

While contributors in this collection do not provide readers with a rigid list of actions to disrupt whiteness, readers are invited to recognize the myriad enactments of whiteness, deleterious effects of intergenerational trauma, their complicity in perpetrating racism and colonial violence, and their responsibility to redress the ongoing denigration of Indigenous peoples. As the editors maintain, “readers are challenged to grapple with deeply embedded assumptions regarding where and with whom the responsibility for change is located” (12).

This collection makes an important contribution to scholarship on white settler colonialism and anti-Indigenous racism. The counter-narratives interwoven across the chapters expose a settler colonial regime characterized by genocide, ongoing violence, and deeply entrenched racism and its detrimental effects on generations of Indigenous peoples. Beyond these rich narratives, there is an earnest call to professionals in various sectors to “unlearn entrenched colonial scripts” (253) and grapple with the ways in which they have benefited from colonial violence. Authors provoke some of the contentious and mixed emotions well-meaning white women may experience, including assuming the stance of white saviours. Some may also assert their expertise of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing yet have done little to interrogate their own complicity. The editors reminded individuals and institutions alike that they must extend beyond current diversity and inclusion or implicit bias training, which often centres whiteness. As the editors assert, these trainings “often lack a foundational analysis of white settler colonialism and the unequal power dynamics that continue to negatively impact Indigenous Peoples” (252). This edited collection serves as a rich source of knowledge for those who wish to better understand the devastating consequences of anti-Indigenous racism, how the so-called helping professions contribute to and maintain systems of injustice against Indigenous people, and actions they can take to thwart injustices against Indigenous peoples and communities.

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Kyle P. Steele

Making a Mass Institution: Indianapolis and the American High School

New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020. 206 pp.

“Where’d you go to high school?” (1) is Kyle Steele’s hook for this engaging book about Indianapolis, Indiana secondary schools. Steele’s question resonates because, as he shows, attending high school has become the norm for practically all Americans. In examining how Indianapolis’s high schools wrestled with many challenges—curriculum differentiation in an age of mass secondary school participation, youth culture, racial segregation—Steele also tells a national story about American education in the past 130 years.

In chapter 1, Steele examines the watershed 1890–1919 period when Indianapolis expanded from a single high school to a system made up of several. To cope with newly educating practically all adolescents, Indianapolis developed academic and vocational tracks (or “streams” in Canada), which Steele argues in fact sorted students by class, city geography, and ethnicity (eventually by race also). Such tracking played out nationally as well.

Chapter 2 tells another familiar national story, which Steele recounts with Indianapolis’s distinctive racial history. Indianapolis classrooms were once integrated, made possible by an Indiana law that permitted but did not *require* schools to be racially segregated. This was the case even though (or perhaps because) Indianapolis historically had an unusually large proportion of African Americans for a Northern city before the Great Migration. However, in 1922, a slate of school board members backed by the Ku Klux Klan reversed a policy of integration in Indianapolis in a decade that witnessed similar retrenchments elsewhere as well as the Tulsa race massacre (1921) and the Klan’s revival.

Black Indianapolitans opposed segregation. When it was imposed anyway, they maneuvered within it, just as African Americans did in other places. “If a segregated high school was to exist, the city’s black citizens seemed to reason, it had better be great” (39), Steele writes. Like the standout all-Black Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., or Pearl High School in Nashville, Indianapolis’s segregated Crispus Attucks High School (founded 1927) delivered top-notch academics. The school recruited highly educated teachers—some lured from college positions, and all of them African American.

In chapter 3, Steele looks at youth peer cultures in the 1930s and 1940s, as high school, a mass institution, now also “move[d] to the center of the adolescent experience” (62). High schools in Indianapolis, as elsewhere in the United States, tried to direct youth’s massive energies into extracurriculars that reinforced dominating “middle-class, white, patriarchal, and heteronormative values” (62). Steele argues that many youths happily participated in such activities, namely the school newspaper, the Christian Hi-Y club, and school dances.

Chapter 4 begins with high school basketball. This focus is appropriate for hoops-obsessed Indiana, but also frames two of the book’s central topics: extracurriculars and racial segregation. All Indianapolis toasted the Crispus Attucks High School boys’ basketball team when the team made several deep runs into the state finals in the 1950s. And yet white segregationists tried to prevent the state from integrating Indianapolis’s schools despite a 1949 Indiana law desegregating education state-wide and the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision against legal segregation. No longer able to use laws to bend the arc of history away from justice, white segregationists interpreted the *Brown* decision phrase “with all deliberate speed” as a directive to integrate glacially slowly. The first white student did not enroll at Attucks until 1968. Meanwhile, “the young [African American] men of Attucks were legends on the hardwood,” Steele powerfully writes, “but not regarded as neighbors, co-workers, partners, or spouses in a racially integrated society” (90).

Chapter 5 examines life adjustment education—another form of tracking—from the mid-1950s to 1971. Life adjustment courses in civics, driver education, and physical education were meant to prepare youth not for college, nor even workplaces, but for “adult life.” Blue-collar and African American students were tracked into such courses, which also happened nationally.

Suburbanization and metropolitan politics, other topics in chapter 5, were areas where whites blocked racially integrated education. Anti-integration whites, in both Indianapolis and elsewhere in the US, argued that schools merely reflected residential racial segregation and they therefore had no duty to do anything about it, a common but flimsy defence. Indianapolis’s school attendance zones may have created racially homogeneous schools, but this was hardly a passive fact. In less than two decades’ time, Indianapolis school leaders redrew attendance boundaries “360 times, none of which ... made the schools less segregated” (116). When rigging attendance zones stopped working, whites fled to suburbs to re-establish segregated schools there. Tellingly, when, in a rare move, Indianapolis merged its city and suburban governments in 1970, it did not unite school districts: whites would tolerate shared municipal services in any area but one—white schools. Yet in 1981 when busses finally started rolling as part of court-ordered metropolitan desegregation of greater Indianapolis, only African American youngsters boarded them. They were “integrated” into majority white schools where practically no one welcomed them. By 2016 the failed bussing plan had expired, resonating unsurprisingly, and tragically, with a national desegregation story also.

There is a lot packed into this slim book, another example of the newly popular case study style in the matured field of history of American urban and suburban education. Much like Elizabeth Todd-Breland’s *A Political Education: Black Politics and Education Reform in Chicago since the 1960s* (2018), which studies similar themes through African American community organizing, or Andrew Highsmith’s *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan, and the Fate of the American Metropolis* (2016), which uses urban renewal as its lens, Steele’s book re-examines education, civil rights, inequality, opportunity, and American democracy through one city’s high schools.

Because Steele’s book is rich with information and insight, but still short, readable, and interesting, it holds great promise as a teaching tool, particularly to introduce American secondary teacher education candidates, or in-service high school educators taking principalship or other leadership courses, to the histories of the schools, communities, and pupils whose lives they will become part of (or already are).

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