.
8Pierce, Polite Protest, 47.
Flanner House Homes, under construction, with downtown Indianapolis in the background. Beginning in 1951, African American and Jewish groups worked with the city to replace a segregated neighborhood of rundown homes with new, modern houses.

Courtesy, Indiana Historical Society

classified ad manager, thanked the JCRC for alerting the public to this issue.\(^2\)

Housing discrimination was another area that tested the commitment of local Jews to the civil rights agenda. One answer to the problem was to encourage blacks to help themselves by assisting them to build homes. Rooted in the liberal tradition of individual self-reliance as well as in African American calls for black independence through self-help, the Indianapolis building project called Flanner House Homes, Inc., constituted what historian Richard Pierce has termed the “largest self-help housing initiative undertaken in the United States.”\(^3\) The city’s Flanner House settlement home was already a visible symbol of interracial cooperation in the summer of 1951, when the American Jewish

\(^2\)Indiana Jewish Chronicle, September 7, 1956.

\(^3\)Pierce, Polite Protest, 68. This program mirrored Booker T. Washington’s historic emphasis on racial uplift and self-reliance in Up from Slavery: An Autobiography (New York, 1901).
Society for Service elected to make the new initiative its first service project. That a national Jewish organization would come to Indianapolis to build houses for blacks indicated how abysmal the housing situation was in the city. The national group's interactions with the local Jewish community, however, called into question just how willing local Jews were to work to ameliorate racial discrimination. Most Jewish young people seemed uninterested in the project, and the initiative divided adults—some worked for it and others kept their distance and even criticized it as detracting from support for Israel.

The Jews who labored on the project viewed their mission as religious in nature. Project leader Irwin Stark described the initiative as not being "an act of charity, or of public relations, but . . . an act of faith," emphasizing the Judaic ideal of universal brotherhood. He also noted that the work was "a fulfillment of a personal interpretation of several Jewish tenets" and that Jews were "carrying out the ethical directives of their faith." While Stark harbored some paternalistic sentiments (lamenting, for instance, that the city's African Americans were from the South, and hence, did not know about a "money economy"), he nonetheless criticized racist practices during the building project, citing a black builder who should have been promoted to foreman, but was passed over in favor of a white employee whom he had recruited.

In the late 1950s, housing discrimination became a more controversial issue within the Jewish community. Even in the wake of the Supreme Court's 1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer* decision, the legacy of restrictive housing covenants continued to limit where African Americans could live in Indianapolis. By the end of the decade, the issue began receiving more publicity, and the repeal of local housing ordinances began. The concentration of blacks in poorer areas was in part the result of realtors' refusal to show them houses for sale in predominantly white neighborhoods. For example, in 1956 Jewish realtor Sam

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"The leader of the project noted that "to generalize about the attitude of the adult Jewish community is somewhat more difficult." Irwin Stark, "Jewish Work Camp in Indianapolis," *Commentary* 13 (January 1952), 11.


Frankowitz was derided by fellow brokers for working with Henry J. Richardson Jr., who was hoping to buy a house in an upscale, overwhelmingly white neighborhood. An unidentified individual in the Indianapolis Jewish community, worried about anti-Semitic implications of the realtor's actions, placed a phone call to Robert Gordon of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). Gordon, in turn, wrote to JCRC executive director Albert Cherin regarding “a concerted effort on the part of ‘reputable’ real estate interests, to prevent the sale of property in certain areas to negroes. . . . It is my understanding that the major white real estate firms in the community are not interested in developing a reputation as an organization which conveys property to negroes.” Gordon echoed the ever-present concern of many local Jews in noting that the council should “determine whether or not any anti-semitic results will flow from this particular transaction.”

The tenor of the civil rights movement shifted in the 1960s. In Indiana, the state government became more supportive of civil rights legislation, as seen, for example, in the passage of new laws increasing the power of the FEPC. Many Americans, especially young people, began to offer more overt resistance to civil rights restrictions. In 1963, two students who had participated in a civil rights sit-in in Henderson, Kentucky, were fired by their employer, the Evansville State Hospital. Rallying to the students' cause, JCRC director Levine issued a statement to the press: “To punish so severely, an act of conscience as important as the participation in sit-ins; an act that most religious and moral leaders consider to be noble, puts the State of Indiana in a very compromising position.” Levine declared that the case would prove “embarrassing to Indiana”; noted that the hospital was restricting the women's “personal freedom of action and association”; and, on behalf of the JCRC, asked Governor Matthew Welsh to formally investigate the matter and disclose the facts related to the students' dismissal.

Throughout the decade, the civil rights community worked to lessen housing restrictions. In 1964, the same year that President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the landmark national Civil Rights Act, the

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Indianapolis NAACP chapter began a campaign, with assistance from local Jewish organizations, to support fair housing legislation. ADL leader Gordon met with Robert Graves, president of the Indianapolis Real Estate Board, in an attempt to discern the realtor’s position on an open occupancy ordinance. While Jewish support for open occupancy measures and fair housing was considered radical at the time, JCRC director Goldstein later reflected that such advocacy derived from both political and religious leanings: “Primarily Jews were liberal back then, but Jews were involved in civil rights as Jews.” For many Indianapolis Jews, religion remained the primary motivation to action, as faith dictated politics.

In another attempt to ameliorate poor housing conditions for the city’s black residents, the JCRC, NAACP, ADL, and National Council of Jewish Women, along with other groups devoted to civil rights, sponsored the 1960 Indianapolis Seminar on Open Occupancy Housing. At one of its meetings, JCRC executive director Levine spoke extensively on housing discrimination. In his politically charged speech, he addressed the shortage of adequate housing for African Americans as well as their inability to choose where to live, and he expressed his concern that politicians, both locally and nationally, cared more about the plight of those in other countries than that of black citizens in the United States. Levine also noted his desire to establish a commission that would help African Americans gain access to better housing and show the white community that, contrary to popular argument, housing values did not decrease because of black neighbors. In closing, he placed the struggle for fair housing in the Cold War context of his audience: “History will not judge us by how well we do in the missile race, but how well we do in the human race.” Following the seminar, Levine wrote to Frances Levinson at the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing, informing her of the meeting’s success and

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*David Goldstein, telephone interview with author, August 2, 2011.*

*Indianapolis Times, September 29, 1960.*

asking for her advice regarding the establishment of an Indianapolis Committee Against Discrimination in Housing.\textsuperscript{75}

The JCRC and Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation continued local Jewish collaborative efforts, working with the Indianapolis Human Relations Council to prevent housing discrimination. The congregation’s rabbi, Maurice Davis, served as the president of the Indianapolis Human Relations Council and on the Mayor’s Commission on Human Rights.\textsuperscript{76} On the Human Relations Council, he worked closely with Levine, who chaired the group’s housing committee. In a letter to Indianapolis mayor Charles E. Boswell emphasizing the importance of a stronger commission, Levine wrote about the “severe minority housing problem with thousands of our Negro citizens lacking adequate, fairly priced, housing in unsegregated neighborhoods.”\textsuperscript{77} After the Federal Home Loan Bank Board issued a decision requiring all federally chartered savings and loans to adhere to a non-discriminatory lending policy, the JCRC issued a press release in support. In the text, Davis and Levine emphasized the importance of the ruling for the city’s African Americans in gaining access to better housing.\textsuperscript{78}

Jewish support for civil rights would be tested as the movement gained ground. In late January 1961, Harold Robbins, executive director of the Jewish Community Center, invited African Americans to use the center’s facilities and to take part in its programs. Robbins cited the religious principle of “welcom[ing] a ‘stranger in our midst’” to support the new policy. Reaction in the local Jewish community was immediate and strongly mixed. The council hosted a group meeting on the topic “The Negro as a Suburban Neighbor.” The Recorder reported that the “stormy” meeting took place with “an overflow crowd”; the discussion laid bare differences within the Jewish community with regard to race. While all of the panelists supported integrated housing, not everyone in the audi-
ence shared this view. One man stood up and commented: “It’s true that I don’t want white trash or dirty niggers living next to me.” After charging that the NAACP had rigged the meeting, the speaker and several other opponents of open housing left the meeting. But the Recorder also noted the words of Joseph Tobak, a Polish Jew who had survived the Nazis and the Holocaust: “You say, ‘I like Negroes, but.’ I heard the same thing in Poland 40 years ago—‘We like Jews, but.’ Then came Hitler and his mass murders. Some of you think you’re safe because you’ve got money. But you haven’t got money—money’s got you!” Such emotional exchanges demonstrated that there was not unified support in the Jewish community for civil rights issues.

Racial tensions within the larger Indianapolis community often became manifest. Attempts to intimidate African American families who moved into predominantly white neighborhoods were common; some opponents of integrated communities employed the racist symbol of a burned cross. Jewish leaders urged their allies across the religious spectrum to stand together. After one such display, JCRC president Sigmund J. Beck issued a statement: “I hope leaders of the Jewish, Protestant and Catholic institutions in the area will continue to work together to create a climate of acceptance for residents of all races and religions.”

Despite occasional dissenting voices, Jewish leaders and community members worked to promote integrated public schools, fair employment practices, and equal access to good housing. The fourth arena of the civil rights struggle—discrimination in public accommodations—also saw JCRC intervention, once again motivated by political and religious beliefs. The state’s 1885 Civil Rights Law theoretically protected blacks from discrimination in public areas, but in practice failed to do so. Many business and public establishment owners restricted African Americans from their restaurants, parks, hotels, theaters, and shops. Jewish organizations supported the passage of a 1961 amended state civil rights law that desegregated public accommodations, three years in advance of the federal act that promised the same protections.

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10Thornbrough, “Breaking Racial Barriers to Public Accommodations,” 305.
The Recorder had documented the efforts of the NAACP to desegregate Indianapolis restaurants beginning in 1947. Not long after winning their dispute with the Esquire Theater, the JCRC joined the NAACP and the newspaper in their endeavor to protest a segregated gathering at the Indianapolis fairgrounds. The Recorder began a “Crusade to ‘keep Jim Crow out of the Cow Barn’” in 1949 when the American Bowling Congress (ABC) sought to hold its annual tournament at the State Fairgrounds. In other parts of the country, where Jewish and African American groups had taken on the all-white league, many of its working-class members had responded with violence. Indianapolis mayor Al Feeney refused to intervene, stating that the fairgrounds were not under his jurisdiction. Posner, Ransom, and other civic leaders met with the governor, arguing that there was a “KKK-like tinge” to the ABC. Governor Shricker would not commit to personal intervention, but did secure a meeting with the State Fair Board for Posner, Ransom, and other members of their group. The delegation succeeded in keeping the ABC not only out of the Cow Barn but also out of the state. The bowling league moved the 1950 tournament to Columbus, Ohio.

Another case of discrimination in public accommodation revealed the close connections between many local civil rights leaders. In 1951, Sawyer informed C. Oliver Holmes, the ICRC president, about a conversation with William T. Ray, former Indianapolis NAACP president, regarding allegations of discrimination at the Haag Drug Company. In one instance, an African American soldier on leave from camp had been refused service; in a second instance, a woman who frequently ate at one particular store was capriciously rejected one day—”they just [did not] want to serve her anymore.” Ray had asked Sawyer to contact the ICRC about the problem, hoping for a solution; the NAACP leader’s choice to work through the JCRC indicated the level of trust that many African Americans placed in the Jewish organization. In his letter to the ICRC, Sawyer wrote that “Bill suggested that perhaps a letter or a telephone call ought to be made by you... advising the Haag management that... litigation is planned.” Sawyer recommended that contacting the top man-

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For examples, see Indianapolis Recorder, March 15, April 19, June 28, 1947. These articles make no mention of Jewish cooperation, supporting the theory that it was only with the establishment of the JCRC that Indianapolis Jews became noticeably active in civil rights issues.

Indianapolis Recorder, April 23, May 14, 1949; Greenberg, Troubling the Waters, 156.

The longtime entrance sign for Riverside Amusement Park, 1962. Since its inception in 1919, the Indianapolis park had discriminated against African Americans. Cooperation between the city and local black and Jewish groups finally led to desegregation in 1962.

Courtesy, Indiana Historical Society

agement directly would be a better tactic than litigation: “My own feeling is that court action without any mediation would arouse a certain amount of hate if poorly handled by the press.” Holmes took Sawyer’s advice.8 Once again, Indianapolis civil rights leaders took a judicious, peaceful route, hoping to avoid conflict and maintain a positive image rather than pushing for more radical action. Such an approach seemed viable in this particular case because the Haag Drug Company reportedly had decided as early as 1947 to serve African American patrons.87

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8Sawyer to C. Oliver Holmes, September 12, 1951, and Holmes to Haag Drug Company Manager, September 26, 1951, Folder 12 “Correspondence, 1950-1952,” box 150, series II, Jewish Welfare Federation of Indianapolis Records Collection. For an earlier instance of discrimination at Haag, see Indianapolis Recorder, December 4, 1948.

8Indianapolis Recorder, June 28, 1947.
African Americans in Indianapolis also faced discrimination at public recreation spaces. Beginning in 1919, Riverside Amusement Park refused to admit African Americans—except for “Colored Frolic Days” or “Negro Day,” usually held only one day a year. In 1949, the park dropped its official discriminatory policy, but it also put up a sign reading “Patronage Whites Only Solicited.” In 1954, the Mayor’s Commission on Human Rights called park spokesman Robert Coleman to appear before them and address the continued discrimination. Coleman responded that African American patrons “certainly won’t be welcome.” The commission condemned the park’s practices but took no actions to change them. The JCRC tried to keep the issue alive. Levine brought the issue to the attention of Mayor Boswell in a 1960 letter about increasing the power of the Mayor’s Commission on Human Rights. Goldstein, Levine’s successor, noted that the commission was not “worth anything” and that the mayor “didn’t care about civil rights.” Finally, Goldstein wrote to John Coleman, the owner of Riverside:

The displaying of discriminatory signs tends to discourage minorities from taking full advantage of their civil rights, and causes minority group members incalculable psychological damage. The Indianapolis Jewish Community Relations Council strongly condemns this practice.

Coleman removed the signs; Goldstein wrote again and thanked him for his cooperation. Once again, the Jewish organization had cooperated with African Americans and had played a mediating role with whites.

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*David Goldstein, telephone interview with author, August 2, 2011.

Many Indiana Jews became active in the national civil rights movement, and their work further highlights the importance of both religious and political ideologies as motivating forces. Levine wrote to Indiana Methodist bishop Richard Raines, whose son took part in the Freedom Rides in 1961: “Many of us who labor in the field of race relations know well that the demonstrated action of one committed white person far outstrips much verbiage, conferencing and resolution passing.” This commitment took a number of Hoosier Jews to Washington, D.C., and to several southern states. Indianapolis resident Miriam Cohen, a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), was arrested in Albany, Georgia, during a voter registration drive, and her story was featured on the front page of the Recorder.

Goldstein led an Indianapolis contingent to the 1963 March on Washington, and he participated in the Selma to Montgomery march in 1965. Back home in Indianapolis, he addressed the All Souls Unitarian Church’s Unitarian Universalist Fellowship for Social Justice on May 19, 1965. His speech, “A Tourist View of Selma,” emphasized the inherent insignificance of his and others’ actions when compared to the sacrifices and sufferings that African Americans in the South had experienced:

There were those in Selma who saw themselves as the saviors of the town’s Negroes. They were heroes coming to free the slaves, when the truth was that . . . we were merely tourists, one-day visitors who risked very little and would return quickly to our safe normal pursuits. . . . the Negro people of Selma . . . would have to stay and face the wrath of their white neighbors.

Goldstein recognized the paternalistic sentiments of many white activists: He noted that the group of northerners with whom he traveled “did not meet the SNCC kids who had been beaten in the town trying unsuccessfully to eat at a segregated restaurant.” Instead, “there we

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"Indianapolis Recorder, July 6, 1963.

"David Goldstein, telephone interview with author, August 2, 2011."
were, we who had come for one day, feeling that we had saved these courageous people."

Rabbi Maurice Davis was also heavily involved in both the local and national civil rights movement, and the Catholic Archdiocese of Indianapolis awarded him the St. Martin de Porres Medal for his work. According to Goldstein, Davis had the support of his congregation, even if they did not take the same active stance on civil rights as their rabbi. Both men participated in the Selma march, and Goldstein recounted that when they "approached the street on which the Brown Chapel is located an Alabama National Guardsman blocked our way—his rifle across his chest. . . . He came over to our car and looked at us with great hate." The men were allowed to pass and were not arrested. The JCRC had offered to post bond for Indianapolis Jews arrested in the South for civil rights activities, an indication of the organization's commitment to the national crusade.

The mid-1960s saw a nationwide shift in the relationship between African Americans and Jews. In some cities, the rise of the Black Muslim movement brought a corresponding increase in anti-Semitic rhetoric; in response, many Jews began to feel animosity toward blacks. The divergence was not as great in Indianapolis. Local Jews saw the growing differences, but the Indiana Jewish Chronicle continued to cover stories that emphasized positive relations between local Jews and blacks, even while it simultaneously ran articles about worsening relations elsewhere in the country. Good relations between the two groups may also have reflected the low number of Black Muslims in Indianapolis—by 1964, the group claimed only twenty-five members out of a black population of

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"Rosenberg and Rosenberg, To 120 Years, 94.

David Goldstein, interview with author, August 2, 2011.


"Endelman, The Jewish Community of Indianapolis, 249.

Endelman does not discuss to what extent this divide became apparent in Indiana. Ibid., 222. Indiana Jewish Recorder issues from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s do not reveal newsworthy tensions in Indiana.
the state JCRC documented Black Muslim anti-Semitism in other parts of the country, but maintained no record of such problems in Indiana. Also important to the remaining cohesion between the two groups was the work of the local JCRC and individual Jews. In response to a question about the schism between blacks and Jews in Indianapolis, Goldstein remarked that “we worked together for years—ministers and civil rights leaders. Those relationships were solid.” The connections forged from the 1940s and 1950s, through the height of the movement in the early to mid-1960s, served to keep relations cordial in later years.

In 1961, Levine wrote to Andrew Ramsey of the Indianapolis NAACP, thanking Ramsey for a column that he had written on black-Jewish relations: “Writings, such as your own, are crucial if we are to get over the hump of present misunderstandings and on to the really important work.” As national Jewish organizations were beginning to emphasize nascent anti-Semitism within the black community, leaders in Indiana sought to prevent such tensions. In 1963, the Indiana JCRC reaffirmed its stance on civil rights, citing especially the religious obligation for doing so, “in conformance with the highest traditions of Judaism.” The council urged “local Jewish communities to actively participate in the Civil Rights movement” and called upon “Jewish organizations and Jewish individuals to join with Negro citizens in their efforts to achieve equal status.” The group also advocated “Jewish community support of national, state and local civil rights legislation” as well as “participation in the non-violent demonstration techniques which Negroes are utilizing to protest past wrongs and to gain a redress to their grievances.” Likewise, Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation adopted a resolution in support of the 1963 Civil Rights Bill, linking their emphasis on social justice with contemporary issues in the nation.

2 David Goldstein, telephone interview with author, August 2, 2011.
In August 1963, the local NAACP conducted a Freedom Rally to emphasize continuing civil rights restrictions in the state and the city. Rabbi Davis represented the Jewish community at the rally and gave a speech during the event. By the early 1960s, the Indianapolis chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) had staged several protests, including a rally at Shortridge High School that resulted in several arrests. On July 4, 1964, CORE sponsored a 10 Mile March for Freedom through the city, which served as another public example of local civil rights activity.

Religion stood at the heart of efforts to maintain cooperation, and civil rights leaders across Indianapolis hoped appeals to faith would continue the interfaith alliances that they had utilized for so long. In 1964, the JCRC, the Catholic Interracial Council, and the Church Federation of Greater Indianapolis established another interfaith organization, the Indianapolis Conference on Religion and Race, and held a workshop at Indiana Central College (now the University of Indianapolis) where "it was suggested that an ongoing interfaith program be developed wherein the religious groups of Indianapolis could together use their resources, experiences and concern to promote progress in civil rights." The mission statement for the organization, its Declaration of Conscience, emphasized the group's religious nature:

The hour is late, but their [sic] is still time for religion and its spokesmen to assume their proper function in America's struggle for justice and equality. That function is to lead! . . . We who profess commitment to a faith must now commit ourselves to action, that we might worship with our lives as well as with our lips, and testify with deed as well as word that men are brothers, and mankind is one.

By 1965, however, with new leadership in the JCRC, the direction of Jewish social action in Indianapolis began to change. The Indiana

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106 Thornbrough and Ruegamer, Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century, 173.
Jewish Chronicle noted that new executive director Theodore Walden believed that the organization "would defeat its own purpose by devoting its energy exclusively to the field of civil rights. He said the time had come for JCRC to return to some of the traditional Jewish community problems." This change in focus was apparent in the mid- to late 1960s, when the council made prayer in public schools one of its main initiatives. Walden's shift in direction reflected the inward shift of many Jews, both locally and nationally, away from broader community involvement. Norman Sider, Walden's successor, would later reflect that "the civil rights agenda was framed in legal terms. Once you had the laws on the books then it became a question of enforcement." Global events, too, contributed to the change. In the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, Black Muslims supported the Palestinians and Arab states, and anti-Semitic rhetoric continued to increase. Goldstein and Sider agreed that the events of 1967 formed a turning point in Jewish interests in Indianapolis—Israel's survival became a more urgent issue than civil rights, and this new emphasis was one of the reasons for the JCRC's shifting priorities.

The change in direction did not mean that Indianapolis Jews entirely abandoned their work for civil rights. Two initiatives in the late 1960s illustrate that Jewish interest in helping African Americans continued after the time that most scholars consider marks the end of cooperation. In 1966, Theodore Walden considered forming a Negro Community Relations Council (NCRC) to mirror the JCRC. He wrote to Jules Cohen, the executive director of the Greater Philadelphia JCRC, who had authored a discussion paper on the possibility of creating a community council for blacks. The NCRC proposal was the most paternalistic endeavor that the JCRC had considered. What relation this group would have had to the NAACP, Urban League, or other civil rights groups in the city was unclear. Indeed, Cohen warned against any kind of management from outside and argued that such an initiative should be started "from within the Negro community, although we should stand

16Indiana Jewish Chronicle, November 4, 1966.
111Norman Sider, telephone interview with author, August 1, 2011.
12Branch, At Canaan's Edge, 617-19.
13David Goldstein, telephone interview with author, August 2, 2011; Norman Sider, telephone interview with author, August 1, 2011.
by ready to make available the experience of the Jewish community." Cohen did send Walden a description of discussions that the Philadelphia JCRC had facilitated between Jews and African Americans. The council for African Americans never materialized, but it is likely that Cohen's ideas, combined with a desire to prevent the city's interracial alliances from splitting, influenced the JCRC in forming the Negro-Jewish Dialogues, a series of discussions held between 1966 and 1968. The main topics at these meetings addressed concerns of both groups within the national context of growing dissension between them. African American and Jewish participants discussed anti-Semitism and racism, both in the community at large and within their respective communities.

A second initiative that extended beyond the supposed end of the period of cooperation was associated with a national movement begun by Catholics called Project Equality. The purpose of the project was to "encourage religious institutions to do business with suppliers having effective affirmative action programs for equal employment opportunity." Norman Sider, executive director of the JCRC at the time, attempted to recruit other Jewish organizations. Sider wrote letters to rabbis throughout Indiana and convinced many to join. The two main synagogues in Indianapolis, Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation and Beth-El Zedeck, both joined. Support extended beyond the religious and community leadership, as Tuchman Cleaners, a local, Jewish-owned dry cleaning business, also joined Project Equality. The only synagogue that rejected Sider's appeal seems to have been Temple Beth-El in Hammond. Rabbi David Spitz wrote that one of his congregation's board members had "cited a case of church groups being sued for boycotting certain

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firms. Others on the board joined in with their feelings that it is not proper for our synagogue to act 'in restraint of trade' and that this is a matter for... the federal government." The Hammond synagogue was the exception; most Indiana Jews believed Project Equality to be an admirable initiative.

These two examples illustrate the continuation of Jewish interest in improving race relations in Indianapolis. The divide between blacks and Jews became apparent in some areas of the United States, but historians have too often resorted to extrapolating from national occurrences to the state and local levels. Studying what actually happened in Indianapolis, one can readily observe that a radical divergence did not occur, although the Jewish community did shift its focus inward and as Sally Cook noted, Jews began to believe that it was inappropriate for other groups to spearhead civil rights initiatives: "African Americans believed they needed to own their own movement" and the Jewish community recognized this.11 While outside the scope of this study, further Jewish involvement continued through the 1980s and 1990s. For six decades, Jews in Indiana exerted their influence in an effort to improve the treatment of others, especially African Americans. In Indianapolis, civil rights issues were not at the forefront until the late 1940s, coincidentally converging with the establishment of the JCRC. Perhaps this convergence says something about the city of Indianapolis at that time, as a new period began in which leaders started to emphasize improvement and change in the community.

Historians have neglected the history of Jewish involvement in the struggles for civil rights in Indianapolis and in the state of Indiana, even as they have studied how Jews actively participated in the civil rights movement in other parts of the country. Beginning after the Second World War, Indianapolis Jews established a long record of interest and active participation in the civil rights movement, working for school desegregation, fair employment practices, equal housing opportunity, and an end to segregated public accommodations. The story that began in 1948, with the JCRC's work to resolve discrimination against black patrons by the Esquire Theater, continued throughout the 1950s, and


12Sally Cook, telephone interview with author, July 30, 2011.
peaked in the early to mid-1960s—a time when, nationally, Jews and blacks found themselves increasingly at odds with one another. Motivated by religious doctrines and liberal ideals, many members of Indianapolis’s Jewish community joined the crusade for equality for all American citizens. In doing so, they made history. The story of their cooperation with African Americans, and of the many victories won by the coalition of the two communities, extends and complicates the historical narrative of civil rights. To neglect such a story is to diminish the complexity of the past and forget that the road to freedom was, indeed, long and winding.