

THE FEMALE IMPERSONATORS OF INDIANA AVENUE: RACE, SEXUALITY, GENDER EXPRESSION
AND THE BLACK ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

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To my loving sister.

Rest in Peace Erica Lane.

The Female Impersonators of Indiana Avenue: Race, Sexuality, Gender Expression and the Black Entertainment Industry

Indiana Avenue, a thoroughfare located in downtown Indianapolis, Indiana was home to some of Indianapolis' great jazz performers including Wes Montgomery, Noble Sissle and Russell Smith. By the 1930s, Indiana Avenue was an established main street for the Black community of the segregated Indianapolis. Shops, theaters, grocers, drug stores, apartments, saloons and night clubs thrived on the bustling Indiana Avenue. Pedestrians on the Avenue could be entertained by some of the leading African-American jazz performers of the time. Visitors to the Avenue could stop in venues to participate in pansy balls and converse with female impersonators who performed in the clubs and theaters in the densely populated Black neighborhoods just north-west of downtown.

The earliest documented drag show that appeared in Indianapolis in the late 1800s arrived in the city through traveling minstrel shows.¹ The earliest female impersonator performed on Indiana Avenue in 1910.² The Avenue offered a home for non-binary performers and artists in a deeply segregated Indianapolis cultural life. Today, we understand female impersonators or drag queens as gay men who dress up as women in extravagant clothing and makeup to perform either via lip syncing or via live music and dancing. However, drag in early twentieth-century Indianapolis cannot be pinned as a profession solely for gay men. The clothing, wigs, and makeup were designed to "pass" the illusion of a "real" woman entertaining to the crowd.³

On Indiana Avenue, the female impersonators performed in the theaters, clubs and saloons dominated by jazz legends who were born in Indianapolis and others from around the country. Despite the appearance of female impersonator shows, the historical printed record created by Black newspapers in Indianapolis was largely silent from 1911 until 1933. This silence may be due to missing issues of the *Indianapolis Recorder* from 1917 to 1925.⁴ Historians state that the “Pansy Craze” swept the nation in the 1920s.⁵ After 1933, openly gay Black men controlled the Avenue’s drag scene. By the 1960s, performers wore women’s clothing in public even when they were not on stage. How we record these performers and their gender identity is an imperfect historical effort since queer themes are largely underrepresented in local archives and historical writings.⁶ Given the option, performers may have identified as transgender in today’s terminology.

Esther Newton in her anthropological study explains that during the 1960s the entertainers preferred “female impersonator” over drag queen.⁷ Female impersonator denoted professionalism only found on the stage. A drag queen was a “street fairy” or man who wore women’s clothing in public. However, gay Black men did not need to wear women’s clothing in public to be recognized.

A community poll published October 20, 1935 in the *Indianapolis Recorder* asks, “What is your opinion of pansies or fags?”⁸ Despite language that is offensive today, the very existence of this poll highlights the visibility of gay Black men on Indiana Avenue and in Indianapolis’ Black community. Responses from the community varied from tolerance to downright detesting the visible gay Black men. S. W. Whitley, an insurance executive living at 2259 N. Capitol Avenue responded, “There was a time when this sort of person was very modest and respectful [sic] but now they are extremely too bold for any good.”⁹ Whitley’s leveraging of a longer chronological timeline (“there was a time”...“but now”) suggests that gay Black men and possibly Black

transgender women had had a level of visibility on the Avenue for quite some time. The boldness of Whitley's statement is reiterated through the belief and actions among homophobic Black people in Indianapolis that these gay Black men were "repugnant." According to an article printed without a byline in the *Recorder*, Gay Black individuals made it more difficult for the Black community to advance their push for equality within the White Indianapolis community.¹⁰ There were respectability politics at play here as Black people longed to integrate into a segregated Indianapolis that restricted where Black people could go and live.¹¹ However, homophobia and respectability were not sentiments felt throughout the entire Black community at this time. After all the female impersonator shows were widely popular along Indiana Avenue.

On August 5, 1933, a pansy or fairy show advertised in the *Recorder* that it was the first show performed by openly gay Black men in Indianapolis. The show took place at the Paradise Gardens Theater located at 427 Indiana Avenue.¹² According to the *Recorder*, "For the first time in the 112 years since a group of pioneers settled here, Indianapolis has caught up with New York, Chicago, Washington, Atlantic City and Paris. Believe it or not Indianapolis has had its first 'fairy' (fag) (pansy) (sissy) public stage show and dance."¹³ The article infers the rite of passage for a city to go from conservative country town to a cosmopolitan city on par with New York City by offering a pansy ball. The ball was a success—two thousand people attended, and another one thousand people waited outside to get in.¹⁴ Yet, this story did not appear on the entertainment page of the *Recorder*, but on a page dominated by articles on churches and whitening skin cream. The *Recorder* editorial staff knew the placement of the pansy ball article would spark a strong response from the well-to-do-Black-church-going community members. The police response to the pansy show was swift and harsh to control the behavior of Black people to conform with whiteness codes of conduct that limited queer visibility. The advances in digital research and text mining have allowed me to examine the visibility of gay Black men

involved in the Black entertainment industry of Indianapolis through the 1930s and 1940s. My research indicates that drag shows happened with regularity along Indiana Avenue as a way for gay Black men to gain useful employment as well as create a level of tolerance and visibility in the Black community of Indianapolis.¹⁵

Historiography

The history of drag queens performing in jazz clubs throughout the 1930s and 1940s is a new area of a growing research interest. There are traces in academic research on the lives of female impersonators or drag queens that can be brought forward and recentered as the main focus. Historian Kevin Mumford describes this process of recentering as putting the margins at the center.¹⁶ In this case the marginalized female impersonators are under exploration.

Mumford states, “For some time now, historians have argued for a methodology known as history from the bottom up, but the problem is that too many studies of common people ignored uncommon—and profoundly important—episodes of the past.”¹⁷ In other words, how can we understand the complexity of the history of Indiana Avenue without the inclusion of the female impersonators in the historical record? Research on the drag queens’ contributions to Black entertainment in the jazz era explores the intersections of what appears to be two cultural phenomena coexisting on Indiana Avenue.

Entertainers collaborated to entertain Black Hoosiers, yet there are a few instances where the secondary sources note these collaborations. Why were drag queens so popular in jazz clubs throughout the twentieth century? How did drag queens move through, and beyond, heterosexual jazz spaces to become a key feature in venues run by and for gay men? Digitized issues of *The Indianapolis Recorder* were my largest primary source material. I consulted many archives in Indianapolis and jazz historians near and afar to gather more material and was told

over and over again that they could not answer my historical questions. So, I leaned on the *Recorder* to provide this history.

In order to understand how Indiana Avenue formed as the Black entertainment district of Indianapolis, Indiana during the twentieth century, it is important to understand how Black people settled in Indiana and how they built a networked community throughout Indiana. In 1985, Emma Lou Thornbrough published *The Negro in Indiana before 1900* that provides a comprehensive look at the early formation of the State of Indiana and how Black people arrived. Thornbrough utilized contemporary newspapers, court records and letters to track the earliest Black settlers who arrived as slaves and indentured servants.¹⁸ By 1900, there were 15,931 Black people living in Indianapolis.¹⁹ Before her death in 1994, Thornbrough worked on her follow up title *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century*. She stated that the construction of the railroad and rapid urbanization throughout the late 1800s brought more Black people to Indianapolis to settle on designated land just west of downtown.²⁰ Jim Crow-type segregation kept Black people from leaving their neighborhood.

Thornbrough was a progressive historian who sympathized with Black Hoosiers.²¹ “*The Negro In Indiana* would be a depressing book were it not for its underlying current of implicit optimism.”²² Indiana Avenue located inside the segregated community became the Black entertainment district in Indianapolis. Grocers, barbers, bakers, lawyers, dentists and physicians along Indiana Avenue served the needs of the community.²³ But it was the entertainment venues and performers who made the neighborhood a destination for non-residents.

The greatest work ever undertaken to record Indianapolis history is undeniably *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* published in 1994 an edited collection by David Bodenhamer and Robert Barrows. The entries are written by their experts. The topics vary in range and there are a few entries that relate to my topic. The *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* has entries on African

Americans, Indiana Avenue, and jazz. The editors stated the essays “provide an interpretive guide to Indianapolis’ heritage and culture on topics ranging from fine and performing arts to sports, from government to business and economy, from religion to the urban environment.”²⁴ They continued, “Both authors and editors offer them to promote understanding of Indianapolis and to invite reflection on its future.”²⁵

In 1997, Indiana University history graduate student Amy Wilson submitted her thesis, *The Swing Era on Indiana Avenue: A Cultural History of Indianapolis’ African-American Jazz Scene, 1933-1950*. Wilson’s work does not have the optimism of Thornbrough since Wilson’s work comes after most of the jazz venues were razed and urban renewal projects created new apartments and condominiums along Indiana Avenue and the canal.²⁶ Wilson explored the cultural history of Indiana Avenue’s jazz era through primary sources like the *Indianapolis Recorder* which was not digitized at the time of her work. Wilson had to handle the physical copies of the *Recorder* and find relevant information on the nightclubs and musicians who performed there. Wilson utilized few secondary source materials due to the lack of “citations that would link its contents to evidence found in the historical record.”²⁷ Wilson’s thesis takes place in the time period of my study that “will concentrate on the period between 1933 and 1950 when there were more jazz clubs patronized by Blacks and featuring Black musicians around Indiana Avenue than at any time before or since.”²⁸

Indiana Avenue was, unfortunately, a short-lived cultural world for Black entertainment. A breakup of social barriers in the 1940s and 1950s brought about the end of Indiana Avenue as middle-class Black people began moving to other neighborhoods.²⁹ Sanborn Maps situates the jazz club locations along Indiana Avenue from the 1920s through the 1950s, but they also tell a tale of the shrinkage of the community after 1950. My study builds upon the larger narrative of Black neighborhood development and cultural identity. In 2005, Richard Pierce published *Polite*

Protest: The Political Economy of Race in Indianapolis. Pierce explores the politics at play in Indianapolis that brought about the demise of Indiana Avenue that forced Black gay men to fight for entry into White gay clubs for employment, move elsewhere or find other sources of employment. He argues that Black people in Indianapolis “politely” protested housing discrimination within the city. They made some gains that allowed middle-class Black people to move to other neighborhoods away from Indiana Avenue. I argue, in line with Pierce, that the death of Indiana Avenue was due to the passage of Uni-Gov, landmark legislation passed in 1970 that consolidated surrounding townships into one metropolitan county increasing the political strength of White voters while weakening the political strength of Black voters. Uni-Gov absorbed Marion County suburbs with White populations killing the dream of the Black community to elect the city’s first Black mayor.³⁰

Black Indianapolis resident and Historian Clyde Bolden stated, “Now, not only is the community dead but the memory is in danger of fading.”³¹ Bolden tapped into his personal connection with Indiana Avenue to interview Black community members who remembered life on Indiana Avenue. Bolden’s work provides a brief history of Indiana Avenue from the beginning to what he considers the end and subsequent death of Indiana Avenue as the Black entertainment district “around 1960.”³² However, the final death blows came in the 1970s and 80s when revitalization efforts of downtown Indianapolis made Indiana Avenue unrecognizable as a Black entertainment district.³³

Performers found work and gained fame through a network of Black communities throughout the United States, known as the “chitlin’ circuit.”³⁴ In 2012, Preston Lauterbach published *The Chitlin’ Circuit: And the Road to Rock ‘n’ Roll* which explored how musicians moved throughout segregated cities in the United States, Indianapolis included, and made their

living as jazz musicians. “But as black downtowns atrophied and disappeared thereafter, not only was their influence diminished, their mark faded from America’s cultural history.”³⁵

The Black drag queens of Indiana Avenue certainly disappeared from our cultural memory. Yet, in the 1930s and 40s, Black drag queens had access to the chitlin’ circuit to set up their shows allowing them to build their audiences and have steady employment. Jazz performers performed multiple shows a night, worked with multiple bands, and consistently updated their repertoire with popular crowd-pleasing songs. The chitlin’ circuit not only made it possible for jazz musicians to perform throughout major Indiana cities like Terre Haute, Evansville and Gary, but also allowed them to go national with their distinctly Midwest sound.

Throughout the United States, jazz was a growing musical form in the 1920s. Its history is mostly detailed in major cities such as New Orleans, New York and Chicago. And Indianapolis had its own bustling jazz scene along Indiana Avenue. As the Blues became a popular musical form in Indianapolis after World War I it brought more southern Black migrants to northern cities.³⁶ David Leander Williams’ oral history interviews with former Indiana Avenue residents provide narratives of those who were involved in the scene.³⁷ Historian Sherrie Tucker argues that jazz allowed for queer stories to be told as part of the spirit of Black humanity and expression.³⁸ Her use of secondary sources shows how queer women performers were quite popular. Many produced hit records.

For well over one hundred years drag queens entertained audiences in Indianapolis. Drag though, has a longer historical trajectory beginning in the 1100s according to historians Roger Baker and Peter Burton. The earliest publication I have found for this study is an anthropological work conducted by Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* published in 1972. Newton studied gay culture and found female impersonators as the perfect subjects for her ethnography. Newton created a study of normalcy in the lives of gay

culture in America.³⁹ Even though, Newton's study focuses on female impersonators in the late 1960s, it is important to see how the influences of the impersonators of the 1930s and 1940s influenced the taught behaviors and the cultural development of drag in the 1960s.

In 1994, Martin Duberman expanded on the work in gay history by detailing the gay rights organizations that existed in the 1950s and 1960s leading up to the Stonewall Riots, during the Riots and the gay rights movement that came afterwards. The Stonewall Riots is the one historical event that receives the credit for starting gay rights movements. Duberman relied on first-hand accounts of the riots. Duberman credited the rebellion as being led by effeminate gay men and transgender women of color.⁴⁰ Yet, the Stonewall Riots is absorbed by a White-centered gay movement and the people of color that participated in the riots are whitewashed from cultural memory. The Stonewall Riots also overshadows the pre-1960s queer history which is new terrain for historical investigation.

In 1994, historian George Chauncey brought the field in a new direction with his groundbreaking work *Gay New York*. Chauncey's comprehensive work of the gay history of New York brought new understandings of the complexity of gay culture before the 1960s. Chauncey explores drag culture during the jazz era referred to as the pansy craze. Chauncey relied on newspaper articles as well as court cases that detailed the police raids on pansy shows. Chauncey noted, "More research needs to be conducted on other cities to determine the scope, chronology, duration, and causes of the craze, as well as its broader cultural meaning."⁴¹

That same year that Chauncey published his work, Roger Baker and Peter Burton published the beginnings of drag within the Catholic church in the 1100s.⁴² They claim that only men were allowed to perform on stage and the church would act out certain parts of the Bible for its parish. This history is important to note as religion is evoked to repress drag culture along Indiana Avenue within the twentieth century. Baker and Burton saw a void in the history of the

performing arts, and by analyzing plays and operas as well as secondary source material were able to recount the history of drag and its influence on the stage.⁴³

Along Indiana Avenue, these stages operated in what historian Kevin Mumford calls the interzone. In 1997, Mumford published *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*. Mumford brings to light how vice was pushed into minority neighborhoods where it was allowed to exist. “By focusing on black/white contact, then, this study proposes to document not only discrete historic social phenomena, but also the historical creation of race and sexuality in the United States.”⁴⁴

In 1933, these historical elements come together in Indianapolis, Indiana.

And all that drag

In 1933, the owner of Paradise Gardens Ballroom, Raymond (Dee) David, organized the first drag show on Indiana Avenue known as the pansy ball.⁴⁵ Leading up to the event, barber shops and drug stores in the Black community buzzed about the coming show.⁴⁶ Residents did not know what to expect and the news of a coming pansy ball really piqued the interest of the public. Raymond Dee, a native Hoosier, who rose through the entertainment scene even though he started his working career as a waiter in a restaurant in the 1920s.⁴⁷ Raymond followed in the footsteps of his father who retired as a waiter.⁴⁸ Yet, Raymond went further and purchased the Paradise Gardens or Dee’s Paradise Ballroom by the 1930s.⁴⁹ Raymond was also a dance promoter and organized the first pansy ball on Indiana Avenue and packaged it to take place at other venues such as the Madame Walker Theater.⁵⁰

Historians of American entertainment refer to the 1920s and 1930s as the Pansy Craze.⁵¹ Historian Kevin Mumford states that in the 1920s vices such as prostitution, drugs and gambling were concentrated in what he labels “interzones.” “Simultaneously marginal and central, interzones were located in African-American neighborhoods, unique because their (often

transient) inhabitants were black and white, heterosexual and homosexual, prostitute and customer.” Mumford continues, “In this imaginary conceptual map, interzones should be understood foremost as areas of cultural, sexual, and social interchange.”⁵² According to Mumford’s theory, Indiana Avenue would have been the major interzone within Indianapolis where vices and marginalized peoples comingled and flourished. The hotels and apartments that lined Indiana Avenue spoke to its transience as rooted community members lived in the neighborhoods surrounding Indiana Avenue. During prohibition these interzones became more rigid in their boundaries and concentrated in minority communities and entertainment districts. Female impersonators found their community within the confines of this invisible boundary since they had work as entertainers in the jazz clubs. As the *Recorder* described the first pansy show was led by “fairies, fags, pansies or sissies.”⁵³ These words applied to effeminate gay men at this time. These gay Black men were making their public debuts in Indianapolis in 1933 which indicates a level of acceptance from the Black community in Indianapolis.⁵⁴

Jazz was the vehicle that allowed for the first pansy show in Indianapolis. It was uniquely Black American. Jazz was a free form of human expression through music that makes space for all forms of expression, even queer forms of expression. Jazz was impromptu and dirty. The word stems from the Creole patois word “jass” meaning “strenuous activity” like sexual intercourse.⁵⁵

The performers of the first pansy show dressed as female impersonators and sang the great jazz hits of the day such as “Stormy Weather” performed by Frances Davis (Harold Blackey) and “Honey, Won’t You Please Come Home” performed by the chorus of 15 female impersonators.⁵⁶ The pansy show received a positive review in the *Recorder* which was quite critical of the protesters of the first pansy show. The article opens: “A jaded city conscience, long since lulled into a state of coma through tolerance of baseball pool loteries [sic], back alley crap

games, strip poker parties, illicit love tangles, and promiscuous ‘running around’ by both husband [sic] and wives, literally opened its eyes wide in amazement, then sat up straight in surprise, and finally emitted howls of hypocritical condemnation at the same time affecting the pose of closing its nostrils between the thumb and forefinger.”⁵⁷ The paper charged these protesters for their hypocrisy of tolerance of illegal activities and infidelity but directed their fury at the first ever pansy show. To follow was pushback from the “law-abiding” members of the Black community. The pansy performers were certainly members of the local Black community where they went to the same grocery stores, barber shops, saloons and churches.⁵⁸

In 1933, an anonymous letter to the editor titled “For Decency’s Sake” makes two truths clear among the homophobic Black people of Indianapolis: that gay people have always had some level of visibility in Indianapolis society and that their very existence holds back Black progress: “This type of character has always existed but ‘it’ should be made to remain in the background and not be allowed to raise its ugly head and mingle in society. As a matter of fact every ‘Pansy’ in town should be loaded on a discarded battle ship, towed to sea and blown up.”⁵⁹ The letter continues, “There are outcasts of every race of people but I am almost certain that we have a surplus which is extremely detrimental [sic] to the progress of the right thinking, law-abiding.”⁶⁰ The letter writer was aware of the vice that thronged the Black community and invoked the power of authorities that turned a blind eye to the vice that persisted along Indiana Avenue. The visible gay Black men were conflated with gangs, prostitution, gambling and drinking.⁶¹

In the 1910s, female impersonator shows within the White entertainment districts of Indianapolis were few. The White-owned newspaper, *Indianapolis Star*, characterizes White female impersonators as comedians and portrayed “the weaker sex.”⁶² Julian Etlinge is *the* White female impersonator of the day that the *Star* mentions often. Etlinge was a national

performer who always maintained his heterosexuality in print and had to constantly prove his masculinity.⁶³ Etlinge proved his manliness by fighting other performers who tested him backstage.⁶⁴ In 1927, Etlinge claimed that he wanted to leave female impersonation behind and take on more masculine roles in acting.⁶⁵ Characterizations of female impersonators within the *Recorder* never referred to them as “the weaker sex” and referred to female impersonators as entertainers.



Figure 1 Three female impersonators at the Republic Club, a nightclub in Washington, D.C. published in the *Indianapolis Recorder* April 30, 1938.⁶⁶

The *Star's* attempt to explain homosexuality in the early nineteenth century centers around conversations that it is a “morbid” disease.⁶⁷ Another *Star* article stated homosexuals were in an infantile state of development that can be overcome with therapy.⁶⁸ The *Recorder* portrays homosexuality through pseudo-scientific modes of understanding as well. One article claims that if a boy spends too much time around women then he will develop effeminate characteristics, and that girls who spend too much time with men will develop masculine

characteristics.⁶⁹ Yet, another article printed in the *Recorder* features Black female impersonators at the Republic Club in Washington, D.C. (see *Figure 1*) and the article provides a historical narrative of homosexuality from ancient times to 1938. The article continues, “The Rev. J. H. Weeks, Journal Anthropological Institute, writes in the journal that he is informed ‘inversion is extremely prevalent among Negroes in America.’ His informant states that he has ‘good reason to believe it is more prevalent among Negroes than among white people of any nation.’ If sex inversion is the penalty of civilization, then...[author note: ellipsis added by reporter for effect]”⁷⁰ The article goes on to state that scientists’ study of homosexuality is “crude and unsatisfactory.” The *Recorder* was more tolerant towards gay people than the *Star* at the time. This tolerance is significant to note to combat the hyperhomophobic myth placed on the Black community.⁷¹ The vice that existed attracted some White people to venture into the clubs along Indiana Avenue who would then interact with the female impersonators. This level of gay visibility in Black spaces at the time may have led anthropologists to believe homosexuality was more prevalent in the Black community when in actuality it may have been more tolerated in the Black community.

After 1933, pansy balls are not mentioned again in great detail in the *Recorder*. However, the *Recorder* embedded one pansy show (which is listed as a private show) in an article on entertainment on the Avenue.⁷² After 1934, the pansy shows were referred to as female impersonator shows to appease the homophobic Black community members who threatened to bring in police intervention on the jazz clubs and their owners. The club owners took the reference to homosexuality out of the shows to continue hosting female impersonator shows on the Avenue with success. Female impersonator shows allowed gay Black men to continue to entertain in venues along the Avenue and maintain an acceptable level of queer visibility.

The Police and Drag

The pansy ball received much criticism through anonymous articles printed in the *Recorder*. In 1933, the Indianapolis Police Chief Michael Morrissey was praised in his action to raid and shut down following subsequent pansy balls. The police response to pansy balls matters because other vices like prostitution and gambling persisted along the Avenue, yet police and segments of the Black community drew a line at openly gay Black entertainers. Understanding Morrissey and his ability to uphold the status quo of acceptable behavior is important to understand how the Avenue fit into the history of Indianapolis.

Morrissey was a first-generation citizen of Irish immigrants. Chief Morrissey rose in the ranks of the Indianapolis Police Department through the 1920s when Ku Klux Klan membership was at its highest in Indiana.⁷³ The Klan had as much disdain for the Catholic Irish community as they did for the large influx of Black people moving to Indianapolis during the second wave of the Great Migration.⁷⁴ Morrissey grew up on the near east side of Indianapolis in the Irish Hill neighborhood in a working-class Irish community. Morrissey's parents represented the few homeowners in the neighborhood.⁷⁵ The Irish assimilated into the fabric of Indianapolis beginning in the early 1900s.

The *Indianapolis Times* reporter Dennis John O'Neill, who was of Irish descent, exposed the Klan and their dealings in Indiana politics in 1928 driving the Klan into hiding.⁷⁶ Historian William W. Giffin states, "In the 1930s some Federal Writers' Project researchers concluded that the Irish in Indiana had been assimilated completely and had lost their distinctive ethnic identity."⁷⁷ Part of assimilating into White American society can be portrayed through anti-Black racism and repression. Certainly, a mode of American whiteness is maintaining a nuclear family that involved repressing homosexual desires. Homophobic Black community members adopted

certain tenets of whiteness such as respectability and decency that translated into published threats to call Chief Morrissey to Indiana Avenue if pansy shows were allowed to continue.

Chief Michael F. Morrissey, of the Indianapolis Police Department and his efficient staff officers are to be highly commended for their action Saturday night in frustrating what would have been a veritable theatrical exhibit of the entire local colony of degenerates; a bold attempt by promoters of the scheme to pollute the social atmosphere of the community with a new type of stenchy [sic] indecency.⁷⁸

The letter of praise to Chief Morrissey's reaction to the pansy balls does not mention that Morrissey was willing to overlook the vice occurring along Indiana Avenue, but he did not allow the "new type" of "stenchy indecency" to fester in an open environment. "Informed of the plans of the leaders of the 'Pansy' ball crowd to spit in the face of common decency by turning their nasty experiment into an annual affair."⁷⁹ A statement that suggests the promoters of the pansy ball were aware of their popularity since the pansy balls were planned annually. The pushback from Black community members prompted club promoters to refer to pansy balls as female impersonator shows in the future. "With Chief Morrissey's disapproval registered against all such programs for Indianapolis, backed by an outraged public, 'pansy' dancers will have to look elsewhere for a field in which to entertain."⁸⁰ Yet, Indiana Avenue operated as the "interzone" for Indianapolis which severely limited where gay Black men could entertain. In 1934, the pansy performers had more run-ins with Chief Morrissey:

Sally Rand has lost her fan, Give it back you nasty man. The "Sally Rand" was the pansies who gave a "female impersonation["] at the Grand Terrace last Friday night and were raided by the police. The nasty mans were the coppers who stopped the show. They were good enough not to arrest the "boys" ...They complain loud and long that they are decent and should be let alone. Chief Morrissey has other ideas. This is about the fourth run-in the lads have had with the boys in blue who are determined that they shall not show...More power to them...I mean the police.⁸¹ [author note: ellipses added by column writer, Charlie Davis.]

The open resistance from the pansy performers against Chief Morrissey and his officers prevented their arrests. Morrissey's mission to put an end to pansy shows on the Avenue meant that he saw pansy performers as an unacceptable form of entertainment. While the "Pansy

Craze” was met with little resistance in other major cities like Chicago, New Orleans and New York, in Indianapolis, there was open resistance from some members of the Black community.⁸² With the threat of the Police Chief to intervene, the pansy shows were not allowed to continue with the explicit homosexuality.⁸³ The pansy performers resisted loss of employment in the Black entertainment industry through open protest of Chief Morrissey’s police raids and cleverly transformed their act to drop reference to sexual orientation out of their show promotions and continued their craft as female impersonators.

The Illusion and Inclusion

In the first pansy ball to feature female impersonators in Black Indianapolis, many of the performers gave their real names as recognized performers among their community.⁸⁴ After the 1933 pansy ball, female impersonators gave fake female and male names in order to maintain a level of anonymity and protection from homophobic members of the Black community and to separate their stage persona from their personal lives.⁸⁵

In 1933, George Hansard was one of the female impersonators at the Pansy Ball. Hansard’s stage name was Gloria Banks who “lead [sic] a chorus of beautifully gowned, coiffured, massaged, and bleached ‘girls’ in a rhythmic intonation of ‘Forty Second Street.’”⁸⁶ Harold Blakey was another entertainer involved in the first pansy show. Blakey’s stage name was Frances Davis who sang “Stormy Weather” and “Hold me.”⁸⁷

The chorus done up in tights, brassieres, lip stick and everything, returned for an offering of “Honey Won [sic] You Please Come Home”. But the hot weather man demanded his pay. Two of the “girls” fainted.

This was the signal for a grand rush by the crowd eager to make a close examination of the performers.

Thanks to the cops, that day was saved for the “Girls” who were shied away by the Solicitous Raymond “Dee” who sought to preserve his proteges for their big midnight ramble at the beautiful Walker theater, Saturday night.

Others of the pansy cast who covet the spotlight of publicity were Dixie Jean (Harold Blankey); Coleen Moore (Buster Williams[]); Petite (Alphonso Horsley); Ethel Waters (William Shorter); Diris Hall; Lucy White (James White); and Mickey Mouse (Edward Anderson).⁸⁸



Figure 2 Female Impersonator Gilda is performing with arms raised over her head with a full jazz ensemble behind her. Photo taken at the Granville Hotel in Pittsburgh, PA ca. 1946-53. Black and white Kodak Safety Film; Charles “Teenie” Harris, American, 1908–1998; © 2004 Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles “Teenie” Harris Archive⁸⁹

There are no known photographs of the first pansy show in Indianapolis. Using photographs from other cities I extrapolate how the show was received, what the female impersonators wore and how the crowd may have looked in its racial makeup. Historian Laura Grantmyre conducted research on Black female impersonators of Pittsburgh’s Hill District from 1920 to 1950. Female impersonator shows were not unique to Indianapolis’ Black entertainment district. They flourished in Black entertainment districts throughout the United States during the jazz era. Grantmyre states, “a ‘live and let live’ ethos permeated Pittsburgh’s Hill District during its heyday, the 1920s through the 1950s. This relaxed ethos enabled female impersonators to perform in nightclubs, participate in parades, socialize in beauty parlors, sing in church choirs, and gather in neighborhood bars.”⁹⁰ The same is certainly true of the female impersonators of Indiana Avenue. *Figure 2* represents how the stage at the Granville Hotel in

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania looked like featuring the female impersonator at the microphone with a full jazz ensemble behind her to back her up musically. *Figure 2* shows how clubs in hotels on Indiana Avenue may have had a similar appearance during a “floor show.”

Black female impersonators not only sang, but also many danced to entertain their audiences. In *Figure 5*, Gilda is dancing closely with a male dancer in Caribbean themed costumes while the crowd looks on in a cramped dining room. What is compelling about this photograph are the White people in attendance as evidence that White people were common visitors to the interzones where vice and marginalized people like Gilda held a visible presence.

The *Recorder* advertised or reviewed nine female impersonator shows in the 1930s and nine female impersonator shows in the 1940s.⁹¹ These numbers may not seem significant, yet, not all of the shows featuring female impersonators were covered in the *Recorder* as one writer mentions that the female impersonator shows became an annual event after 1933.⁹² The threat of police raids made club promoters hesitant of advertising the shows publicly despite their popularity.⁹³ The *Recorder* sheds light on who attended pansy balls:

To [the] sponsors of the objectionable “Women Imitators” ball is attributed an asserted plan to make the affair an annual event.

It is highly desirable that police know this so as to be on the alert to appear of the scene and throw the performers out if they dare to stage another such ball here.

Police in other cities are on record as having put a stop to many such freakish programs for the good of their communities.

The same policy is needed in Indianapolis where there is a greater and greater tendency on the part of certain social elements to assume dual lives comparable to the celebrated Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

The surprisingly heavy patronage netted by the contemptible program from supposedly self-respecting men and women in all walks of life in this community is condemnable in the strongest of terms; for it represented an uncommendable state of mind on the part of patrons of the affair.

Were it not for our staunch belief that it wasn’t just a simple case of “Birds of the same” specie flocking together, the phenomenon could easily [be] explained.

The promoters of the dance are more to be pittied [sic] than censored. Their’s is obviously a problem to be completely ignored, but not discussed, for in doing so one might unwittingly awaken many an unsuspected, but sleeping dog in the manger.

The important question is whether [sic] or not the coming generation in Indianapolis is to be protected from the demoralizing effects of public programs, the like of which was staged in this city Thursday night of last week.

To what extent the people of Indianapolis will tolerate such indecency in our midst we do not claim to know.

But it is undeniable that the time has come for every decent citizen to rise up against all such repugnant entertainments in Indianapolis.

The “sleeping dog in the manger” did wake up across Indiana. On June 14, 1935, the “famous female impersonators from Indianapolis, stage names, Francis Davis, Doris White, Petite Swanson, Billy Moore” took their act to The Silver Slipper Night Club in Terre Haute, Indiana.⁹⁴ They were accompanied by the Beauma Brothers Orchestra. Yet, the female impersonators were credited with “doing their share of drawing the crowd.”⁹⁵



Figure 3 In 1935, female impersonator “Mae West” from Kansas City, Missouri performed on Indiana Avenue and another venue on the east side of downtown Indianapolis. Photo from *The Indianapolis Recorder* published July 13, 1935.⁹⁶

The chittlin’ circuit was not only taking Black Indianapolis talent out of the city, it was also bringing in talent. During the summer of 1935, “Mae West,” the female impersonator from

Kansas City, Missouri performed at a fourth of July dance at Pasco Hall and headlined the grand opening of the Lone Star night club at 1708 E. Twelfth street (see *Figure 3*).

In Indianapolis, White people who ventured on the Avenue would have experienced local female impersonator talent that received national acclaim. In 1936, Doris (Duchess) White (See *Figure 4*) made headlines as a national female impersonator icon.⁹⁷ White's act lasted a long 16 weeks in Columbus, Ohio and next she took on Chicago, Illinois where she worked in the same venues as famed pansy entertainer, Frankie "Half Pint" Jaxon. Jaxon was reported to stand at 5'2" and was a powerhouse entertainer. He pleased Indianapolis audiences in 1933.⁹⁸ Jaxon was known for throwing his voice into a falsetto and singing the female part in duets. Occasionally he sang both the man's and woman's parts and changed the lyrics of famous jazz songs. Jaxon's version of "My Daddy Rocks Me" has many overt sexual tones that culminates in the end with Jaxon imitating what is considered the first orgasm on a recorded song while he described a sexual relationship with a man referred to as "Daddy."⁹⁹



Figure 4 Doris (Duchess) White pictured on the left with other performers at the Defense Workers Social Club located at 318 1/2 Indiana Avenue. Published in the *Indianapolis Recorder* April 29, 1944.¹⁰⁰



Figure 5 Female impersonator, Gilda dancing with a male dancer in Caribbean style costumes while the audience looks on. Photo taken in Pittsburgh, PA ca. 1930-70; black and white Kodak Safety Film; Charles "Teenie" Harris, American, 1908–1998; © 2004 Carnegie Mus

In 1937, the *Recorder* reported on the star power of Doris (Duchess) White as she traveled the chitlin' circuit to Cincinnati, Ohio with a revue of other Black entertainers. After the fourteen-week show at the Rosebud Inn in Cincinnati, Doris reportedly said, "It's time to go now, girls!"¹⁰¹ In 1944, she worked two shows nightly at the Log Cabin Supper Club alongside newcomer female impersonator Ivy Anderson and other entertainers (see *Figure 6*). By the 1950s, The Duchess worked regularly in the bars and clubs along Indiana Avenue. Doris was rarely referred to as a female impersonator. Her level of acceptance in the Black community of Indiana Avenue and her talented status may have created a status of "Black woman entertainer" that was rarely given to female impersonators.¹⁰² The advertisement (see *Figure 6*) featuring The Duchess and Ivy Anderson is very ambiguous as to whether the picture of the woman is a female impersonator or not. This advertisement plays into the awe and mystery of the craft of female

impersonation that would attract patrons to attend the shows. They had to find out for themselves.



Figure 6 Female figure smiling in an ad featuring female impersonators: Doris Duchess White and Ivy Anderson. From the *Indianapolis Recorder* published 1944.¹⁰³

Gay Black men and Black transgender women were visible on the stages of Indiana Avenue and on its city sidewalks. Pansies lived in the apartments lining the Avenue as early as 1935.¹⁰⁴ In the 1940s, gay Black men and Black transgender women were openly walking the Avenue. Column writer Saint Clair Gibson wrote an open letter to *Recorder* staff writer Opal Tandy who was in Europe fighting in World War II. February 17, 1945, Gibson updated Tandy of the goings on back home. In the middle of the letter Gibson wrote:

Several new he-she's are now struttin' the Avenoo [author note: nickname for Indiana Avenue] like peacocks with their hair marcelled [sic] down to the bricks. We even saw one wearing earrings. Some of the less timid males are trying to put them on the make. It's the same old thing, Pal. There are all kinds of freaks, and we guess they will be with us always.¹⁰⁵

A reader responded to Gibson's column letter with a letter of support for gay Black men and Black transgender women:

I read your letter to the soldiers over-seas, which I thought was very nice to send them the hometown news. But one thing you didn't mention to him was, what the Negroes are doing in Indianapolis to help win the war. You dished him all the other dirt but that.

Mr. Gibson, you made a statement concerning the freaks. Which was out of bounds. That is my opinion. The *News*, *Star*, or *Times* wouldn't have dared to print in their papers about their people which you put in *The Recorder* about Freaks of our race.

Suppose everybody in this big world was just like you, tell me what kind of a place would this be to live in? So that is why God made different kinds of vegetables and fruits for those who dislike one will have the choice of the other.

Every real HE MAN with pants on is NOT A MAN; every woman in a dress on is not a real woman. Indianapolis will always be a southern town because it is made up of southern Negroes and whites who do not know the civil war is over. And as long as you are around, there will always be different kinds of people.

A citizen of Indianapolis.¹⁰⁶

Gibson admitted that the "reader fan" had a point in the letter and confessed, "We didn't mean any offense to those persons who practice or approve of this sort of thing. We, as human beings, know that this sort of thing will be going on long after this old bedraggled body is 'A molding in the cold, cold ground.'"¹⁰⁷ The reader letter invokes God who makes different types of fruit and vegetables as He does people to appeal to a religious audience. The most progressive paragraph was the last where the reader wrote about transgender people existing and how exhausting it was to deal with conservative people by labeling Indianapolis citizens "southern" people. Gibson struggles with the last paragraph of the reader's letter but acknowledges "regardless how you feel about the writer, you must admit that he has a right to his say."¹⁰⁸

"It's time to go now, girls!"

There is ample evidence in the *Indianapolis Recorder* that female impersonators were visible along Indiana Avenue from the 1930s well into the 1970s before Indiana Avenue started to fade with its crumbling infrastructure due to neglect by the government and the Black elites

moving away to northern reaches of the city away from the interzone where vice was allowed to flourish.¹⁰⁹ The poor were left to see their community fall apart around them. In 1968, bussing moved young Black students to schools further away from their community.¹¹⁰ Eventually, the local government completed their plan to bulldoze the buildings along Indiana Avenue to “revitalize” the city center to its current form that we know today. The IUPUI campus takes up a great portion of what used to be a poor Black neighborhood.¹¹¹ What is now the Ransom Place neighborhood, Crispus Attucks High School and the Madame Walker Theater are some of the last remaining vestiges in Indianapolis to a deeply segregated northern city where the Black community was forced to live together and put up with vices flourishing in the Black entertainment district. The female impersonators made up a part of that community relegated to the margins. The gay Black men who performed in the same jazz clubs as the greats deserve to be remembered as visible characters in the community. They do not deserve to be forgotten. Fortunately, the digitized copies of the *Indianapolis Recorder* and the ability to text mine the articles through key word searches, I found them and pieced together how they fit into the fabric of Indiana Avenue and the Black community of Indianapolis beginning in the 1930s until 1950.¹¹²



Figure 7 Carole, a female impersonator singer, before her reported surgery in Copenhagen. Photo from *The Indianapolis Recorder* published February 25, 1967.¹¹³

The pansy ball of 1933 points to a level of acceptance that many in the Indianapolis Black community had for gay Black men who took the stage and performed for their community. The pushback from homophobic community members made it so gay Black men had to rebrand their show to drop the homosexual connotation and take on solely a female gender expression. The idea was to pass as a beautiful Black woman through costume and makeup. This tradition continued well into the 1970s along Indiana Avenue that included Candy “Live the Life I Love” Le Verne from Indianapolis and Carole from Philadelphia (See *Figure 5*). The *Recorder* reported February 25, 1967 that Carole, born Harry Leslie Small, would undergo a “sex-change operation” in Copenhagen, Denmark. Carole is quoted as saying, “Black women in America are among the luckiest on the face of the earth and it will be marvelous to be one.”¹¹⁴ Without this long tradition of female impersonation in Black entertainment districts across the United States that emboldened Carole to take the stage first as an impersonator where she later affirmed that she is a transgender woman. This level of visibility and tolerance in the Black community challenges

the myth of hyperhomophobia placed on the Black community as well as a challenging level of resistance to heteronormative codes of whiteness permeating American society.

Returning to Indianapolis' first pansy ball is a letter of support by Mrs. Holloway printed in the *Recorder* following the backlash. Mrs. Holloway's letter printed September 9, 1933:

Editor: Having read in your worthy weekly an article deriding and censoring the recent female "impersonators" revue, I along with others became interested in knowing what the reason was for such attack. It seems to me that a little too much stress has been put on some forms of amusements while others, far more detrimental, are allowed to be tolerated.¹¹⁵

Mrs. Holloway referred to the Stag parties held at the "Casino" where men only were admitted:

for the sole purpose of satisfying a lust and passion of the lowest degree. The show, gladly given by a number of "ofay" [author note: white] women, was a source of pleasure for our gentlemen (some of whom, mind you, were indignant at the suggestion of an effort by our unfortunate members of the intermediate sex to entertain in a perfectly proper and legitimate manner).¹¹⁶

Mrs. Holloway was the only letter writer who printed her actual name and publicly defended the legitimacy of the pansy ball as well as its harmless form of entertainment considering that married men at stag parties were sleeping with White women.

Mrs. Holloway refers to gay Black men as being a part of the intermediate sex and even places quotation marks around "impersonators" in the letter. Her letter paints a more complex narrative of queer acceptance and levels of understanding in 1930s Black America during a progressive period in music, sexuality and politics.

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¹ Amusements. *Indianapolis News*. August 9, 1898. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INN18980809-01.1.6&srpos>

² "Visit the Crown Garden." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. September 10, 1910, p. 3. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19100910-01.1.3&srpos>

³ Wilson, James F. "The Somewhat Different Diva: Impersonation, Ambivalence and the Musical Comedy Performances of Julian Eltinge." *Studies in Musical Theatre* 12, no. 1. March 2018, 9–23. doi:10.1386/smt.12.1.9pass:[_]1.

⁴ "Help us complete the historic record." *Indianapolis Recorder*. University Library Digital Collection. IUPUI. <http://www.ulib.iupui.edu/collections/IRecorder>

⁵ George Chauncey. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940*. New York: Basic Books. 1994, p. 314. Grantmyre, Laura. "'They Lived Their Life and They Didn't Bother Anybody': African American Female Impersonators and Pittsburgh's Hill District, 1920-1960." *American Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 4, 2011, pp. 983–1011. *Crossref*, doi:10.1353/aq.2011.0053.

⁶ I contacted the Indiana Historical Society, Indiana State Archives, Indiana State Library, IUPUI Archives, Butler University Archives, and the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department Archives asking for assistance on my project and what they might have available for me to utilize in my research. The archivist for the Indiana State Library told me that I would need to take a "sideways approach" to my research that included consulting with "straight" materials and collections looking for context clues that indicated the presence of queer culture.

⁷ Here is an excerpt of the interview Esther Newton conducted with her informant:

Esther Newton: Why, by the way, don't you like "drag queen?" You prefer the term "female impersonator?"

Informant: To me I think "drag queen" is sort of like a street fairy puttin' a dress on. Tryin' to impress somebody, but "female impersonator" sounds more professional.

EN: What is a "street fairy?"

I: It's a little painted queen that wants to run around with make-up on in the street and have long hair, and everything, to draw attention. From Newton, Esther. *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. Phoenix ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, 17.

⁸ "Questions: What is your opinion of Pansies or Fags?" *Indianapolis Recorder*. October 20, 1934, p. 4. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19341020-01.1.4&srpos>

⁹ *Ibid.* October 20, 1934, p. 4.

¹⁰ "It's Your Responsibility Judge Baker-Sheriff Sumner." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. August 19, 1933, p. 4. Accessed 7 October 2018. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19330819-01.1.4&srpos>.

A citizen openly calls for the enforcement of the law and police to enforce banning future pansy shows in Indianapolis and Marion County.

¹¹ Wilson, Amy H. *The Swing Era on Indiana Avenue: A Cultural History of Indianapolis' African-American Jazz Scene, 1933-1950*. Thesis. IUPUI. 1997, pp. 134-135.

¹² Womack, Bob Sr. "Believe Me... When I Tell You." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. June 23, 1973, p. 10. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19730623-01.1.10&srpos>;

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¹³ "Look Out New York! Indianapolis Now Has Its Own Copyright 'Fairy' Show." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. August 5, 1933, p. 3. Accessed 7 October 2018. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19330805-01.1.3&srpos>

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 1933, 3.

¹⁵ My research interest in drag queens was sparked during class discussion during the Intro to Public History course in the Fall of 2016. Dr. Philip Scarpino mentioned gay men performing in the jazz clubs of Indiana Avenue. Dr. Scarpino directed me to graduate student, Amy Wilson's Master's thesis of history on the jazz era of Indiana Avenue.

¹⁶ Mumford, Kevin J. *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*. Columbia University Press, 1997, p. xii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 1997, p. xii.

¹⁸ Thornbrough, Emma Lou. *The Negro in Indiana before 1900: A Study of a Minority*. 1st Indiana University Press ed. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993. Originally published: Indianapolis, Ind.: Indiana Historical Press, 1957.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 1993, p. 229.

²⁰ Bolden, Clyde Nickerson. "Indiana Avenue." *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*. Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 730.

²¹ Moses, Wilson J. "Emma Lou Thornbrough's Place in American Historiography." *Indiana Magazine of History* 91, no. 1 (1995): 5. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27791801>.

²² Moses, Wilson. 1995, p. 5.

²³ Thornbrough, Emma Lou and Lana Ruegamer. *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

²⁴ Bodenhamer, David J., et al., editors. *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*. Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 1994, p. 3.

²⁶ Wilson, Amy H. *The Swing Era on Indiana Avenue: A Cultural History of Indianapolis' African-American Jazz Scene, 1933-1950*. Thesis. 1997, viii-ix. IUCAT IUPUI (*library catalog*), EBSCOhost (accessed July 24, 2018).

²⁷ *Ibid.* 1997, p. vii.

Wilson mentions *Indianapolis Monthly* magazine articles, *The Jazz State of Indiana* and *Nuvo* magazine as her secondary source materials

²⁸ *Ibid.* 1997, p. xi.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 1997, pp. 134-135

³⁰ Pierce, Richard B. *Polite Protest: The Political Economy of Race in Indianapolis, 1920-1970*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, pp. 7-8.

³¹ Bolden, Clyde Nickerson. *Indiana Avenue: Black Entertainment Boulevard*. Bloomington, Ind: Authorhouse, 2009, p. 1.

³² *Ibid.* 2009, p. 8.

³³ *Ibid.* 2009, p. 11.

³⁴ Lauterbach, Preston. *The Chitlin' Circuit: And the Road to Rock "N" Roll*. Norton & Company, Inc. 2012.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 2012, p. 13.

³⁶ Bodenhamer, David J., et al., editors. *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*. Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 329.

³⁷ Williams, David Leander. *Indianapolis Jazz: The Masters, Legends and Legacy of Indiana Avenue*. Charleston: The History Press, 2014, p. 86.

³⁸ Tucker, Sherrie. "When Did Jazz Go Straight?: A Queer Question for Jazz Studies." *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 4(2). 2008, pp. 1-16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21083/csieci.v4i2.850>

³⁹ Newton, Esther. *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. Phoenix ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. xv.

⁴⁰ Duberman, Martin B. 1993. *Stonewall*. New York, N.Y.: Dutton, p. 201.

⁴¹ Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890 - 1940*. NYC, N.Y: Basic Books, 1994, p. 320.

⁴² Baker, Roger, and Peter Burton. *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts*. Washington Square, N.Y: New York University Press, 1994, pp. 25, 26.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 1994, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Mumford, Kevin J. *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*. Columbia University Press, 1997; p. xvii.

⁴⁵ "Look Out New York! Indianapolis Now Has Its Own Copyright 'Fairy' Show." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. 5 August 1933, p. 3. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19330805-01.1.3&srpos>

⁴⁶ "Listening in with Charlie Davis." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. July 29, 1933. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19330729-01.1.4&srpos>. "It was in the Walker Drug Store last Thursday night that Lee Johnson was kidding some of the boys about the coming Pansy Frolic. All was well until Otto Ramsey walked in, still the kidding went on this time to Otto. And some of the things he told Lee (who really meant no harm)."

⁴⁷ Year: 1920; Census Place: *Indianapolis Ward 4, Marion, Indiana*; Roll: *T625_452*; Page: *5B*;

Enumeration District: *99*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 1920.

⁴⁹ Wilson, Amy. 1997, 138.

⁵⁰ Indiana Archives and Records Administration; Indianapolis, IN, USA; *Death Certificates*; Year: *1943*; Roll: *11*.

⁵¹ George Chauncey. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–940*. New York: Basic Books. 1994, p. 314. Grantmyre, Laura. “‘They Lived Their Life and They Didn’t Bother Anybody’: African American Female Impersonators and Pittsburgh’s Hill District, 1920-1960.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 4, 2011, pp. 983–1011. *Crossref*, doi:10.1353/aq.2011.0053.

⁵² Mumford, Kevin J. *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*. Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 20.

⁵³ “Look Out New York! Indianapolis Now Has Its Own Copyright ‘Fairy’ Show.” *The Indianapolis Recorder*. 5 August 1933, p. 3. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19330805-01.1.3&srpos>

⁵⁴ Grantmyre, Laura. “‘They Lived Their Life and They Didn’t Bother Anybody’: African American Female Impersonators and Pittsburgh’s Hill District, 1920-1960.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 4, 2011, p. 987. *Crossref*, doi:10.1353/aq.2011.0053. Grantmyre states that gay Black men were performing regularly in the Black entertainment district of Pittsburgh in the same time. I compare Pittsburgh’s Black entertainment district to Indiana Avenue; “Pansy Ball Vs. The Stag.” *The Indianapolis Recorder*. 9 September 1933, pp. 4. This article provides a voice of support for

Pansy Balls along Indiana Avenue; "Listening in with Charlie Davis." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. August 19, 1933; p. 6. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19330819-01.1.6&srpos>. "That one of the Pansy boys borrowed a dress from a lady living in Haughville to be in the show at the Paradise Gardens July 18 and has not returned it." I interpret this bit of local gossip as evidence of acceptance within the Black community since a community member loaned her dress to a pansy performer.

⁵⁵ "Jazz." *www.thesaurus.com*. www.thesaurus.com/browse/jazz.

⁵⁶ "Look Out New York! Indianapolis Now Has Its Own Copyright 'Fairy' Show." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. 5 August 1933, p. 3. Accessed 7 October 2018. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19330805-01.1.3&srpos>

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 1933, p. 3.

⁵⁸ I located many of the performers utilizing Ancestry.com that are referenced in the "Illusion and Inclusion" section. The pansy performers were living around Indiana Avenue and one performer previously worked as a clerk in the Crispus Attucks High School bookstore. Crispus Attucks was the segregated Black high school located close to Indiana Avenue.

⁵⁹ "'For Decency's Sake.'" *The Indianapolis Recorder*. 16 September 1933, p. 4. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19330916-01.1.4&srpos>

⁶⁰ *Ibid*. 1933, p. 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid*. 1933, 4. "I wish to call your attention to another menace and that is the conduct of a 'gang' of vagrants cut-throats and thieves who loiter about 25th St. and N. Western Ave."

⁶² Patrick, Borbin. "'All Clear' Is Swell: Air Force Show at English Tuneful Frolic." *Indianapolis Star (1923-2004)*, Apr 13, 1943, p. 11. *ProQuest*, <http://ulib.iupui.edu/cgi->

bin/proxy.pl?url=http://search-proquest-

com.proxy.ulib.uits.iu.edu/docview/1890648473?accountid=7398; Borbin states in the third paragraph, "'All Clear,' which remains at English's tonight and tomorrow night and certainly deserves to be seen, features a top-notch group of female impersonators who have a barrel of fun at the expense of their sisters-in-arms, the WAACS and otherwise exploit the foibles of the alleged weaker sex where it touches army life."

⁶³ "Queen Elizabeth: History's greatest Female Impersonator." *Indianapolis Star* (1907-1922); May 14, 1911; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Indianapolis Star pg. SM4

⁶⁴ McIntyre, O.O. "New York Day By Day" column. *Indianapolis Star* (1923-2004), Jun 04, 1927, p. 6. ProQuest, <http://ulib.iupui.edu/cgi-bin/proxy.pl?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1889436501?accountid=7398>.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 1927, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Rivera, Elex. "Believe it or Not, Washington Has Its Full Quota of 'Twilight Men.'" *The Indianapolis Recorder*. 30 April 1938, p. 13.

⁶⁷ Charles, L. E. "Two Words a Day" column. *Indianapolis Star* (1923-2004) Retrieved from <http://ulib.iupui.edu/cgi-bin/proxy.pl?url=http://search-proquest-com.proxy.ulib.uits.iu.edu/docview/1889993474?accountid=7398>

⁶⁸ Dr. Crane, George W. "The Worry Clinic" column. *Indianapolis Star* (1923-2004), Apr 23, 1948, p. 9. ProQuest, <http://ulib.iupui.edu/cgi-bin/proxy.pl?url=http://search-proquest-com.proxy.ulib.uits.iu.edu/docview/1890818854?accountid=7398>.

⁶⁹ "Whistling Girls and Those Men Are Bendy by Parents –Science." *The Indianapolis Recorder*, October 4, 1941, p. 1.

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- ⁷⁰ Rivera, Elex. "Believe it or Not, Washington Has Its Full Quota of 'Twilight Men.'" *The Indianapolis Recorder*. April 30, 1938, p. 13.
- ⁷¹ Russell, Thaddeus. "The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality," *American Quarterly* 60.1 (2008): 101–30
- ⁷² Davis, Charlie. "Listening in with Charlie Davis." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. May 5, 1934, p. 4.
<https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19340505-01.1.4&srpos>
- ⁷³ Giffin, William Wayne. *The Irish*. Indiana Historical Society Press, 2006, p. 75.
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- ⁷⁶ Giffin, William Wayne. *The Irish*. Indiana Historical Society Press, 2006, p. 77.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 78; Marion Co.-260.5-Ethnology, microfilm, roll 16, frame 0798, IFWPP.
- ⁷⁸ "Well Done Chief Morrissey." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. 12 August 1933, p. 4.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 1933, p. 4.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 1933, p. 4.
- ⁸¹ "Listening in with Charlie Davis." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. October 20, 1934; p. 4.
<https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=INR19341020-01.1.4&srpos>
- ⁸² "That Thursday Night Ball." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. August 5, 1933, p. 4.
<https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=INR19330805-01.1.4&srpos>; The article states: "We voice the unanimous sentiment of all law-abiding and tax paying citizens of Indianapolis in

advancing the suggestion that the chief of the Indianapolis police take steps NOW to prevent a recurrence of the outrage.”

⁸³ Grantmyre, Laura. “‘They Lived Their Life and They Didn’t Bother Anybody’: African American Female Impersonators and Pittsburgh’s Hill District, 1920-1960.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 4, 2011, p. 984. *Crossref*, doi:10.1353/aq.2011.0053.

⁸⁴ “Look Out New York! Indianapolis Now Has Its Own Copyright ‘Fairy’ Show.” *The Indianapolis Recorder*. 5 August 1933, p. 3. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19330805-01.1.3&srpos>

⁸⁵ “Jumpin’ Nitely at the Defense Workers’ Club.” *The Indianapolis Recorder*. April 29, 1944, p. 12. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=INR19440429-01.1.12&srpos>; This is one article of many that only mentions the female impersonators stage name.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 1933, p. 3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 1933, p. 3.

⁸⁷ “Look Out New York! Indianapolis Now Has Its Own Copyright ‘Fairy’ Show.” *The Indianapolis Recorder*. August 5, 1933, p. 3. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19330805-01.1.3&srpos>

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 1933, 3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 1933, 3.

⁸⁹ “Gilda.” *Black and white* Kodak Safety Film; Charles “Teenie” Harris, American, 1908–1998; © 2004 Carnegie Museum of Art, Charles “Teenie” Harris Archive.

<https://collection.cmoa.org/objects/5c120fc7-50d9-47d2-94f7-77c36cc76335>

⁹⁰ Grantmyre, Laura. "“They Lived Their Life and They Didn’t Bother Anybody’: African American Female Impersonators and Pittsburgh’s Hill District, 1920-1960.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 4, 2011, p. 987. *Crossref*, doi:10.1353/aq.2011.0053.

⁹¹ I conducted a key word search on the digitized copies of the *Indianapolis Recorder* with the following search terms: pansy, pansies, female impersonator, female impersonators. I limited the search to look at the 1930s and 1940s. In the 1950s, female impersonator shows are advertised with more frequency.

⁹² Roberts, Porter. "Praise and Criticism." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. March 20, 1937, p. 13. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=INR19370320-01.1.13&srpos>. Roberts wrote, "If I had my way: I would pours [sic] gasoline on every annual sissy (some writers call them pansy balls), and set them afire! The I would cus-out [sic] the mayors and police forces for letting them occur publicly every year."

⁹³ Wilson, Amy. 1997, 122.

⁹⁴ "Night Life in Terre Haute." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. June 15, 1935, p. 13.

<https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=INR19350615-01.1.13&srpos>

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 1935, p. 13.

⁹⁶ "“Mae West.”" *The Indianapolis Recorder*. July 13, 1935, p. 13.

<https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=INR19350713-01.1.13&srpos>

⁹⁷ "Female Impersonator Taking Columbus, O. Night Spot by Storm." *The Indianapolis Recorder*.

March 28, 1936, p. 13. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19360328-01.1.13&srpos>

⁹⁸ "Trianon Attraction." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. August 5, 1933, p. 3.

<https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19330805-01.1.3&srpos>

⁹⁹ Ellege, Jim. "Frankie Jaxon & Chicago's Jazz-Age Pansy Craze." Dissertation. Five Points: Georgia State University. 2011, pp. 167-68.

¹⁰⁰ "Jumpin' Nitely at the Defense Workers' Club." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. April 29, 1944, pp. 12. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=INR19440429-01.1.12&srpos>. Usually the articles will introduce the entertainer as a "female impersonator." White is listed in the photo caption by only her full stage name "Doris (Duchess) White."

¹⁰¹ "Naptown Performer Going Big in Cincinnati, Ohio." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. 1 May 1937, pp. 13. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19370501-01.1.13&srpos>

¹⁰² "Jumpin' Nitely at the Defense Workers' Club." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. April 29, 1944, p. 12. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=INR19440429-01.1.12&srpos>. Usually the articles will introduce the entertainer as a "female impersonator." White is listed in the photo caption by only her full stage name "Doris (Duchess) White."

¹⁰³ "Open Nitely Log Cabin Supper Club." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. May 27, 1944, p. 13. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=INR19440527-01.1.13&srpos>

¹⁰⁴ "Listening in with Charlie Davis." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. March 16, 1935, p.4. <https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=INR19350316-01.1.4&srpos>. Davis wrote, "Pansies in a certain Avenue apartment house are receiving plenty of rolling eyes."

¹⁰⁵ Gibson, Saint Clair. "The A-V-E-N-O-O: A Belated Letter to Pvt. Opal Tandy Somewhere in The European Theater of War." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. February 17, 1945, p. 12.

<https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=INR19450217-01.1.14&e=-----194-en-20-INR-1--txt-txIN-he%252Dshe%27s----->

¹⁰⁶ Gibson, Saint Clair. "The A-V-E-N-O-O." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. February 24, 1945; pp. 12.

<https://newspapers.library.in.gov/?a=d&d=INR19450224-01.1.12&srpos=1&e=-----194-en-20-INR-1--txt-txIN-he%252Dshe%27s----->

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* February 24, 1945; pp. 12.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* February 24, 1945; pp. 12.

¹⁰⁹ Bolden, Clyde Nickerson. "Indiana Avenue." *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*. Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 731.

¹¹⁰ Bodenhamer, David J., et al., editors. *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*. Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 9.

¹¹¹ Bolden, Clyde Nickerson. "Indiana Avenue." *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*. Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 731.

¹¹² Though female impersonators were visible and working along the Avenue up until the end of the Black entertainment district in the 1970s.

¹¹³ "Would Rather Switch." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. February 25, 1967, p. 1.

<https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19670225-01.1.1&srpos>

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 1967, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ "Pansy Ball Vs. The Stag." *The Indianapolis Recorder*. September 9, 1933, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 1933, p.4.