

What was the Citizens School Committee, the most powerful, longest lasting IPS school board group that no one's ever heard of?

This breakout session will look into the history and politics of the [Citizens School Committee](#) (CSC) and go about not only trying to determine its significance, but what to do about what was discussed.

Formed in Oct. of 1921 to bring a "...new deal in management" to IPS, CSC won the Nov. 1921 election against the incumbent Better Schools League (BSL).

Known as the "Little schools slate" or "*News Slate*" due to backing by the *Indianapolis News*, CSC meant to control the IPS budget by limiting the proposed BSL building program. The issue split the city. Democrats and businesses liked the CSC. The GOP, the *Indianapolis Star*, and Klan sought to fix the old schools and build new ones. GOP's Lew Shank became mayor, but his voters spilt their ticket. The democrat-backed CSC won.¹

After the Nov. 1921 election, CSC all but reneged on its pledge by overseeing the perpetuation and growth of what was already a segregated school district in a Jim Crow city. What made this white supremacist elected civic body infamous was that in 1922-24, it oversaw the creation of a racist system of high schools: Attucks, Washington, a new Shortridge, and an expanded Manual. IPS had become a segregated district based not only on a hierarchy of color, but ethnicity/nationality, religion, class, neighborhood, and occupation/vocation.¹

Attention must be paid to the late 1922 background co-scheme and its seemingly separate negotiations around a new north-side Shortridge and the Butler College (known then as the "Shortridge Annex" because of the number of Shortridge grads enrolled) and its move from Irvington to Fairview Park. Both schools would open in their new north-side locations in the fall of 1928.

As suggested, CSC was not alone. This 1922 decision was also affected by the local [Chamber](#); racist cartoons in the *Star*,² racist editorials in the *Times*;³ the racism of Butler College and its president, Dr. Robert Aley;⁴ and the north-side middle-class citizens of the [Federation of Civic Clubs](#). Even Shortridge Principal [George Buck](#) wanted an Attucks. Question: Were any of the above mentioned Klan members?

What is truly ironic is that this bigoted body lost the 1925 IPS school board election to an equally bigoted body in the form of the Protestant School ticket of the KKK. This meant that none other than the Klan would be carrying-out the racist 1922 CSC decisions for Jim Crow high schools and an expanded segregated K-8 district. What's even more interesting is that this choice between "gasoline and dynamite" reoccurred in the [1929 IPS election](#) where a recharged CSC ticket again ran against KKK, and won this time.

Revived in the 1930s by Judge John Niblack, and later by co-conspirator Bill Book of the Chamber, CSC ran IPS, unopposed, from 1930 to 1968 when it lost to [Non-Partisans for Better Schools](#)--and then disappeared.

As post-1968 political and racial tensions grew due to the US Justice Department suit to integrate IPS, "white flight" began. IPS 1967 enrollment was 108,743 students (32% Black). To some, [UNIGOV ensured de-facto segregation](#) in IPS. To others, it was a [benefit](#). By 2003, IPS had 40,084 students (57% Black). Today,⁵ just 22,928 students are enrolled (40% Black/31% Latino). Questions: Was UNIGOV racist? Does the CSC live on?

What? So what? Now what?

1. [1920s events leading up to and through the creation of Attucks and Washington and the relocation of Cathedral, Shortridge, and Butler College.](#)
2. [07.26.21 Racist children's activity "Drawing Lessons for Our Kiddies: A bottle of Ink turned into a pickaninny" Indianapolis Star](#) and [11.16.22 Racist Cartoon "Roger Bean" Indianapolis Star](#)
3. [04.28.22 "The Negro Problem" Editorial Indianapolis Times](#)
4. [08.25.27 Butler President Aley to Lionel Artis of YMCA on quota limiting new Black students to 10 per year](#)
5. <https://inview.doe.in.gov/corporations/1053850000/population>

Citizens School Committee

“The city [Indianapolis] shows us the things we want to see while we ignore the things you cannot face. In this way the city becomes a fractured mirror.”

~ “Axes & Mirrors” *The Manufactured History of Indianapolis* (Reeves, 2013)

With all the primary sources available, it is obvious the Citizens School Committee (CSC) was a force in the history of IPS and Indianapolis from the early 1920s to the late 1960s. This is a powerful legacy.

Yet, what is not so obvious is the lack of a broader and more in-depth critical analysis given CSC in the 2916 documentary, [Attucks: A school that opened a city](#), or the 2020 attempt by IPS to explore the roots of the district’s racism as explained on page 1 of “[Rectifying the misleading history of IPS](#).”

We will be looking at these sources and histories, and begin to place them in perspective, and thus begin to consider what may be done today now that this lack of close examination is brought to light.

“The most frightening thing about Indianapolis is Indianapolis, the fact that it continues to undermine itself by being someone other than what it is or who it is.”

~ Transcript from Callers #43-#47, *The Manufactured History of Indianapolis* (Reeves, 2013)

What is at stake here is “The Indianapolis Story”: to openly unpack 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, religion, neighborhood, ethnicity, ability, and politics--is to right this past, making our city’s story is true, and making sure it is not repeated.

The Citizens School Committee and the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, and the Indianapolis Public Schools: 1930 to the early 1960s

As stated above in, “What was the Citizens School Committee, the most powerful, longest lasting IPS school board group that no one’s ever heard of?” a revived and reorganized CSC won the 1929 IPS board election and reclaimed control of IPS in January of 1930. It did not hurt the CSC campaign that the Indiana Klan’s Grand Dragon was arrested, convicted, and jailed for rape—leading to the Klan’s political demise throughout the state.

Also, critiquing the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce (ICC: <http://vorcreatex.com/indianapolis-chamber-of-commerce/>) is called for. An IPS/ICC relationship remained relevant in the decades after the IPS Klan board was defeated because the business group’s continued involvement with and empowerment of the CSC to the benefit of ICC.

John Niblack and the Citizens School Committee, and Bill Book of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce

Once the CSC came back into power, ICC became co-conspirators as the 2 groups controlled the district unopposed for over 3 decades: 1930-1964. See more at [IPS segregation and desegregation 1920s-1970s](#).

The 2 organizations were led by local power brokers and social conservative ¹ accomplices: Republican and Marion County Circuit Court Judge John L. Niblack (1897-1986) and Indianapolis Chamber executive and Republican William H. “Bill” Book (1891-1965). See more here:

- <https://beta.indyencyclopedia.org/john-lewis-niblack/>
- <https://www.amazon.com/Times-Hoosier-Judge-Lewis-Niblack/dp/0983199426>
- <https://beta.indyencyclopedia.org/william-henry-bill-book/>
- <https://beta.indyencyclopedia.org/chamber-of-commerce/>

1. Remember both Mr. Niblack and Mr. Book were in Indianapolis, a Bible-Belt city influenced politically, culturally, and socially by the [John Birch Society](#) founded in Indy in 1958?

Niblack was the head of CSC from 1930 to 1963. Book was head of ICC from 1934 to 1963. Note the importance of 1963; that's when the tide began to turn and certain citizens began to question the CSC/ICC control of the IPS school board. The following data show the 1920's demographic similarities of these 2 allied racists and Indianapolis Jim Crow era public school and city segregationists groups.

Links to the CSC creation in October of 1921, and other the statistics from 1929, 1934, and 1942 showing the demographics of the CSC membership:

1. <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/1921-Citizens-School-Committee-forms-Oct-25.pdf>
2. <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/1929-IPS-school-board-candidates.pdf>
3. <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/1934-Citizens-School-Committee-members.pdf>
4. <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/1934-Breakdown-of-Citizens-School-Committee-members.pdf>
5. <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/1942-Citizens-School-Committee-members.pdf>
6. <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/1942-Breakdown-Citizens-School-Committee-membership.pdf>

Links to 1922 ICC membership and actions of members to push IPS to create Attucks :

1. <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/1922-Indy-Chamber-Info-on-Board-of-Directors-members-.pdf>
2. <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/1922-Indy-Chamber-Info-on-Education-Committee-members.pdf>
3. <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/1922-Pt-1-Chamber-Newsletter-asks-for-segregated-IPS-system.pdf>
4. <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/1922-Pt.-2-Chamber-Newsletter-asks-for-segregated-IPS-system.pdf>

In the late 1940s, the power of CSC and Judge Niblack began to fade:

- In 1948, Eugene Pulliam, the owner/publisher of the *Indy Star*, decided to support integration (Pierce, p. 44).
- In 1949, Indiana Governor Henry Schricker decided to support Henry J. Richardson's 1949 Indiana school desegregation law (Pierce, p. 45).

By 1959, the League of Women Voters and Indianapolis PTA had organized against CSC. Still Judge Niblack remained the driving force behind it and the organization continued its practice of controlling nominations, and thus every seat on the school board. Despite these women's push back, CSC won November 1959 election (Pierce, pp. 49-51).

A 1963 US Civil Rights Commission report noted desegregation efforts in Indianapolis were lacking.

It was 1968 before the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice (CRD-DoJ) directed the IPS board to take voluntary steps to end its 14th Amendment violations (Pierce, p. 51).

The ICC supported UNIGOV legislation (Pierce, p. 116). UNIGOV became law in the years of 1969 and 1970 (Thornbrough, p. 165).

As a result of the CRD-DoJ actions, white families realized that their children would have to sit in classrooms with Black children. Known as “white flight,” these families began to leave the district.

- In 1971, IPS had 102,734 students: 37.8% Black
- In 1981, because of “white flight,” IPS had 57, 269 students: 45.5% Black
 - a loss of 45, 465 in 10 years.
 - ~ “IPS enrollment, 1950-2003: Chronology of IPS segregation efforts.” *Indianapolis Star*, May 10, 2004

It was not until 1968 when Robert DeFranz, backed by the Non-Partisans for Better Schools slate (<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/05.06.68-Pre-election-ad-for-Non-Partisans-for-Better-Schools-running-their-slate-for-1968-IPS-board-election.pdf>), won an IPS seat. Independent and African American minister Rev. Landrum Shields also won a seat. The days of Judge John Niblack and CSC’s domination of IPS were over.

With Bill Book gone, ICC changes politics

In 1964, with social conservative and segregationist Bill Book gone, ICC changed its mind regarding public housing (Thornbrough, p. 171). And, in 1965, ICC started supporting fair/equal employment acts (Thornbrough, p. 181).

- Get more information on CSC: (Pierce, pp. 38-40)
- For more information on Judge John Niblack: (Pierce, pp 49-50)
- Discover more on Bill Book in the *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, pp. 335-336.
- See more on UNIGOV: (Pierce, pp. 114-123)

The Indy Chamber and IPS today

“Pro-reform coalitions tend to be dominated by business and political elites and supported by neighborhoods with large concentrations of highly educated middle-class professionals”

~ Kimbal & Sterns, “Democracy at work: School board elections & reform in St. Louis”

“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, that the tradition developed that the Klan was responsible for Crispus Attucks high school.”
~ Dr. Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the 20th Century*, p. 60

Were the 1950’s maneuverings by SCS the origins of later efforts by Thornbrough’s Indianapolis “‘establishment’ whites” to avoid the stigma of racism by making the KKK the scapegoat for their hate? What is interesting here are the efforts by the CSC to distance itself from its October 25, 1921 origins. A 1951 IPS campaign brochure claims CSC began in 1928!

- <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/1951-Citizens-School-Committee-brochure-claiming-the-organization-started-in-1928.pdf>

Evidently, CSC leadership wanted to avoid any connection to CSC’s 1921 original organization, the one that helped create Attucks in 1922 and go on to enable a Jim Crow school district and city. Oddly, did they think 2020 IPS voters wouldn’t go back and look at the October 25, 1921 *Indy Star*?

References

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http://www.untagsmd.ac.id/files/Perpustakaan_Digital_2/POLITICAL%20ECONOMY%20Polite%20protest%20%20the%20political%20economy%20of%20race%20in%20Indianapolis,%201920-1970.pdf
- Dr. Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks on the 20th Century*, 2000
- Videos on IPS history 1864-1930 by the Loflin Center on the History of IPS
 - Part I-A 1864-1921 A Critical History of the Indianapolis Public Schools 1864-1930
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kKigk3m4kc&t=283s>
 - Part I-B 1922-1930 A Critical History of the Indianapolis Public Schools 1864-1930
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqwJKBBoruY&t=1121s>

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