

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](#)