

# A “Fearless Editor” in a Changing World

## Fort Wayne’s Jesse Greene

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**ABSTRACT:** During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Fort Wayne newspaper editor Jesse Greene used his bully pulpit to attack vice and bigotry in his city. Greene became particularly well-known for exposing the deeply entrenched racism of the Ku Klux Klan after they moved into Fort Wayne in 1921. For two years (until Greene’s death in 1923), his newspaper, the *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, condemned the “intolerance, prejudice and hatred” of the organization that Greene considered a “menace to Americanism.” As an important voice of the Progressive Era in the Midwest, Greene shaped public opinion across northeast Indiana and throughout the state. Greene’s life and work remind contemporary readers of the indispensable role of a free press.

**KEYWORDS:** Jesse Greene; Fort Wayne; Ku Klux Klan; Progressive Era; journalism

Progressive-Era journalist Jesse Greene (1867–1923) is equally remembered today for his illustrious career, his stance against the Ku Klux Klan, and his pithy barbs with counterparts. For nearly two decades, readers depended on his daring interpretation of current events in the *Fort Wayne News* and later the merged *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*. Greene did not shy away from condemning politicians for not serving their constituents and set off “editorial dynamite” against white supremacists. Using his bully pulpit as the editor of one of northeast Indiana’s largest newspapers, Greene aimed to build a more democratic society through his relentless

attacks against vice and bigotry. In an era when investigative journalists were dubbed “muckrakers” and seen as controversial figures, Fort Wayne had its own “fearless editor” in Jesse Greene.

Greene’s editorials offer us an insight into Progressive-Era ideals and the growth of Fort Wayne into a bustling industrial hub. German immigrants and African Americans poured into the area in search of jobs at local factories and at the railyards of the Pennsylvania Railroad. With the influx of industry and labor came the social woes that affected other major cities in the Midwest: rampant racism, political corruption, corporate greed, and environmental degradation. Jesse Greene exposed these issues and encouraged his readers to take action to improve their city.

When he died in 1923 at age fifty-six, fellow journalists and politicians across the state praised this staunch advocate of progressive ideals for his exceptional career. Muncie publisher George B. Lockwood described Greene as “one of the brightest bravest and best newspaper men Indiana has ever known.” Conservationist and fellow Republican Richard Lieber expressed his deep respect for Greene’s independence and strength of character: “In a world of standardized souls and bleached convictions, it was a joy to hear his fearless voice.” “Always was he a positive force striving for the upbuilding of the community in which he lived and the state as a whole,” the *Indianapolis News* added. “His opponents respected him. His friends loved him.” In a 1950 memoir, looking back on his many years as a Fort Wayne journalist, Cliff Ward remembered Greene as “a brilliant writer with an excellent educational background. He packed more dynamite in an editorial punch than anyone I ever knew.”<sup>1</sup>

#### EARLY LIFE, CRAWFORDSVILLE, AND WABASH COLLEGE YEARS, 1867–1901

Jesse Greene’s career as an editor was a natural product of his upbringing and formal education in the post-Civil War era. Similar to Progressive-Era leaders profiled by historian Robert M. Crunden, Greene was nurtured by

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<sup>1</sup> “Friends and Admirers Pay Tribute to Jesse A. Greene,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, October 16, 1923, p. 17; Herbert G. Bredemeier, *Colorful Journalism in Fort Wayne, Indiana* (Fort Wayne, Ind., 1966).

Protestant values, loyalty to the ideals of Abraham Lincoln, and excellent academic opportunities. Rejecting a career in the ministry or politics, professions more often chosen by his parents' generation, Greene channeled his passions for building "a moral democracy" into the largely unchartered field of journalism.<sup>2</sup>

The second of four sons to Rev. James W. and Catherine Elizabeth Organ Greene, Jesse was born on March 3, 1867, in Indianapolis. His father, a former circuit rider for the northern Indiana Methodist Episcopal Church and, more recently, a volunteer with the wartime Indiana Sanitary Commission, was then serving a small conservative downtown congregation at Strange Chapel. As Rev. Greene accepted other calls to ministry, Jesse spent part of his childhood in Terre Haute and Greencastle. In 1878, when he was eleven years old, his father became the minister of Crawfordsville's First Methodist Episcopal Church. Thereafter, Jesse and his brothers had access to superior local public schools as well as Wabash College's preparatory and college courses.<sup>3</sup>

Growing up, Jesse might have heard stories of hardship and hard-won prosperity surrounding his parents' childhoods in pioneer settlements in St. Joseph and La Porte Counties. He would have absorbed their pride in education and progressive thinking that included opposition to slavery. His mother was a graduate of Albion College, a Methodist school that took early leadership in women's education. When Rev. Greene entered the Methodist ministry in 1855, he found that although his fellow pastors were divided on how to address slavery, they were united in opposing it on principle. As the country edged closer to civil war, the Northwest Indiana Conference aggressively opposed any continuation of slavery. Rev. Greene, described as one who entered "heartily into all the reforms of the day," would not have hesitated from making his own views known.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert M. Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressive Achievement in American Civilization 1889-1920* (Urbana, Ill., 1982), 15, 171.

<sup>3</sup> "Jesse Greene Dies at Fort Wayne Home after Long Illness," *Crawfordsville Journal*, October 15, 1923; "Rev. James W. Greene," *A Biographical History of Eminent and Self Made Men of the State of Indiana*, vol. II (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1880), 20-21; "Rev. James Wilson Greene, D.D.," *Sacred Poems of Rev. Richard Hargrave: With a Biography of Himself and Biographical Sketches of Some of His Coadjutors*, ed., Rev. Wm. P. Hargrave (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1890), 318-25. See also, "Dr. James Wilson Greene," Montgomery County, Indiana, INGenWeb Project, <http://www.ingenweb.org/inmontgomery/obituaries/g/greene-james-wilson.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> For description of James Wilson Greene's early years in St. Joseph County, see "Jackson Greene, farmer," in *Pictorial and Biographical Memoirs of Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties* (Chicago, Ill., 1893), 126; "Mrs. J. W. Greene," *Minutes of the Sixty-Second Session Northwest Indiana Conference*

As the largest Protestant denomination in Indiana in the early 1900s, the Methodist Episcopal Church set high cultural ideals for Jesse Greene and his generation. Its down-to-earth values of social responsibility likely conditioned Greene to view the world through a moral lens. From a young age, he was instilled with the importance of mission work among recently freed slaves in the South and impoverished immigrants crowded into big cities. Greene also drew practical lessons in hard work from his father's years serving the Northwest Conference, perhaps most significantly when Rev. Greene reluctantly accepted the role of raising crucial funds for DePauw University. As a young Methodist, Jesse would have been expected to adapt the denomination's strict ban on dancing, card playing, tobacco, and alcohol, but such restrictions do not seem to have created a somber family lifestyle. Crawfordsville friends remembered his parents as popular and always good company, and their home as warm and inviting: "It was principle and not expediency that ruled in that household." His parents' diverse circle of friends included Wabash College professors and community-minded women who, like his mother, were active in the Crawfordsville Current Events Club and helped organize the new town library.<sup>5</sup>

In 1883, Greene entered Wabash College's two-year preparatory program—a rigorous classical curriculum that encouraged both spiritual and intellectual development. Six years later, he graduated from the college with a Bachelor of Arts in classics. During his undergraduate years, Greene served as editor for *The Wabash*, the monthly literary magazine, and he belonged to the Beta Theta Pi fraternity. Given his outstanding academic record, he was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, the nation's oldest academic honor society.<sup>6</sup>

Outside of the classroom, Greene honed his public speaking and research skills in the Calliopean Literary Society, one of Wabash College's

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*of the Methodist Episcopal Church September 24–29, 1913* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1913), 231–32; "Catherine Organ Greene," Montgomery County, Indiana INGenWeb, <http://www.ingenweb.org/inmontgomery/obituaries/g/greene-catherine-organ.htm>; Jack J. Detzler, *The History of the Northwest Indiana Conference of the Methodist Church 1852–1951* (Nashville, Tenn., 1953), 41–43.

<sup>5</sup> Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth 1880–1920* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1968), 445; Detzler, *The History of the Northwest Indiana Conference*, 45–46, 84–86; Hargrave, *Sacred Poems of Rev. Richard Hargrave*, 323; "Jesse A. Greene," *Indianapolis News*, October 15, 1923, p. 6; Rebecca A. Insley, "Life in Crawfordsville," *Indianapolis News*, December 17, 1898, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> E-mail to author from Linda Petrie, Archivist, Wabash College, January 12, 2016; e-mail to author from Beth Swift, Archivist, Wabash College, July 18, 2016; James Insley Osborne and Theodore Gregory Gronert, *Wabash College: The First Hundred Years, 1832–1932* (Crawfordsville, Ind., 1932), 57, 102, 175–76, 183.



Alumni Class of 1889, Wabash College, Crawfordsville, Indiana  
Pictured are (from left to right) Arthur Albert McCain, Moreland Boyd Binford,  
Francis Morton Fox, Jesse Greene and James Hannah (standing).

Courtesy of Robert T. Ramsay Jr. Archival Center at Wabash College

two oratorical societies. Steeped in traditions dating back to the college's founding in 1832 by Presbyterian ministers, the societies mirrored the universal popularity of oratory as public entertainment in nineteenth-century America. Contests were regularly held on the Wabash campus, and every spring leading college orators competed in a statewide contest drawing large audiences. Subjects ranged from American foreign policy and famous people, to more subjective topics such as "The Philosophy of Skepticism" and "The Man and the State."<sup>7</sup>

Finally, Jesse Greene's college years were colored by Civil War memory. More than five hundred Wabash College alumni, professors, and students had fought in the Union Army. Crawfordsville's Civil War hero and renowned author, General Lew Wallace, was a familiar sight about town and at Rev. Greene's church. Battles such as Lookout Mountain and Chickamauga were kept alive at reunions drawing thousands of veterans in the Grand Army of the Republic.<sup>8</sup>

After graduation, Greene served as principal of a small high school in southwestern Missouri, but two years later in 1891, he returned to Crawfordsville to work for T. H. B. ("Bent") McCain, longtime publisher of the *Crawfordsville Journal*. The newspaper's robust growth had prompted McCain to form a stockholding company with himself as president and editor, Greene as city editor, and McCain's son Arthur, Greene's college classmate, as treasurer and business manager. The widely esteemed progressive "old guard" newspaperman exposed Greene to the inside political webs of the state legislature and the Republican Party. Equally important, McCain instilled in him the responsibilities of a newspaper editor for molding public opinion.<sup>9</sup>

Following Bent McCain's death in 1898, Greene assumed editorial control of the *Journal* and soon drew statewide attention for his commentary on "the ills of the world." Like well-known editors of his day including

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<sup>7</sup>L. R. Lind, "Early Literary Societies at Wabash College," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 42 (June 1946), 173–76; Osborne and Gronert, *Wabash College*, 175–78; "Contesting Colleges," *Indianapolis Leader*, April 16, 1881, p. 2; "Wabash and Depauw," *Indianapolis News*, April 15, 1887, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup>"Civil War Commemoration Set for Sept. 27," *Wabash News*, August 28, 2013, online at [https://www.wabash.edu/news/displaystory.cfm?news\\_ID=10005](https://www.wabash.edu/news/displaystory.cfm?news_ID=10005); "Wilder's Brigade Reunion," *Indianapolis News*, September 8, 1887, p. 1; John D. Forbes, "Lew Wallace, Romantic," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 44 (December 1948), 385; Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 27.

<sup>9</sup>"Death Claims Jesse A. Greene," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, October 15, 1923, p. 1; "Found in the State Press, All Around Good Fellow," *Indianapolis News*, January 28, 1896, p. 2; *Crawfordsville Journal*, Souvenir Edition, October 19, 1894, p. 12, Crawfordsville District Public Library.

William Allen White of the *Emporia [Ks.] Gazette* and William Rockhill Nelson of the *Kansas City Star*, he found the role of editor a natural fit for his progressive spirit, keen mind, and sharp wit. Although a Republican, he did not hesitate to criticize fellow party members when he felt they were wrong. In fall 1899, for example, Greene drew attention from state newspapers for his attack on the Republican state central committee for failing to support the Republican candidate in the upcoming Indianapolis mayoral election.<sup>10</sup>

Outside of his work at the *Journal*, Greene pursued a master's degree at Wabash College and established his reputation as a community leader. He served as an early president of the Crawfordsville Dramatic Club, the town's most prestigious organization, and was appointed to the Crawfordsville School Board. His social standing was further assured by his marriage in November 1897, at age thirty, to Katherine Campbell, daughter of Crawfordsville merchant and banker Henry Campbell. In 1899, Greene was invited by Wabash College to join the college's new honorary literary society.<sup>11</sup>

With his newfound editorial voice, Greene took the opportunity to defend Indiana's reputation against maligners—even when they were some of the state's best-known writers. In July 1899, he scolded Edward Eggleston and James Whitcomb Riley for misrepresenting their home state. Riley's depiction of a "typical Indianian" was "a grotesquely spoken creature, who never had existence here save in isolated communities in by gone times." Greene described Booth Tarkington's recent *The Gentleman from Indiana* as "a slander of this state." "Will the state never cease to be a mark for literary fakes, failures and fledglings?" he asked. "Indiana is just as progressive, just as intelligent, just as resourceful and just as good in every other way as any state in the Union." The article was republished in the *Fort Wayne News* and the *Indianapolis News*.<sup>12</sup>

Greene also immersed himself in the closed-door fights and public pageantry of the Republican Party. While never wanting to run for political office, he established himself as a forceful party voice in the spring of 1900,

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<sup>10</sup>Walter Johnson, *William Allen White's America* (New York, 1947), 64–65; *The Republic* (Columbus, Indiana), September 27, 1899, p. 2; *Indianapolis News*, October 20, 1899, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup>"Life in Crawfordsville," *Indianapolis News*, December 17, 1898, p. 8; "A Church Wedding," *Crawfordsville Journal*, November 12, 1897; "Henry Campbell Dead," *Indianapolis News*, July 22, 1915, p. 5; "Spring Vacation Begins," *Indianapolis News*, March 24, 1899, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup>"Indiana in Literature," *Fort Wayne News*, July 23, 1899, p. 4; *Indianapolis News*, July 21, 1899, p. 11.

as secretary of the Ninth District Republican Congressional Convention. In this role, he helped choose Republican candidates and delegates to the national party convention and organized elaborate rallies, including a September 1900 gathering at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds to support the party's presidential ticket of William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. He made it widely known that Roosevelt's "aggressive spirit" would bring the Republicans certain victory in the November elections.<sup>13</sup>

During his twelve years at the *Crawfordsville Journal*, Greene built a reputation as a forceful writer, a proud Hoosier, and a serious politician. Although his Crawfordsville roots seemed firm, in October 1901, he sold his share of the *Journal* to Bent McCain's surviving family and assumed the editorship of the *Terre Haute Tribune*, the leading Republican paper for southwestern Indiana. When his move was announced in late December, Greene was praised as "one of the ablest young men in the newspaper profession in Indiana" who was close to Indiana Republican Party leaders.<sup>14</sup>

#### EDITOR, *FORT WAYNE NEWS*, 1904–1918

Jesse Greene's decision to join the *Terre Haute Tribune* was likely based on his eagerness to work for its publisher, Clarence Bicknell, a widely admired journalist and businessman. After arriving in Terre Haute, however, Greene found that Bicknell and his brother Ernest, the *Tribune's* majority owners, had sold their controlling interest and invested in a small Fort Wayne afternoon newspaper, the *Fort Wayne News*. Within weeks, the *Tribune's* artist and its circulation manager joined Clarence Bicknell in Fort Wayne. In late November 1903, Greene formalized an agreement to buy a share of the *News* and work as the newspaper's editor. The *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, the morning Democratic paper, praised Greene as a "man of considerable means and a widely known newspaper man."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Crawfordsville Men: Enthusiastic Over the Prospects for Republican Success," *Indianapolis Journal*, July 19, 1900, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> "New Editor of Tribune," *Indianapolis News*, December 24, 1901, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Reprints from *Terre Haute Tribune* and *Terre Haute Express* in the *Fort Wayne News*, June 11, 1902, p. 4; *Indianapolis News*, June 17, 1902, p. 4; "Barcus and Richardson," *Indianapolis News*, January 31, 1902, p. 9; "Fort Wayne, Ind., Aug. 19," *Indianapolis Journal*, August 20, 1902, p. 4. Bert J. Griswold, a well-known Fort Wayne historian, was an artist for the *Terre Haute Tribune* who followed Clarence Bicknell to Fort Wayne and later returned to Terre Haute in January 1903 to help Greene cover the West Terre Haute coal mine disaster. "Griswold Helped Them," *Fort Wayne News*, January 28, 1903; "To Buy Share in *Daily News*," *Journal-Gazette*, November 27, 1903.

For almost thirty years, the *Fort Wayne News* had been known for its “racy” stories; its readership was limited to mostly working-class people. The *News* was considered politically independent, except in election season, when it often leaned Republican. It reached only about 1,600 readers daily, far fewer than its Democratic competitors, the morning *Journal-Gazette* and the afternoon *Sentinel*. In addition, Fort Wayne had two German-language newspapers, the *Freie Press* and the *Staats-Zeitung*. The first order of business for Clarence Bicknell was to strengthen the paper’s editorial policy, invest in new printing machinery, and new telegraph facilities. By the time Greene joined Bicknell in winter 1904, the *News* reported a daily circulation of over seven thousand readers and claimed the largest circulation of any Fort Wayne newspaper.<sup>16</sup>

In the early 1900s, Fort Wayne was a burgeoning industrial city and railroad center. As Indiana’s third largest city, with 45,000 inhabitants, it stood as the commercial hub of northeast Indiana. The city’s monumental Beaux-Arts-style courthouse had just been completed in 1902. The city also boasted a new Carnegie Library, recently paved streets, electric interurban lines, and a growing park system.<sup>17</sup>

Fort Wayne was a German city with as much as seventy-three percent of its population of German descent. Under the large organizational umbrella of the local German American Alliance, German Americans participated in athletic clubs, singing societies, war veteran societies, and organized cultural festivals. In churches and schools, people spoke German. German Americans were industrial and commercial leaders, skilled craftsmen, blue-collar workers, and union leaders. For decades, descendants of German immigrants ran for city and state offices as Democrats to serve their community. The Berghoff Brewery was not only a major local employer and beer distributor, its owners were an active force in state politics. Reportedly, Fort Wayne’s German Americans, many representing Berghoff Brewery, owned most of the city’s one-hundred-seventy-three saloons.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Scott M. Bushnell, *Hard News, Heartfelt Opinions: A History of the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette* (Bloomington, Ind., 2007), 51–52; “Death Claims C. F. Bicknell,” *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, March 18, 1920, p. 1; “How the News Is Appreciated,” *Fort Wayne News*, March 1, 1904, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> John D. Beatty, “Fort Wayne from the Progressive Era to the Roaring Twenties,” in *History of Fort Wayne and Allen County*, vol. 1 (Evansville, Ind., 2006), 76–91.

<sup>18</sup> Nancy Eileen Brown, “The 1901 Fort Wayne, Indiana City Election: A Political Dialogue of Ethnic Tension,” (master’s thesis, Indiana University, 2013), 23, 24; “Messrs. W. F. Ranke . . .,” *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, October 25, 1906, p. 1; “Revived Many Kindly Memories of the Fatherland,” *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, October 14, 1907, p. 2; Jim Sack, “The Germans in Fort Wayne,” *History of Fort Wayne and Allen County*, vol. 1, 688–92; Bushnell, *Hard News, Heartfelt Opinions*, 85–89.



Transfer Corner, at the intersection of Main and Calhoun Streets in Fort Wayne  
 In the early 1900s, Fort Wayne grew rapidly into the commercial hub of northeast Indiana.  
 Newly paved streets and electric interurban rail lines provided access to jobs and commerce.  
 Courtesy of Allen County Public Library Community Album

For a reform-minded writer like Greene, Fort Wayne was a minefield of social problems associated with rapid industrial growth, corruption, and racism. Low-wage workers in the city's mills, railroad shops, breweries, and factories worked fifty-five hour weeks, often under dangerous conditions. Living in crowded and substandard housing, few had indoor plumbing. Women and children were frequently employed to supplement their family's subsistence-level income. Young women working in low-paying factories risked falling prey to the city's many brothels. Saloons and gambling dens clustered around the railroad stations and lined downtown streets. The city's small African American community found limited employment opportunities and faced deeply entrenched segregation.<sup>19</sup>

For a committed Republican like Greene, Fort Wayne offered unexpectedly strong political opportunity. Theodore Roosevelt's 1904

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<sup>19</sup> Peggy Brase Seigel, "Industrial 'Girls' in an Early Twentieth Century Boomtown: Tradition and Change in Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1900–1920," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 99 (September 2003), 231–53; Clifford Scott, "To Make Fort Wayne Safe for Democracy," *Old Fort News*, vol. 75, no. 1 (2012), 1–16.

landslide victory had included Allen County, an all-time first for a Republican presidential candidate in the traditionally Democratic city. Thousands of local citizens cheered as Roosevelt's vice president, Indiana senator Charles Fairbanks, and the state's second-ever Republican senator Albert Beveridge, paraded through the streets; a crowd filled the Majestic Theatre for the politicians' rousing speeches. Indiana Republicans also achieved a strong hold on state politics with the election of Governor Frank Hanly, a strong supporter of temperance reform (a Republican priority).<sup>20</sup>

With Roosevelt at the nation's helm, Jesse Greene championed the country's new imperial power and jumped on the nationwide bandwagon protesting unbridled monopolies. While always remaining a Republican, however, he exhibited an independence that blurred distinctions between progressive and conservative. In 1908 and 1909, for example, as county option laws were pushed through the legislature, Greene remained skeptical of their success in curbing alcohol abuse. Eliminating legal saloons, he believed, would only promote bootleggers and "blind tigers." In 1911, when Fort Wayne industrialists and Republican politicians lined up to oppose the ill-fated Keegan Child Labor Act before the state legislature, Greene sided with labor leaders and progressive reformers to urge shorter work weeks and safer conditions. When Twelfth District Republicans favored Theodore Roosevelt's third-party "Bull Moose" presidential candidacy in 1912, Greene remained loyal to the mainstream Republican candidate William Howard Taft. Following the party split and the election of Democrat Woodrow Wilson, he worked to re-unite Republicans as a frequent popular speaker at district meetings. Nevertheless, Greene found his stride as a fearlessly independent voice for the betterment of Fort Wayne. As he relentlessly attacked the city's culture of political corruption and vice, he followed patterns practiced by other Progressive-Era journalists. When he exposed the city's deeply entrenched racism, however, Greene stepped into an area where few white men of his day ventured.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> G. Stanley Hood, "Political History of Allen County, Part Three, 1900–1933," in *History of Fort Wayne and Allen County*, vol. 1, 297–300; Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 92, 125–26; "Mr. Fairbanks This Evening," *Fort Wayne News*, October 31, 1904, p. 1; "Beveridge Was Given Ovation," *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, November 2, 1904, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> "For Congress," *Fort Wayne News*, June 21, 1904, p. 4; "The County Option Law," *Fort Wayne News*, September 28, 1908, p. 6; *Fort Wayne News*, February 4, 1911, p. 8; "The Federation," *Fort Wayne News*, February 28, 1911, p. 7; "Straddling Is Impossible," *Fort Wayne News*, July 31, 1912, p. 6; "Great Republican Meeting," *Fort Wayne News*, June 10, 1914, p. 3. Jesse Greene's career resembles that of W. R. Nelson, editor of the *Kansas City Star*. Nelson began his career in Fort Wayne as owner of the *Fort Wayne Sentinel* and was admired by Greene. See, "Col. W.R. Nelson Dies in Kansas City Home" and "William R. Nelson," *Fort Wayne News*, April 13, 1915, p. 1.

Shortly after arriving in Fort Wayne, Greene jumped into a local controversy surrounding a typhoid fever outbreak. In November 1903, contaminated water from the St. Mary's River had entered the city's main water supply. Not until early February 1904, however, had City Health Commissioner Dr. A. H. Macbeth publicly warned citizens of the presence of deadly typhoid bacteria in the water source. Despite more than eighty new cases of typhoid, the *Journal-Gazette* forcefully defended Dr. Macbeth, blaming the problem on the Republican waterworks trustees who had assumed oversight of the water plant the year before. Viewing the *Journal-Gazette's* attack as political, Greene shot back with front-page headlines, "Macbeth a Traitor" and "Who is to blame?" He reminded readers that a 1900 city ordinance required the health commissioner, not the waterworks trustees, to perform weekly tests of city water. Next to the story, Greene ran a three-column-wide cartoon of Dr. Macbeth bowing his head before a sign ("He failed to perform his most important duty") and a copy of the 1900 ordinance. Greene opined that Democratic mayor Henry C. Berghoff was left with no choice but to demand Macbeth's resignation. The *News* added that during the previous fall, the Pennsylvania Railroad had contracted with the waterworks to supply water to its new shops and roundhouse on the city's near eastside. Lacking adequate oversight, the railroad company had delayed installing a check valve to prevent river water from backing up into the city water lines.<sup>22</sup>

Six weeks later, the mayor issued a report assuring Fort Wayne citizens that their drinking water was safe again. Reluctant to point fingers, Mayor Berghoff nevertheless implied that the Republican waterworks trustees were not at fault. *News* readers drew their own conclusions as well. Greene's editorials, together with his paper's investigative reporting, had put Democrats on notice that there was another influential newspaper—and political party—in town.<sup>23</sup>

Of all his targets, Greene hurled the most relentless attacks against Democratic mayor William J. Hosey for his connections to the city's thriving underworld. Hosey was elected to the first of four non-consecutive terms in 1905 on ambitious promises to transform the city. His administration would build a new electric light plant to provide cheap electricity to even

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<sup>22</sup> "Who Is to Blame?," and "MacBeth a Traitor," *Fort Wayne News*, February 4, 1904, p. 1; "Day's News in Water Controversy," *Fort Wayne News*, February 6, 1904, p. 1; "More About MacBeth," *Fort Wayne News*, February 6, 1904, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> "Mayor Berghoff Issues a Statement on Water Question," *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, March 26, 1904, p. 4.

the poorest Fort Wayne citizens. He promised to elevate railroad tracks and lower water rates. In January 1910, looking back on Hosey's first term, Greene claimed that the public would not hold the mayor's unfulfilled promises against him. What was more important was Hosey's failure to enforce laws that he was bound by oath to uphold. Greene charged that Hosey had flagrantly allowed gambling, illegal liquor sales, and prostitution to flourish: "You are utterly lacking in moral perception of a certain sort and it is not inconceivable to believe that you would consider a city where licentiousness, debauchery and inebriety had full swing 'a live and progressive city.'"<sup>24</sup>

Greene frequently chastised Hosey for tolerating underage drinking and unlicensed saloons. In a June 1908 editorial entitled "Why There Are Crusaders," Greene described the recent jailing of four teenagers for public indecency and intoxication as part of an all-too-common pattern. Not long before, three boys between the ages of twelve and fourteen had been found "dead drunk" at noon downtown along the train tracks. In both cases, the police knew where the teenagers had openly purchased alcohol: "the besotted barkeeper who sold these children the liquor that debased and brutalized them is still at large."<sup>25</sup>

Prohibited by state law from running for re-election in 1910, Hosey campaigned for Democratic candidate August Schmidt as his replacement. When he promised voters that Schmidt would do as much as his administration had done to control drinking, the sale of liquor, and overall vice, Greene fired back: "When you intimate that during this time the good people of this city have endorsed your tolerance of gambling dens, the selling of liquor in brothels, the rule of the slot machine, the saloon with the wine room annex, and the score of other evils fully as obnoxious, you insult decency, sir."<sup>26</sup>

Republican Jesse Grice won the 1910 election and quickly ended the city government's tolerance of vice. On February 7, 1911—aided by a grand jury investigation, Allen County Circuit Judge Edward O'Rourke, and the city's new Board of Public Safety—Chief of Police Dayton Abbott ordered the brothels in "The Flats," the city's notorious red-light district,

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<sup>24</sup> "Vale Hosey," *Fort Wayne News*, January 3, 1910, p. 6; John D. Beatty, "Cyprians, Shanty Dancers, and Ladies of Pleasure: Prostitution in Fort Wayne from the Canal to the Progressive Era," *Old Fort News*, vol. 64, no. 1 (2001).

<sup>25</sup> "Why There Are Crusaders," *Fort Wayne News*, June 13, 1908, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> "Mayor Hosey's Attitude," *Fort Wayne News*, October 27, 1909, p. 6.



Wigwam Saloon, Fort Wayne, Indiana, ca. 1900

Jesse Greene often condemned saloon owners for promoting underage drinking in Fort Wayne. Progressive-Era prohibition efforts eventually led to the statewide prohibition bill in February 1917.

Courtesy of Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society

to be immediately vacated. Then in 1913, Hosey reopened the issue as he campaigned for re-election, favoring the re-establishment of a segregated red-light district. Greene labeled Hosey “the high priest of the so-called Personal Liberty cult [who] believes in letting every man do as he pleases no matter how much misery his conduct may visit upon those dependent upon him.” The editor’s most incriminating charge against the former mayor was that “at the time of his former election [he] held mortgages on one or two disreputable houses on North Calhoun street that had been built presumably with money furnished by him.”<sup>27</sup>

Despite Greene’s support of the Non-Partisan City Central Committee, which published articles in the *Fort Wayne Sentinel* from September to November 1913, advocating the eradication of local vice, William Hosey

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<sup>27</sup> “Property Owners in Vice District Must Get Out,” *Journal-Gazette*, February 8, 1911, p. 1; “Administration with O’Rourke,” *Fort Wayne News*, February 9, 1911, p. 1; “Dayton Abbott Is Made Chief,” *Fort Wayne News*, February 9, 1911, p. 1; “Mr. Hosey’s Moral Views,” *Fort Wayne News*, June 25, 1913, p. 8.

was elected to his second term as mayor. Greene returned as one of his most outspoken critics. In December 1913, for example, he despaired that Hosey's appointments to the new board of safety were "the very men who served him in this capacity before, and under whose rule the lawless element did as it pleased." Two years later Greene went after the owners of a downtown hotel and saloon known for selling liquor to teenagers and promoting immorality.<sup>28</sup>

Greene also consistently wrote about the plight of Fort Wayne's African American community. The city's small black community grew with the arrival of laborers recruited to work in railyards, factories, and construction sites. In 1915, African Americans numbered fewer than 1,000 out of the city's total population of over 74,000. Nevertheless, African Americans had established a strong presence in Fort Wayne. They had churches, clubs and lodges, a football team, an employment agency, physicians, lawyers, and ministers. They exhibited pride in community celebrations such as the annual Emancipation Day commemoration. However, segregation remained standard practice and most African Americans were trapped in poverty, limited to service or manual labor jobs, and lived in noticeably inferior, squalid housing. Health officials were alarmed by the "greatly disproportionate" cases of tuberculosis among African Americans.<sup>29</sup>

Even though Fort Wayne public schools were integrated, white parents refused to allow African Americans to join their parent groups. In late 1913, local African American women pushed back. With support from the Mother's Club of the YWCA, they formed a citywide parents club publicized as "the second colored Mothers' club ever organized in the United States, the first north of the Mason and Dixon line." Organizers held a door-to-door canvas to recruit members. Regular meeting notices over the following year indicate the women's success.<sup>30</sup>

Despite modest gains, racial inequality and injustice largely prevailed. In 1914, a drunken white patron murdered a black headwaiter at the

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<sup>28</sup> "Chairman Thomas Talks on Result," *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, November 5, 1913, p.1; "A Bad Beginning, Mr. Hosey," *Fort Wayne News*, December 15, 1913, p. 6; "Hurting Business," *Fort Wayne News*, July 23, 1915, p. 20; "The Defender of Outraged Virtue," *Fort Wayne News*, July 28, 1915, p. 14; "Spared Ed's Feelings," *Fort Wayne News*, December 7, 1915, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> "Relieving Labor Shortage," *Journal-Gazette*, May 13, 1913, p. 3; "Contractor Forced to Bring Negroes Here for Big Task," *Journal-Gazette*, September 15, 1915, p. 3; Clifford Scott, "To Make Fort Wayne Safe for Democracy," *Old Fort News*, vol. 75, no. 1 (2012), pp. 1-16; "Open Tents for Plague Patients," *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, July 16, 1913, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> "Colored Women Seeking a Club," *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, November 20, 1913, p. 12; "Colored Mothers Organize," *Fort Wayne News*, December 12, 1913, p. 16.

downtown Anthony Hotel. Numerous witnesses verified the unprovoked shooting of H. T. Bruce by Tony Trentman, a wealthy local businessman; a special grand jury charged Trentman with first-degree murder. Months later, however, Trentman pleaded guilty to manslaughter and avoided a jury trial. The lesser charge of manslaughter carried a sentence of two instead of twenty-one years in the penitentiary.<sup>31</sup>

In spring 1916, mindful of this pattern of discrimination, Greene seized an opportunity to uncover another example of systemic racism, this time in a competition announced by the *News's* evening competitor, the *Sentinel*. The contest was allegedly open to all young women in Fort Wayne and northern Indiana. Those who solicited the most new subscriptions to the *Sentinel* were eligible for \$5,000 worth of luxurious prizes. Downtown retail merchants criticized the contest as a "gift scheme contrary to the established rules of the association." Greene labeled it "a flagrant violation of a written agreement" that *Sentinel* editor E. A. K. Hackett had initiated several years earlier with the *News* and *Journal-Gazette* to block such schemes. In early May, Greene learned that a young African American woman had been disqualified from the contest solely because of her race.<sup>32</sup>

On May 4, Greene published an impassioned editorial, "A Rough Road to Freedom," exposing the rarely acknowledged experience of being black in America.

We shall have to admit that the negro citizen in the United States hardly has a fair shake. Handicapped by tradition, by poverty, by prejudice, and by unjust discrimination, he is forced to struggle as best he may under a load which would make a dangerous outlaw of one less temperamentally an optimist. The length to which this spirit of unfairness with which the negro has to contend was rather strikingly illustrated here in Fort Wayne the other day and the incident is aggravated by the fact that the one offending has always professed friendship for the negro race and advocated for it the exercise of Christian aid and sympathy.

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<sup>31</sup> "To Be Charged with Murder," *Fort Wayne News*, April 2, 1914, p. 1; "Trentman Pleads Guilty to Manslaughter Charge," *Journal-Gazette*, September 29, 1914, pp. 1, 11.

<sup>32</sup> "The Sentinel's Campaign," *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, April 22, 1916, p. 4; "The Sentinel's Latest," *Fort Wayne News*, April 25, 1916, p. 16; "Brother Hackett and the Color Line," *Fort Wayne News*, May 3, 1916, is an op-ed written by an African American and signed G. W. W., likely W. Wendell Gaskin.

Greene then described the experience of the “young colored girl,” a graduate of Fort Wayne High School, who had entered the *Sentinel's* contest. After she successfully canvassed friends, her name was omitted in the list of contestants published in the *Sentinel*. When she called the newspaper's business office, she was assured that her name would be included in the next issue. After waiting for days, she called again, only to be told that “no colored person could enter the contest.” When she appealed directly to Hackett, he told her: “He was sorry, but her color was against her.” Greene was appalled:

All the poor girl asked was a fair chance to compete for a prize. . . . Her character was above reproach, her conduct unassuming, and her money just as good as that of any one else. The only thing against her was that she was of negro blood. A discrimination of this sort is against the written law of the land and it is against the unwritten law of the square deal. Over and above all this, however, it is against the law of Almighty God.

Greene imagined Hackett at St. Peter's gate to heaven and wondered if he would prevent the young woman's admission solely because of her race.<sup>33</sup>

In his editorials, Greene also addressed political allegiances that were shifting on the eve of the country's entrance into World War I. In early 1917, the power of the Indiana liquor lobby steadily collapsed, culminating in the passage of the statewide prohibition bill in February. Greene described this demise as self-inflicted: “If ever a business deliberately committed suicide it was the liquor business of Indiana. Blind to warning signals and deaf to admonitions, it rushed blindly on to destruction.” He acknowledged the wide bipartisan support for prohibition that enabled the bill's passage. He also pointed out that in Allen County, German Democrats, “disgusted by the tactics of President Wilson” and the abuse of power by local Democratic Party leaders, were joining the Republican Party. This broad change in public opinion, Greene declared, was “certainly enough to make an old man scratch his head and think.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “A Rough Road to Freedom,” *Fort Wayne News*, May 4, 1916, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> The state prohibition bill was approved on February 9, 1917. “Indiana Goes Dry,” *Fort Wayne News*, February 3, 1917, p. 16; “Absurdity Gone to Seed,” *Fort Wayne News*, January 30, 1917, p. 16; *Fort Wayne News*, January 31, 1917, p. 16.

In November, other significant changes were underway as the News Publishing Company purchased the *Sentinel*. On January 1, 1918, the merged newspaper, the *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, became official.<sup>35</sup> Greene now served as editor of a newspaper with a daily circulation of over 30,000 copies. The merger also allowed the new newspaper to draw upon the combined news services of the Associated Press and the United Press. Only one other Indiana newspaper, the *Indianapolis News*, offered this feature. At age fifty-one, much like nationally famous Kansas editor William Allen White, Greene became “something of a preacher, something of a teacher, something of an autocrat” for a newspaper that was an undeniable powerhouse.<sup>36</sup>

#### EDITOR, *FORT WAYNE NEWS AND SENTINEL*, 1918–1923

During the last five years of his life, Greene continued to play a prominent role in Allen County and state politics. Like most Republicans, he opposed the United States’ entry into the League of Nations and favored woman suffrage. When Congress approved Prohibition with the 18th Amendment in 1920, Greene predicted that American families would be healthier and safer. He served on the boards of the Allen County and the state anti-tuberculosis leagues; was active in the Fort Wayne Quest Club, a downtown lecture society; and was a member of the local Rotary Club and the Masons. Greene also served as a trustee and president of the board of the Indiana Boys School in Plainfield. Despite his political and public leadership, no one doubted that Greene’s most influential position was as the leader of the *News and Sentinel*. Following the death of Clarence Bicknell in March 1920, Greene was elected president of the News Publishing Company.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Editor’s note: According to the *Indiana Newspaper Bibliography* by John W. Miller (Indianapolis, Ind., 1982), pp. 7–8, “on December 11, 1925, the title of the paper was shortened to the *News-Sentinel*.” Examination of individual issues from 1918 through 1923 used in the context of this article reveal that the masthead varied. It read the *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel* between January 1918 and June 1921 and *News-Sentinel* through 1923. We have retained the title the *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel* for consistency.

<sup>36</sup> “Valedictory,” *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, December 31, 1917, p. 4; “Consolidation Effected,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, January 1, 1918, p. 1; “The News by Wire” and “A Word to the Public,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, January 1, 1918, p. 20; “Statement of the Ownership, Management, Circulation, Etc.,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, April 2, 1918, p. 7; Johnson, *William Allen White’s America*, 64.

<sup>37</sup> “Death Claims Jesse A. Greene,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, October 15, 1923, p. 1; “J. A. Greene New President,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, March 23, 1920, p. 1; “It Tells the Story,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, January 26, 1920, p. 9; “Governor Names Trustee for Indiana Boys’ School,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, December 4, 1918, p. 2; “E. B. Ball on Boys’ School Board Succeeding Editor,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, November 15, 1923, p. 1.

World War I had given African Americans hope that they would benefit from the nation's pledge to make the world safe for democracy. As they supported the war effort at home and saw their young men leave for military service, they drew attention to the discrimination they experienced in Fort Wayne. Throughout the war, the *News and Sentinel* published letters and reports of local African American soldiers in training camps and battlefields in France. For example, William J. Briggs's letter to the conscription board in February 1918, expressed the patriotism that many young black men shared in anticipation of their military service: "I am a negro but from head to foot, and particularly at heart I am an American."<sup>38</sup> Greene also published letters regarding the racism black soldiers experienced in Fort Wayne. In an August 9 op-ed, W. Wendell Gaskin protested the "malicious, degrading, and humiliating experiences" suffered by three black servicemen who, while changing trains downtown, were denied service at nearby cafés. Two days later, he added, African Americans driving through Fort Wayne were not allowed to attend a downtown theatre. At the local train station, they found a sign: "We cater only to white trade." "Surely we have a just cause for complaint. Good people of Fort Wayne, is this giving us a square deal?" Gaskin demanded. A week later, Frank Poindexter, a young man preparing to leave for military service, questioned the patriotism and the "100 per cent Americanism" of white Americans when black soldiers were treated as second-class citizens and subjected to the "law of the mob" when they returned home.<sup>39</sup>

On May 8, 1918, thirteen local African Americans organized the first Fort Wayne branch of the NAACP. Over the next three years, they brought national leaders to the city to talk about African American wartime achievements and goals for the future. They sent delegates to national NAACP meetings, sponsored Emancipation Day celebrations, and pushed for greater opportunities for young people. In February 1920, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, a founder of the NAACP and editor of its monthly magazine, *The Crisis*,

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<sup>38</sup> "Patriotic Negro," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, February 21, 1918, p. 2. According to Scott, "about seventy-five black troops enlisted from Fort Wayne." "To Make Fort Wayne Safe for Democracy," 13.

<sup>39</sup> W. Wendell Gaskin, "Objects to It," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, August 9, 1918, p. 9; Frank Poindexter, "Democracy for All," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, August 14, 1918, p. 10; W. H. Conner, "Criticizes Policemen," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, July 22, 1919, p. 4; Gaskin and Poindexter are also quoted in Scott, "To Make Fort Wayne Safe for Democracy," 4–5, 11.



Ku Klux Klan in Fort Wayne, 1924

The Klan gained significant prominence in Fort Wayne during the 1920s. Greene used his position as the editor of the *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel* to shape public opinion and help slow the rise of the Klan.

Courtesy of Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society

spoke to “a large and enthusiastic” audience at Turner Chapel. By the end of November, the Fort Wayne NAACP branch reported 500 members.<sup>40</sup>

As many Fort Wayne African Americans were organizing under the banner of the NAACP, the Ku Klux Klan was also rising throughout the country, finding particular strength in Indiana. In fall 1921, Greene and the *News and Sentinel* launched a two-year assault on the group, assuring Klan organizers that Fort Wayne would not tolerate their “dangerous” and “barbaric” Invisible Order. While the newspaper’s morning rival, the *Journal-Gazette*, campaigned against the Klan as well, the record of Greene’s

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<sup>40</sup> “Advance Welfare of Colored People,” *Journal-Gazette*, May 9, 1918, p. 14; “Organize Welfare League,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, May 9, 1918, p. 4; “Dr. W.E.B. Dubois Coming,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, February 21, 1920, p. 13; “Officers Are Elected,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, November 27, 1920, p. 9.

fight to shape public opinion suggests a deeply rooted conviction against racism.<sup>41</sup>

September 1921 was a pivotal month for Greene and his Fort Wayne readers. On September 7, the *News and Sentinel* began a twenty-one-day series of full-page in-depth articles written by the *New York World* exposing the background, marketing strategies, and corruption of the national Klan. The *News and Sentinel* was one of eighteen leading papers across the country that partnered with the *World* and the only Indiana newspaper.<sup>42</sup> The *News and Sentinel* weathered an immediate threat of libel suits from national Klan leaders, but Greene enjoyed strong local support. On September 9, the *News and Sentinel* quoted a cross-section of community leaders including members of the Masons and the American Legion, prominent faith leaders, an investment broker, and an African American lawyer who all condemned the Klan as “a menace to Americanism.” Less than a week later, the newspaper announced that the Klan organizer who had been in Fort Wayne only one month had cut his planned stay short and left town. In the final article of the series, Greene proclaimed: “The *News-Sentinel* Exposed It: Firm in the belief that racial and religious hatreds have no place in America this newspaper took up the fight against the Ku Klux Klan just as it has taken up scores of other fights for civic decency.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In *Citizen Klansmen*, Leonard Moore identified only four Indiana newspapers that criticized the Klan: *South Bend Tribune*, *Muncie Post-Democrat*, *Richmond Evening Item*, and the *Indianapolis Times*. Leonard Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921–1928* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2000), 26. For discussions of Muncie’s *Post-Democrat* editor, George Dale, see Ron F. Smith, “The Klan’s Retribution Against an Indiana Editor: A Reconsideration,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, 106 (September 2010), 381–400; and Bradford W. Scharlott, “The Hoosier Newsmen and the Hooded Order: Indiana Press Reaction to the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1979), 13–17. For discussion of *South Bend Tribune* editor Frederick Miller, see Scharlott, “The Hoosier Newsmen and the Hooded Order,” 17–19.

<sup>42</sup> “Vow Binds Members to Unseen Constitution,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 18, 1921, p. 10, lists eighteen other newspapers that participated in the series: *New York World*, *Chicago Daily News*, *Pittsburgh Sun*, *Minneapolis Journal*, *Seattle Wash. Times*, *Knickerbocker-Press*, *Syracuse Herald*, *Dayton News*, *Dallas Texas News*, *New Orleans Times Picayune*, *Oklahoman*, [*Houston*] *Chronicle*, *Toledo Blade*, *Examiner News Era*, *Buffalo News*, *Boston Post*, *Milwaukee Journal*, *St. Louis Post Dispatch*.

<sup>43</sup> “Atlanta Ku Klux to Charge Libel,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 8, 1921, p. 1; “Ku Klux Klan Is Denounced,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 9, 1921, p. 1; “Ku Klux Moves On,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 14, 1921, p. 1; “Case Against Klan Proved,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 27, 1921, p. 17; “Ku Klux Klan Nearly Succeeded,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 18, 1921, p. 20; “Fifty Initiated by Klan Here,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 11, 1921, p. 1. For a description of the *New York World*’s series, see Roger Streitmatter, *Mightier Than the Sword: How the News Media Have Shaped American History*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, Col., 2012), 96–99.

# ATLANTA KU KLUX TO CHARGE LIBEL

**KING KLEAGLE CLARKE DECLARES KLAN  
WILL FILE BIGGEST LIBEL SUIT IN  
HISTORY OF WORLD AGAINST NEWS-  
PAPERS EXPOSING ACTIVITIES**

## 200 LAWYERS TO PLEA

**AIM TO PUT NEW YORK WORLD, NEWS-SENTINEL  
AND OTHER NEWSPAPERS MAKING EXPOSE  
OF "INVISIBLE EMPIRE" OUT OF BUSINESS.**

(Special to the News-Sentinel.)

ATLANTA, Ga., Sept. 8.—Without taking any official action on the World's exposure of its methods, E. Y. Clarke, imperial kleagle of the Ku Klux Klan, after consultation with Col. William J. Simmons, imperial wizard, contented himself with issuing a statement to this effect:

That the initial article in the World's announced series exposing the Ku Klux Klan contains a number of false statements for which the World will be made to answer in a libel suit; that all other newspapers of publications publishing false statements regarding the organization will be held "to a strict accountability" in the libel suits; and individuals uttering false statements regarding the organizations, or regarding persons connected with it in an official capacity or otherwise, also will be made to prove in court the statements they make or stand the consequences.

# Ku Klux Klan Nearly Succeeded

**Fort Wayne would have proved a fine hunting ground  
for the Ku Klux Klan with its campaign of  
hate and intolerance with its**

## Price of \$10 a Head

**But one thing prevented this Ku Klux Klan fastening its  
claws on this community.**

# The NEWS-SENTINEL Exposed It

**Firm in the belief that racial and religious hatreds have  
no place in America this newspaper took up the  
fight against the Ku Klux Klan just as it  
has taken up scores of other fights  
for civic decency.**

Greene launched a two-year assault on the Klan in the pages of the *News and Sentinel* despite threatened libel suits.

Despite early limited success in some Indiana towns and cities, the Klan continued its aggressive recruiting and growth in the state. In the summer of 1922, the Klan launched a state takeover. Led by D. C. Stephenson from his Indianapolis base, trained salesmen spread across Indiana appealing to white Protestants to unite around the belief that traditional American values were becoming lost in a new world of vice and urbanization. The broad Klan appeal to Protestant evangelicalism resonated with Indiana citizens who championed Prohibition as a way to an ethical society and felt left out of the booming prosperity that surrounded them. Indiana as a whole had few recent immigrants, African Americans, and Jews—all common targets of national Klan propaganda. Instead, Klan literature in Indiana and its newspaper, *The Fiery Cross*, focused on local corruption and stirred fears about Catholics. Lured by patriotic rhetoric, theatrics, white-robed Klansmen, and large burning crosses, thousands of white citizens paid a \$10 membership fee and took an oath of allegiance to the Klan and its tenet of Protestant white supremacy. According to historian Leonard J. Moore, every week between July 1922 and July 1923, “an average of more than 2,000 Indiana men joined the Klan.” At year’s end, the state Klan boasted some 118,000 members, well on its way towards becoming “the largest and politically most powerful state Klan organization” of its time.<sup>44</sup>

During the summer of 1922, Klan organizers recruited extensively in Fort Wayne. On September 10, the front page of the Sunday morning *Journal-Gazette* reported that an anonymous local Klan organizer had called the newspaper’s office to announce an upcoming public meeting in a city park at a date to be determined. The caller predicted that 10,000 people would turn out for the occasion, including 3,000 local Klan members. The next day, the front page of the *News and Sentinel* quoted a sermon by Rev. Thomas M. Conroy at the city’s Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The Klan was “un-American,” he had told his parishioners Sunday morning, its propaganda, “sinister.”<sup>45</sup> The same week, some 200 Lutheran leaders gathered in Fort Wayne for an annual meeting of the American Luther League. The delegates approved a campaign to oppose Klan-sponsored legislation designed to weaken parochial schools. W. D. Holterman, the organization’s national secretary, charged that the

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<sup>44</sup> Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 16–17, 19–20, 23. According to Moore, Catholics comprised approximately twenty percent of Indiana’s population in 1920.

<sup>45</sup> “Ku Klux Klan Plans First Meeting Here,” *Journal-Gazette*, September 10, 1922, p. 1; “Public Ceremony Planned by Klan,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 11, 1922, p. 9.

Klan's "intolerance and hatreds" were incompatible with the league's mission to improve the spiritual welfare of their students.<sup>46</sup>

Greene's editorials relentlessly condemned the Klan's bigotry:

And now the Ku Klux Klan brazenly announces that it will shortly hold a public demonstration in Fort Wayne which will be attended by 3,000 local members of the damnable organization. Of course this is the veriest kind of clap trap. There are not 3,000 members of the Klan in Fort Wayne and if there were anything like that number they could not be dragged into public acknowledgment of their membership.

Denouncing the Klan as "the most un-American, vicious and impossible organization that ever insulted the nation," Greene challenged the Klan to show him the list of 3,000 names so that he could make them public. "We'll wager a rubber tuning fork against a lace trimmed skillet, they cannot produce 200 names," he added.<sup>47</sup>

Greene also argued that the Klan should be denied permission to meet at the city's Lakeside Park. The parks were to "promote good citizenship and better relationships among the elements of the citizenry." A Klan meeting "would be laying the ground work for a good sized riot for Fort Wayne is not the character of community in which such abandoned teachings as those of the Ku Klux Klan safely may be preached." One city councilman attempted to call a special session to discuss banning the Klan meeting, but efforts were dropped because of opposition from both Col. D. N. Foster, president of the park board, and Mayor Hosey.<sup>48</sup>

While there was no public protest against the Klan, few Fort Wayne citizens turned out for the Lakeside Park meeting. Instead of the predicted

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<sup>46</sup>In 1921, the American Luther League, a nationwide association for young people, was headquartered in Fort Wayne. Of the 14,000 students then enrolled in Fort Wayne schools, approximately 1,500 attended Lutheran schools; 3,000 attended Catholic schools. "Schools Open with Large enrollments," *Journal-Gazette*, September 15, 1921, p. 7; "Prominent Men Are on Program," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, October 9, 1921; "Convention to Close Today," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, October 10, 1921, p. 9; "Lutheran to Speak on Klan's Interference," *Journal-Gazette*, September 12, 1922, p. 18; "Luther League to Fight Klan," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 14, 1922, p. 13.

<sup>47</sup>"K.K.K. in Fort Wayne," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 12, 1922, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup>"Meeting of the K.K.K.," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 22, 1922, p. 4; "Will Not Stop K.K.K. Meet," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 23, 1922, p. 1; *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 25, 1922, p. 4.

10,000 Klansmen, approximately 1,500 people attended. Of these, Greene guessed that 1,498 came out of curiosity. Rather than a “gathering of the [K]lan waving of fiery crosses, mysterious powwowing and sheeted and hooded figures engaging in a haunting ritual, the while tooting horns,” Greene described the event as a “flag waving and mother love contest” featuring “indifferent speakers.” Four days later, Greene responded to Klan supporters with an argument that he often repeated: “The objection to this Ku Klux Klan is not that it professes Americanism but rather that it proposes to antagonize certain races and certain religions . . . America assumes to be a torch-bearer among the nations but when certain of our citizens employ this torch to set fire to their neighbors’ houses it is imperative to call a halt.”<sup>49</sup>

In mid-October, a front-page *News and Sentinel* story reported a secret Klan meeting at the American Federation of Labor Hall on West Main Street. The principal speaker, an unnamed Methodist minister from Indianapolis, claimed that the Klan was growing faster in Indiana than anywhere else in the country. He planted suspicion and fear of Catholics: “Fort Wayne is a Catholic town, gentlemen. I don’t need to tell you that.” He criticized Catholic clergy and the Knights of Columbus; alleged that Catholics were hoarding guns and ammunition in the basement of an Indianapolis church; and claimed that Catholic leaders subsidized newspapers across the country. Such rhetoric seemed to draw new members—at the end of the meeting more than 100 people submitted membership applications.<sup>50</sup>

On November 21, the Klan staged its second public city meeting at the downtown Temple Theatre. Once again, Klan theatrics and white robes were missing. The featured speaker, identified only as “G-18,” appealed to the vulnerabilities of his Fort Wayne audience. The Germanic branch of the white race was superior, he assured them. While he denied any use of “tar and feather” tactics, he stressed the need for the Klan to enforce laws when police forces were weak. Like other Klan leaders, “G-18” also voiced anti-Catholic rhetoric. The Klan’s understanding of “100 percent Americanism” excluded any loyalty to a foreign pontiff, meaning the Catholic Pope. Despite Klan-publicized expectations to the contrary, however, the

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<sup>49</sup> “Disappointed,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 26, 1922, p. 4; “A Poor Argument,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, September 30, 1922, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> “Klan Gets Members,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, October 14, 1922, pp. 1, 2.

meeting attracted only a “small crowd” on the main floor and fewer than a dozen people in the balcony.<sup>51</sup>

In a front-page story in early December, the *News and Sentinel* claimed credit for forcing the Klan to move out of its local headquarters in the North American Building. Still, many community leaders, primarily Protestant ministers, avoided public statements. Following the well-publicized condemnation by the New York City-based Federated Council of Churches, only one local minister, the Rev. James W. Strachan of South Wayne Baptist Church, opposed the Klan when interviewed by a *News and Sentinel* reporter.<sup>52</sup>

Locally, only Catholic and Jewish leaders consistently expressed moral outrage over the Klan's racial and religious invective. Rev. John Dapp, assistant rector of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, delivered an “impressive” speech before the local Lions Club in which he stressed that patriotism should not be used “in order to arouse and foster hatred for one another.” Rabbi Aaron L. Weinstein, speaking before the city's College Club, contrasted the tolerance of George Washington with “the intolerance and bigotry” of the Klan. Rabbi Weinstein also shared extracts from threatening letters anonymously sent to him by Klan members. Greene's paper consistently reported on such speeches; it also carried the regular feature “In Colored Circles,” a community notebook, in which African Americans publicized a wide variety of activities illustrating race pride and political activism. The community feature covered events such as the regular monthly meetings of the local NAACP and the organization of a chapter of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders by local black women, as well as ministerial encouragements for black voter registration. Rev. Robert Little, pastor of First Presbyterian Church, was the single Protestant minister recorded as denouncing the Klan. He was “heartily applauded” for his “courageous stand” and “fearlessness” in a speech before the Optimists Club, the *News and Sentinel* reported.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> “Says Whites Are Supreme,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, November 24, 1922, p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> “K.K.K. Menaces News-Sentinel,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, November 28, 1922, p. 1; “Pastors Refuse to Talk,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, October 25, 1922, p. 19; “The K.K.K. in Action,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, December 1, 1922, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> “Rector Calls Klan Loathsome Disease,” *Journal-Gazette*, February 22, 1923, p. 12; “Lions Hear the Rev. John Dapp,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, February 22, 1923, p. 13; “Weinstein Gets Threat,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, February 19, 1923, p. 16; Marian Horan, ed., “How Did Black Women in the NAACP Promote the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, 1918–1923?,” <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/lynch/intro.htm>; “Minister Denounces Klan,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, January 3, 1923, p. 8.

Such reticence on the part of Fort Wayne Protestant leaders correlated with the Klan's membership growth. In early February the Klan, now headquartered in the Randall Hotel, held daily recruiting sessions that allegedly enrolled between 50 and 75 new members a day. Behind locked doors, new initiates were indoctrinated into Klan principles that stressed "relentless opposition to Catholics, negroes, and Jews" and absolute secrecy. Sermons by two local Protestant ministers, noted in *The Fiery Cross* that March, suggest how some churches helped. Rev. Overmeyer of Calvary United Baptist Church pointed out that "100 percent Americanism" stood for eliminating vice that was then as rampant in Fort Wayne as it was during the "jail flats" days. Rev. D. R. Mais, preaching at Creighton Avenue Church of Christ, endorsed Klan Americanism by raising fears of conspiracies against Christianity, public schools, and "God-given rights of American liberty."<sup>54</sup>

In this same period, Greene reported Klansmen met with him to protest his editorials and to explain their principles. He responded by reiterating his objections: "Gentlemen, you are playing with fire and I have no hesitation in saying to you that you are wrong, woefully and inexcusably wrong." It seemed clear, however, that the Klan's grip on Fort Wayne was growing. At a membership meeting at the end of April, a Klan organizer appealed to new members by describing the Klan "as a religious organization." He urged the some 200 men in the audience "to uphold the traditions of the nation and to promote the interests of Protestants, Gentiles and whites." The state of Indiana's Klan, he boasted, had reached 350,000 members.<sup>55</sup>

On Saturday, April 28, the Fort Wayne Klan undertook its largest local extravaganza to date, an evening parade predicted to draw some 4,000 Klansmen. Mayor Hosey ordered the police to prevent the parade, triggering a decision by the board of public safety that the mayor's order was illegal. Forced to back down, Hosey ordered every city police officer on duty to prevent any disorder. When the Klan had first reserved a city park for a meeting two years earlier, Greene had favored banning the meeting; this

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<sup>54</sup>"Take Many into the Klan Here," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, February 3, 1923, p. 21; "Fort Wayne Hears Powerful Address," *The Fiery Cross*, March 16, 1923, p. 2; "K.K.K. Yes or No?," *The Fiery Cross*, March 30, 1923, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup>"The Ku Klux Klan," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, March 16, 1923, p. 4; "Makes Drive for Members," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, April 28, 1923, p. 15.

time he supported ignoring it. To deny the legal right to parade peacefully would only start trouble:

By all means let this foolish society 'demonstrate' to its heart's content so long as it keeps within the law. Men do not want to belong to an order of this sort . . . But once start in to 'forbid' and to use the police in preventing demonstrations that are not illegal and you start trouble. You build up the very thing you would tear down.<sup>56</sup>

At least a thousand Fort Wayne citizens lined the route from Spy Run Avenue south to Harrison Street, then south to Baker, north to Calhoun, past City Hall on Barr Street, and back to Spy Run. Reporters for the *Journal-Gazette* and the *News*, anxious for a head count of the marching Klansmen, broke the story the next day. Instead of the Klan's predicted 4,000 participants, only about 500 marchers turned out. Moreover, most of these men had come to Fort Wayne by chartered interurban trains from areas across Northern Indiana. Even with smaller numbers, however, the parade was a grand theatrical spectacle. First came a car with a large blazing white cross. Following close behind were two carloads of Klansmen. Then came eight white-robed masked Klansmen on horseback, followed by two marching bands. Last came the marching Klansmen: some 350 robed unmasked marchers thought to be from out of town; then about a dozen Klansmen in full ceremonial dress with their faces fully covered, most likely representing the Fort Wayne Klan. Some carried placards broadcasting such threats and Klan principles as "Bootleggers We Have Our Eyes On You," "White Supremacy," and "Separation of Church and State."<sup>57</sup>

The parade probably confirmed Greene's strong convictions that most local Klan members would be too ashamed to parade, even with their faces covered. The Klan, he believed, was a phenomenon due to die out on its own even if its demise was unexpected. In the immediate future, the Fort Wayne Klan obtained a permit for another public meeting to be held in early May. By this time, Greene had turned his attention to the American

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<sup>56</sup> "500 Klansmen March Through City Streets," *Journal-Gazette*, April 29, 1923, p. 6; "Crowd Sees Klan Parade," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, April 30, 1923, p. 7; "To Insist on Law and Order," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, April 28, 1923, p. 1; "A Foolish Order," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, April 27, 1923, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> "500 Klansmen March Through City Streets," *Journal-Gazette*, April 29, 1923, p. 6; "Crowd Sees Klan Parade," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, April 30, 1923, p. 7.

Unity League, which was falsely accusing prominent Fort Wayne citizens of being Klan members. In one of his last editorials—written in May as he struggled with Bright’s Disease, a crippling kidney disease—Greene defended innocent men against the zealous “lying tongue of scandal.”<sup>58</sup>

In the summer of 1923, Greene retreated to his northern Michigan summer home on Burt Lake hoping to regain his health. In his absence, federal Prohibition officers moved into Fort Wayne to begin arresting bootleggers identified by members of the Klan. By the third week of July, the officers arrested 104 violators. Greene also missed a mid-September speech by Patrick J. O’Donnell, a Chicago criminal lawyer who was president of the American Unity League. Speaking to over a thousand people at the Elks Temple, O’Donnell claimed he had the membership list of the Fort Wayne Klan, and he promised to read the names at a meeting scheduled two weeks later.<sup>59</sup>

Jesse Greene returned to Fort Wayne on September 28, gravely ill. Two weeks later, on October 13, he died at his Wildwood Avenue home. His funeral was held in Crawfordsville followed by burial at Oak Hill Cemetery. Signifying his enduring relationships to Crawfordsville and Wabash College, Dr. George L. Mackintosh, president of Wabash College, and the Rev. U. Z. Leazenby, superintendent of the Crawfordsville district of the Methodist Church, directed Greene’s celebration of life.<sup>60</sup>

Within a few weeks, plans for a great Klan parade and all-day celebration, expected to draw 100,000 Klansmen to Fort Wayne, were cleared with the chief of police. *The Fiery Cross* announced that the Klan intended to observe two great milestones on November 10: Statewide membership for 1923 had reached 500,000; their goal for 1924 was to reach one million members. The Imperial Wizard of the Klan, Dr. H.W. Evans of

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<sup>58</sup> “Kluxers to Meet in Lakeside Park,” *Journal-Gazette*, May 3, 1923, p. 3; “By Product of the Klan,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, May 5, 1923, p. 4. During the summer and fall of 1923, numerous Fort Wayne citizens publicly swore that they were not Klan members. See for example, *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, July 28, 1923, p. 1; *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, November 3, 1923, p. 17. Kenneth Jackson argues that the Rev. J. F. Noll, editor of *Our Sunday Visitor*, was one of the most influential supporters of the American Unity League. Kenneth Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915–1930* (Chicago, Ill., 1992), 102–103.

<sup>59</sup> “Death Claims Jesse A. Greene,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, October 15, 1923, p. 1; “Victims Caught in Big Federal Booze Net, Now Hundred and Four,” *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, July 19, 1923, p. 13; “O’Donnell Opens Klan Fight Here,” *Journal-Gazette*, September 17, 1923, pp. 1–2.

<sup>60</sup> “Funeral Services for Jesse Greene Held in This City,” *Crawfordsville Journal*, October 16, 1923.

Atlanta, Georgia, was scheduled to give an address at the gathering held at Memorial Park.<sup>61</sup>

On the day of the widely publicized event, reporters from major national newspapers including the *New York Times* arrived in Fort Wayne to cover the Klan's promised "brilliant spectacle." Jesse Greene would not have been surprised when reporters counted not 100,000 but 10,000 Klan members, men, women, and children, "most of them masked" and most from across Indiana and neighboring states. "The Fort Wayne delegation was conspicuous by its absence," reported the *Journal-Gazette*. O'Donnell's promise on behalf of the National Unity League to publicize Fort Wayne Klan membership lists had recently been blocked by a federal judge.<sup>62</sup>

Despite predictions that, if ignored, it would fade on its own, the Fort Wayne Klan gained political power following Jesse Greene's death. The Klan endorsed candidates for Allen County offices and won Republican primaries in May and general elections in November. Similarly, David Hogg, Allen County Republican chairman and Klan-backed candidate, defeated three-term 12th District Republican congressman Louis Fairfield in the primary and went on to win in November. In that same November election, however, Allen County voters defeated Klan candidates Republican Ed Jackson for governor and Fort Wayne attorney Robert A. Buhler for county prosecutor. Moreover, Dr. Carleton B. McCulloch, Democratic nominee for governor, won an anti-Klan campaign in Fort Wayne. Allen County thus gained the distinction as the only large urban area in Indiana where Jackson did not win a majority.<sup>63</sup>

Historians have found other signs of uneven Klan strength in estimates of local membership. According to Leonard Moore, Allen County male members during the 1920s totaled around 2,100 or about seven percent of the total eligible population, one of the lowest percentages for a state where on average as many as one-third of native white men belonged to the Klan. This was all the more remarkable considering the city's Chamber

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<sup>61</sup> "Klan to Parade," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, October 11, 1923, p. 21; "Ft. Wayne Plans for Meet," *The Fiery Cross*, October 12, 1923, pp. 1, 5; "Klan Plans Big Gathering Here," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, November 8, 1923, p. 21.

<sup>62</sup> "Many Newspaper Men Are Here," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, November 10, 1923, p. 1; "75,000 View Klan Parade," *The Fiery Cross*, November 16, 1923, p. 1; "Pickpockets Work Ku Klux Crowds," *Journal-Gazette*, November 11, 1923, pp. 1, 6; "Crowds Line Streets as Klansmen Stage Parade," *Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, November 12, 1923, p. 2; "Judge Denies Order for Records of Klan," *Journal-Gazette*, October 20, 1923, p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 173–75; *Huntington Press*, September 21, 1924, p. 1.

of Commerce 1920 advertisement that Fort Wayne's population was 88.73 percent native-born American.<sup>64</sup>

Moore posits that the Klan's limited success in Fort Wayne was due to a Catholic mayor and a "strong anti-Klan political culture." Certainly this anti-Klan culture consisted of a large population of German Lutherans and Catholics who valued parochial schools and opposed Prohibition. Catholics, moreover, who bore the brunt of the Klan's attacks against non-Protestants, had consistently been bold public adversaries. African Americans who forcefully addressed their second-class citizenship contributed to an anti-Klan culture as well. In addition, the *Journal-Gazette's* vigorous campaign against the Klan left indelible impressions on its readers. Most often overlooked, however, was the work of Jesse Greene, a powerful, indefatigable editor who for nearly twenty years believed that Fort Wayne citizens deserved a city free of vice, bigotry, and prejudice. Herbert S. Willis, editor of the *Waterloo Press*, expressed what many Fort Wayne readers long believed: Jesse Greene "was fearless. He clung to the truth. He not only gave expression to his own thought, but expressed what many dared not put in print. Invariably he was right."<sup>65</sup>

As a voice of the Progressive Era, Jesse Greene carried the principles he learned growing up in post-Civil War era Indiana into a changing world. His courageous voice spoke to higher values during a time when vice, racism, and white supremacy were too often tolerated. Today, Greene's editorials challenge historians to reconsider Indiana's haunting reputation as a center for early twentieth-century intolerance and bigotry. His powerful voice still reminds us of the need for independent, no-holds barred, honest journalism.




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<sup>64</sup>Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 7, 55; "Facts Brought Out in 'Survey' by Chamber of Commerce Which Prove Fort Wayne Has Many Industrial Advantages," *Journal-Gazette*, February 22, 1920, p. 6B.

<sup>65</sup>Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 58; Herbert S. Willis, untitled eulogy, *Waterloo Press*, October 18, 1923, p. 4.