

“The Way to Go is to Integrate”: The Politics of Integration at Crispus Attucks High School

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When Indianapolis public schools desegregated after a 1971 court decision, white parents were often wary of sending their kids to previously all black schools. The most prominent all black school was Crispus Attucks High School. As the school's principal recalled the fears of white parents, "we had community people, fathers, others and sons who came here and tried to brain wash me and tell me it was unsafe. The school was a bad place to be - - you couldn't come down here without getting beat up, and that is why they didn't want their kids here. It was a bad place to be, and one father said to me, 'you know this place isn't safe.'" Yet, Donalson worked diligently to challenge such assumptions, steering Attucks through a tumultuous era by not only challenging white stereotypes and maintaining the pride and legacy of the school in the black community. Donalson responded to that white father by stating that he had worked at Attucks for many years, that it was a safe school, and "Indianapolis has just received an all-American award for being an all-American city, and that to me, would suggest that there is no unsafe place in a community like that. If this place is unsafe, I would suggest that you go to the mayor's office and tell him that Attucks High School is unsafe, and he ought to return that all-American award until this place is made safe."¹ A great leader must precede great change and Crispus Attucks High School Principal Earl Donalson rose to the challenges of desegregating a previous all-black high school. Without his diligence and perseverance, Attucks may not be the institution of excellence it is today.

Bias and stereotypes permeate all societies in more ways than commonly perceived.

Looking in the past, however, hindsight often proves these perceived images wrong. But, if these

¹ Joseph T. Taylor, "Indianapolis Public Schools, Crispus Attucks High School, Interviews with Principals," Box 20, Folder 6, M0825: Joseph T. Taylor Papers, 1922-2000, Indiana Historical Society (Hereafter M0825).

misconceptions go unchallenged, they will retreat as an undercurrent of the historical narrative. When considering school desegregation, for example, popular history tends to remember the story of Ruby Bridges. She has become the face of integration: a pretty, little black girl walking up to a school building filled with Caucasian peers on November 14, 1960.²

As Donalson's story suggests, this narrative must be reexamined because it emphasizes the integration of African American students into white schools, but overlooks alternative experiences of school desegregation. Stories of the impact of school desegregation on all-black schools, their students, teachers, and administrators have received less attention. Many of the studies that examine the impact of desegregation focus on the cost to black teachers or administrators in southern school districts.³ How, this paper asks, did African American teachers, administrators, and students in a predominantly black school in the urban North react and respond to integration? This essay challenges the popular narrative of school desegregation by exploring the less well known story of white students attending Crispus Attucks high school, a previously all-black high school, in Indianapolis after court-ordered desegregation in 1971.

Crispus Attucks High School, founded in 1927, was an African American school that had become a center of pride in the Indianapolis African American community due to its history of strong athletics, excellent academics, and successful service programs. When Indianapolis Public schools (IPS) were faced with desegregation as a result of a local court order in 1971, however, this cornerstone of the black community was jeopardized. As my essay demonstrates, administra-

² "Ruby Bridges (1954-)," *National Women's History Museum*, Accessed December 15, 2015, <https://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/ruby-bridges/>

³ Fairclough Adam, "The Costs of Brown: Black Teachers and School Integration," *The Journal of American History* 91, Issue 1 (2006). <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/91.1/fairclough.html>; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century* (World: Bloomington, 2001), page 37, PDF e-book. http://www.iupress.indiana.edu/product_info.php?products_id=19973.

tors, teachers, and students were each challenged by desegregation and responded in unique ways. By examining the counter-narrative of the integration of an African American school, this paper suggests that the meaning of quality education differed from the common call for integrated schools when placed in the context of desegregating an all-black high school. School desegregation, in other words, represented a challenge to quality education at Attucks which would disrupt the long history of the pride and community built by African American residents, students, teachers, and administrators at Crispus Attucks. But those in charge of Crispus Attucks did not shy away from making integration work. Principal Donalson, this paper demonstrates, steered Attucks through the transition of desegregation and ensured that the school maintained a strong reputation in Indianapolis.

This paper will first examine why Attucks was built and the reasons the Indianapolis community felt that a separate black school needed to be constructed. Following that, I explore how desegregation occurred on a national and city-wide level, then specifically how Crispus Attucks dealt with the changes of desegregation. Finally, I consider the legacy of desegregation at Crispus Attucks. These changes impacted the pride of the African American community in a unique way that the traditional narrative may overlook. By examining the impact of Brown on a specific school, prejudices and stereotypes of both the black community in regards to white members, and vice versa, are revealed.

The Background of Crispus Attucks High School

Crispus Attucks High School was built in 1927 as an all-black high school, the first and only in Indianapolis. School officials decided in 1922 that the all-black high school would be

constructed for “the purpose of segregating the 800 black students, who were, at the time, attending Manual, Shortridge and Tech high schools alongside white students.”⁴ The school quickly became a source of pride among the African American community. A factor that contributed to this pride was the fact that most of the teachers, who were predominately African American, had advanced degrees - a significant achievement for African Americans during the Jim Crow era. Earl Donalson, for example, was appointed principal of Crispus Attucks High School in 1968. He remained principal until 1983, when he passed the responsibilities to David Robinson, the first white principal in the school’s history.⁵ As Donalson recalled about the importance of Attucks as a space for African American educators:

When you look at a staff like at Crispus Attucks from 1927-1960, there were no opportunities for blacks prepared in secondary education other than Crispus Attucks... Many of them were prepared in the southern black college. Some of them had taught in southern black colleges... There are other persons who came from state schools, private colleges that kind of thing. But, for the most part, they were very well prepared and became a part of the institutional complexion of that school. You had somewhere between zero and very little staff turnover. It was possible for a person to graduate from Attucks - go do whatever they do after they get out of high school - and return ten to fifteen years later and relatively little change within the faculty.⁶

Since black educators faced discrimination in hiring and were often not accepted in white schools, Crispus Attucks High School provided an important place for the development of African American education in Indianapolis. The teachers’ academic excellence, consistency, and

⁴ Tracey Dodds, “Crispus Attucks made history — and change,” *Indy Star*, last modified November 25, 2014, <http://www.indystar.com/story/sports/high-school/2014/11/25/crispus-attucks-made-history--and-change/70088932/>

⁵ Stanley Warren, *Hail to the Green, Hail to the Gold* (Virginia Beach: The Donning Company/Publishers, 1998), 89.

⁶ Joseph T. Taylor, “Indianapolis Public Schools, Crispus Attucks High School, Interviews with Principals,” Box 19, Folder 2, M0825.

experience provided students with a magnificent education and provided the cornerstone to successful adult lives.

Over time, the Crispus Attucks school evolved into more than just a place for education. Beyond the classroom, it provided a location for a community to grow and thrive. The number of students quickly grew, as more industries in the region attracted African Americans after World War I. The number of African Americans in Indianapolis grew from 21,816 in 1910 to 34,678 in 1920.⁷ Although many African Americans were headed for larger industrial cities such as Chicago and Gary during the Great Migration, Indianapolis was also an attractive option since it was “home to a variety of small and medium-sized manufacturing establishment” for employment and families.⁸ This influx of middle- and working-class African Americans created a demand for a location for a tight-knit community to flourish. Due to the large number of new African Americans in the city, a community began to form to make the transition into a new city easier and to provide protection from threats and intimidation stemming from the Ku Klux Klan.⁹ This need was answered by building Crispus Attucks High School. The school served not only as an institution of education, but also as a place for the African American community to meet and grow.

Crispus Attucks gave the African American community a safe place for their needs to be met and space for pride. By eliminating the competition with white students, black students were able to succeed in a space free of racial prejudice. The larger community was also invited inside the doors of Crispus Attucks to visit the branch of the Marion County Public Library which was

⁷ Thornbrough, 35.

⁸ Ibid., 37.

⁹ Ibid., 35.

housed in the school.¹⁰ The addition of a musical organ in 1927 marked the hope and desire for a boastful, excellent educational institution where students had an opportunity to excel in both art, athletics, and academics.¹¹ Many speakers and black celebrities visited Attucks from across the country to show support of the institution, providing the black students with many opportunities unavailable to their white peers at other schools such as hearing important speakers and learning from influential musicians and teachers.¹² Possibly due to exposure to great leaders and thinkers, many talented individuals graduated from Attucks and went on to be barrier breakers, including jazz legend Dr. David N. Baker, Jr. and basketball star Oscar Robertson.

Yet, being the only black high school in a segregated school system had its disadvantages as well. Facilities were lacking and equipment was outdated and sparse. Athletic teams were banned from competing with other IPS schools due to their race. This forced the teams to compete with other black schools across Indiana and surrounding states.¹³ Though Crispus Attucks High School fought different challenges than other IPS schools, it remained a steadfast educational facility and served as a place for African Americans in the Indianapolis community to call home.

Despite the pride generated by Attucks, the demands for integration after World War II raised questions about the survival of Attucks as an all-black school. Steps towards integration in Indianapolis began before the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* 1954 Supreme Court case

¹⁰ Warren, 41.

¹¹ Ibid., 42.

¹² Ibid., 45.

¹³ Ibid., 73.

changed the face of the nation's educational policies. In the post World War II period Indianapolis residents, both black and white, wrestled with the idea of integration. With the growth of the African American population after World War II, pressure for school integration accelerated. The outcome of these discussions was the 1949 School Desegregation Act. The 1949 School Desegregation Act served the purpose of:

establishing a public policy in public education and abolishing and prohibiting separate schools organized on the basis of race, color or creed, and prohibiting racial or creed segregation, separation or discrimination in public schools, colleges and universities in the state of Indiana and prohibiting discrimination in the transportation of public school pupils and students.¹⁴

Unfortunately, very little was done to put this law into action and few schools were integrated as a result of the 1949 desegregation act. The 1949 School Desegregation Act made it possible, but not mandatory, for black students to attend schools closer to their home rather than traveling to Attucks. Approximately two hundred black freshmen who would have automatically been assigned to Crispus Attucks High School took the opportunity to enroll in high schools previously reserved for white students in the fall semester of 1949.¹⁵ The initial successes of the 1949 School Desegregation Act, however, did not largely impact the student body of Crispus Attucks, as the tradition of traveling to Attucks continued long after 1949.¹⁶

The landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* unanimously decided that there was no place for racial segregation in public schools. Further, segregation violated the Fourteenth

¹⁴ Sophia Nicholas Gonis, *An Analysis of Desegregation Trends in the Indianapolis Public Schools*, (Butler University, 1965), page 129, PDF e-book. <http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1032&context=grtheses>

¹⁵ Warren, 62.

¹⁶ Warren, 1.

Amendment's Equal Protection Clause.¹⁷ In contrast to the 1949 Desegregation Act, it was now mandatory for all public schools to integrate. However, the act was slow to be put into action and segregated schools continued to be the norm across the country, including those in Indianapolis. Some African American parents, teachers, and students preferred segregated schools because the achievements that school made were accomplished entirely by African Americans for African Americans. Although they opposed segregation, it had also provided them with job opportunities, community building, sports programs, and a place of pride for black students. The separation from their white peers freed black students to thrive in their education and the community. Through Crispus Attucks and segregated school policies, the student body became leaders and boundary breakers through basketball, winning the State Championship in 1955, and in academic achievement.¹⁸ The prospect of desegregation would challenge these benefits that an all-black school provided during an era of racial segregation and discrimination.¹⁹

Desegregation and the Impact on Crispus Attucks

After sixteen years of resisting *Brown v. Board*, the United States Justice Department filed a lawsuit against Indianapolis Public Schools in May of 1968, which left no room for Indianapolis to postpone integration any longer.²⁰ After this case there was no longer the option of

¹⁷ Alex McBride, "Supreme Court History: Landmark Cases," PBS.org, last modified December 2006, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/supremecourt/rights/landmark_brown.html.

¹⁸ Tracey Dodds, "Crispus Attucks made history — and change," *Indy Star*, last modified November 25, 2014, <http://www.indystar.com/story/sports/high-school/2014/11/25/crispus-attucks-made-history--and-change/70088932/>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ebony Chappel, "Brown vs. Board of Education," *Indianapolis Recorder* Newspaper, last modified May 15, 2014, http://www.indianapolisrecorder.com/news/local/article_f70b0300-dc6f-11e3-b2ed-001a4bcf887a.html

recognizing the law, but remaining passive about integration. After a 1971 lawsuit requiring desegregation, the black students of Crispus Attucks would be bused to schools in the district to force integration. The method of one-way busing meant that black students would be sent to other schools and a small population of white students could choose to come to Crispus Attucks High School. The changes would take their toll on the students, parents, administration, and community.

The traditions of Attucks were threatened by desegregation, striking fear in the hearts of the African American community who contributed to Attucks, as well as the new white teachers and students who were going to teach and attend the school. Fear of a new school, the quality of education, and racial difference created great hesitation toward integration in both black and white community members and students. Students and teachers alike were hesitant to come to the formerly all black school. Community members and parents were afraid to send their students to Crispus Attucks High School for fear of the new school. Rumors surrounded the physical condition and quality of education at the school, further proof of ostracism of African Americans living in Indianapolis in the 1970s.²¹

Principal Earl Donalson faced many difficult decisions during the transition of integration and took much of the responsibility in ensuring the conversion of Attucks went smoothly. Principal Donalson worked relentlessly to counter misconceptions about the school. He began by compiling a fact sheet with the positive contributions Attucks had made to the community, which he sent to radio stations and all of the newspapers. To win the public, he relied on the media, whom

²¹ Joseph T. Taylor, "Indianapolis Public Schools, Crispus Attucks High School, Interviews with Principals," Box 20, Folder 6, M0825.

he invited to a luncheon to convince them to promote Attucks in a positive light.²² Further, he invited the public to an open house of Attucks to give the community a chance to experience what he believed Attucks to be for themselves. He recalled the reaction of one family whose pre-conceptions about an all-black school were overturned on their visit because it captured the general attitude of white parents and students at this time:

We had the place cleaned up and everything, and I never shall forget, I stood there in the hall, with my Sunday smile on, and in comes a white family, husband, wife and two kids, they stood in the door, and said, ‘why, this is a nice building, this is the first time I have ever been in here, I didn’t know this place was like that. It’s even clean.’²³

Both the students who were leaving Attucks and the new students who were arriving were scared in the face of the changes brought about by integration. This experience brought to Principal Donalson to see the true challenge he faced regarding desegregation. By going to media sources and meeting with white parents who were skeptical of the school, he worked to publicize the positives that Attucks had to offer to all people. But upon gauging the reactions of journalists and families, Donalson explained, “It didn’t occur to me that this community had some of the attitudes about Attucks High School that I discovered in the last 7 years — that we were different, inadequate, just everything but what we ought to be, it was all right for blacks, but not for whites.”²⁴ The need for promotional efforts about Attucks revealed the stereotypes and fears that white community members had with desegregation, specifically their own white children attend-

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

ing a previously all-black school. But Donalson and other leaders worked to alter their perceptions.

White parents were not the only ones to be worried about desegregation at Attucks. The black community was also wary of the impact integration would have on their school. To prepare the Attucks community for desegregation, Joseph T. Taylor, the Dean of Liberal Arts at IUPUI - Downtown Campus addressed parents, teachers, students, and administrators from Crispus Attucks at the opening of the 1971 school year. He discussed issues of race relations during a workshop in August of 1971.²⁵ The fact that a speech attempting to convince the audience that integration was necessary demonstrates the reticence of change on behalf of African Americans. By acknowledging the misconceptions and providing advice regarding how the Attucks community should approach and understand the implementation of school desegregation, he addressed the community's fears and concerns at the time. In this speech, Taylor supported the integration of Attucks and schools in general because he saw education as a means of achieving a diverse society, explaining:

If we are to complement each other, black and white, we need a common set of tools. Education will provide these tools. That is the task that society sets for it. For understandable reasons, some blacks and some whites think it better to educate their offspring separately. I don't share this view. I cannot share this view as long as I have optimism that the American dream or unity in diversity can be realized. Black children need the experience of being educated for participating in the mainstream under the same conditions as their white contemporaries, against whom they will compete - with whom they must live and work.²⁶

As Taylor suggested, school desegregation would not harm the educational experience at Attucks, but instead would strengthen it. To Taylor, desegregated education was a remedy for the

²⁵ Joseph T. Taylor, "A Perspective for Improving Race Relations," 1971, Box 5, Folder 9, M0825.

²⁶ Joseph T. Taylor, "A Perspective for Improving Race Relations," 1971, Box 5, Folder 9, M0825.

larger societal issues of race relations. Education would provide students with tools to overcome racism, in both action and beliefs. Taylor held the opinion that the school was a training ground for life in a desegregated world, which enhances the need for desegregated schools. By urging his audience to open their minds to an integrated school, he calls on them to see the benefits for black students as they prepared to enter a world filled with unequal opportunities.

Dean Taylor recognized these issues within his speech by reminding his audience that “Black youngsters suffer great deprivations, that to the grinding pressures of institutionally buttressed racism.” Attucks, Taylor believed, was part of a segregated past that undermined quality education. He outlined three ways that segregated schools limited the education of black students:

1. They are likely to be poor with all that being poor in an affluent society entails.
2. They are by definition, by the rules of the game, a minority group.
3. They are, any may well remain, given the moral operation of the system, politically weak and economically unsophisticated.²⁷

The reality that blacks faced in the larger society was now mirrored within their school, causing unnecessary competition, Dean Taylor argued. Taylor used these points as further justification for the necessity of integration. Although Crispus Attucks had become a strong community for Indianapolis African Americans, Taylor argued that the balance of power remained unequal outside of the school. Until integration occurred and racial boundaries were broken, African Americans will remain outcast from society and unable to succeed equally to their peers.

²⁷ Ibid.

Taylor felt that there was much to learn in schools that transfers into larger society, but his attitude was not universally shared. Gilbert Taylor, a 1955 Attucks graduate who later earned a doctorate degree and is currently the curator of the Crispus Attucks Museum, offered an alternative reaction. Based on personal experience and a familiarity with the history and future of Attucks, he felt “integration was the worst thing to happen to Attucks” because it signaled a loss of a vibrant and successful all-black institution.²⁸ This view mimicked some of the attitudes of the time, and some that persist into today. Integration forced black students to compete in the schools as well as larger society.

When the first day of school came in 1971, and integration was put into place, there was much fear in the white community. This could be seen by the white families who had attended the open house and the need for positive propaganda in newspapers and radio stations. Recalling the experience with desegregation, Principal Earl Donalson described two major problems. First, the problem of new teachers and staff who were not happy about being placed in Attucks gained his attention. As Donalson mentioned, “the new staff who didn’t want to be here, and wanted to complain, worried the hell out of me — made life uncomfortable.”²⁹ The experience of desegregation, in other words, not only brought students who were unhappy with desegregation, but also staff and teachers, threatening the quality of education and the pride of the school.

Principal Donalson’s second worry revolved around the lack of trust from the white community. “Everyone who had a kid coming here, except maybe a half dozen families,” Donal-

²⁸ Gilbert Taylor (1955 Attucks graduate who has a doctorate and is curator of the Attucks Museum at the school) in discussion with the author, October 29, 2015.

²⁹ Joseph T. Taylor, “Indianapolis Public Schools, Crispus Attucks High School, Interviews with Principals,” Box 20, Folder 6, M0825.

son recalled, “had to talk to me about being here, and tell me how unsafe it was here, and the kids would be poorly educated, and that we weren’t equipped, and there was something wrong with me, and I was prejudiced and all that and I had to listened to all that stuff.”³⁰ To deal with this integration in the freshman class, he held 420 conferences for the 420 freshman [both black and white] and allowed none of the transfers out of the school that white parents had requested. Donalson addressed the fears of students, parents, teachers, and administrators to the best of his ability. And it paid off. Desegregation went smoothly due to the diligent work of the school corporation in handling the changes that were occurring.³¹

One area where Donalson faced significant challenges but also successfully defied tension was in disciplinary measures. The first year, there were many fights between black and white students and these were handled very firmly by the principal. Gangs began to form; white students who were anti-black fought against groups of blacks who were anti-white. Principal Donalson recalls receiving a call regarding a large group of white students meeting outside of school, by the stadium, who were organizing a fight. He brought the students into his office and tried to counsel them. This incident occurred again, which forced Principal Donalson to suspend the students and have conferences with them. During their conversations, however, he discovered the names of black students who were doing the same thing; they, too, were suspended. After all the students returned to school from their suspension, Donalson described the following week as the time when “all hell broke loose.” A major fight started and each of the students blamed each other for starting it. In the end, Donalson “expelled about 20 kids, half of them white and half of

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

them black.”³² Many parents were upset with the violence and their child’s suspension, so Donaldson “had all the families come down there and all the kids, school board attorney, and some of these families had an attorney, and we started the hearing” that provided no clear answers, but set a precedent of quickly and decisively handling any racial tensions.³³ In the end, about five students who were involved did not return to Attucks, the other fifteen got back on probation. This extreme event set the tone for the rest of the school year by suggesting that “in this school there was going to be justice, we didn’t care what color you were.”³⁴ By showing that violence was not tolerated, the community and parent complaints that the school was unsafe were quashed over time.

But students were not the only people to be affected by the 1971 Desegregation Act. Teachers were to be integrated as well. In fact, black teachers were still largely limited to positions at Crispus Attucks. By 1970, “92 black high school teachers and 781 white high school teachers” were employed by Indianapolis Public Schools, but only 2 white teachers were on the Attucks staff.³⁵ To begin the process of integrating teachers, white teachers were sent to Attucks and black teachers assigned to new Indianapolis public schools. As mentioned previously, it was very difficult for black teachers to find places where they were able to teach and many had Masters degrees. These teachers were willing, but not excited, to go teach in a school where they were a minority and were more knowledgeable than the rest of their co-teacher but under-appreciated.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Warren, 64.

In Dean Taylor's interview with Donalson, the teacher changes proved disastrous for Attucks. Donalson describes the meeting with the school board where he was told he which teachers he would be losing to adjust for the requirement of black teachers at white schools. Donalson recalled a school board member reaching into a drawer and handing him a sheet with a list of teachers who would be leaving. His reaction was one of shock; he was appalled that the school board would force him to get rid of teachers without having any input in the decisions. The loss of these valuable teachers also represented a loss of pride and community in the school since these classroom leaders greatly impacted the school climate and the represented the African American community as a whole. Donalson described the seemingly unfair process used by the school board, which hurt Attucks disproportionately compared to the other schools receiving the high-quality Attucks teachers:

I said, 'How, did you get these names?' He said, 'Random selection.' I said 'you mean to tell me you put all the teachers names at Attucks High School, and drew out these — it is hard for me to imagine that random selection would allow you to draw these names out. I have planned my program around these folks — some of these are key people and I don't know how I'll operate without them.' He said, 'well, you don't have any choice. You can't complain about the folks that you are receiving, or about the folks that you're losing. If anyone on your staff who is being transferred objects to it, they can complain, but you can't, and all you have to do, if you are losing a chemistry teacher at Attucks High School is to just forget that teacher existed, and the teacher that is assigned to you from one of these other two schools, can do the same job you are doing, just change then names on the schedule, and you ought to be all right.'³⁶

The school climate shifted dramatically due to teacher retention rates. Students need some consistency in their education. High teacher turn-over rates in a short period of time, relatively inexperienced teachers who would not have been hired otherwise, and a newly integrated high school

³⁶ Joseph T. Taylor, "Indianapolis Public Schools, Crispus Attucks High School, Interviews with Principals," Box 20, Folder 6, M0825.

combine to create a tense learning environment. This uphill battle was eventually overcome, but not without its set of trials. To meet the teacher integration demands of the school board, Attucks school in 1971 was comprised of one-third white and two-thirds black students but the staff composition was exactly the opposite.³⁷ These numbers represent a dramatic change from the previously all-black high school and highlight the extreme shift in Attucks as a result of desegregation.

White teachers, on the other hand, were hesitant to be moved to a previously all-black high school. Many of the teachers who were scheduled to move to Attucks decided to quit before they would work at Crispus Attucks. Donalson faced a struggle with the school board to keep quality teachers at Attucks and receive quality white teachers in return. White teachers, for example, often proved upon discovering their transfer to Attucks. Only about half of the assigned teachers actually came, the other half of the needed teachers came from people who were looking for jobs in the system for the first time and had some experience in the area of instruction that needed to be filled in order to be fully staffed. These inexperienced teachers caused the quality of education to decline and the sense of community suffered due to the reluctance of new teachers to come to Attucks at all. There was a strong feeling of that the white teachers who came did not want to come at all. These mandates for teacher transfers happened for three years, 1968, 1969, and 1970. Although Principal Donalson tried his hardest to keep educators at Attucks and limit the number of transfers, the school board defended their decisions by saying that “Attucks was the only place in the city where we have teachers with secondary licenses, so you’re the black

³⁷ Joseph T. Taylor, “Indianapolis Public Schools, Crispus Attucks High School, Interviews with Principals,” Box 20, Folder 6, M0825.

pool, and we have to get them from you.”³⁸ The impact was detrimental and the effects were obvious to Donalson in the lower quality instruction and loss of pride in the school:

I had begun to notice that there could be no stability in any plan because you were always changing personnel, and you were changing in large quantities, and so I protested to the board that what you are doing, and expect me to maintain a school is impossible, and about this time the black revolution was going on — we had groups of blacks who were organized — who objected to the movement of teachers, and threatened that this school would be closed, and they were putting pressure on me not to let those teachers leave here as if I had some control or authority.³⁹

It was evident in this statement that Donalson felt powerless against the school board. They were forcing a change too quickly, which had detrimental effects on Attucks. Additionally, teacher quality declined since highly qualified African American teachers left and less qualified white teachers with little background and knowledge of the history of Attucks were hired. Of course, this was not the experience of all teachers and wonderful teachers did remain, but the changes brought upon by implementation had effects on educational qualities and not just on the composition of the student body.

Prior to integration, Crispus Attucks was not permitted to compete athletically or academically with other Indianapolis Public Schools due to their race. This segregation from the region forced them to compete with all-black schools much farther away. The Crispus Attucks Tigers continued to succeed, however, even when they allowed to compete with white schools. In 1955, they claimed the State basketball title with an undefeated season, which shocked sports world.⁴⁰

³⁸ Joseph T. Taylor, “Indianapolis Public Schools, Crispus Attucks High School, Interviews with Principals,” Box 20, Folder 6, M0825.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Tracey Dodds, “Crispus Attucks made history — and change,” *Indy Star*, last modified November 25, 2014, <http://www.indystar.com/story/sports/high-school/2014/11/25/crispus-attucks-made-history--and-change/70088932/>

When white students joined black students in the classroom and larger school community, their successes were no longer celebrated in the same way. Being the black public school of Indianapolis was a source of pride for the community that was stripped away through the integration of the school.

Upon reflection, Earl Donalson saw no lasting advantages to segregated education. Although the transition to an integrated school was a daunting task, the benefits of integrated education are worth it. Donalson felt that “the way to go is to integrate the program and the staff and the activities and teach youngsters the best way we know how the merits of being competitive, rant that have people feel sorry for you.”⁴¹ As Dean Taylor predicted and Principal Donalson mimicked, an integrated school would better prepare both black and white students for the “real world” and increase the quality of education for both school. The lasting positive impact is evident by the records showing that in the 2013-2014 school year, the school received an “A” rating on the Indianapolis Department of Education’s grading scale.⁴² This quality education could not exist if the violence issues were not dealt with. Because of the strong foundation the school built out of rocky moments of history, including integration, the school continues to be a point of pride for the entire Indianapolis community, no longer just the African American community.

Legacy of Desegregation at Crispus Attucks

Upon reflection, Early Donalson saw no lasting advantages to segregated education. Although the transition to an integrated school was a daunting task, the benefits of integrated edu-

⁴¹ Joseph T. Taylor, “Indianapolis Public Schools, Crispus Attucks High School, Interviews with Principals,” Box 20, Folder 6, M0825.

⁴² *Indiana Department of Education*, <http://compass.doe.in.gov/dashboard/reportcard.aspx?type=school&id=5473>

cation were worth the change. Donalson felt that “the way to go is to integrate the program and the staff and the activities and teach youngsters the best way we know how the merits of being competitive, rant that pave people sorry for you.”⁴³ As Dean Taylor predicted and Principal Donalson mimicked, an integrated school would better prepare both black and white students for the “real world” and increase the quality of education for both school.

Over time, the school continued to grow as a source of pride not only in the black community, but for Indianapolis as a whole. Currently, it is a Medical Magnet of Indianapolis Public school. This school serves as a technical high school creating prepared future healthcare workers and successful citizens. It houses a museum to commemorate where blacks and the school have been and where they will go in the future. The present successes of the school would not have been possible if Principal Donalson had not worked diligently to maintain high quality teachers, promote the school to the community, and swiftly handle violence in the school.

This success, by no means, came easily to the school. For a short time immediately before and after integration, community was lost because both black and white students, families, and teachers were hesitant to let go of the community they had built and adapt to a new community together. Eventually and with many hours of hard work put in by administrators, teachers, and community members, a new sense of community formed, built from the remains of the schools founding ideals and contemporary societal expectations. Even though fear dominated the narrative at the time of integration, Attucks proved to be a success story. As curator Taylor expressed, there are still regrets and opinions that do not support integration, but the end result counters this idea as seen by the long-term success of Attucks as an integrated institution.

⁴³ Joseph T. Taylor, “Indianapolis Public Schools, Crispus Attucks High School, Interviews with Principals,” Box 20, Folder 6, M0825.

Crispus Attucks unique history speaks to a larger issue in Indianapolis and the United States. By identifying the attitudes of both black and white students, teachers, administrators, and community members, the perceptions and fears regarding integration and education can be highlighted, preserved, and commemorated. This school's success speaks to a larger success. While not all negative attitudes on integrated education have receded in the twenty-first century, Crispus Attucks stands as a proud memorial to a hope for a continued successful implementation of *Brown V. Board*.

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