NEW DEAL OR “RAW DEAL”: AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE PURSUIT OF CITIZENSHIP IN INDIANAPOLIS DURING FDR’S FIRST TERM

Benjamin J. Clark

Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in the Department of History, Indiana University

October 2009
Accepted by the Faculty of Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Robert G. Barrows, Ph.D., Chair

Nancy Marie Robertson, Ph.D.

Melissa Bingmann, Ph.D.
for Sarah
Acknowledgments

Writing a thesis is, for the most part, a lonely process. But I know very well that no one is an island. I could not have completed this project without the support of many people.

I’ve had the pleasure of learning from many great historians over the years. First, I would like to thank the members of my committee. Dr. Robert Barrows, the chair, provided invaluable insight and a much need editor’s pen. Dr. Melissa Bingmann has taught me what it means to be a public historian. Dr. Nancy Marie Robertson conducted a colloquium that showed me how to apply the concept of citizenship to historical analysis, which led me to this thesis topic. Drs. Jeffrey Webb, Paul Michelson, and Dwight Brautigam were my first great teachers and inspired me to pursue a career in history. Drs. Philip Scarpino, Kevin Robbins, and Marianne Wokeck challenged me as a graduate student to define what exactly it is that historians do. Wilma Moore at the Indiana Historical Society helped immensely in my search for the right sources. Steve Stanek provided fresh insights. Kilby Davis, the first historian I ever knew, taught me to love books.

My parents have always been unwavering in their support, even when I decided to forego a practical career in favor of doing what I love. Along the way, they’ve taught me the value of integrity and hard work. My older siblings, Marilynn and Daniel, set high standards for me to attain. My friends in Grehovo unknowingly remind me to be humble and grateful for everything I have. Sarah, my wife and best friend, is not only beautiful, but she is extraordinarily kindhearted and fiercely intelligent. She inspires me to be the very best version of myself every day.
CONTENTS

Chapter One: African Americans in Indianapolis

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................1
African Americans in Indianapolis before the Great Depression ..............................................12
The Great Crash ..........................................................................................................................18
The Election of 1932 ..................................................................................................................22

Chapter Two: Roosevelt’s First Administration and the New Deal, 1933 through 1936

The Beginnings of a New Deal ..................................................................................................24
Civilian Conservation Corps .................................................................................................25
Federal Emergency Relief Administration .............................................................................29
Civil Works Administration ....................................................................................................33
National Industrial Recovery Act ..........................................................................................36
Works Progress Administration .............................................................................................48

Chapter Three: The New Deal and the Pursuit of Citizenship by African Americans

African Americans Speak Out .................................................................................................57
Confronting Discrimination and Racism ................................................................................61
Political Citizenship ..................................................................................................................66
Economic Citizenship ..............................................................................................................73
The Politics of Civil Rights .....................................................................................................77
Social Citizenship and the Anti-Lynching Crusade .................................................................83
Conclusion ...............................................................................................................................93

Bibliography ..............................................................................................................................95

Curriculum Vitae