

An oral history of the Indianapolis Public Schools

Hypothesis

The individual school histories of Attucks, Butler, Cathedral, Manual, Shortridge, and Washington crossed and were interrelated in time and local politics. In one period covering 18 months, from June of 1921 to December of 1922, the past was razed, the ground was tilled, and the seeds planted to either create or expand, or move these local secondary institutions. In another 12 months time, between September 1927 and September 1928, these schools were born and reborn and bloomed into a new generation of schools designed for what America was to be. This new school matrix would also define the city of Indianapolis and how its citizens would relate to one another.

Were these events and the creation of these schools related or was it mere happenstance? This oral history project proposes an intent, and if not a plan, then a pattern of relatedness. Reacting to many factors including demographic changes, religious issues, urbanization, class and race norms, economics, Darwinism, school pride and sectionalism, housing, health, and general power politics, the Indianapolis community carried out its plans for the future. As these ideas and plans were made and developed, they involved a chess game of movements and movements within movements and counterpoints until the doors of these schools were finally opened and no more could be done about it. All of this brought about a new political *status quo* created, symbolized, and maintained by the very schools themselves. This new custom was not initiated by sinister forces or by those faces hidden behind KKK hoods, but by ordinary Hoosier citizens enmeshed in past and present historical events.

Importance of Project:

This project concerns itself with the history of the public and private schools in Indianapolis. At the same time it tells the history of a city. The history, growth, and issues involved in the history of the Indianapolis educational system are also the history, growth, and issues involved in the development of this central Indiana area. This oral history project reflects the history of class strata and economic issues of the city. The project reflects the history of Hoosier African-Americans and their civil rights and educational struggles. The project also reflects the religious history of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews in the community. The oral history relates ideas and changes involved in local neighborhoods demographics, educational strategies, and the creation and closing of local schools over an 80 year period. Finally, the history relates the ideas and personalities of people involved in school policy development and how decisions were made that involved generations of school children.

Goals of Project:

- To collect remembrances, reactions, ideas, opinions, and anecdotes of individuals concerning the history and related issues involved in the history of the Indianapolis Public Schools.
- To help future individuals better understand the issues and history involved in the Indianapolis Public Schools.
- To cover and elaborate on the history of the Indianapolis Public Schools not covered by newspaper and board minutes or other conventional means.
- To provide insight regarding key personalities and individuals involved directly and indirectly with policy decisions dealing with said history.
- To better understand the relationship between private and public school growth from 1921 to the present.