

Principal George Buck and Shortridge High School: The legacy of the IPS caste system

This breakout session looks at actions of Shortridge leader George Buck as a catalyst for a decades-old social hierarchy of IPS schools based on race, class, religion, neighborhood, ability, and ethnicity. At the 12:35 minute mark of the 2016 WFYI documentary, [Attucks: A school that opened a city](#), the narrator stated, "The Chamber of Commerce joined the segregationist push as did parent-teacher organizations and the principal of Shortridge."

Interestingly, what the film shows is a principal in his office at his desk, but the narrator never mentions the principal's name...why? Could it have been that this principal was George Buck and IPS 94 at 2701 Devon Avenue, 46219 is named after him? See: <https://myips.org/georgebuck/>.

We can't forget, on September 19, 1922, Principal Buck went before the IPS school board and publically expressed his racist beliefs by endorsing the building of an all-Black Attucks HS (See IPS school board minutes, *Book W*. p. 397), and the consequent Jim Crow school district.

He came to Indianapolis in 1910 as principal of Shortridge (1864)¹ then located downtown at Pennsylvania and Michigan where the federal building is now located. Looking back, in 1922, the IPS board voted for a new Shortridge. In 1928, the school moved from downtown into the newly constructed \$1.5M building at 34th and Meridian. The 1922 board also voted for a new west-side school. George Washington HS opened just west of Belmont and West Washington in Wayne Twp in the fall of 1927.

Here is a time line on the [1920s events leading up to and through the creation of Attucks and Washington and the relocation of Cathedral, Shortridge, and Butler College](#).

The 1924 plans, for an expanded Manual HS (est.1895), made it more convenient for the city's south-side students,² who had previously chosen to attend Shortridge, to stay close to home. This was also the case for the west-side's immigrant ethnic Southern European students, say from Haughville, who now had Washington HS which opened, like Attucks, in 1927. For Tech HS's east-side students, many of whom were a distance from the downtown Shortridge as it were, would now have less motivation to attend a school it would then take two streetcar routes to reach.

After September of 1928, IPS high schools were a part of a city-wide educational caste system that sorted/ranked students and schools not only by race, but by class, religion, neighborhood, ability, ethnicity, career/vocation,³ even gender.⁴ In the upper echelon was Shortridge, sharing a rank with the now quota-driven Butler College⁴ that opened at 46th and Sunset also in 1928. Next was Broad Ripple HS (1923). Tech HS (1912), ranked next. Below each was Manual. Near the bottom was the new Washington. With [eugenics as the Indiana standard](#), last came Attucks. Indy's Catholic community got in the mix too. A [new Cathedral HS opened](#) at 14th and Meridian also in September of 1927.

Questions will be raised during this breakout session around the significance of Mr. Buck's action which validated the white supremacy of the era. And, in light of Black Lives Matter and historical issues raised by The 1619 Project, what to do, if anything, about his name being on an IPS school.

What? So what? Now What

1. It must be noted, Shortridge gained and still has recognition as one of the most outstanding high schools in America, widely known for the academic achievements of its graduates.
2. German, Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants, and Black and white students whose families arrived here from the South during the America's 1st Great Migration, 1910-1940. See: [1900-1920 Indianapolis during 1st Great Migration](#).
3. [Making a Mass Institution: Indianapolis and the American High School](#) by Dr. Kyle Steele
4. In Sept of 1927, Butler began a quota. Only 10 Blacks per year could attend. All were women. Although there were many Black men on Butler's Irvington campus, none were welcomed at the new campus in Sept of 1928. See the quota letter: [08.25.27 Butler President Aley to Lionel Artis of YMCA on quota limiting new Black student to 10 per year](#).

When, Where, Why and How the IPS Caste System Started

The quote in the rectangle below is from a 1979 discussion I had with former Indiana State Rep. Henry J. Richardson, Jr.¹ Read his bio: <https://beta.indyencyclopedia.org/henry-j-richardson-jr/>.

His insights show IPS planned a school caste system² in 1922. IPS kept Shortridge HS as the highest ranked by building a new school and moving it to 34th and Meridian (a good distance from downtown a 100 years ago) in 1928, and thus physically/symbolically away from schools of the lower echelons.

IPS would reinforce the status of Shortridge by the removal of its Black American population through the 1922 creation of the racially segregated Attucks HS.

IPS also reinforced the status of Shortridge by the removal of its west-side students, mainly from Haughville's Southern European families (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4DZN9UTmdA>), through creating George Washington HS. For some reason, it was located west of the Center Township line into Wayne Township—one block west of Belmont St. on West Washington St. Go figure.

By 1924, the IPS board, ever influenced by the city's oligarchy of [1920s Indianapolis establishment education decision-makers](#) established a budget of \$2,900,000.00 for its high school program: Shortridge \$1,500,000.00/2,500 students; Washington \$500,000.00/1,000 students; Attucks \$500,000.00/1,000 students; and, \$400,000.00 for an addition along Madison Ave. for Manual HS. See: [1921-29 events shaping creation of Attucks and Washington, and relocation of Cathedral, Shortridge and Butler College.](#)

In the fall of 1927, Attucks opened, taking its place at the bottom of the district's pecking order. Tech HS, Manual, and then Broad Ripple HS (which had joined IPS in 1923)--and the new Washington also opening in fall of 1927--would each scramble for the more regarded positions in the IPS hierarchy.

Protestants, Catholics, and Jews: Adding religion to the pecking order shuffle

From its beginning, IPS, like most US public schools, was influenced by the Protestant religion. Recall, until 1963 (<https://religionandpolitics.org/2012/06/25/when-the-court-took-on-prayer-the-bible-and-public-schools/>) school prayer and the Protestant *Bible* were part and parcel of public education. From the perspective of this analysis, IPS is essentially a protestant district. e.g., it “celebrates” Christmas. Does it celebrate/recognize any Islamic, Lutheran, Jewish, or Catholic observances/holidays?

In May 11, 1922 the city's Catholic community purchased land at 14th & Meridian for a \$1,000,000 (around \$16M in today's money) for the new Cathedral, which would open the same month and year as Attucks and Washington—September of 1927. Go figure. What truly significant, this would expand religion as a factor in the politics of Indy's Jim Crow education system.

After 1924 and the imposition of strict national immigration quotas, the growth of the Indianapolis Jewish community slowed considerably. The existing community³ prospered, however, and Jews began moving out of the south-side: <https://beta.indyencyclopedia.org/judaism/>. Still, the move of Shortridge north to 34th and Meridian and the \$400K addition to Manual, would influence any south-side or downtown Jewish families from sending their child/ren to Shortridge.

- Question: what were the enrollment numbers of students from Jewish families in Shortridge before and after 1928?
- Question: what were the changes in enrollment numbers by demographics at Manual around Italians, Germans, Irish, and southern whites before and after 1928?

Here's Mr. Richardson, Jr.'s statement about what happen in 1922 and IPS:

Mr. Richardson Jr.: Let me start with myself. I finished Shortridge High School in 1921 when Shortridge was at the northeast corner of Pennsylvania and Michigan. There was integration--there was no segregation of schools. Manual was on the south side and Tech on the eastside and Broad Ripple had a little school up north. So what happened was in 1922 the public school board had a meeting with the purpose of setting up segregated schools under the permissive act of the 1867. You see the school system was organized on a township basis originally and you might go into that. It would be interesting. Your townships under the law controlled the schools system and the policies of the schools. And you had a section of the law that provided for the permissive integration depending on the township board. This was before we had first-class city school boards. You see Indianapolis is a first-class city and it comes under a special law and then you had a right to have a board of school commissioners which were elected. What this board did... Are you Jewish?

John Harris Loflin: No, I'm not.

Mr. Richardson Jr.: Well, I might as well tell you this. The prejudice here as a matter of basic social differential of races was more acute as far as the Catholics and the Jews as it was anything else.

John Harris Loflin: Even color?

Mr. Richardson Jr.: Oh yes. And none of the Jews of any note lived north of Washington Street. They all lived on the south side--south Meridian Street and all that area in there was Jewish and of course the Jews went to Manual High School. Some of the Jews went to Shortridge.

I used to sit with one of the Josephs and so forth. Well the acuteness as a manner of prejudice against the Jews and Catholics at that time was outstanding! So when the school board passed a resolution to form a special committee in 1922 to see about redistricting your high schools so that they would be able to get the Jews and the poor white people out of Shortridge and get the Negroes out. So they passed a resolution and they toyed with it, manipulated and maneuvered and they made an overall deal: that if we are going to build a new Shortridge we might as well do a good job while we're at it: get the poor white people from the south-side and the Jews out of Shortridge, create Washington High School, move Shortridge High School, and build Attucks High School. That was all one deal. Manual High School would take care of the Jews and the poor white folks from Kingan's Hill in west Indianapolis. Now you listen to me. So the deal was made to put Manual up for the Jews and poor white people from the south-side, to take them out of Shortridge. So then the leading Negroes here, who were made up of Senator Brokenburr, a lawyer and some other citizens--they we were all Republicans--and the school board were Republicans too... The Negroes went to the school board and protested this resolution.

Question: We know from the [Attucks](#) film (13:45-14:00) that more than one group, most of them were Black, protested the building of Attucks. Were there any local African Americans or groups that wanted an Attucks? Think: Marcus Garvey had visited Indianapolis during this era. There may have been one or more contingents of "Back to Africa" Indianapolis Blacks. Did Alain Locke's 1920s New Negro Movement (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9eEDC_Cf_8) that enabled "racial dignity" influence local African Americans to support an Attucks High School?

1. 1949-1981: IPS delays and circumvents integration for over 3 decades!

What's relevant here, Mr. Richardson, Jr.'s creation and sponsorship of the 1949 law requiring the state to integrate its schools. Yet, with *Brown v. Board* in 1954, to the US Justice Dept. taking IPS to federal court in 1968, to the 1977 adoption by IPS of the Desegregation Design, and finally to the 1981 transfer of some 5,600 Black students to township schools, IPS avoided integration for 32 years!

In the background, in 1967 IPS had 108,743 students—32.8% were Black. By 1981 the enrollment was 57,269 students—45.5% were Black. In 2021, IPS has 22, 928 students—40.3% Black, 32.8% Latino, and 21.6% white <https://inview.doe.in.gov/corporations/1053850000/population>

2. *Making a Mass Institution* describes how Indianapolis created a divided and unjust system of high schools over the course of the 20th century, one that effectively sorted students by race, class neighborhood, religion, politics, ability, and ethnicity. Like most US cities, IPS began its secondary system with a singular decidedly academic high school (think Shortridge), but ended the 1960s with multiple high schools with numerous paths to graduation. Some of these schools were academic, others vocational and still others for what was finally called “life adjustment”--think Harry E. Wood HS (1953-1978) and its segregated division of Special Ed. students, referred to on the street as “daps.”

This system mirrored the multiple forces of mass society that surrounded it, as it became more bureaucratic, more focused on identifying and organizing the students based on perceived abilities, and more anxious about teaching conformity to middle-class values. As IPS became a mass institution, it maintained the status quo far more often than it challenged it. This IPS high school plan became a template for other urban districts on how and where to educate students, and validating the sorting and ranking purpose of high schools. ~ paraphrased from *Making a Mass Institution: Indianapolis and the American High School* by Dr. Kyle P. Steele, 2020

3. 1020's Southside Synagogues

There were 3 synagogues around Manual HS: The United Hebrew Congregation/Madison & Union; Shara Tefilla /Merrill & Meridian; Azarus Achim/708 S. Meridian St. There were also 2 more farther south: Congregation Knesses Israel/1021 S. Meridian; and, Congregation Bikoor-Chaleem Ansha Hoaree/1051 S. Capitol.

Resources

- a) Early 1920s <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Zeitgeist-of-early-1920s.pdf>
- b) Rationale for “Past the Klan: The roots of racism in IPS & beyond”: <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/1-Rectifying-the-misleading-history-of-the-district-presented-in-the-Black-Lives-Matter-Resolution-of-the-Indianapolis-Public-Schools>.
- c) “Racial Bias and the Crumbling of a City: The educational/racial repercussion of the Indianapolis Unigov decision <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/08/indianapolis-school-districts/496145/>
- d) “UniGov: The Turbulent Making of Modern Indianapolis” <https://www.wfyi.org/programs/unigov>
- e) “Indianapolis Public Schools enrollment, 1950-2003: Chronology of IPS desegregation efforts.” May 10, 2004, *Indianapolis Star*.
- f) “An Analysis of Desegregation Trends in the Indianapolis Public Schools,” Sophia Nicholas Gonis, August 1965, Butler University https://myips.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/An-Analysis-of-Desegregation-Trends-in-the-Indianapolis-Public-Schools_word.pdf
- g) “50 years ago the US Justice Dept. sued IPS to force desegregation” <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/history/retroindy/2018/05/31/desegregation-indianapolis-chronology/655073002/>
- h) Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce <http://vorcreatex.com/indianapolis-chamber-of-commerce/>