The 1920s were a difficult time politically for the Catholics of the Diocese. Anti-Catholicism was a major factor in the politics of Detroit between 1919 and the mid-1920s; this was the case as well in many other Michigan communities. Anti-Catholic organizations in the state, the Ku Klux Klan premier among them, did decline sharply in membership and influence after 1925. But the presidential campaign of 1928 revived the cause, albeit temporarily, and gave anti-Catholic rhetoric a prominence in national political discourse that it had not had since the late nineteenth century. Al Smith did not lose the presidency in 1928 because he was a Catholic, or so it is eminently arguable. The prosperous 1920s were a thoroughly Republican decade. Probably no available Democrat could have beaten Herbert Hoover, who was, in that happy pre-Depression era, a much-admired man. (Smith's chief rival for the Democratic nomination in 1928 was also a Catholic, something that was conveniently forgotten as the campaign passed into the folklore of American politics.) But 1928 was still a blow to Catholic pride, and perhaps especially in Detroit, where Al Smith received only 37 percent of the vote.1

There was another side to the 1920s, however, at least in the Diocese of Detroit. Catholics in the city of Detroit made important political gains in that decade, a reflection of their considerable numbers and the growth of the Catholic middle class. These gains set the stage for the unprecedented Catholic successes of the 1930s, when Detroit's Frank Murphy was a rising star in politics, and the Roosevelt White House, wielding enormous powers of patronage, courted Catholics as they had never been courted before. This courtship yielded psychological as well as economic benefits: Catholic political confidence expanded perceptibly in the 1930s and the 1940s, even in a historically Protestant state like Michigan. And that expanded confidence meant, in the prosperous postwar years, something like emancipation for a good many Catholics. Religion ceased to be a divisive issue in the politics of Detroit. (Catholics by then were prominent on both sides of the political divide.) And even in Michigan politics, where Catholics were a distinct minority of voters, the religious preoccupations of an earlier generation had given way to a surprisingly ideological politics.
Catholics arrived politically, in good part, because the Democrats emerged after 1932 as the nation's majority party. (Catholics were still a mostly Democratic population even in the 1950s.) But their political success had to do as well with rising levels of income and education among Catholics, with the increasingly assimilated character of the Catholic population, and with the homogenization of national life that was born of depression and war. Political arrival, then, had not a little to do with economic and social arrival, although many Catholics in the 1950s, perhaps especially the well educated, clung to a sense of themselves as perennial outsiders in American life. There were relatively few Catholics, after all, in the upper echelons of government and industry and on the faculties of the most prestigious universities. And anti-Catholicism had emerged in a newly respectable guise by the late 1940s. No longer a mass movement, it was now the ideology of an urbane elite, who held to a thoroughly secular vision of American culture and democracy. This was certainly an important development. But it does not gainsay the remarkable progress made by a substantial portion of the Catholic population, many of whom were separated by only a generation from the hard realities of immigrant life.

The respectable anti-Catholicism of the postwar years did feed on some serious tensions, not all of which were rooted in the distant past. Catholic schools had long been a source of controversy, and the schools were a principal bone of contention in the years after World War II. But Catholics also found themselves increasingly isolated in their opposition to divorce and contraception. After the early 1930s, it was no longer possible to pretend that a Christian consensus existed with regard to the permanence of marriage and the immorality of birth control, and the Catholic position on these matters was increasingly seen as an eccentric one, admirable in the abstract, perhaps—and fewer and fewer Americans were even convinced of this—but hardly the grounds on which law and public policy could be based. Censorship too was an increasingly divisive issue, and for much the same reason. The Legion of Decency still had Protestant admirers in the 1950s, but the standards enforced by that organization were alien to a growing number of Americans. As for liberal intellectuals, uneasy Catholic allies in a revitalized Democratic party, they deplored what they saw as the Catholic penchant for a too-zealous anti-Communism. The Spanish Civil War had bred a bitterness between these camps that had not been forgotten in the early 1950s, when the rise of Senator Joe McCarthy gave liberal intellectuals new cause to worry about the political values of the large and growing Catholic population.

Many Catholics, of course, gloried in their sense of marginality, even as they resented it. A commitment to separate Catholic institutions grew stronger, generally, as Catholics became a wealthier and more assimilated population. Certainly this was true in the Archdiocese of Detroit, where the network of Catholic educational and social welfare institutions grew impressively in the twenty years after World War II. It was at least partly because of this that the intermarriage rate in these years remained relatively stable, and was lower than it seems to
have been for certain years in the 1920s, when Catholics were still a mostly ethnic population.

Prosperity and assimilation, then, did not result in an immediate erosion of Catholic institutional loyalties, although many critics of the Church had hoped that this would happen. For a time those loyalties grew stronger, and were perhaps the more “Catholic” for their being the less explicitly “ethnic.” But assimilated Catholics were generally more imbued with the values of the larger society than Catholic spokesmen liked to admit, and powerfully drawn to that society. Many educated Catholics were delighted by Pope John’s call for an “opening to the world,” and warmly sympathetic to the “secular” theologies that enjoyed such a vogue in the mid-1960s. The walls of the Catholic ghetto were not impermeable; the most enthusiastic Catholic proponents of the new secularism, indeed, had generally been bred within those walls, which they proceeded to attack in the 1960s in a fine display of native optimism. Only thoroughgoing Americans could have been so impatient with the claims of tradition.

Those ghetto walls opened out in the 1960s on a world in political turmoil. For Detroiters, at least, the turmoil had above all else to do with race: the city’s troubled and episodically violent history of race relations came to a culmination of sorts in the 1960s, as Detroit moved from an increasingly polarized politics—in which race was the principal issue—to a major riot in 1967. The events of the 1960s had profound effects on the local Church: its members were more seriously divided over issues of social policy than had perhaps ever been the case. And the exodus of whites from the city placed dozens of parishes in financial jeopardy. Detroit’s Catholic leaders had been reluctant, for the most part, to address the problem of race relations in the city before the crisis of the 1960s. But even the more conservative among them had undergone a fundamental change of heart on the question in the wake of the Second World War. The Catholic leadership in Detroit was willing to accord a legitimacy to black aspirations in the 1960s that it had not done in 1943, when Detroit was the site of the then-most-deadly race riot in the nation’s history. This change of heart was of major importance, especially for the Church but also for Detroit. It is appropriate, then, that the history of racial attitudes among Detroit’s Catholics, and the history of race relations within the Church itself, should be a major focus of this chapter. That it occupies the concluding section of the chapter—following sections devoted to marriage and sexuality, to partisan politics, and to the Second World War—is in no way meant to belittle its importance.

**Intermarriage, Divorce, and Contraception**

Bishop Michael Gallagher apparently believed that mixed marriage was a problem in his diocese. The Chancery over which he presided was often careless when it came to gathering statistics—Catholic Directory figures for Detroit are especially unreliable in the Gallagher years—but the bishop asked in 1925 that a parish-by-parish accounting of mixed marriages be compiled for the entire Dio-
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cese. That particular year was a happy choice: markedly fewer dispensations were issued in 1925 than was the case in 1924 or 1926. And the incidence of mixed marriage in that year was lower than it is reported to have been for most years in the 1920s: just under 23 percent of the marriages performed in the Diocese in 1925 had involved a non-Catholic partner. But that figure masked a disturbing trend. Mixed marriages only rarely occurred in the foreign-language parishes: just under 5 percent of the marriages in Detroit’s ethnic parishes had been mixed in 1925. In the English-speaking parishes of the city, however, more than 30 percent of the marriages had involved a non-Catholic. Presumably the incidence of mixed marriage could be expected to rise in the future, as mass immigration came to an end and the ethnic populations were assimilated.

But this is not what happened. The incidence of mixed marriage seems to have stabilized in the first half of the 1930s, when from 22 to 24 percent of the marriages recorded involved a non-Catholic. No figures are available between 1938 and 1942, but the rates thereafter generally ranged between 22 and 25 percent. An upward trend is not apparent until the mid-1960s, when the incidence of mixed marriage began a rise that culminated in the highest rates that have ever been recorded for the Archdiocese as a whole. Thirty-four percent of the marriages performed in 1969 were mixed; 38 percent in 1972. Only recently has a modest downward trend been evident.

The apparent stability in the incidence of mixed marriage between about 1930 and the mid-1960s is a rather remarkable phenomenon, given the increasingly assimilated character of the Catholic population. It is perhaps explained in part by the disciplined religious practice that was more and more evident among that population, especially in the middle class. But it probably had more fundamentally to do with the great expansion in Catholic secondary education that began in the 1920s. The parochial high school helped to keep the adolescent’s world a Catholic one, and this increased the chances that even thoroughly Americanized youngsters—including the not-particularly-devout—would eventually marry Catholics. The growing number of Catholic youth organizations in the Archdiocese was significant in this respect as well.

The Catholic secondary school was important too as a source of reinforcement for Church teaching with regard to marriage. And reinforcement was needed, at least according to Catholic spokesmen. The incidence of divorce was at record levels in the early 1920s, and continuing its seemingly inexorable rise. Divorce, moreover, was losing much of its stigma, at least in the nation’s larger cities. “A few years ago a divorced man or woman lost something of social status and was generally looked at askance, and divorce was regarded as a family disgrace,” the Michigan Catholic pointed out in 1921. “At present divorce is accepted as a matter of course, having, perhaps, incidental evils but of no inherent wrong.” The liberal Protestant clergy were sometimes blamed by Catholics for this dolorous state of affairs, but popular entertainment—particularly the now ubiquitous movies—was a far more frequent scapegoat. The marriage in 1920 of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford occasioned a series of outraged editorials in the
Michigan Catholic, for both stars had been previously married, and their immense popularity threatened to give divorce and remarriage a romantic legitimacy in the eyes of many Americans. Perhaps at their pastor's urging, the members of the St. Agnes Sodality at Detroit's St. Elizabeth's Church pledged to boycott any film in which either Fairbanks or Pickford appeared. The Michigan Catholic praised their "sacrifice," and noted that "a like movement" had recently been inaugurated in Holy Redeemer parish.

The growing acceptability of divorce was evidently of concern to Bishop Michael Gallagher, for he ruled in 1923 that Catholics under his jurisdiction must henceforth have episcopal permission to file for divorce. Such permission had in fact been mandated by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, but Bishop Foley had apparently seen no need to have a diocesan regulation to this effect. There is a certain irony here, for Foley's tenure had spanned a period of rapid and dramatic increase in the incidence of divorce, while the Gallagher years were marked by a much more gradual rise, as indeed were the Mooney years that followed. But Gallagher's flock was an increasingly assimilated one, and presumably the more susceptible to shifts in social values. Archbishop Mooney, for his part, was certain that the largely assimilated Catholic population had been seriously affected by the culture's tolerance of divorce. "It is evident even to the casual observer," he wrote, probably in the mid-1940s, "that the evils of civil divorce have lessened the respect our Catholic people should have for the sacred bond of marriage."

There is evidence, in fact, to indicate that this was true, although Catholics were notably different from other groups in their attitudes toward divorce. A 1958 survey found that Catholics in Detroit were much more likely than Protestants or Jews to think that divorce was "always" or "usually" wrong. Two-thirds of the middle-class Catholics questioned were of this opinion, as were 63 percent of the working-class Catholics. (In both groups, respondents were more likely to say that divorce was wrong than that birth control was always or usually wrong.) Still, more than one-third of the Catholics questioned were apparently convinced that divorce was morally acceptable in many cases. But Detroit's Catholics in 1958 had a relatively low incidence of divorce: 8 percent of the Catholics in the sample had been divorced, compared to 16 percent of the white Protestants. Among the Jewish respondents, interestingly enough, only 4 percent had been divorced, although the great majority of those respondents claimed to believe that divorce was not usually wrong.

Catholics, then, were both markedly different from the rest of the population in their views on divorce, but affected too by the tolerant attitudes that prevailed in the larger society. Such, at least, is the picture that emerges from this particular study. Some of the Catholics who did not believe that divorce was wrong were obviously marginal Catholics: those who attended Mass irregularly, the study noted, were much more likely to condone divorce than those who were weekly churchgoers. But there were regular churchgoers too who were tolerant of divorce. Perhaps they knew first-hand of deeply unhappy marriages, or were
troubled by the suffering that was an inevitable consequence of the Church's unyielding stand on the indissolubility of marriage. But whatever their motivation, this minority, which proved to be a growing one, was clearly inclined to a less legalistic view of morality than the Church endorsed. They were obviously supported in this inclination by a pragmatic, broadly tolerant society.  

Divorce was not a cause of political conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Detroit, despite their markedly different views. Divorce had been legal for a very long time in most American jurisdictions, and Michigan's divorce law was not a notably liberal one. Matters were quite different, however, with respect to contraception, which was increasingly a topic of public debate in the decades after World War I. Catholic spokesmen in Detroit, like their counterparts in other dioceses, were vociferous opponents of efforts to make birth control more freely available; increasingly—and especially after 1930—they were seen as the principal opponents of liberalized laws and policies with regard to contraception. This led to a growing hostility toward the Church on the part of many non-Catholics, who argued that Catholics had no right to impose an essentially sectarian morality on a religiously diverse population. (This was, of course, very much the argument that Catholics had used against Prohibition and Sabbatarian laws.) The growing isolation of the Church in its opposition to contraception was an important source of the evident sense of "otherness" that prevailed among many assimilated Catholics in the decades after World War I. And it meant that the issue of birth control came to loom almost unnaturally large in the mind of the Catholic community. Opposition to birth control was a veritable badge of tribal membership for growing numbers of Catholics, and a touchstone of loyalty to the Church.

Still, there were apparently many Catholics who largely ignored the Church's teaching on birth control. The Catholic birth rate in the 1920s declined more rapidly than that of American Protestants, although Catholic families were still, on average, much the larger. But large families were mainly found in the immigrant generation; native-born Catholics tended to have markedly smaller families than their immigrant forebears had done, especially when those native-born Catholics lived in cities. It is not certain, of course, that these smaller families were achieved by means of contraceptive practice. But many Catholic spokesmen thought that "sinful artificial causes," in the words of the Michigan Catholic, had much to do with the fall in the Catholic birth rate. "Many letters have come to me disagreeing with the attitude I have taken towards Catholic women who persist in limiting their families," one of the paper's syndicated columnists wrote in 1928. "Some of these women have insisted that I am behind the times. Some go so far as to say the Church is narrow."  

The editor of the Michigan Catholic invariably attributed reactions like these to obstinate bad faith: it was "weak-kneed, so-called liberal Catholics" who succumbed to the siren song of the birth-controllers. But there were those who thought that the problem had more fundamentally to do with the failure of the Church to explain the grounds on which contraception was forbidden. "I know
of no Catholic who believes in divorce," a recent Catholic college graduate wrote in 1937, "but I know of innumerable Catholics who have been led to believe that birth control is not only advisable, but absolutely necessary. They do not know why it is wrong; i.e., they do not understand the ends of marriage, nor the evils of frustrating a natural faculty, and hence they are practicing various means of contraception, and believing that they are quite within God's law, or at least getting around it neatly."9

The Catholic hierarchy and the Catholic press by 1937 had long since abandoned their reticence on the subject of contraception, and it is initially hard to see how Catholics could have remained in ignorance of Church teaching. A part of the explanation may lie in the relatively arcane nature of the Catholic argument against contraception. Most Catholics were not at home with "natural law" concepts, and may well have had trouble understanding the logic of an argument that seemed to ignore pragmatic considerations of individual and social good. Opposition to divorce made eminent sense in a population where social mobility, and even survival, depended on family solidarity; opposition to contraception was perhaps less evidently sensible, for small families were at a clear advantage when it came to achieving security and a degree of social mobility. Then too, it is possible that many priests were reluctant to question penitents closely in the confessional with regard to contraception, thereby encouraging those penitents to think that birth control, at least in their own circumstances, was not gravely sinful. There were venerable grounds in pastoral theology for a prudential practice of this sort, and it was one that would surely have eased the burdens of pastoral life, especially in working-class parishes. Indeed, there were bishops and priests, both in Europe and America, who claimed that this "laxist" approach was common in the confessional. But we have no way to know for certain whether or not this was the case.10

We do know, however, that contraception was more and more openly and widely addressed in the American Church in the decades after 1920. It was in the 1920s that birth control began to be acknowledged publicly as a fact of American life, and in this same decade the availability of inexpensive and generally effective contraceptives was greatly increased. It was in the 1920s too that the birth control movement in the United States ceased to be the domain of bohemians and political radicals, and began to acquire a soberly professional aura. Against this tide of social change, the Church in Detroit, like the Church elsewhere, hastened to erect defenses. The Michigan Catholic began to editorialize on the evils of contraception, something that it had hitherto done only rarely. Birth control, readers were repeatedly told, was an abominable crime—against the laws of God and of nature. It weakened the marriage bond and promoted immorality. It was a danger to the physical health of the individual and the moral health of the nation. And it meant a diminished ability, on the part of the nation, to defend itself in time of war. (The proponents of birth control, by this logic, were unpatriotic as well as immoral.) How frequently—and how explicitly—the topic was addressed in sermons in the 1920s is something we do not
know, although the priests of the Diocese were obliged by then to follow a prescribed course of sermon outlines that included a sermon on marriage. For the matter was not an easy one to address, at least in clear and unmistakable terms, before a large and varied audience. It makes sense, however, to assume that the growing frankness of the Michigan Catholic with regard to contraception had echoes in the realm of pastoral practice.  

It was still possible in the 1920s, if not entirely perspicacious, for Catholics to believe that their views on birth control were shared by most professing Christians. Only a minority of liberal Protestant clergy were willing to publicly endorse the practice of contraception by married couples. But the situation was fundamentally altered with the coming of the Great Depression. The terrible suffering of the early 1930s gave weight to the arguments of liberal theologians, and a number of Protestant leaders then, and even a few denominations, gave conditional sanction to contraception. The most publicized of these pronouncements was that of the Anglicans’ Lambeth Conference in the summer of 1930: married couples might licitly use birth control, the conference resolved, if their desire to avoid pregnancy did not result “from motives of selfishness, luxury, or mere convenience.” A standing committee of the Federal Council of Churches in the United States gave a guarded blessing to contraception just a few months later. And numerous local denominational bodies also endorsed the practice. The Detroit Methodist Episcopal Conference, for example, adopted a resolution late in 1931 that made the provision of contraceptive information to married couples an obligation of pastors, who were held to be responsible for the “family happiness” of their parishioners.

The birth control movement acquired other respectable supporters too over the course of the 1930s. They included growing numbers of physicians and social workers, and a variety of moderate to liberal reformers. The General Federation of Women’s Clubs called in 1935 for repeal of the longtime ban on the distribution through the mails of contraceptive information and devices. And the American Medical Association voted in 1937 to recognize contraception as “proper medical practice.” There was growing popular acceptance of the practice too, as evidenced in part by a sharply diminished birth rate. An equally telling sign was a widespread tolerance, at least in large cities, for the promotion and sale of birth control devices, even where this was against the law. “Contraceptive displays are on view in many Detroit stores,” the Michigan Catholic noted bitterly in 1935. “Why can’t Catholic organizations here take ... action to enforce the law?” But the law itself was under siege by then, for the birth control movement was better organized in the 1930s than it had ever been before, and well aware that public opinion was undergoing a major shift with regard to contraception. The Birth Control League of Michigan, founded in 1931, quickly emerged as a tenacious lobby for the repeal of anti-birth-control laws at the state and the federal levels. It was active as well in raising funds for a growing network of “maternal health” clinics in the state, which provided contraceptive information and devices to a mostly working-class clientele. (Detroit had four such clinics by 1937, the first
of which had been opened in 1928.) That these clinics had Catholics among their clients was something of which the Chancery was unhappily aware: twenty-two of the fifty-four patients referred to one Detroit clinic in the latter half of 1937 had identified themselves as Catholics, at least according to an anonymous report on the clinic’s operation.13

Catholic spokesmen were shocked by the seemingly sudden legitimization of birth control, and embittered by what they saw as a Protestant betrayal on the issue. This was clear in the Michigan Catholic’s editorials in the early 1930s, and in the numerous opinion pieces that the paper reprinted from national Catholic publications. “The last twelve months have witnessed attacks upon the family emanating not only from pagan sources, but even from groups commonly thought to be Christian,” an editorial from America asserted in 1931. “The sole defender of the family in this supposedly Christian country is the Catholic Church.” The sense of betrayal, and of acute alarm, was not confined to the American Church. Pius XI issued Casti connubii, his 1930 encyclical on Christian marriage, at least in part as a response to the Anglican decision to tolerate contraception. The encyclical provided a comprehensive synthesis of Catholic teaching on contraceptive practice, and directed the clergy to enunciate that teaching in clear and uncompromising terms, especially in the confessional. How quickly and extensively the encyclical affected pastoral practice is impossible to determine, but its effects were real and evidently widely felt. “At all events,” as John T. Noonan has noted, “its issuance was of immense relevance to the question whether a Catholic could practice contraception in the innocent conviction that it was not a sin. The publicity of the encyclical itself in an age of rapid diffusion of the news made such innocence less likely.”14

If the particulars of pastoral practice must remain a mystery, we know that the early 1930s saw a much more aggressive Catholic role in the politics of birth control. Numerous Catholic organizations were mobilized in defense of laws that limited or prohibited access to contraceptives. The League of Catholic Women was notably active in Detroit, lobbying against repeal of state and federal birth control laws, and against the provision of public monies to local birth control clinics. The Holy Name Society too issued regular condemnations of the birth control movement and its various legislative goals. Catholics were an important constituency in the Democratic party, and their protests were widely effective: not a single bill endorsed by the National Committee for Federal Legislation on Birth Control was passed by the Congress in the 1930s, and many states retained restrictive laws with regard to contraception. But Catholics paid for these victories, both in terms of revived hostility to the Church and an increasing sense of their own estrangement from a growing population of Americans.15

The 1930s was a significant decade on the birth control front for one additional reason. Recent medical findings had made possible a more effective use of periodic continence—the “rhythm method”—as a means of avoiding conception, and these findings were widely publicized in the early 1930s, both in the United States and Europe. There was considerable uncertainty as to the condi-
tions under which “rhythm” might be tolerated or even recommended by a con-
fessor, for Casti connubii had not spoken to the question. (Pius XII gave an
explicit blessing to the method in 1951.) But the practice was apparently increas-
ingly common in the 1930s and the 1940s. This seems to have been the case in
the Archdiocese of Detroit: the Chancery announced a mandatory conference
for priests in 1945 on “the morality of artificial birth control and rhythm and
the treatment of these matters in the pulpit and the confessional.” The two
priests who addressed the conference stopped well short of endorsing the rhythm
method as morally acceptable for all married couples, but agreed that it might
be tolerated by confessors under a fairly wide variety of circumstances. And both
assumed that a good many Catholics had attempted to use the method as a means
of family limitation, although not always with the proper motives or under cir-
cumstances that would warrant a confessor’s approval. The more conservative
of the two, indeed, was of the opinion that contraceptive practice among Catho-
lics was disturbingly widespread, and that Catholics were often reluctant to ad-
mit that such conduct was seriously sinful. “There can be no doubt in the mind
of any confessor about the prevalence of the evil of birth control by contraceptive
methods,” Msgr. John Linsenmeyer asserted, “and his experience proves to him
that only a few of those who practice these methods make their acts matter of
confession.”

It was almost certainly true that substantial numbers of Catholics were using
forbidden means of family limitation, even in the 1940s. They were, however,
a distinct minority in the Catholic population, at least according to survey data.
(A survey done in 1955, for example, estimated that about 30 percent of Ameri-
can Catholic women were using “artificial” birth control.) But a significantly
larger minority of Catholics apparently believed that contraception was not
necessarily sinful. Only 56 percent of working-class Catholics in Detroit, accord-
ing to a 1958 study, thought that birth control was “always” or “usually” wrong.
Middle-class Catholics were more likely to endorse Church teaching, but fully
one-third of these respondents thought that birth control was not usually a sinful
practice. Catholics were still much more likely than Protestants or Jews to be
opposed to contraception, as this and other surveys indicated. And Catholic op-
position to birth control was still a factor in politics. But the changing values
of the larger society had clearly had an effect on the Catholic population. Cer-
tainly the Chancery assumed, by the late 1950s, that contraception was routinely
practiced even by church-going Catholics. It was on these grounds that the arch-
diocesan director of the CCD was moved, in 1957, to criticize the increasingly
popular custom of parents receiving communion with their children on First
Communion Sundays. “It seems inconceivable to me,” Msgr. Edward Burkhardt
wrote, “that, in any given group of First Communicants, there would not be par-
ents who are habitual and unrepentant in their use of birth control, and who,
under the pressure of the situation, would not hesitate either to conceal such
a sin from a priest or to lie to the priest about his or her dispositions.” Cardinal
Mooney apparently spoke to the issue at the priests’ retreat that year. And in
1959 a Chancery directive forbade all First Communion ceremonies where parents received the sacrament together with their children.\textsuperscript{17}

Contraception, then, was a source of division within the Church well before Vatican II. It is true that Catholic attitudes and behavior with regard to birth control changed more rapidly in the decade after the council than they had apparently done in the 1950s. But by the time of the council it was evident that American Catholics, for all their disciplined religious practice, were more and more inclined to a view of sex in marriage that departed fundamentally from papal teaching. Not that this teaching had been static: Pius XII had made an enormously important concession in 1951 when he endorsed the rhythm method for all Christian couples, provided that they had acceptable motives—and these he defined with unprecedented generosity—for avoiding conception. The Pope even expressed the hope that medical science would one day make the rhythm method a truly certain means of family limitation. But Pius XII, like his successors, was deeply ambivalent about sexual expression in marriage: the rhythm method, as Paul VI admitted, was acceptable largely because it imposed a period of continence on the couple, because it required them “to dominate instinct by means of . . . reason and free will.” This was a view of married sex that fewer and fewer of the laity were willing to accept. Indeed, before the 1960s had drawn to a close, the growing estrangement of the laity with regard to sexual ethics had done more than anything else to create a crisis in episcopal authority.\textsuperscript{18}

**Politics**

The early 1920s saw a resurgence of organized anti-Catholicism that was very nearly national in scope, although its wellsprings were mainly in the South. It was to some extent a continuation of prewar trends. But the anti-Catholicism of the 1920s had a more intensely xenophobic flavor than it had had before the First World War, and an apparently broader appeal. This unsavory chapter in American political history had to do in part with a troubled economy—high rates of inflation and unemployment bedeviled the nation between 1919 and 1922—and with a postwar upturn in foreign immigration. These problems were acutely manifested in Detroit, where unemployment was at crisis proportions in 1921, and where rapid population growth, much of it due to immigration, had caused a serious housing shortage. But the surly political mood of the country had at least as much to do with a soured idealism and a frustrated longing for order. The crusading spirit of 1918 had given way to a bitter sense of betrayal, for it was almost immediately clear that the war had failed to establish a new morality internationally. Nor had America been purified by her first great foreign crusade: a wave of strikes and riots followed hard upon the war, and then an outbreak of the most pervasive lawlessness in the nation’s history. (The lawlessness was occasioned by the advent of Prohibition, which was yet another failed crusade. For its advocates had hoped to restore the country to a mythic purity and uniformity.) The politics of the early 1920s, then, were freighted with
an almost intolerable burden of disappointed hopes and exaggerated fears. It is hardly surprising that Catholics, along with blacks and Jews and the foreign-born, should have found themselves in the role of scapegoat.\textsuperscript{19}

The rising tide of discontent was apparent in Michigan even in 1919. The campaign to outlaw parochial schools was coming by then to resemble a mass-based movement, although it fell well short of majority support within the state. A more disturbing indicator, at least for non-Catholics, was the growth in the state of the Ku Klux Klan, which had only recently been resurrected as a whitesupremacist organization. The resurrected Klan, however, was also bitterly anti-Catholic, and it was principally on an anti-Catholic platform that it came to prominence in Michigan and in Detroit. The height of Klan power in the state was apparently achieved in 1924, when a write-in campaign for mayor of Detroit nearly succeeded in placing a Klan-backed candidate in office. That campaign—it was a three-man contest—was a vitriolic one, and the results revealed a deep religious division within Detroit's electorate. But the victor in 1924 was in fact a Catholic, one John W. Smith, who was easily reelected in 1925. Smith was the beneficiary of an enormous Catholic vote in both elections, Catholics being by far the largest minority group in the city. He ran well too among Detroit's growing population of blacks and among Jews, for both groups were even more fearful of the Klan than Catholics were. (The Klan, then, was probably an unwitting engine of Catholic political progress.) Smith's winning coalition in 1924 and 1925 was very much that which had launched Frank Murphy on his Detroit political career in 1923, when he was first elected a judge of the Recorder's Court.\textsuperscript{20}

Klan strength in Michigan waned rapidly after 1925, the result in part of well-publicized financial scandals within the national organization. But the decline had to do as well with a change in the national mood: the xenophobic fever of the early 1920s had cooled perceptibly by 1925. This was due partly to a now-booming economy, and partly to the recent success of the nativist lobby in securing the most stringent legal restrictions on immigration in the nation's history. And there was a growing revulsion at the excesses of the various movements that championed the cause of so-called Nordic supremacy. The public did not turn decisively against the assumptions that underlay such movements, although the growing secularity of the culture had already weakened the basis for anti-Catholicism. Nonetheless, as John Higham has written, “the nation's traditional values undoubtedly exercised a quiet brake on xenophobia.”\textsuperscript{21}

The change in mood was apparent on many fronts by 1925, but perhaps nowhere more so than in the vicinity of Lapeer, where the Church Extension Society had in 1923 begun an experiment in rural evangelization. Lapeer County had been an important center of Klan activity in the early part of the decade, and had twice voted in favor of the anti-parochial-school amendment. By the mid-1920s, however, pastors there were able to report a noticeable thaw in Protestant-Catholic relations. Father John Parker, for example, who came to the village of Davison in 1926, found many Protestants who were eager to be
part of a parish musical comedy production, staged to raise money for his tiny congregation. “Half the cast is non-Catholic,” he noted. “We have a professional director, a hired orchestra, and almost a Klan chorus. It’s going to be some show.” By the spring of 1927, Father Parker had lectured locally at the Literary Club and at the high school, and had agreed to hold the high school baccalaureate services for 1927 in the Davison Catholic church. And he was pleased to report that local Catholics had “succeeded in getting the stores of Davison to close for Good Friday afternoon. This stopped a Methodist Episcopal supper that was to be given on Good Friday evening.” Nor was Father Parker’s experience a singular one. His confreres in neighboring villages had similar stories to tell.22

Passions had cooled to such an extent by 1928 that it was possible for the Democrats to nominate a Catholic candidate for president. Al Smith’s candidacy was inevitably of great symbolic importance for Catholics, and, perhaps just as inevitably, occasioned a groundswell of anti-Catholic propaganda, especially in the South. “The country is being flooded with anti-Catholic literature,” the Michigan Catholic complained in September. “These spurious, silly and vicious charges have been exploded a thousand times.” For its own part, the Michigan Catholic had remained above the battle, as had most of the Catholic press. The paper gave only the most limited coverage to the Smith campaign, and, true to its tradition of nonpartisanship—a tradition, at any rate, since the turn of the century—did not endorse the Democratic standard-bearer. The editor, indeed, praised both nominees for their qualifications, pointing out that the election of either would make religious history, for Herbert Hoover was a Quaker, and no Quaker had ever been elected president. But he did see fit to carry a syndicated column, called “Your Ready Answer,” which was meant to help Catholics counter the many arguments that were being advanced against Smith on the grounds of his religion. These did not necessarily have to do with theology or Church discipline. On September 13 the column was devoted to the objection that “Catholics are not fitted to hold high office. They haven’t the refinement other Americans have.”23

Smith was not as badly defeated, at least in terms of the popular vote, as the Democratic nominee had been in 1920. Nor had his party fared well in 1924, for it was badly factionalized and seemingly resigned to long-term minority status. But if Smith’s defeat looks in retrospect to have been very nearly inevitable, it was still painful for many Catholics. The campaign had been an ugly one, and Catholics were all too aware that Hoover was the first Republican to have broken the “Solid South.” This alone seemed likely to doom the presidential aspirations of Catholics for a long time to come. But Smith had run surprisingly well in a number of large industrial cities, although Detroit was not among their number, and he had done better than expected among Western farmers. This suggested an emerging base for a revitalized politics of reform, should the Democratic party overcome its divisions and chart a fresh ideological course. Such a thing seemed unlikely in prosperous 1928. But by 1932, conditions were very
different. The party was poised on the verge of the "Roosevelt revolution," and Catholics were about to see their political fortunes altered.

Something like this had already happened, in fact, in the city of Detroit, where Frank Murphy had been elected mayor in 1930 and again in 1931. The 1930 election had pitted Murphy against the incumbent Charles Bowles, whose corrupt administration—shocking even by Detroit's lax standards—had resulted in his recall and a subsequent special election. Bowles had been the Klan-backed candidate for mayor in 1924 and 1925, and there were reform-minded Catholics locally who counseled Murphy not to run. Bowles would surely raise the religious issue with Murphy in the race: "It is his big card," Father John McNichols, SJ, pointed out, and there was "enough small-minded Protestantism in Detroit to make it count." But religion was not an overt issue in the 1930 campaign. Father McNichols had perhaps drawn unwarranted conclusions from Al Smith's defeat in 1928. Or he may have assumed that the advent of hard times meant a resurgence of anti-Catholicism in politics, as it had so often done in the past.  

In 1930, however, hard times gave birth to an issue-oriented politics, at least in Detroit. Murphy ran well that year in the city's ethnic neighborhoods and among blacks and Jews—an uneasy coalition of the reform-minded and the dispossessed. And his first year in office produced programs and rhetoric that reinforced the loyalty of this varied constituency. Murphy was an early proponent of what eventually came to be known as New Deal liberalism. "We have been in an era of extreme individualism," he commented in 1934. "It has been best expressed in the industrial order, where it was believed that every man should look out for himself. But this individualism is ruthless and un-Christian, because every man does not have a chance to look out for himself. We shall have to substitute a socialistic sense for this individualistic sense." In a devastated Detroit, where unemployment may have run to 50 percent at the depths of the Depression, talk like this was bound to elicit a response that cut across religious lines. Detroit was indeed a polarized city in the early 1930s, but it was more and more a polarization based on social class.  

Still, Frank Murphy was a source of pride for the great majority of Catholics locally, and a powerful symbol of the group's political coming-of-age. The rise of Father Charles Coughlin to national prominence coincided with the Murphy mayoralty, something that strengthened the association of Murphy, then a Coughlin ally, with Catholic political assertion. The superior of the Good Shepherd Sisters in Detroit was presumably typical of a good many Catholics in her response to Murphy's victory in the 1931 primary. "We are all very happy over the results," Mother Patricia wrote from her convent, "and we watched the returns with great interest. During all day Tuesday, Oct. 6th, prayers were being said in our chapel by Sisters, Magdalens and children, and lights kept burning that if it were God's holy will you might be the choice of the people of Detroit." Father Michael Cefai, pastor at St. Paul's (Maltese) Church in Detroit, had also seen the hand of God in the 1931 primary. "Once again the people have spoken," he wrote to Murphy, "and once again, through them, God has manifested His
Will. God wants you to be Detroit's Mayor.” Loyalties like these were hardly a secret in Detroit, and there were last-minute efforts to rally the so-called Protestant vote against the mayor. But if this had any effect at all, it probably worked to augment Murphy’s impressive margin of victory. Catholics did better than ever before in contests for the City Council, too: when the votes had been counted in 1931, four of its nine members, chosen at-large, were Catholics. Murphy’s career for the rest of the decade was closely linked to that of Franklin Roosevelt, who regarded Murphy as a principal ally in the Midwest and an important liaison to Catholics. Murphy’s association with Roosevelt, in turn, strengthened his image as a champion of the poor, and helped to broaden his appeal among non-Catholics. And this helped to undermine the long tradition of religious division in Michigan politics. The state broke with another, albeit related, tradition in 1932, when it gave its electoral votes to Roosevelt—he was the first Democrat to have carried the state since 1852—and elected a Democratic governor and legislature. Frank Murphy himself ran for governor in 1936, although his religion was widely thought to be a handicap in so heavily Protestant and traditionally Republican a state. That handicap was presumably a major reason that Murphy’s victory in 1936 was a narrow one—far narrower than the margin by which a triumphant Roosevelt carried the state. But it was victory nonetheless, and Murphy took office in 1937 as Michigan’s first Catholic chief executive.

Governor Murphy’s term in office was an eventful one. Michigan was a principal arena of labor strife in 1937, and Murphy gained national notice—notoriety, in some quarters—for his role in mediating the sit-down strikes at General Motors and Chrysler. For a time, indeed, his reputation was such that he was prominently mentioned, and not only in Michigan, as a possible presidential candidate in 1940. Murphy himself was not immune to presidential fever, and made it a point to speak frequently outside the state during his term as governor, although he never ceased to worry that his religion might be a fatal handicap in a national race. The Murphy-for-president “boomlet” came to an end, however, in November 1938, for he was decisively beaten in his bid for re-election as Michigan’s governor. A weakened economy had eroded his support, and he may well have paid a price for his prominent identification with the cause of industrial unionism. There were those who thought that this was the case among conservative Catholics. “Many of those who gave lip-service to Social doctrines you have enacted into law deserted their own party to vote against you,” a leading layman in Detroit informed a disappointed Murphy. “We know that this is true and this kind of defection, in my judgment, had much to do with your losing the election.”

The balance of Murphy’s career was played out on a national stage. He served as Roosevelt’s attorney general from 1939 until 1940, and then as an associate justice of the Supreme Court. But he left behind him in Michigan an important political legacy. Murphy had attracted a coalition of interest groups to his various campaigns that eventually transformed the Michigan Democratic party, and
this transformed party, after World War II, made Michigan a genuine two-party state. For the mostly Democratic Catholic population, this meant a greater political leverage than it had ever had before. Murphy, moreover, both symbolized and helped to generate a growing Catholic political confidence. If Michigan's Catholics did not wholly outgrow their defensive mentality when it came to public life, they were notably more at ease in the political arena by the close of the Murphy era.\textsuperscript{29}

This heightened confidence is evident in the increasingly systematic attention that Michigan's bishops gave to politics. The state's five Catholic bishops agreed in 1942 to give their joint support to what was in effect a Church lobbyist, who was “to look after our interests in Lansing while the Legislature is in session.” In 1944, the bishops established the Michigan Catholic Welfare Committee. Made up of charity and school officials from each of the Michigan dioceses, the committee was expected to monitor state legislative developments and to recommend action, where it was appropriate, to the bishops of the Michigan Province. The committee proved to be an effective lobby on a number of strictly Catholic matters, and it regularly worked with other religious and civic groups on a variety of larger issues. In 1958, for example, the Michigan Catholic Welfare Conference, as it was now known, had a hand in the defeat of a proposal to mandate Bible reading in the schools, worked—unsuccessfully—for a bill to ban most Sunday shopping, and supported successful measures to restrict the sale of “indecent literature.” In each of these endeavors, the conference had substantial non-Catholic support.\textsuperscript{30}

There was little non-Catholic support, however, for state aid to parochial schools, something that had long headed the Catholic political agenda. Limited gains had been made, to be sure. The Michigan legislature voted in 1939 to authorize local school districts to provide bus transportation to children who attended nonpublic schools. By the 1950s, the parochial schools were the beneficiaries of public health services and government-subsidized milk and hot-lunch programs. There were numerous cases too where parochial school pupils made use of public school facilities. But it was clear that Michigan's voters would not countenance any direct subsidy to parochial education, and Catholic leaders were deeply resentful on this score, as were untold numbers of Catholic parents. Their resentment seems to have grown significantly in the decade after 1945, as the cost of Catholic education began its precipitous rise.\textsuperscript{31}

The issue was an increasingly divisive one at the national level too. The Catholic bishops' longstanding opposition to federal aid to education was politically awkward by the late 1940s, as Cardinal Mooney, among many others, was uncomfortably aware. But those bishops who did not object in principle to federal aid were unwilling to support it without provision being made for aid to parochial schools. This demand touched off an acrimonious debate in the late 1940s, one that did considerable damage to Catholic-Protestant relations.

That debate has continued, albeit in generally muted tones, up to the present day, with the federal courts having played a major role in defining the
terms of the dispute. For Michigan’s Catholics, however, the parameters of the debate were abruptly narrowed in 1970, when a referendum amended the state’s constitution to prohibit any public funds from being expended on nonpublic schools. “Proposition C,” as it was known, had been opposed by a broad coalition of religious and political leaders, and contested by Catholics with much the same vigor they had brought to the “school amendment” campaigns of the early 1920s. Its passage was a death-knell for a number of financially troubled schools. And it seemed to many Catholics to constitute a repudiation of their rights as citizens—to call into question the political progress that Catholics had purportedly made.32

But that progress was real, notwithstanding Proposition C. The proposition, indeed, had been initiated in response to a major Catholic victory in the Michigan legislature, which had voted early in 1970 to make state funds available for the purpose of subsidizing lay teachers’ salaries in nonpublic schools. (This form of “parochiaid,” as it was popularly known, was subsequently held to be constitutional by the state supreme court.) Some of the considerable support for Proposition C was certainly rooted in anti-Catholic sentiment. Some of it represented an inchoate anger at rising taxes. But there were many voters who genuinely believed that a strong system of public schools was essential to the health and continued political openness of a multiracial and multiconfessional society, and that the state had an obligation to devote its resources to the public schools alone. Perhaps they were wrong; many Catholics thought that they were. But the logic is not inherently anti-Catholic.

WAR AND RUMORS OF WAR

Relatively few Catholics in the 1930s were much concerned with questions of foreign policy, although the world was clearly in a parlous state. Many leaned to a vaguely isolationist position, hoping to forestall American involvement in a second European war. But the issues that were real to the vast majority of Catholics were domestic issues, unemployment preeminent among them. Domestic issues were of major importance to the hierarchy too and to prominent members of the laity. For Catholic leaders like these, however, the 1930s was also a decade of struggles over foreign policy, struggles that invariably pitted the Church against the forces of secular liberalism. Those forces were triumphant, more often than not: Catholics protests had not prevented American recognition of the Soviet Union nor appreciably altered American policy with regard to Mexico. But Catholics were instrumental in shaping the American response to the Spanish Civil War, an achievement for which they paid a price, both in terms of liberal hostility to the Church and their own sense of alienation.

Archbishop Mooney stood with the rest of the hierarchy in its support of the Franco forces. But he was apparently troubled by the bitterness of the debate that raged domestically over Spain, and by the tendency on both sides to see matters in simplistic terms. Sympathy for the Spanish Republic, he told the Apos-
tolic Delegate in 1941, should not necessarily be taken as an index of hostility to the Church. "For my own part, I am inclined to allow a large margin of error on this matter to non-Catholics in general," he wrote, "and in fact to all who have no exact knowledge of the situation in unhappy Spain." The principal lay supporter of Franco's cause in Detroit was likewise inclined to more modulated opinions in private than he was in public. Arthur D. Maguire, a local attorney, was capable in 1938 of likening Catholic defectors from Frank Murphy's camp to "reactionary Catholics in Spain," who "took all hope out of the hearts of the Common people—that was one of the main causes of the Spanish Civil War." Significantly, perhaps, he wrote these things to his archbishop.33

Still, the public campaign in defense of Franco was as uncompromising in Detroit as it was elsewhere. The Michigan Catholic was not as extreme in its editorial rhetoric as certain Catholic organs were, but its coverage of the war was lurid and wholly uncritical, and it leveled bitter criticism at the Catholic Worker for that paper's editorial stance in favor of neutrality. The war in Spain was a "crusade," the editor pointed out. "If 'The Catholic Worker' is right in its advocacy of neutrality on the Spanish issue, then the Popes were wrong when they encouraged the Catholics to wage war on the Turks at Lepanto and before the gates of Vienna." The principal focus of activity locally was a petition drive early in 1939 in support of a continued American embargo on arms to Spain. Arthur Maguire chaired the drive in Detroit—it was part of a nationwide campaign, orchestrated by the National Council of Catholic Men—and under his direction the work proceeded with apparent dispatch. "The committee has addressed a letter to pastors," the Michigan Catholic reported on January 12, "and tens of thousands of petition blanks are being distributed among societies and parishes in the Detroit area. . . . The signed petitions will be picked up Jan. 19 by students of the University of Detroit under the direction of the Rev. Joseph A. Luther, SJ." Before the month was out, Maguire was claiming a total of more than 175,000 signatures. Under the circumstances, this seems to indicate a widespread support among Catholics for the embargo.34

That support, of course, may have tapped isolationist sentiment as well as sympathy for Franco's cause. A Gallup poll in 1938 concluded that slightly more than half of American Catholics were either neutral on the Spanish question or partisans of the Loyalists. But in Detroit, as in virtually every other diocese, the Catholic leadership was solidly on the Nationalist side. The one dissenting voice locally was that of Msgr. Joseph Ciarrocchi, whose La Voce del Popolo gave a qualified editorial blessing to the Loyalist cause, on the grounds that the Loyalists were fighting a "triple facism"—and against enormous odds. The embargo, in his view, was not neutrality but a dangerous partiality, and he opposed Catholic efforts to retain it. Ciarrocchi's unorthodox position earned him a sharp rebuke from the Chancery early in 1939, after which he promised to be silent on the Spanish question. "But I am sorry . . . that I cannot retract what I have said on the matter," he told Chancellor Edward Hickey, "as I would be an hypocrite and betray principles of Justice as I see them." He had not changed his views a de-
cade later, when he confided to Cardinal Mooney his deep misgivings about what he assumed was the hierarchy's support for American recognition of the Franco regime. "To protect Franco's reactionary and tyrannical regime would be a stain worse than the one coming from the upholding of Mussolini," he warned. "You would probably not experience immediately much damage, but all faux passes are paid in history sooner or later."35

Spain and Mexico were distant tragedies, the stuff of propaganda. But the war in Europe was by 1940 the uneasy preoccupation of growing numbers of Americans. The tenor of the national debate over foreign policy grew increasingly shrill in 1940, when Catholics were prominently associated with the anti-interventionist camp, although there was a considerable division on the issue among the national Catholic leadership. Pearl Harbor put an end to the debate, and ushered in four grueling years of war, from which the United States emerged as incontestably the world's most powerful nation, and one with a potentially vast international role. The country was fundamentally changed because of this, and in ways that eventually led to new political divisions among Catholics. In the shorter term, however, the war meant a heightened unity within the multiethnic Catholic population, and worked as well to diminish the distance between Catholics and other Americans. For the war was a powerful agent of national homogenization.

What made the war so effective in this respect was not simply its length or its totality, although these were immensely important. Day-to-day life on the home front meant a consciousness of national purpose and identity that was greater than anything experienced in previous conflicts. Even more significant, however, was the radically egalitarian ideology that was deployed in the struggle against Nazism. The domestic applications of this ideology were widely ignored or even resisted: Detroit is not the only city whose wartime history is scarred by racial violence. But the war years also saw the first federal measures against racial discrimination in hiring, and saw the rise of an unprecedented militancy among Northern blacks—an important new dimension in urban and national politics. And this had meaning for Catholics, although religious bigotry by the 1940s could hardly compare in intensity to hatreds based on race. For anti-Catholicism had since the 1890s been substantially fueled by theories about the genetic inferiority of peoples from Southern and Eastern Europe. Insofar as racist thinking was delegitimized, Catholics stood to benefit. An inevitable by-product of the assault on the racist mentality, moreover, was a celebration of the virtue of tolerance. That celebration was so much a part of American life in the postwar years that some religious leaders—not all of them Catholics—feared for the doctrinal integrity of their respective churches. But there is no doubt that the altered mood meant an easing of religious tensions. Significantly, as we have noted, the anti-Catholicism of the postwar decade was largely an elite concern, and not a mass-based movement.

Detroit and its satellite cities were powerful symbols, during the war, of American industrial might. But they were more troubling when taken as images of
the nation's common life, for they were severely congested, wracked by racial and ethnic animosities, and by a rising incidence of delinquency and family instability. It was problems of the latter sort that seem most to have worried the local Catholic leadership, who found it especially hard to bless the wartime employment of married women. "Parents, your responsibility for your children comes before any other consideration," the pastor at St. John the Evangelist warned in 1943, disturbed by a "notable increase in the absentee list of our school." Still, the employment of wives and even mothers was clearly a necessity, for there was an acute shortage of workers locally by 1943. Several parishes, indeed, had wartime day nurseries on their premises, and the Felician Sisters opened a nursery for the children of defense workers at the Guardian Angel Home in Detroit in 1942.36

What redeemed such sacrifices, for a man like Archbishop Mooney, were the veritably holy purposes for which he believed the Allies were fighting. "The fate of our country and of Christian civilization hangs in the balance," he wrote to his priests toward the end of 1942, urging them to say a "Victory Mass" each Sunday and to devote the weekly Holy Hour to prayers for local soldiers and the victims of war. In much the same spirit, he assured his priests that the national flag could be displayed in church during Mass and other ceremonies; indeed, it ought to be displayed, if parishioners so requested. The "religious foundations of patriotism" that Mooney commended to his clergy's care have, of course, a venerable lineage. The Archbishop's wartime rhetoric is easily matched by any number of local sermons during World War I. But the Second World War had a demonstrably greater effect on the worldview of most Americans than the much briefer involvement in the First World War had done. The relative restraint of domestic rhetoric during World War II is an ironic witness to this: there was not much doubt at home about the threat or the fundamental evil of the enemy. This unanimity contributed mightily to the sense of national purpose that was so important a product of the war. And it gave to postwar foreign policy a crusading flavor that commended it to most Americans and perhaps especially to Catholics, for whom the apocalyptic vision of a John Foster Dulles bore a kind of tacit imprimatur.37

Mobilization meant that Catholic institutions, like most others, were permeated by a consciousness of the war and its apparently imminent threat to the American mainland. Parochial schoolchildren, like their public-school counterparts, had weekly air-raid drills, and Sacred Heart Seminary offered regular lectures on civil defense, where, in the words of the Holy Trinity parish chronicles, the participants "were instructed about what to do when the bombs really come." Marygrove College instituted mandatory "victory courses" for its students in the winter of 1942; "these classes covered every phase of work and study that women might need in a war emergency," the IHMs' historian has explained, "from auto repair to general principles of international law." And there was no parish so small that its life was not colored by the war, its Sunday bulletins filled with news of parish boys in the armed forces, its women's groups given over to Red Cross
sewing, its liturgies and devotions directed to the cause of peace with victory. Father Emmet Hannick of St. Rose parish in Detroit was a model wartime pastor: each of the more than 650 parish men who entered the military received his pastor's personal blessing and a rosary and missal, according to a longtime friend of Father Hannick. “He kept in touch with all the boys with personal letters, sending Christmas packages and other gifts from time to time.”

The war meant new institutional experiences too. Catholics had provided their own recreational services to soldiers in the First World War, when the Knights of Columbus had regarded itself as a rival of sorts to the Salvation Army and the YMCA. But during World War II, Catholics joined with Protestants and Jews in the United Services Organization (USO). The USO in Detroit had an interfaith executive committee and a presidency that was supposed to rotate among Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish representatives. The first president was a Catholic, who was duly succeeded by a Jew. But Henry Myers was so effective in the job that the executive committee asked him to serve for the duration of the war. “Father Clancy was a prime mover in this,” the executive director of the local USO remembered, having reference to Father Raymond Clancy, who served as the committee’s Catholic representative. The Detroit USO was an ambitious operation, coordinating the services of nearly 20,000 volunteers. And for many of those who worked closely with it, the experience was a profoundly ecumenical one. “This was the first time in Detroit, I am told, that Catholic, Protestant and Jewish organizations . . . had ever worked together— at such a high level—to supervise such a large organization,” the executive director later recalled. “The results were most inspiring, and their wholesome shadow must have been of great help in future programs.”

It was an altered Catholic community, then, that emerged from the war: less divided within itself, more fully integrated into American life. It was an altered world as well, filled with unexpected international tensions and, for all the veneer of domestic conservatism, a fundamental restiveness at home. The most consequential signs of the times, domestically, had to do with race: a new black assertiveness, coupled with a delegitimization of racist ideologies, meant a renegotiation of race relations in the United States, beginning—but not ending—with an assault on legal segregation. That renegotiation was a long and sometimes violent process, and one that changed the face of American life. It changed the American Church as well, notwithstanding its relatively small black membership.

CATHOLICS AND RACE

Detroit had only a small black population before the First World War. (There were just under 6,000 blacks in the city in 1910, about 1.2 percent of its total population.) Their small numbers had helped to blunt the worst effects of racism: the city’s principal black district was home as well to many whites, and the black elite enjoyed surprising access to white political and business circles. The city’s
public schools, moreover, had been integrated in 1871, albeit at state behest and only after several years of bitter white resistance. Nor was the color line invariably drawn in public accommodations: many of Detroit’s restaurants complied with the terms of Michigan’s 1885 civil rights act and served blacks, while the city’s theaters in the late nineteenth century were open to all comers. The great majority of blacks, to be sure, were confined to poverty by a segregated labor market, and in no condition to appreciate the relative freedom enjoyed by more affluent members of their race. Still, their situation was freer and more secure than that of blacks in the post-Reconstruction South.40

For all the tolerance accorded the local black elite, the vast majority of whites in Detroit before 1914 held unabashedly racist views. (This was true, indeed, as late as the 1940s.) Catholics were no different in this respect from other Detroiters, despite their own experience of bigotry. Catholics, in fact, were widely believed to be more aggressively anti-black than many of their contemporaries, for it was Catholics with whom blacks typically competed for jobs and housing. Detroit’s heavily Irish Corktown district was reputed to be a dangerous place for blacks in the nineteenth century, and gangs of Irish toughs harassed black citizens on occasion in the city’s principal Negro district. Black leaders, in their turn, were sometimes bitterly xenophobic in their rhetoric, lending support, in the 1890s and after, to proposals for immigration restriction and even, in several notable instances, to the virulently anti-Catholic American Protective Association.41

Despite the tension that prevailed between blacks and certain segments of the Catholic community, Catholic spokesmen locally, in the years before World War I, were largely silent on the issue of race. Bishop Foley is not known to have spoken publicly on the matter, nor, evidently, did any of his clergy. The Michigan Catholic, on the other hand, ran periodic editorials on the question of race relations, although these almost never had reference to the local scene, and it regularly carried news about the spread of Catholicism among American blacks and in Africa. Longtime editor William Hughes was proud of the universality of his Church, and sensitive to the egalitarian strain in American culture. He was capable in 1890 of applauding a Michigan Supreme Court decision that upheld the public accommodations section of the state’s civil rights law and that endorsed “an absolute, unconditional equality of white and colored men before the law.” He gave front-page coverage in 1891 to Archbishop Ireland’s call for abolition of the color line, including an end to laws against miscegenation. But Hughes was by no means free of the racism that permeated his society, and his editorials endorsing legal equality for blacks were considerably outnumbered by those that argued for segregation in the South and a rigidly limited sphere of equality in the North. “A great part” of the black population, the Michigan Catholic declared in 1892, “are essentially as much pagan as their ancestors in Africa.” Hence they did not merit the suffrage, not in the South, at any rate, where their numbers were so large. “First make the Southern negroes socially the equals of white, by making them as a class, what they are not now, a moral people, hon-
est, industrious and well-behaved generally, and then political equality will follow as a matter of course, without the aid of constitutional amendments or of political agitation."

Hughes was willing to grant, at least in his more reflective moments, that blacks were potentially worthy of political equality; in this sense his was not a purely racist point of view. But by the mid-1890s, with racist thinking coming more and more to dominate the nation’s intellectual life, Hughes spoke increasingly in terms of an ineradicable inferiority. His paper came very close to condoning the widespread practice of lynching—"the law of the land holds no deterrent strong enough to prevent black ruffians from outrages on white females"—and defended laws against miscegenation. There were "ordinances set in man's inner being," the Michigan Catholic declared in 1893, "which decree that the races shall not intermingle." For this reason, all but the most perfunctory social contact between the races was impossible. Intimate association with blacks caused "revulsion and disgust" in whites, the paper asserted in 1897, arguing against the appointment of the first black cadet to the Naval Academy. Presumably the same revulsion would justify nearly every instance of discrimination that occurred in Detroit, and perhaps even the illegal practice of segregation in public places.

The Michigan Catholic was never again as stridently racist in its editorials as it was in the mid-1890s. The ebbing of racist passions nationally was evident after the turn of the century, and the calmer mood was reflected in the paper's columns. William Hughes could argue with genuine conviction against the evils of lynching by 1906, and he seldom had reference, after 1900, to crime and sexual immorality among blacks. Indeed his paper made no comment at all about the rapid growth of Detroit's black population during and after 1915, despite an ominous increase in racial tensions locally. But it was clear that Hughes and his associates assumed that blacks in the North would live and work, at least for the foreseeable future, almost wholly apart from whites, and that whites were justified in demanding segregation when it came to jobs and housing. "It is not very nice to find out that your across the hall neighbor is a mulatto," the Michigan Catholic's "Rosaleen" wrote in 1911, cautioning her readers against the dangers of even "high-class" apartment houses. Her almost reflexive racism was typical, not only of Catholics, but of white Detroit as a whole.

Churches have historically been among the most segregated of American institutions, and such was the case in nineteenth-century Detroit. Probably fewer than 2 percent of the city's black churchgoers at the turn of the century were members of white congregations. Those black churchgoers, of course, were nearly all Protestants. Detroit had received little immigration from either Maryland or Louisiana—the principal cradles of black Catholicism—and the Church in Detroit had made only the most limited efforts at convert work among blacks. Father Bernard Soffers, the Dutch-born pastor of St. Anne's parish, is the only priest in the nineteenth century who is known to have evangelized in Detroit's black community. He had a "chapel for colored people" in the basement of his
church by the mid-1860s, and it was he who encouraged the IHM Sisters to open a “colored school” in Detroit. They did so in 1867, in a modest frame building that was hastily erected behind the then-cathedral. The school survived only until 1870, however. The Sisters “found it impossible to bring the children to religious principles,” according to their mission chronicle. “None of them showed any desire for baptism. It was therefore thought proper to close the school.”

Father Soffers was transferred to Monroe in 1872, which brought an uncere­monious end to the “colored chapel” at St. Anne’s. He left behind him a city lot that had been bought for a future black church, and a “Coloured Church and School fund,” which survived at least through 1876. But it was not until 1911 that a second “colored chapel” was established in Detroit. Until that time, Detroit’s black Catholics apparently worshiped with whites. “We have not a few Catholic negroes who attend the churches nearest their homes,” the Michigan Catholic reported in 1898, the editor unfortunately neglecting to indicate just which churches these were. We do know, however, that one of the founding mem­bers of St. Peter Claver’s (Negro) parish had been a longtime communicant at Holy Trinity, notwithstanding the history of enmity between the city’s Irish and its blacks. At least one black family were members of the Cathedral parish. And a well-known black attorney was buried from St. Stanislaus (Polish) Church in 1908.

The founding of St. Peter Claver’s mission in 1911 signals the beginning of what might be called the era of the “racial parish” in Detroit, an era that ended after World War II. Four parishes for blacks were established in the city between 1911 and 1943, and a fifth—a mission in the mostly black suburb of Inkster—was opened in 1945. Each of these was regarded at the Chancery as something other than a territorial parish; their memberships were defined by race and only sec­ondarily by residence. (Thus, Our Lady of Victory mission “serves the Negroes in Presentation and St. James Parishes,” according to its pastor in 1948.) The racial parish was analogous to the ethnic parish in certain respects, although it could hardly be justified, as ethnic parishes were, by the need to provide for people whose native language was not English. (This did not prevent the Michigan Catholic in 1926 from including St. Peter Claver’s in a list of “strictly foreign­speaking” parishes.) The ethnic parish, moreover, was at least in theory a tempo­rary phenomenon; ethnic parishes were expected eventually to assume terri­torial status. But there is no indication before the late 1940s that the Chancery saw the racial parish as anything but a permanent part of the city’s religious landscape.

Still, the racial parish was widely regarded, at least among Catholics, as a sign of liberality. The appalling poverty in which most blacks lived could be ef­fectively remedied only by means of their moral regeneration, or so most Catho­lics were led to believe. Support for the “colored missions,” then, was a way of expressing concern for the plight of a suffering and despised minority, and of affirming the spiritual equality of blacks. Interest in the “colored missions” seems to have risen perceptibly in the decade after World War I. Such, at least,
was the case in Detroit, where the "colored missions" benefited from a growing fascination with missionary work generally and where escalating racial tensions threatened an always-fragile civic order. The *Michigan Catholic* carried a notably increased volume of news about missionary work among blacks in the 1920s, and evinced a cautious interest in the development of black vocations to the convent and the priesthood. This latter was especially significant, for it entailed at least a tacit admission of black equality in the intellectual sphere. Indeed, the drift of mission publicity in the 1920s was toward a warmer, more human image of blacks, one that stressed their dignity as persons fully as much as their purported simplicity and childlike spontaneity. But the paper was far from ready to challenge the color line, either locally or in the South. The *Michigan Catholic* gave no coverage to Detroit's notorious "Sweet case" in the mid-1920s, nor did it make more than passing reference to the anti-black agenda of the Ku Klux Klan. "Bigotry," in *Michigan Catholic* parlance, meant prejudice against the Church.

The Great Depression was a stimulus to Catholic social action, and this in turn meant a greater interest than ever before in the needs of the "colored missions." As we have already seen, a number of Catholic Action groups were attracted in the 1930s to what was more and more often called the "Negro apostolate." It was the Communist party, ironically enough, that gave this apostolate some of its undoubted romance and much of its urgency, for the Party worked hard in the 1930s at organizing urban blacks, and could claim the allegiance of growing numbers of black intellectuals. The Party's militance—and its insistence on a radical equality—was a model of sorts for the more idealistic advocates of Catholic Action. "How can we remain passive in the face of such abomination?" demanded seminarian Donald Hessler in 1934, with reference not only to conditions in the South but to segregationist policies in Catholic schools and hospitals. "The devil thrives on this continued prejudice." Segregation in Catholic institutions came under increasing fire from both lay and clerical activists in the 1930s, although the vast majority of Catholics surely supported such segregation. An important source of criticism locally was Father Leo DeBarry's weekly "Propagation of the Faith" column in the *Michigan Catholic*, where warm support for the "colored missions" occasionally flowered into gentle disapproval of racist policies within the Church. "Why are not more of the potential leaders of 'America's Kindliest Race' admitted to our Catholic colleges and universities?" Father DeBarry not untypically asked in 1934. The *Michigan Catholic*'s editor too was willing by 1939 to endorse at least nominal integration at Catholic colleges, and to admit that blacks suffered grievously from unjustifiable discrimination in law and employment and politics. "Traditional thinking on the part of white Catholics must give way to the gospel of charity," he warned. But his paper never spoke directly to the manifold racial problems of Detroit, or to the segregation that still prevailed in many of the city's Catholic schools and hospitals.  

The racial parish, then, accommodated a Catholic world that was overwhelmingly segregationist in its mentality. But many black Catholics too, even in the 1940s, wanted parishes of their own, where social life was warm and spontaneous
and blacks held positions of leadership. Certainly the founding of St. Peter Claver's parish in 1911 was welcomed by black Catholics locally, although some of those Catholics were part of an integration-minded black elite. Such was attorney Eugene J. Marshall, appointed "special organizer" of the mission at its founding meeting, which assembled in St. Mary's School at the behest of Holy Ghost Father Joseph Wuest. Some of the eighteen persons at the meeting were probably Father Wuest's parishioners, for St. Mary's was a downtown church by 1911 with an appropriately heterogenous congregation, and the priest had an interest in black convert work. (The Holy Ghost Fathers, who eventually had charge of four of Detroit's racial parishes, were an order devoted mainly to missionary work in Africa and among American Negroes.) Father Wuest's interest in St. Peter Claver's mission proved to be important, for the initial membership was much too small to raise the money needed for a church. Outside help was necessary, and it was to this end that Father Wuest established the St. Peter Claver Aid Society early in 1913. The Aid Society, an interparochial women's group, was a principal source of funds for St. Peter Claver's parish in its early years, enabling the congregation in 1914 to buy a modest church. A rectory was acquired in 1917—the pastor had previously lived at St. Mary's—and in 1915 the congregation opened a fund to build a parish school. It was not until 1936, however, that St. Peter Claver's parish had a school of its own.

Little is known about the men and women who were St. Peter Claver's first parishioners. Black Catholicism is generally said to have attracted a disproportionate share of the well-to-do and the upwardly mobile, and this seems to have been the case in Detroit. A doctor and a lawyer were among the founding members, the most senior of whom was a waiter at Detroit's prestigious Russell House, and hence—by community standards, at least—a man of considerable means. The first church committee included a mailman and a city hall custodian, both of them reckoned by their black contemporaries as solidly middle-class. But the congregation had its share of the indigent too. "The St. Peter Claver Aid Society," according to the "Mission secretary" in 1913, "not content with giving parties, have taken an active part in aiding our needy members." The parish continued to have a varied membership in terms of social class, although it was the well-to-do who dominated its organizational life. In this sense, St. Peter Claver's was similar to the typical ethnic parish.

St. Peter Claver's was virtually indistinguishable from the typical English-speaking parish when it came to its liturgy and parish organizations. Save for devotion to Blessed Martin de Porres, introduced in the late 1930s, there was nothing distinctively "black" about parish worship; indeed the congregation was remarkably responsive to prevailing devotional trends, which may partly account for its interest in the newly popular cult of the Blessed Martin. (A growing militancy is suggested, however, by the establishment in 1943 of an "inter-racial shrine" in the church, where Blessed Martin and St. Peter Claver were enthroned with the Sacred Heart.) Parish societies too were those familiar to nearly every Catholic: an Altar Society was organized at the founding meeting of the parish,
and a Holy Name Society in 1915. By 1923 the parish had a drama club, a Young Ladies' Sodality, a St. Vincent de Paul Society, a Boy Scout troop, and junior and senior choirs. Its membership was still quite small—there were 150 communions at Easter in 1924—but evidently the members were an active group, deeply involved in the life of the parish. 51

St. Peter Claver's differed from other parishes, however, in some important ways. Probably the majority of its members were converts, even in the 1920s. As a consequence, there was a notably smaller proportion of families in the congregation than was the case in other parishes, and a considerably higher incidence of mixed marriage. The congregation looks to have been disproportionately female too: two-thirds of the adults baptized at the church between 1917 and 1932 were women, and slightly more than two-thirds of those confirmed between 1929 and 1938 were women and girls. In each of these respects, St. Peter Claver's was typical of racial parishes in the United States in all but the historically Catholic regions of the South. It was typical too in its relative isolation from the larger Catholic community and its uncertain relationship to the black world around it. 52

The members of St. Peter Claver's obviously had many fewer contacts with their fellow Catholics than was the case in other English-speaking parishes. Still, the parish was not wholly isolated. White charity was essential to its survival for a very long time, and at least some members of St. Peter Claver's Aid Society took a personal interest in parish life, attending Mass and devotions at the church on occasion, and having apparently warm relations with parish leaders. Whites had charge of religious education at the parish from the beginning, with teachers from the Catholic Instruction League having replaced the Carmelite Sisters by 1923. Devotional life too allowed for at least occasional contact with a larger Catholic world. Pastor Ferdinand Kreutzkampf promoted the church as a shrine to St. Joseph in the early 1920s, and apparently with some success. There was a racially mixed congregation at Tre Ore services on Good Friday in 1922, at least according to William Bradley, president of the Diocesan Union of Holy Name Societies, who was deeply moved by "the manifest devotion of the large crowd of white and negro worshippers." And in the later 1930s, the parish was a center for Blessed Martin devotions. 53

Certain parish organizations at St. Peter Claver's had occasional contact with their counterparts in other parishes. Holy Name men from the parish went regularly to the quarterly meetings of the Diocesan Union, and the parish had teams in the Holy Name Society's baseball and basketball leagues in 1927 and again in 1933. (The leagues apparently fell on hard times in the late 1920s, and were revived only in 1932.) Sports proved to be an important bridge between the parish and the larger Catholic community in the 1930s and the 1940s, for St. Peter Claver boys were active in the CYO, especially in its widely publicized boxing program. The parish boxing team took the CYO trophy in 1937 and 1938. Women's organizations in the parish, however, seem to have been almost wholly isolated from white Catholic women's groups, with the single exception of the St.
Peter Claver Aid Society. The opening of St. Peter Claver Community House in 1939 did bring the League of Catholic Women into contact with the parish, and led to a growing cooperation between members of the league and leading parish women. But there was a certain inequality of status implied in a relationship like this, no matter how cordial the contact might be, for league women came as social workers and bearers of charity to the black community. There was no real equivalent for black Catholic women to the Holy Name Society or the CYO, where blacks met whites on a formally equal footing.54

Even in a setting of formal equality, of course, contact between black and white Catholics was likely to be hedged about by fear and suspicion. Detroit's black Catholics were well aware that they were not welcome in certain of their city's churches nor in the vast majority of its parochial schools. Detroit was not unusual in this regard, nor were Detroit's black Catholics unusual in their resentment at the situation. As early as 1917, a group of black Catholics in the nation's capital had organized a "Committee Against the Extension of Race Prejudice in the Church," their principal grievances having to do with discriminatory practices in certain congregations, with the dearth of schools and colleges for black Catholics, and with the negligible number of black priests in the United States. By 1925, the committee had evolved into the Federated Colored Catholics, with members in a number of northern towns and cities. Detroit had at least one delegate at the 1925 convention, for A. R. Feliciano of St. Peter Claver's parish was elected recording secretary of the group. (Mr. Feliciano was director of the NAACP for Michigan and Ohio in the mid-1920s.) A chapter of the Federated Colored Catholics had been organized in Detroit by 1928 and it was an active one, although its focus seems to have been primarily social, Mr. Feliciano's political connections notwithstanding. The Detroit chapter hosted the group's national convention in 1930, with the economically devastated city a fitting backdrop for speeches on poverty and public health and discrimination in employment. Segregation in Catholic schools and colleges, however, was apparently addressed in a circumspect manner, and the tone of the sessions was far from militant, at least according to the Michigan Catholic. "The delegates, by papers and talks, asked their fellow white Catholics to remember that the Negro is a human being seeking to do his duty on this earth so that he may gain his eternal reward," the paper reported. "The delegates requested that their race be not judged by individuals who appear in the crime news and urged their fellow Church members to become acquainted with the better element of the Negro race to appreciate its efforts toward cultural, social and spiritual progress."55

The Federated Colored Catholics had been envisioned by most of its founders as an all-black organization, analogous to groups like the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Polish Roman Catholic Union. In 1932, however, the organization split into rival factions, one of which emerged in the mid-1930s as the National Catholic Interracial Federation. The federation, as its name implies, was open to both blacks and whites, and its long-term goals were frankly integrationist, although it was both apolitical and exceedingly cautious in its rhetoric.
and tactics. The principal strength of the Interracial Federation lay initially in the Midwest; Detroit had a chapter by 1934, with Charles Rawlings as its president. The group was not a particularly active one, and ceased for several years to function at all. But it was reorganized in 1940, with an interracial slate of officers and an interracial executive committee. The revived Detroit chapter hosted the national convention that same year. It was not until 1942, however, that the Catholic Interracial Council of Detroit was established, although with most of the same personnel as the apparently defunct Federation chapter of 1940. The council was the first Catholic organization in Detroit to speak in a sustained and effective way to the problem of race relations in the Church and in the larger society.56

Detroit's blacks by the early 1940s were a notably more militant group than they had ever been before, and the founding of the Catholic Interracial Council was in part a reflection of this change. At least some of the more affluent black Catholics locally were politically active, and all were alert to shifts in the prevailing mood. The rising tide of militancy, however, posed special problems for black Catholics, who lived on the margins of two separate worlds. The church was a natural political vehicle for most black Protestants. But for the congregation at St. Peter Claver's, with its white priests—and they subservient to the Chancery and a religious superior—this easy meshing of racial and religious loyalties was very nearly impossible. Even as moderate a group as the Federated Colored Catholics had met with clerical resistance in the early 1930s, not at St. Peter Claver's but at the recently founded parish of St. Benedict the Moor. And a short-lived movement in the late 1930s to bring a black priest to Detroit had drawn a series of rebuffs from the Chancery. "Loyal parishioners should be willing to support their church financially and to endeavor to give enthusiastic backing to the plans which the Pastor adopts for its welfare," Chancellor Edward Hickey told one petitioner, wholly unmoved by the claim that the Holy Ghost Fathers were "not progressive."57

A black priest had in fact been ordained in Detroit in 1926, although he was assigned to the newly created Diocese of Lansing in 1938. This was Father Norman A. Dukette, a native of Washington, D.C., and a graduate of Columbia College in Dubuque, Iowa, and of St. Paul's Seminary in Minnesota. Father Dukette's was something of a late vocation: he was thirty-four at his ordination, and it was perhaps his maturity as well as his evident intelligence that commended him to Bishop Gallagher. Dukette had been the first of his race to attend Columbia College; his record there was apparently an exemplary one, and not only academically. "As I stand now on the threshold of my graduation morning," he wrote in 1922, "I can truthfully say that never was a boy received more whole heartedly by his professors and fellow students than I was." Seminarian Dukette gave credit for this to "the spirit of Columbia College, so ideally democratic and American, so Catholic in deed as well as in name." But a portion of the credit rests with Dukette himself, for his was a winsome personality and—as his long and difficult career revealed—a graceful patience in adversity.58
There was only one other black diocesan priest in the United States when Father Dukette was ordained early in 1926. Nearly all diocesan seminaries were still closed to blacks, most bishops assuming that what black priests there were would be members of religious orders, probably the Society of the Divine Word, which worked primarily in the black community and had opened a Negro seminary in 1923. Bishop Gallagher was presumably of this mind himself, for he never announced that his own diocesan seminary was open to black applicants. (Sacred Heart admitted its first black student in 1946.) Still, his willingness to ordain Dukette set Gallagher apart from the vast majority of his fellow bishops, and suggests a sensitivity on questions of race that his public pronouncements never showed. The Federated Colored Catholics singled out Gallagher and Cincinnati’s Archbishop John McNicholas in 1926 for their admirable interest “in the development of a Negro clergy.”

Father Dukette was not assigned to a parish immediately upon ordination. He traveled widely about the United States for the better part of a year, ostensibly surveying the progress of Catholicism among blacks, but presumably also marking time while his bishop decided what to do with his new black priest. (The Holy Ghost Fathers were still in charge of St. Peter Claver’s, and apparently reluctant to surrender the parish.) Still, it was a year of welcome public recognition for the soft-spoken Father Dukette: he addressed the Negro section of the Chicago Eucharistic Congress and the annual convention of the Federated Colored Catholics, was guest of honor in a number of black parishes, and returned in triumph to Detroit at Christmas for a glorious midnight Mass at St. Peter Claver’s Church, in whose rectory the young priest stayed on visits to the city. There were other local honors too: Father Dukette was among the Lenten preachers at St. Aloysius Church in 1927, a rare distinction for so junior a priest. The situation was presumably a difficult one for Holy Ghost Father Charles Kapp, who had been pastor at St. Peter Claver’s since 1924. Father Kapp was obviously held in affection by his parishioners, and his tenure in Detroit saw a steady rise in the number of parish baptisms. But there were many in the congregation who hoped that Father Dukette would eventually become their pastor.

Father Dukette was finally given a pastorate in the early spring of 1927, when he was assigned to the newly created parish of St. Benedict the Moor. St. Benedict’s was defined as a racial parish, its members to come from the black population on Detroit’s west side, a population that was smaller than the population assigned to St. Peter Claver’s, but on the whole a wealthier one. Despite its canonical status, however, St. Benedict’s was at least initially a biracial congregation. A number of white families who lived near the church attended it for its convenience; some were perhaps attracted by its small size and its personable pastor. But whatever their reasons for attending, whites were indisputably there, and in relatively large numbers. The inaugural Mass found the little church “crowded with negroes and whites,” while a typical Sunday in the following autumn saw sixty whites and fifty-eight blacks at the principal Mass. This careful
count, unfortunately, was done by members of a white committee who were try­
ing to persuade the Chancery of "the need of an English speaking church in the neighborhood," by which they meant, of course, a church that was not shared with blacks. (This committee enjoyed substantial white support in the area, at least according to a 1927 petition.) And there was apparently a growing tension between black and white members of the congregation with regard to control of parish societies. The Chancery spoke to this in 1932, when it reiterated St. Benedict's status as a racial parish, where whites were not "parishioners in the true sense of the term." Whites might occasionally attend Mass at the church. But they were not permitted to join parish societies, to serve as committee­men, ushers, or Mass servers, or to have weddings, baptisms, or funerals at the church. The number of whites in the congregation seems to have declined after this ruling, although some continued to worship at the church. There were still Polish names among the active members of the Holy Name and the Little Flower societies in 1933.61

If his white parishioners, or a portion of them, were a source of vexation for Father Dukette, his success among blacks was swift and gratifying. His modest church was apparently well filled on Sundays, despite the negligible numbers of black Catholics in the vicinity, and the priest soon established a Holy Name Society in the parish, as well as a Sodality of the Blessed Virgin and the League of the Sacred Heart. "Colored Catholics have an especial devotion to the Mother of God," Father Dukette told the Michigan Catholic, explaining his large sodality membership. "Often even Protestant colored people are so desirous of showing their devotion to Mary that they wear medals and Rosary beads around their necks." Evening devotions at the church apparently drew a regular following of black Protestants. There were numerous Protestants too at the first parish mis­sion, which was preached by a well-known Redemptorist in December 1927. "This mission was one of the happiest that I have ever given," Father Michael Pathe wrote at its conclusion, moved by the "enthusiasm and devotion" of the congregation, by the "splendid singing," and by the crowds that came even to the early morning Mass. "At the opening Mass the attendance was so large that people were standing in the aisle and in the vestibule," he recalled. "As the days went on we found it necessary to fill the sanctuary with chairs."62

Father Pathe was not the only white priest to have an affection for the con­gregation at St. Benedict the Moor and for its young black pastor. Diocesan and religious order priests regularly preached at St. Benedict's weekly Holy Hour and at novenas, excited by this missionary endeavor in their midst and by the success of "the young, zealous and gentlemanly Father Dukette." (The words are Father Pathe's.) And there was good cause for excitement: despite its poverty, the congregation was growing rapidly. Father Dukette recorded 103 conversions in his parish in the first fifteen months of its life. Most of the converts were black children, many of them recruited through the Catholic Instruction League, which established a catechetical center at St. Benedict the Moor early in 1928. Through the children, however, Father Dukette quite reasonably hoped to reach
adults—parents and other family members. Black parishes generally grew in this fashion, with the number of converts rising sharply once the parish established a school.63

But Father Dukette did not remain at St. Benedict’s to reap his promising harvest. He was removed from the parish, probably in the summer of 1929, and assigned in October of that year to found a “colored mission” in Flint, a city with only a small black population and a history of anti-Catholicism. (Father Dukette said the first Mass at his new mission before a congregation of two persons.) The reassignment was obviously punitive. The reason for it, however, is not known: nothing remains in the Chancery archives that sheds much light on the question. The priest had certainly been judged guilty of a serious offense. And his black parishioners recognized the justice of the verdict, if they did not agree with the sentence. “Now we understand all about Father Duckette,” a parish committee wrote to Bishop Gallagher, “but we know that he can do more in St. Benedict the Moor parish if you can in any way forgive and give him one more chance. We too will do the same and try to help him make good.”64

Bishop Gallagher did not relent. Father Dukette spent the rest of his long career in Flint, quietly building Christ the King into a large and active parish. He was as assiduous in his pastoral duties there as he had been in Detroit, despite the immensely difficult conditions under which he labored—difficult especially in the 1930s, when Christ the King mission was still too poor to have even a chapel of its own. (The mission had “over 100” members by 1939, “most of whom are converts.”) Father Dukette became for at least the more militant of Detroit’s black Catholics a sign of their subordinate status in the Church. But he never allowed himself to be a focus of public protest, although his career was surely damaged by the Flint assignment, from which he could not play the national role that was potentially his as a black priest in Detroit.65

Father Dukette was replaced at St. Benedict the Moor by a member of the Mariannhill Fathers, a German missionary order whose work was primarily in Africa. The new pastor came to a badly divided congregation, and quickly alienated a substantial portion of his black parishioners. “Please send us some person that has not spent his time in Africa and believe[s] that we have no better understanding than some of the heathens of Africa,” a parish petition pleaded, probably in 1930. “The man that we have now is absolutely impossible, he doesn’t like our children and the young people are the making of the church.” The Mariannhill Fathers surrendered the parish early in 1932, presumably at the behest of Bishop Gallagher, who was worried that the dwindling congregation would not be able to meet its debts. St. Benedict the Moor was then assigned to the Holy Ghost Fathers, and the popular Father Charles Kapp was brought from St. Peter Claver’s to be its pastor. Under Father Kapp’s direction, the congregation began once again to grow, although its financial problems were severe throughout the 1930s. “I can understand why my predecessors catered to a certain extent to the whites,” Father Kapp admitted in 1933. “They needed the money, and that was one way of getting it.” Partly because of its debt, the
parish did not build a school until 1952—and then only with generous Chancery assistance. Without a school, its growth was almost inevitably limited. The parish had about 500 members in 1940, according to its pastor, compared to some 1,300 at St. Peter Claver's.

The evident health of St. Peter Claver's parish was due in part to the work of Father Henry Thiefels. Father Thiefels, who came to the parish in 1932, was a native Detroiter, having been raised in St. Anthony's parish on the city's East Side. He had an immediate success at St. Peter Claver's: the seventy-three adult baptisms recorded there in 1933 were more than twice as many as any previous yearly total. "A constant stream of converts" was being received into the Church, a parishioner wrote to the Michigan Catholic in June of that year. "Two months ago on the Holy Name Sunday, every man and boy received Holy Communion. The church was crowded to the doors and the spectacle was wonderful to behold!" It was Father Thiefels who revived the long-dormant campaign to establish a parish school, pointing to the 150 parish children enrolled in the Sunday school and to the many non-Catholic parents in the vicinity who wanted to give their children a Catholic education. He found willing allies in his Holy Name Society, notwithstanding the Depression. Holy Name member James Gibson "made a fiery plea for cooperation by parishioners" at the opening meeting of the school campaign in 1934, "saying that some of the men were so determined to have a school that, if necessary, they would give their labor as well as every cent they can scrape up for the purpose."

The inaugural meeting was followed by months of assiduous fund-raising. Dances and dinners and bazaars added mite upon mite to the slender balance, with film star Stepin Fetchit making a surprise appearance at an especially memorable card party in the parish hall. "Fetchit is a practical Catholic," the Michigan Catholic informed its readers, "and received his early education in a Catholic school." The Michigan Catholic gave generous publicity to the various parish events, and this resulted in some limited white support for the undertaking. It was a white businessman who chaired the "second phase" of the school campaign, which opened late in 1934. But there was no help forthcoming from a financially strapped and politically beleaguered Chancery. "We have not received any word from you," two Holy Name men from the parish reminded Bishop Gallagher at the close of 1935, "and to date we have only rumor to inform us that you are in sympathy with our efforts."

St. Peter Claver's School was finally opened in the fall of 1936. Its sixty-four pupils, enrolled in grades one through three, were housed in the converted apartment building where Father Thiefels had his rectory. Their numbers had grown to more than 120 by the following year, when a kindergarten and a fourth grade were added. "There is a fine spirit amongst the children," Father Thiefels wrote then, "and we hope not only to bring many of the little ones into the church, who are non-Catholics but also in many cases the parents as well. . . . The school has been received by the people as a god-send for the reason that many of the public school children in this section have a very low standard of morality."
Father Thiefels was not being bigoted or condescending: respectable black families in segregated Detroit lived side-by-side with petty and not-so-petty criminals. Drugs and prostitution were evident facts of daily life. In a world like this, the discipline and rigid sexual morality that were widely associated with Catholic training made parochial schools immensely appealing to many black parents.69

St. Peter Claver's School would not have survived, however, had it not been for the generosity of the Felician Sisters, who donated their services as teachers during the school's first years. And its growth was made possible in good part by Archbishop Mooney's "gift" of the buildings of Sacred Heart parish to the people of St. Peter Claver's. (Sacred Heart, a one-time German parish, had lost nearly all its members by the late 1930s; its closing had been rumored since the early 1920s.) The Mooney "gift" was a gradual and, initially, a tentative one. Sacred Heart school was opened to black children in the fall of 1938, when St. Peter Claver's School was closed. Father Thiefels became pastor of Sacred Heart parish at the same time, although he continued to serve as pastor of St. Peter Claver's too, presumably to oversee the gradual consolidation of the two congregations. Resistance to these changes was expected: the mostly elderly white members of Sacred Heart were known at the Chancery for their fierce insistence on lay authority in the parish, and a group of them did send a bitter letter of protest to the archbishop. ("After building up the Parish to what it is now and then seeing the negroes come in and knock it down is more than we can stand.") But the parish apparently changed hands without serious incident.70

The parish plant at Sacred Heart was in a state of near-dilapidation in 1938. It was relatively large, however, and this enabled the former St. Peter Claver's congregation to expand its school. That school had eight grades by 1938, and an enrollment of 390. (Ninety of those students were white; there were whites at the school until 1945.) A ninth grade was added in 1941—"a beginning, please God, of a Catholic High School for the colored in Detroit," in the words of Father Thiefels. There were 515 children in the school by the fall of 1943, when the longed-for high school had become a reality. The physical plant was still a makeshift one, and the school was perennially short of funds. "This year we are teaching chemistry and we have neither chemicals or instruments," Father Thiefels told the archbishop in 1944. But the school enjoyed an excellent reputation in the black community, both for academic discipline and moral training. For despite the large number of non-Catholics in the school, the Felicians maintained a rigidly Catholic regime. The "Happy Mission Helpers" in the school's fourth grade were learning to see the world in much the same terms as youngsters in the neighboring Polish parishes. "This money ($5.00) is for the ransoming of a pagan baby," the fourth grade wrote to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in 1939. "We wish to call him Martin in honor of Blessed Martin de Porres. We would like to see what he looks like if possible. We are saving now for a baby girl."71

The success of the school meant a larger crop of converts than ever before. "Since the school was started four years ago, the Parish has increased its member-
ship threefold,” Father Thiefels observed in 1939. The parish was sufficiently large by then to support a mission, which opened in Detroit’s “North End” in 1939. The members of the Holy Ghost mission initially worshiped in a private home, and Sisters from Sacred Heart School taught catechism there. There were hardly enough black Catholics in the “North End” to warrant a new parish: “ten Catholic families and about 20 prospective converts” made up the original Holy Ghost congregation, according to Father Thiefels. But the Chancery assumed that neighboring white congregations would not welcome even a limited number of blacks to their churches, and certainly not to their schools. A generous grant from the Archdiocesan Development Fund (ADF) enabled the small congregation at Holy Ghost to build a church in 1944, although it was hardly an imposing one. (A basement chapel, Holy Ghost was too small for any but modest weddings and of no use at all for funerals, because, as Father Thomas Clynes explained in 1955, “there has been no suitable means of ingress or egress for a casket.”) It was Chancery generosity too that led to the opening of a parish school in 1949. Largely because of that school, the congregation at Holy Ghost had grown to more than 400 by 1955.72

The Chancery continued its policy of establishing racial parishes at least through the end of World War II. Our Lady of Victory mission was opened in 1943, again with generous assistance from the ADF. The mission was intended to serve the black inhabitants of a nearby wartime housing project, the Chancery still unwilling to initiate integration at the several white parishes in the vicinity. It was in connection with Our Lady of Victory that the first black Sisters came to Detroit: two members of the Oblates of Providence, a Negro order based in Baltimore, arrived in the parish in 1948 to work as catechists and home visitors. A parish school was opened in the fall of 1954, just six months after the Supreme Court had ruled against the constitutionality of segregated schooling. If this awkward conjunction disturbed the Chancery, no one said so publicly. Most Chancery officials, like most parish priests, assumed that the vast majority of white Catholics wanted segregation in their schools. “The colored are not welcome in Dearborn,” Father John C. Ryan had told the archbishop in 1945, explaining why a “colored mission” was essential in the suburb of Inkster. (Holy Family mission was opened there in that same year.) There was no reason to think that things were appreciably different a decade later.73

But there had in fact been important changes with regard to race relations by 1955, notwithstanding the desire of most whites for segregated schools and neighborhoods. The black population of Detroit had grown enormously in the 1940s; by the 1950s, that population was moving into many areas that had hitherto been reserved for whites. “Negroes are building and buying on both sides of us, and that in areas which have heretofore been restricted,” the pastor of Holy Ghost parish wrote to Archbishop Mooney in 1950. “God bless the Supreme Court.” The Court’s striking down of restrictive covenants, however, did not please every city pastor. “This parish is going down,” a priest at St. Bernard’s quite typically told the Chancery in 1953. “The north part is getting very col-
ored." Men like this were understandably fearful that "white flight" from the city would be the ruin of their large and often heavily-indebted parishes. But the inexorable spread of black settlement meant that even the least socially conscious of the clergy could no longer be indifferent to the problem of race relations. Either Detroitzers learned to live together amicably, regardless of race, or a substantial number of Catholic parishes would be in serious financial trouble.

The spread of black settlement had led by the late 1940s to a decline in the congregation at Sacred Heart Church, the principal center of black Catholicism in Detroit. An expansion of the high school there seemed inadvisable to the superior of the Felician Sisters, to whom the project was proposed in 1949. The neighborhood was increasingly home to only the poorest members of the black community, she pointed out; enrollment at the school had already begun to decline. She drew attention as well to the "aversion of the pupils to segregation." That aversion had much to do with the growing political influence of blacks in Detroit, and a corresponding increase in their militancy with regard to civil rights. Black leaders were more and more open about their objections to segregated parishes, with their inevitably inferior facilities, and to the segregationist policies that still prevailed in many Catholic schools and hospitals, even in the late 1940s.

The increasing militance of the black community was complemented in the postwar years by a growing sense among whites that overtly racist policies were morally indefensible. The war itself had much to do with this: Hitler and his death camps had made the evils of racism real in a peculiarly terrible way. Archbishop Mooney seems to have been among those who revised their assumptions about race and race relations during the 1940s. Mooney had come to Detroit with views that were probably typical of many of his fellow bishops. He hoped to see a growing number of black converts in the Church, and to this end he contributed personally to the Catholic Board for Mission Work Among the Colored People, and used archdiocesan resources to aid the struggling black parishes within his own jurisdiction. But he thought almost exclusively in terms of a segregated Church and a segregated city. It was at Mooney's behest that the priests at Blessed Sacrament Cathedral organized a neighborhood "improvement association" in 1941, the purpose of which was to prevent any further movement of blacks into the cathedral parish. (The project was not a success.) The archbishop was understandably anxious to protect his investment in the cathedral, but he seemed oddly indifferent to the plight of Detroit's fast-growing black community, which was more affected than any other by the wartime housing shortage in Detroit. That shortage was a critical factor in the racial rioting that engulfed a portion of the city in the summer of 1943. Mooney, however, was inclined to see black grievances in terms of a "precipitate" Negro leadership. "I am sure that, here in Detroit at least, they are being egged on by agitators with an eye only to their own subversive ends," he told the Jesuit John LaFarge. A "realistic" approach to race relations, in the Archbishop's view, would not "demand intermarriage, full social equality and special 'rights' such as public opin-
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ion is not prepared to accept"—this according to Chancellor Edward Hickey, who was a principal Mooney confidant in 1943.76

By the late 1940s, however, the now-Cardinal Mooney had clearly begun to think in terms of an integrated Church. He was very much the gradualist: the Cardinal never issued a public statement condemning segregation, and he tolerated overtly segregationist policies in certain of his parish schools, even in the late 1950s. But Chancery sympathies in the postwar years were obviously with those priests who evinced an interest in the "Negro apostolate" and who were prepared to facilitate the integration of their schools and congregations. Father Hubert Roberge, who came to St. Leo's in 1953, assumed—and correctly—that he had Mooney's full support in his efforts to make St. Leo's a model of racial cooperation. Blacks had been attending the church for a number of years when Roberge became pastor; St. Leo's High School had been the first parochial high school in Detroit to admit black students, probably in the late 1930s. But even in 1953 there were no black members in the various parish organizations. Father Roberge set out to remedy this, finding black "volunteers" to integrate the ushers and the Altar Society, appointing a black parishioner to the church committee, and instructing his flock that, as members of Christ's Mystical Body, they were bound in conscience to regard one another as brothers. Cardinal Mooney was genuinely delighted by the progress at St. Leo's—"this all important work," as he wrote to Roberge, "in which you and I are so vitally interested." But he was not pleased when Father Roberge called publicly, in a 1954 article in Integrity magazine, for an "authoritative statement" from the American bishops against racism and continued segregation in the Church. The work at St. Leo's was supposed to have proceeded with "as little talk and public announcement as possible," the Cardinal reminded Father Roberge. "We should seek results through our endeavors and not publication of those results or public disapproval of the work of others."77

Father Roberge was not alone in his zeal and idealism. A growing number of local priests were interested in the Negro apostolate by the early 1950s, and some had already moved on to a concern for civil rights. Father John Finnegan, pastor of Detroit's St. Patrick's parish, was chairman in 1952 of a citizens' committee that was formed in support of a municipal Fair Employment Practices act. The Michigan Catholic, hitherto reticent on the subject of race, condemned racial bias in the Knights of Columbus early in 1954, and greeted the Supreme Court's Brown decision with warm approval. "America lived one of its finest hours when the US supreme court voided the 58-year old doctrine allowing 'separate but equal' in the public schools," the editor declared. "The new decision may help to disprove the ancient fallacy that 'you cannot legislate morality." And there was a growing commitment to "Negro work" on the part of women religious, something that disposed this important population to an unprecedented support for civil rights. Symptomatic of this was the founding in Detroit in 1949 of the Home Visitors of Mary, an order devoted to catechetical and convert work among blacks and—by force of example—to the betterment of race relations in
the city and the Church. The community admitted its first black postulant in 1957, a development that the founders had hoped for from the very beginning. Many of the existing women’s orders, moreover, seemed in the prosperous post-war years to find a renewed sense of mission in their work at center-city schools, where enrollments were more and more heavily black.78

The Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters were typical of many orders in their newfound enthusiasm for the Negro apostolate. The IHMs at Holy Trinity School were delighted to welcome a black lay coworker in 1946. “The seventh grade, her homeroom, and the entire school were completely won by her gracious manner and her artistry of conversation,” the mission chronicle noted. Holy Trinity had received its first black pupil in 1945, the same year that blacks were first enrolled at Detroit’s Holy Rosary, also an IHM school. The grammar school at Holy Rosary was nearly one-third black by 1947, for the neighborhood around the school was rapidly changing hands. The Sisters, however, betrayed no distress on this score. “These pupils are clean, tractable and cooperative, and well liked by all the Sisters,” according to the mission chronicle. By 1950, the IHMs had agreed to send Sisters to St. George’s in Detroit, which was about to reopen as a territorial parish in an almost exclusively black neighborhood. (St. George’s had been a Lithuanian parish until it was closed in 1947.) St. George’s School had refused to accept black children even in the 1940s, and there was considerable bitterness in the neighborhood on this account. Perhaps this was one reason that the badly overextended IHMs had agreed to take on the new assignment. The sense of purpose and of quiet excitement that permeates the mission chronicle at St. George’s, however, suggests that the Sisters who went there were hungry for something more challenging—and more significant politically—than work in a suburban school.79

St. George’s School was reopened in the fall of 1950 with an almost entirely black enrollment. Two overburdened Sisters had charge of 109 pupils, enrolled in grades one through four. Most were non-Catholics and all were products of the public schools, to which fact their new teachers attributed the rowdiness of the St. George classrooms. “School becomes a nightmare for two nuns!” the mission chronicle reported in September. “Silence and study had no meaning to this undisciplined group. . . . Pen and paper could never express what went on during this time.” It was not until December that the Sisters won the “struggle for supremacy.” Their pupils’ parents proved to be natural allies in the struggle: “Almost every family sent a representative either that day or during the week that followed,” the chronicle recorded of a “reporting day” in 1951. “The personal interest we took in each child made a lasting impression on the eager parents. . . . ‘Sister, I want my child to learn and you make him behave, don’t let him fight,’ seems to be the general plea whenever you meet them.” The St. George neighborhood was poor, with one of the highest delinquency rates in the city. Small wonder that parents were grateful for a school where rules were sternly enforced and perennial troublemakers were invariably expelled. A faculty meeting held early in 1954 was apparently typical of the St. George approach to discipline:
Josephite Father Henry Offer, the much-admired pastor, "went through the complete list of pupils, gave us a background of each family, discussed problems and spotted those who should be dismissed."80

St. George's School had a religious as well as an educational mission, and to this end Father Offer insisted that the parents of pupils enrolled in the school attend Sunday Mass with their children and take a course of instruction in Catholic doctrine. Failure to comply meant the expulsion of one's children from the school. And even the non-Catholic pupils at St. George's were required to attend daily Mass and the usual round of devotions. The more devout among the pupils were enrolled each year in the school sodality, where they learned the Rosary and other Marian prayers. "At each afternoon dismissal these little ones assemble before the Grotto of Lourdes for a hymn to Mary and her Son," the Sisters reported. "Some go there for their private devotions." If there were parents who disliked this kind of proselytization, they apparently kept it to themselves. The school's enrollment continued to grow, reaching 214 in 1955, and the school was eventually expanded to include eight grades. There were bumper harvests of converts too, especially among the children. The school was nearly 43 percent Catholic in 1958, by which time the congregation was well accustomed to witnessing the baptisms of large convert classes. "Those Sisters who came when St. George opened really see it growing spiritually as well as intellectually," the mission chronicle noted in the spring of 1956.81

St. George's School survived until 1964, when freeway construction resulted in the destruction of the parish buildings and much of the adjacent neighborhood. The children were easily accommodated at nearby parish schools, both of which already had substantial black enrollments, while the Josephite Fathers were "compensated" by being placed in charge of St. Benedict the Moor. St. Benedict's was no longer a juridically "racial" parish, however. "It is my own conviction that a strictly Negro parish is unjustifiable in the Detroit area," Archbishop John Dearden told the Superior General of the Josephites in 1963. Happily, St. Benedict's had a white minority in its congregation at this point. But there was considerable doubt as to its permanence: whites were moving from the city in unprecedented numbers by the mid-1960s, when Detroit's population was perhaps 35 percent black. Integration in Detroit had proved to be an evanescent phenomenon: neighborhoods typically changed hands in less than a decade.82

The process by which the various neighborhoods changed hands was rarely a peaceful one. Detroit has a long history of racial violence, and much of it has centered on conflicts over housing. Black-occupied buildings in racially mixed areas were sometimes bombed in the 1920s, as were black-owned businesses and churches. Father Francis Beccherini wrote almost casually to Bishop Gallagher in 1929 about an East Side church that had recently been bought by a black congregation, "and bombed presumably by some Italians." Working-class whites in Detroit were more than usually likely to be homeowners, and the Catholics among them belonged to parishes that had heavy investments in schools, rec-
tories, and convents, not to mention large and sometimes sumptuous churches. They almost inevitably saw the expansion of the black population as an economic threat—indeed as a threat to their way of life. The black population, on the other hand, had grown so rapidly since 1915 that the historically "black" district could not begin to meet its housing needs. And more prosperous blacks were understandably anxious to move away from the noise and congestion and violence of the city core.83

The growth of the black population in the 1920s resulted in the integration of a handful of Catholic schools in Detroit. "At least five" of the city's parochial schools accepted black pupils in 1922, according to the Michigan Catholic. But they probably accepted only a limited number: the priests at St. Peter Claver's parish in the 1920s and the 1930s assumed that the great majority of their children could not be accommodated at near east side parochial schools. St. Wenceslaus School seems to have been the first with a substantial representation of blacks. The school in this one-time Czech parish was apparently integrated in the mid-1920s. By 1930, 40 of its 110 pupils were black children. The pastor at St. Wenceslaus had presumably integrated his school in order to prevent its closing: the school had only 50 pupils in 1922. But it was with evident pride that he claimed in 1929 to have been the first pastor in Detroit to accept black children in his school. (For all his pride, he was probably in error.) Very different, however, were the attitudes of the neighboring Polish clergy. The East Side Polish parishes were among the largest in the city; their parishioners were fiercely loyal, and unusually slow to abandon their aging neighborhoods. Reluctant to flee to greener reaches of the city, Poles typically regarded the parish school as a final defense against an expanding black population. Their schools, even in decline, remained closed to blacks at least through the 1940s and, in some cases, into the 1960s.84

The Depression meant a temporary decline in Detroit's population, and this eased tensions over housing. The 1930s, indeed, were a relatively peaceful decade on the racial front. Certain limited gains were made in the area of parochial school integration, and Marygrove College accepted its first black student in the summer of 1938. The University of Detroit had been nominally integrated for some years—it was among the first of the Jesuit colleges to be opened to blacks—and its dean of men was prepared, by the mid-1930s, to insist that the school's black students be fully included in campus life. Father Joseph Luther, SJ, demanded an immediate end to discriminatory practices in campus-area restaurants in 1934, when the university had six black students. Should any student complain about the nondiscrimination policy, he told one of the offending proprietors, "please give me his name and I shall see that he is called before the Faculty Board on Student Activities, of which I am Chairman, and his intolerant and narrow racial views corrected."85

The voices of men like Father Luther were overwhelmed in the early 1940s by rising racial tensions in Detroit. The city's black population grew enormously
then, and so did its once-small population of Southern whites. These were war-time migrants, moreover, for whom there were plentiful jobs but very little housing: blacks and whites too were forced to double up with friends and relatives, and not a few families took refuge in garages and even less substantial outbuildings. Government-financed housing projects had begun to alleviate the shortage by 1942, but the projects themselves were a cause of racial animosity. The black population was far too large for the hitherto black areas of the city, and it was necessary to build “black” projects in neighborhoods occupied mainly by whites. St. Louis the King parish, largely Polish, was a principal center of resistance to the Sojourner Truth housing project, which was finally opened to black families in 1942. Poles were by no means the only Detroiter to oppose the project; much of the resistance came from Southern whites. And many Poles lived peaceably in racially mixed neighborhoods—even in racially integrated buildings, as the secretary of the Detroit Urban League pointed out in 1943. “During the June riots,” he noted, “there were no race conflicts in these houses.” But it was apparent nonetheless that working-class Catholics as a group were deeply hostile to blacks, and deeply fearful of them.86

Tensions exploded into violence on June 20, 1943. Three days later, with the U.S. Army occupying portions of the city, more than thirty persons had died, most of them black. Whites had been the principal aggressors in the riot, according to dispassionate observers, and white police were widely blamed for much of the violence. The riot seems to have caught the Chancery off guard: the Michigan Catholic took two weeks to come out with a timid editorial deploring the violence. The paper made no reference to the conduct of the police.87

Archbishop Mooney, for his part, made no public statement at all. He had been under pressure from black leaders since 1941 to speak to the question of race relations, particularly in view of the escalating tensions between blacks and Poles. But he believed, as he told Father John LaFarge, that black leaders were “naive in their belief in the effectiveness of a word from me and utterly unaware of the complications an injudicious word might cause as well as the difficulty of being both positive and judicious in the circumstances.” Mooney had considerable sympathy for the Poles, whose parishes often carried heavy mortgages, and feared that they did not wholly trust their Irish-American bishop. “They are by temperament never phlegmatic,” he reminded LaFarge, “and are just now heavy-hearted over what has happened to the homeland and in Russia . . . . Before making any statement I must in conscience consider that any declaration of mine which might have a general apologetic value for the Church among the Negroes would most certainly have a disastrously disturbing effect on the more than two hundred thousand Polish Catholics who are a large part of my direct responsibility.” Mooney was more than willing to have the American bishops make a collective statement on the problem of race, as indeed they did, and under his leadership, in the fall of 1943. But certain of his clergy had hoped for more. “As things are now, I believe we are looked upon as one of the most bitterly
reactionary elements in the Detroit situation, far behind the Protestants and the CIO," Father John Coogan, SJ, complained in 1944. He wanted Mooney to issue "an authoritative statement on local racial policy," and to do so immediately.\textsuperscript{88}

No such statement was forthcoming. Perhaps in part because of this, the racial policies of the various parishes and local Catholic institutions were anything but uniform, even in the 1950s. Most Catholic elementary schools in the central portions of Detroit were accepting black students by the early 1950s. But a number of high schools remained closed to blacks, and the Catholic hospitals locally had only just abandoned their discriminatory policies. The ability of a parish to resist integration seems to have depended largely on its size and its financial health. Father Vitalis Lasota, pastor at SS. Andrew and Benedict Church, was virtually ordered by the Chancery in 1950 to accept black Catholic students in his school. Father Lasota's parish was small, its Slovak founders having mostly left the vicinity of the church. As late as 1957, however, the Chancery was unwilling to insist that the pastor at Corpus Christi (Polish) parish cease his openly discriminatory practices. The pastor's rudeness to a prospective black parishioner had been "unfortunate," the chancellor admitted. But under the circumstances it would be best for her to enroll her children in a public school.\textsuperscript{89}

As Detroit became an increasingly black city, its Catholic schools and institutions were more and more likely to be open to blacks. Several of the center-city Catholic high schools had black majorities by the mid-1950s. There were still priests, to be sure, who were openly hostile to blacks: the pastor at St. Theresa's parish in Detroit "has discouraged the acceptance of colored men into the Ushers and men's societies," an assistant at the parish told the Chancery in 1958. "The same goes for the Altar Sodality. He is afraid, he says, of the affect it will have on the remaining white people." But behavior like this was distinctly out of favor at the Chancery, as the young assistant understood. Cardinal Mooney expected his priests to make their peace with integration.\textsuperscript{90}

His successor was even more emphatic on this score: Cardinal John Dearden was an articulate proponent of equality within the Church and in his see city, and an ardent supporter of expanded government programs for the poor. For a time it seemed that his generous vision was helping to transform both his city and his Church. Under a young and vigorous Catholic mayor, Detroit was a national showpiece for the War on Poverty in the mid-1960s, and a city often lauded for its progress toward equality in jobs and education. The city's reputation for tolerance, however, did not survive the summer of 1967, when the infamous Detroit riot ushered in a new and troubled chapter in the city's history. The Church has played an admirable role in that chapter, which lies beyond the scope of this book. Still, Detroit is a mostly black city now, and the Catholics of the Archdiocese a mostly suburban population. The problem of race relations has not been solved, but simply evaded—and with predictable social consequences.
ILLUSTRATIONS
National Council of Catholic Women, Victory Bond parade, Monroe, in September 1942.

Father Henry Thiefls, C.S.Sp., and children from St. Peter Claver's School, Detroit, probably during Christmas 1937.
Kindergarten at St. Peter Claver's School, Detroit, during Christmas 1937. Father Henry Thiefeis at rear.

Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD): religious education at Holy Family mission in Inkster, probably in the late 1940s.