

Myth vs Fact: Crispus Attucks High School and the Ku Klux Klan

This breakout group will analyze the evidence collected to date, and judge the level of significance of the information. Along with this process, group members will decide what to do about what they concluded.

We here in Indiana are well aware of the Klan. Rising to power in the early 1920s, by 1922 Indiana had the largest Klan organization in America. See [1923 Distribution of Klan strength in Indianapolis](#). Klan members held local and state offices in Indiana from 1925 to 1929. Looking back at those frightening and dangerous times, it is easy to conclude that some of our worst public policies and laws, including school segregation in Indianapolis, were crafted and carried out by the Klan. But easy conclusions are not necessarily true.

One example is the local urban legend that the Klan created Attucks. Here is a main example transcribed from the 5:06-5:27 mark of the documentary, [Attucks: A school that opened a city](#).

Janet Cohen: “When you walked its [Attucks] halls, you walked in the steps of giants. The irony that it was the Klan who didn’t want us to have something—a powerful school with teachers and students who excelled...”

Narrator: “But, it wasn’t the Klan who created Crispus Attucks. Racism in Indiana ran far deeper than that.”

...it is significant for the purposes of this study that, while the “Klan board” was accused of loose financial practices, politicizing the school system, and nepotism, they were neither charged with racism nor criticized for segregating schools. Not until many years later, after the state law that abolished school segregation was adopted in 1949 and “establishment” whites wanted to remove the stigma of racism represented by segregated schools, did the tradition developed that the Klan was responsible for Crispus Attucks high school. ~ Dr. Emma Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the 20th Century*, p. 60

And, here’s another example of how the Attucks/Klan history is misconstrued. Here is the first sentence printed in the introductory paragraph of the Attucks video: “Built while the Ku Klux Klan ran Indiana, Crispus Attucks High School was designed to fail.”

Though true, the statement was also deceptive. Only half the story was told. Yes, the Klan ran the IPS board in 1926-7 when Attucks was built and opened. But it did not run IPS when Attucks was created in 1922 by an IPS school board guided by the [Citizens School Committee](#). See Dr. Moore’s [The real story on IPS and the KKK](#).

Here’s 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 policy of segregation was instituted before Klan-supported candidates took office, continued while they were in position, and was maintained after they were ostensibly removed from the school board. The simple but unpopular explanation is that the majority of white voters wanted segregated schools. ~ Dr. Pierce, [Polite Protest](#), p. 31.

The participants will watch videos and read documents and articles that tell about how Crispus Attucks, Indy’s segregated high school, was created. We will also try to answer these questions:

- Who espouses the myth that the KKK created Attucks and how?
- What mainstream—non-Klan--voices advocated for segregated schools in Indianapolis?
- What constituents, associations, and publications did they represent?
- Who spoke out against segregation?
- 100 years later, why is it important to overturn myth with fact?

What? So what? Now what?