

**Indiana, Indianapolis, race and disability, class and ability: From Attucks and Wood to the Sidener Gifted Academy, Tindley Charter School, and New Horizons Alternative High School.**

**Eugenics and special education: Attucks HS and Wood HS**

The early 1900s in Indiana were shaped by progressive era concerns with improving society. Influenced by scientific ideas about intelligence and heredity, progressives turned to social engineering: measuring intelligence (IQ) and genetics. Schools tested and ranked students, and for the sake of efficiency and society, sorted them into traditional, vocational, or special education tracks, and so “their proper place in society” (Osgood, 2010).

Using eugenics (improving society by controlled selective breeding), Indiana passed the world’s first law (1907) requiring sterilization of certain “defectives” or “undesirables.” Marriage between “superior/inferior stocks of people” was regulated. Attucks was built (1927) to segregate Blacks and prevent commingling. (Are eugenic ideas gone? No. See Tom Burrells’ *Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority*)

The next major expansion of special education was in the 50s and 60s. As in the early 1900s, standardized tests tracked students. However, new categories of slow learner/LD, mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, and culturally deprived helped remove/re-segregate students (mainly non-White, immigrant, and poor) from the regular classroom.

**The stigmatization of Special Education in Indianapolis**

IPS began gifted classes (IQ >125) and opened Harry E. Wood (1953), a 7-12 vocational school also housing most of the city’s special education students under the label of “Adapted Materials.” These “A.M.” students had a special section in the building on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and special sections in Wood’s yearbook. For example see pp 77, 79, 83, 89, and 91 of the 1961 *Wood Log*. <http://www.digitalindy.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/hewhs>

To understand the stigmatization of Special Ed., what is interesting is from the city’s street epistemologies came the term “dap” which was pulled out of the term “**adapted**” in “Adapted Materials.” Wood became the “dap” schools. Students were “dap heads” or “slow heads.” “Dap” became a pejorative term used around the city: “Hey, Billie, your ‘dappy’ uncle’s here.”

**From race and disability to class and ability: The gentrification of education\***

National concerns over magnets and charters re-segregating districts by class and ability are quite current (Mickelson, 2008; Eaton & Rivkin, 2010; Layton, 2010) and beg many questions about Marion County schools.

Do all children have an equal opportunity to learn? Are charters ( i.e. Tindley), magnets (i.e. Shortridge) and special programs (i.e. Sidener or CFI), and the growth/success of township schools, and private schools (religious and academic) creating a 2-tiered system--separate and unequal--based not on race, but socio-economic status and ability? Does this reflect a more refined type of segregation: tracking for the 21st century? Is a “gentrification” of education taking place when only a relatively privileged white-black-brown “minority” have a chance at a quality education?

To conclude, have we moved from the early 1900's/1950's where students were segregated by race and disability (Sp. Ed.) to a 21<sup>st</sup> century dual system based on class (the middle class of all colors) and ability? It is highly unlikely the quality of education among 1<sup>st</sup> tier schools (all Marion County charters, magnets, special programs--let alone township and private/parochial schools) and 2<sup>nd</sup> tier schools (the remainder of IPS and its sub-system of alternative programs/schools) are the same. Don't we want equal educational opportunity?

Next week Part 4: Solutions to the over-representation of Black males in Special Ed.

Jose M. Evans Indianapolis City-County Councillor and Chair Black & Latin@ Policy Institute  
John Harris Loflin Director of Education and Youth Issues Black & Latin@ Policy Institute

---

Eason, S. & Rivkin, S. (2010, July 28). Is desegregation dead? *EducationNext*.

Layton, L. (2010, Aug. 12). *The new segregation*. Newsreview.com. Chico, CA.

Mickelson, R. (2008). *School Choice and Segregation by Race, Class, and Achievement*. Charlotte: University of North Carolina.

Osgood, R. (2010). Education in the name of Improvement: Eugenics practices in Indiana schools. *Indiana Magazine of History*. September 2010

\*Michelle Fine, a professor at the CUNY Graduation Center, expressed her frustration with what she sees as the "gentrification of public education." She asserted that public schools are being turned into "two-tier" educational systems with an increase in the privatization of what were once schools for all so that only the relatively privileged have a chance at a quality education.