

HOOSIER WOMEN AT WORK

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The Indianapolis Maternal Health League, African American Birth Control, and Public Health

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In their last meeting of the year on December 19, 1946, the Indianapolis Maternal Health League made their mission clear for the New Year. The group had voted to delete the previous number one Medical Policy of the Indianapolis Maternal Center, "Patients are accepted only upon the presentation of a written referral statement from a licensed physician, social worker, minister, social agency or hospital clinic." Beginning in 1947, the new top priority for the Maternal Health League was, "The services of the clinic are given to both white and colored women." With this statement promoted to the agency's top priority and the removal of the previous statement, the Indianapolis Maternal Health League ushered in a new year full of accessibility and opportunity. The League, beginning in 1947, focused the Indianapolis birth control campaign on creating a black birth control clinic through incorporating contraceptives into Indianapolis' public health program ran out of the Morgan Health Center. By April 1951, however, the Maternal Health League became almost entirely focused on pre-marital counseling. Birth control access for Indianapolis African Americans remained restricted. An examination of the interactions between Flanner House and the Indianapolis Maternal Health League, along with the Indianapolis Board of Health, reveals why a birth control clinic was not established at the Morgan Health Center in 1951.

In this paper, I will discuss the Indianapolis birth control movement's failure to reach African American women based on the Planned Parenthood of Central Indiana Records, Harvey N. Middleton Papers, the *Indianapolis Recorder*, and pertinent secondary literature. I argue that the City Board of Health's unwillingness to support birth control in the Indianapolis public health system and the Maternal Health League's resolution to remain outside the control of the City Board of Health severely restricted African American women's access to birth control. If George Kempf of the City Board of Health would have allowed the Maternal Health League to establish a birth control clinic at the city's main public health center for African Americans, then black women would have been able to procure birth control and contraceptive information from their own neighborhood.

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