

IPS and the mystery of the missing *Indianapolis Recorder* newspapers: What happened, who benefits, and what are we going to do about it?

The Indianapolis Recorder (Recorder) newspaper is quite distinguished. It's America's 4th oldest surviving African American newspaper! The IUPUI Library has a Digital Collection spanning 1889 to 1916 and from 1926 to 2014: <https://ulib.iupui.edu/digitalcollections/IRecorder>.

Note, today, as we try to understand events from the 1921-1925 era surrounding IPS, and particularly from the Black perspective, we find 9 years of *Recorder* newspapers are mysteriously missing! From January 1, 1917 to December 31, 1925, some 468 editions are evidently nowhere to be found. What's also relevant, how did *Recorder* editors, journalist and columnists cover what happened in the city, state, nation and world during this span? See: Zeitgeist of the early 1920s <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Zeitgeist-of-early-1920s.pdf>

Notably, we'll never get to read the *Recorder's* coverage of the events leading up to and following the December 1922 creation of IPS high schools: Attucks, Washington, and a new Shortridge. Today's historians won't have the *Recorder's* news items and editorials around the [real story about the Klan and IPS](#). The *Recorder's* coverage of the [Citizens School Committee](#), [Federation of Civic Clubs](#) and Indy [Chamber](#), and other members of the [inner-circle of Indianapolis education decision-makers](#) who enabled a Jim Crow school district and perpetuated a segregated city--some say still exists, is gone.

As well, of course, today's readers will not see what or which 1917-1925 African and Pan-African, and other global events, were deemed as newsworthy by *Recorder* staff and publisher.

Fortunately, our own Mari Evans reminds us we live in "Up south" Naptown:
"Indianapolis is truly dichotomous; a city in which contradictions is truly the norm. It is easy to be deluded here, especially when one prefers delusion to clarity."

The missing *Recorder's* are a metaphor. Each represents a need for both a broad and in-depth factual peer-reviewed analysis regarding exactly where and with whom the foundation of IPS's history is rooted, thus calling for an accurate history of Indianapolis as well.

Indeed, our city had the *Indianapolis World* (1883-1932), *Indianapolis Freeman* (1884-1926), *Indianapolis Ledger* (1912-1925), and the *Indianapolis World Telegram* (1929-1940), reporting on this January 1, 1917 to December 31, 1925 era; nonetheless, these Black newspapers are not the *Indianapolis Recorder*.

This session aims to challenge citizens to not only grasp the fact some 468 *Recorder* editions have disappeared, but unpack who benefits from this absence, and what to do about it.

What? So what? Now what?

Exploring Local Revisionist History: The 9 years of the missing *Indianapolis Recorder*

The term **historical revision** means the act of questioning the established views while providing other evidence, or reinterpreting what was behind decisions of the people involved.

“Indianapolis is truly dichotomous; a city in which contradictions is truly the norm. It is easy to be deluded here, especially when one prefers delusion to clarity.” ~ Mari Evans

Author Evans is right. Indianapolis citizens seem to like delusion. We avoid asking about the biggest and most successful attempt at revisionist history in Indianapolis: *the 9 years (1917-1925) of missing Indianapolis Recorder newspapers*. That is around 468 editions! See for yourself: www.ulib.iupui.edu/collections/IRecorder.

This is a new form of revisionist history only Hoosiers, and invariably the *status quo* in Indianapolis, could pull off and get by with it: all is wiped away; all is silenced.

The contradictions here are that there have been no questions, outcry, or series of public forums or workshops about the missing editions by the *Recorder*, and/or Indiana Historical Society, or Marion County Historical Society, or Indiana State Museum, Indiana State Library, let alone the IUPUI Digital Library or Marion County Public Library. And, this does not include the local and state university Black history departments. Finally, what about the national and our local NAACP chapters, the Indianapolis Urban League, or even the Black Press USA/National Newspaper Publishers Association? *All look the other way; all are silent.*

The fact that, to date, the *Recorder* editions are missing is even beyond the concept of “historical amnesia” or “collective forgetting.” To make it clear: amnesia implies someone had something to forget; “reinterpreting historical events through a selective revisionist lens” implies there is something to reinterpret. *We, today, do not know what was published in the first place.*

This is a new form of manipulating history equal to the use of the “memory hole”¹ in the workings of the “Ministry of Truth” throughout Orwell’s dystopian *1984*, or the antics of the former Soviet Union under Stalin or Khrushchev which would simply erase a suddenly disesteemed comrade the Communist Party wanted removed from any official state historical photos.

“I woke up in the middle of the night screaming from a dream. This had never happened to me before. I was running downtown [Indianapolis] through a park filled with war memorials and tombstones, giant obelisks and monuments to the dead, and a small man stood on the marble steps, his face covered by a hood and he told me to turn around, but I did not.”

~ Transcript from Caller #12, *The Manufactured History of Indianapolis* (Reeves, 2013)

1. A memory hole is any mechanism for the alteration or disappearance of inconvenient or embarrassing documents, photographs, transcripts, or other records, such as from a website or other archive, particularly as part of an attempt to give the impression that something never happened.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memory_hole

At this point, Hoosiers with integrity can only assume the papers are missing on purpose. No one believes every single edition of the approximately 468 Recorder newspapers is missing by chance.

“[Here in Indianapolis,] we are programmed to disbelieve what we experience, this impacts how we view society and how we view ourselves.” ~ Mari Evans

Remember, 1916-1925 editions of the *Recorder* (America’s 4th oldest surviving African American newspaper) covered multiple, multiple significant global, national, and local (state, county, city, and neighborhood) African American events--tragic, violent, deliberate, homicidal, psychotic...horrific events. As well, the *Recorder* covered African American accomplishments: the triumphs of spirit; actions of culture, honor, courage; and, entire cultural/political movements, and each in spite of constant intimidation and blatant systemic racism.

We will not see the *Recorder* stories/editorials/columnists/letters to the editor covering the “Red summer” of the Oklahoma race riots; the torture, burnings, lynchings in the south; and, what’s most relevant, the *Recorder*’s coverage of the 1922 actions by our Chamber and the Federation of Civic Clubs, the *Indianapolis Times* and *Star*, and the meetings and decisions by the Citizens School Committee influenced IPS board to create Attucks.

Yes, the Chicago *Defender*, the Indianapolis *Freeman*, and *World*, plus local papers (*Star*, *News*, *Times*) are not missing, but they are not the *Recorder*.

1. **Why are 9 years of the *Recorder* still missing? Raising the curtain hiding the underbelly of Indianapolis**

“Don’t make waves; don’t be unpleasant; and if Truth is unpleasant, then avoid Truth.”
~ Mari Evans on life in Indianapolis

The fact of the missing *Recorder* editions is a metaphor; it represents a need for a clear and authentic history of Attucks and so IPS, and so our Indianapolis. Exposing, dismantling, and making aright the blatant bunkum of our city’s entrenched power structure are what is at the heart of the inspiration for my research and [Attucks: The school that opened a city](#). Now that the process has started, it will require a constant and courageous interrogation and dismantling of the Matrix which supports the “crooked” history.

Contemplate the following quotes to understand why the 468 *Recorder* newspapers are still missing:

2. “For a span of my memory this has been a city of opposing wills, two faces firmly set toward different directions—one covertly determined to maintain the status quo, to continually block any access to power, or to parity; the other advocating an active morality and its right to inclusion as an equal entity rather than a colonized one. This has been a city of perpetual confrontation, however cloaked, between the powerless and those who influence, control, and engineer the city’s movement in the inexorable and often ruthless march toward ‘greatness’...” ~ Mari Evans, *Clarity as Concept*

3. “I don’t think Indianapolis has ever been a place for radical or even progressive politics. Historically, it has been a place where you rear your family and people smile even when there’s nothing to smile about. Everybody acts right and stays in their place.” ~ The Rev. Thomas Brown, Ebenezer Baptist Church

4. “The most frightening thing about Indianapolis is Indianapolis, the fact that it continues to undermine itself by being someone other than what it is or who it is.”
~ Transcript from Callers #43-#47, *The Manufactured History of Indianapolis* (Reeves, 2013)

5. “[Here in Indianapolis,] we are programmed to disbelieve what we experience, this impacts how we view society and how we view ourselves.” ~ Mari Evans, *Clarity as Concept*
6. “The city [Indianapolis] shows us the things we want to see while we ignore the things you cannot face. In this way the city becomes a fractured mirror.”
~ “Axes & Mirrors” *The Manufactured History of Indianapolis* (Reeves, 2013)
7. “Indianapolis is truly dichotomous; a city in which contradictions is truly the norm. It is easy to be deluded here, especially when one prefers delusion to clarity.” ~ Mari Evans, *Clarity as Concept*
8. “It is a classic American story, the leitmotif of a nation whose contradictions are all the more searing in a prospering highly visible ‘all-American City,’ than elsewhere.”
~ Mari Evans on Indianapolis, *Clarity as Concept*
9. “What may set Indianapolis apart, though, is the local emphasis on getting along. Being a team player, fitting in, seems more crucial here than in many other places. To get ahead in Indy, you mustn’t want to change things, but improve them, oh so gradually.” ~ David Hoppe, NUVO magazine columnist
10. “What is more acceptable [here], more comfortable, is a high level of acculturation. Acculturation being defined as ‘to alter...through a process of conditioning.’” ~ Mari Evans, *Clarity as Concept*
11. “And so it is with Indianapolis. Looking back over the last 40 years, everything has changed and nothing has changed. This is a tale of 2 cities: “Locked in” to one city, “locked out” of the other. “Being ‘locked out’...one has to experience the acid psychological locking out that depends on color as the referent—not money, not manners, not clothing, not caste. Color.” ~ Mari Evans, *Clarity as Concept*
12. “‘Locked out’ is something that can be changed, something that must be changed, because for me, even at an early age, it produced an enormous rage, a rage that should not be dismissed as merely youthful or isolated.”
~ Mari Evans, *Clarity as Concept*
13. “Many Black folk thought of Indianapolis as urban, ‘Up South.’ It was better than being ‘down South,’ but it retained many of the negative propositions of the deep South and was not yet enlightened of ‘progressive’ as the West or East Coast counterparts. Conservatism and racism were alive and compatible.”
~ Mari Evans, *Clarity as Concept*
14. “Indianapolis, I tell friends in other places, is a city where the preservation of Euro-American cultural traditions and the enhancement of those traditions has been consistent. Not only consistent, but increasingly an economic factor too significant to be ignored or dismissed.” ~ Mari Evans, *Clarity as Concept*