

Remember the Titans: A Theoretical Analysis

Rameca Leary

Regent University Ph.D. Program
Communication and the Arts, Charleston
Email: ramecaleary@aol.com

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses a pivotal time in American history, when a 1971 Supreme Court mandate required southern school districts to end segregation (Daughterity, 2011). In Alexandria, Virginia, the merger of three rival high schools yielded a racially diverse football team and coaching staff. Beforehand, blacks and whites had their own schools. Many wondered how the new T.C. Williams Titans football team would fare. This paper takes an in-depth look at the film, Remember the Titans, which is based on this story. It analyzes the film using Gordon Allport's (1954) Intergroup Contact Theory to assess how people from different backgrounds interact within group settings. It explores how communication barriers and the absence of knowledge can lead to ignorance. A 21st century legacy is also discussed, including ideas for further research.

Keywords: integration, diversity, communication barriers, legacy, further research

After Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968, civil rights activists fought hard to keep his dream of racial equality alive (Tinuoye, 2012). Sadly, many black students in the south were still learning in dilapidated schools with insufficient materials. In 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina*. It legitimized busing as a means of integrating schools and mandated that southern school districts comply (Daughterity, 2011). As a result, large numbers of black students entered formerly white schools, and vice versa.

In Alexandria, Virginia, the effects of the Supreme Court ruling created an air of uncertainty (Sullivan, 2005). Tensions were high as parents and students wondered how three rival high schools could successfully merge ... as one, the T.C. Williams Titans. How would black and white students adapt to this new environment? Would the newly-formed football team be successful? There were too many unanswered questions. It took a lot of hard work and determination, but the coaches and players eventually became a strong, unified force. The Titans won the 1971 Virginia state championship with an undefeated record (Guttendorf, 2011). This heartwarming story impressed Hollywood producer Jerry Bruckheimer so much that he vowed to bring it to the big screen. In 2000, Disney Studios released the critically-acclaimed film, *Remember the Titans*, based on the team's story. The movie was not only about the game, but explored such themes as diversity, racial struggles, love, and friendship (Bruckheimer & Yakin, 2000).

When people fail to interact with others from different ethnicities or cultures, a fear of the unknown can prevail (Crisp & Turner, 2009). One theorist who explored this issue extensively was Gordon Allport. In 1954, he introduced Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT) to argue that contact and interaction between members of different identified groups must be present to recognize similarities and gain knowledge of "the other" (Massey & Hodson, 1999, p. 669). In *Remember the Titans*, confronting racial adversity helped the team overcome numerous obstacles. Therefore, the focus of this paper will be to explore: (a) Intergroup Contact Theory's major concepts; (b) its applicability to communication; (c) provide a theoretical film analysis; (d) examine the Titans' legacy; (e) and address ideas for further research.

Intergroup Contact Theory: Major Concepts

Intergroup Contact Theory sheds light on the issue that communication barriers and the absence of knowledge can lead to ignorance. This, in turn, "makes a person easy prey to rumor, suspicion, and stereotyping" (Matusitz, 2012, p. 93). Allport (1954) attested that prejudice is a direct result of generalizations or oversimplifications

about an entire group of people based on incomplete or mistaken information. He believed prejudice could be reduced when individuals learned more about other groups of people. Matusitz (2012) discussed how contact can fail to cure conflicts when situations create anxiety. Instead, contact situations should last long enough to allow anxiety to decrease so members of conflicting groups can feel comfortable with one another (Allport, 1954; Brown & Hewstone, 2005). To obtain beneficial effects, Allport (1954) believed contact situations should have certain criteria to be successful: *equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of authorities, law or customs.*

Cohen and Lotan (1995) stressed the importance of having ingroups and outgroups strive for *equal status* in situations. Pettigrew (1998) noted how prejudice reduction through contact requires “an active, goal-oriented effort” (p. 66). Chu and Griffey (1985) discussed how athletic teams serve as prime examples of groups yearning to share *common goals*. In a collaborative quest to win, interracial teams need each other to achieve their goals, such as winning games (Miracle, 1981). Pettigrew (1998) contended that *intergroup cooperation* is evidenced quite often in school settings. Bettencourt, Brewer, Rogers-Croak, and Miller (1992) explored intergroup competition and argued that without a collaborative effort to alleviate it, common goals could never be achieved. Allport (1954) emphasized how intergroup actions encouraged by *authorities* established basic norms of acceptance. Field research in the military, business, and religious organizations addressed this point of view (Pettigrew, 1998). Furthermore, if Allport’s (1954) criteria are not met, there is no guarantee positive change will occur, meaning intergroup conflict and prejudice could increase (Bratt, 2002).

Literature Review: Applicability to Communication

In the fields of psychology, criminology and sociology, ICT has been touted as one of the best ways to improve relations among groups experiencing conflict (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Wright, 2009). Brown, Brown, Jackson, Sellers, and Manuel (2003) explored how predominantly white colleges with athletic teams responded to playing with black athletes. The findings differed in reference to individual versus team sports. They concluded attitudes of those in team sports became more positive as intergroup contact increased while attitudes of those in individual sports were unaffected. Byrnes and Kiger (1990) argued the most effective educational programs for reducing prejudice are those that involve simulation or role-playing techniques. They found those who participated in their simulated Blue-Eyes, Brown-Eyes prejudice reduction simulation admitted they were less prejudiced after a three-week span.

Furuto and Furuto (1983) conducted a racial adversity study in Hawaii among white university students. They concluded that workshops addressing racist attitudes were more effective than those focusing solely on stereotypes when reducing prejudice toward various ethnic groups. Lowenstein (1985) researched prejudicial behaviors among children living in a United Kingdom therapeutic community. The study revealed those who attended workshops on racial tolerance exhibited a reduction in prejudice for at least six months. Lowenstein argued the enthusiasm of the group leader and support from staff significantly affected reduction rates.

Pettigrew and Tropp’s (2006) meta-analytic test of ICT indicated “intergroup contact” has the ability to reduce negative stereotyping and prejudice toward outgroup members (p. 751). They stressed an integral step to reduce negative stereotyping and prejudice involves the tendency of familiarity, which could lead to liking. They proposed through contact, people get to know one another, and if the interaction is positive, it could encourage feelings of affiliation.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Although extensive Intergroup Contact Theory research has been conducted in the realm of communication studies, there are still pros and cons. As with any theory, some critics claim ICT is not always predictable, and may not be manifested the same way in all situations (Pettigrew, 1998). Allport (1954) even warned, “It may not always be the case that knowledge causes friendliness, or whether friendliness invites the acquiring of knowledge” (as cited in Matusitz, 2012, p. 93).

Strengths

Intergroup Contact Theory has been applied successfully to education. It serves as the framework for cooperative learning techniques that involve assigning white and non-white children to “interdependent teams that cooperate to complete classroom assignments” (Sears, Pepleau, & Taylor, 1991, p. 434). Bratt’s (2002) research posited that school-aged students had more favorable attitudes towards outgroup members they encountered at school. Ellison and Powers (1994) found that black students who developed close friendships with whites held more positive views, compared to blacks who had not developed such friendships at all.

Weaknesses

Although Intergroup Contact theory has received much attention and empirical support (Jackman & Crane, 1986), it still has critics. Dixon, Durrheim, and Tredoux (2007) argued ICT sounded great on paper, but “in principle, a majority can believe in racial justice, but in implementation, they are unwilling to create policies to change racial disparity” (p. 871). Forbes (1997) argued the level of analysis appeared to influence the results rather than the conditions of contact. Dixon, Durheim, & Tredoux (2005) stressed that limited research involving other races (e.g., Hispanics and Asians) indicated ICT needed to be refined to explore how it affects groups other than white Americans.

Intergroup Contact Theory: Film Analysis

It was the summer of 1971, and with the fall semester just a few weeks away, Alexandria, Virginia, residents braced themselves for the dawn of a new era. Black and white students would be playing on the same football team. *Remember the Titans* chronicled the events on the big screen, but Allport’s (1954) Intergroup Contact Theory will be utilized to analyze the team’s progression from utter chaos to sheer cohesiveness. The T.C. Williams Titans were starting with a clean slate, which meant ICT’s core concepts: *equal status*, *common goals*, *intergroup cooperation*, and *support of authorities, law or customs* would be put to the test.

School Board Decision

Denzel Washington and Will Patton portrayed the film’s main characters, Herman Boone, and Bill Yoast. Both men were pleased with the actors’ performances (Guttendorf, 2011; Sullivan, 2005). When the school board voted to hire Boone, a black man, over Yoast, a white man, the news divided the community (Bruckheimer & Yakin, 2000). Although both were coaches, Yoast had more experience. There were no feelings of *equal status* in this situation. Yoast was stunned a man with more experience could be overlooked for the head coaching position. “Black, white, pink or green, I didn’t give a hoot. All I knew was that a guy named H-E-R-M-A-N was taking my job” (as cited in Sullivan, 2005, p. 43). Boone knew he was not the most qualified candidate, but the school board wanted to put him at the helm, especially since many of the new players were black. According to Boone, for many onlookers, “That was the straw that broke the camel’s back” (as cited in Joel, 2012, para. 11).

Boone knew that, in order to coach the team successfully, he would need to instill an atmosphere that promoted *intergroup cooperation*. He believed Yoast would be a great addition and that they could, eventually, share a *common goal* of team unity with the desire to win. He knew integration among the coaches would be a positive gesture to show players that blacks and whites could work together. When Boone offered Yoast the assistant coaching position, he initially declined. However, when several of his star white players said they would boycott the new team if he did not oblige, Yoast finally accepted. “I knew that every journey started with a step, and I had taken my first step with him” (as cited in Sullivan, 2005, p. 52).

The Players Meet

During the first team meeting, black players thought they would not have an integrated team. However, when Yoast walked in with white players, there was a wave of contention as the young men locked eyes for the first time (Sullivan, 2005). Who would make the team? Would the new coach be fair? There were so many unanswered questions. Players on both sides hoped for *equal status*, but would that dream become a reality? Blacks and whites sat in different areas during the meeting. Boone confessed, “Ideas were rolling around in my head like a rollercoaster. As head coach, I was not going to allow this mentality to creep on my team” (as cited in Guttendorf, 2011, para. 21).

With Boone coaching offense and Yoast handling defense, both men had a lot of decisions to make. One of the major concerns was creating a united front. Julius Campbell, a defensive end, was a driving force among black players. Jerry "The Rev." Harris and Petey Jones were also standouts. Two-time All-American linebacker Gerry Bertier, an Alexandria legend, was the focal white player who, eventually, became team captain. Ronnie "Sunshine" Bass and Lewis Lastik also had prominent roles in the film.

Football Camp: Gettysburg College

Before heading to football camp, Boone made everyone purchase suits to be worn on the bus. This was a new team *custom*. By exercising his *authority*, he wanted everyone to realize that being a football player came with specific rules and expectations. Just as police officers enforce the *law*, Boone's goal was to set high standards. This meant exemplifying favorable behavior both on and off the field. He told players if they worked hard and survived camp, they would earn a spot on the team.

Moments before the players traveled to Gettysburg College, Gerry confronted Boone with specific demands. This blatant disrespect of *authority* baffled Boone because Gerry was acting like the head coach, when, in fact, Boone held the position (Amir, 1976). In his quest to achieve *equal status*, Gerry faltered because he broke an essential *law* in Boone's eyes, focusing on personal goals instead of considering what was best for the team (Miracle, 1981). When Boone noticed the players were boarding the buses in a segregated fashion, he made everyone exit. Instead, he reserved the first bus for offense and the second for defense. This meant whether black or white, players would be forced to sit together (Patchen, 1982). They were also told their seat partners would be their roommates. For Boone, this was an early attempt to foster *intergroup cooperation*. He believed if the students took baby steps, they would eventually view each other as *equals*, looking beyond skin color.

Many parents thought Boone would not survive camp. Others wanted him to resign. From a community perspective, there was no *common goal* in reference to the football program (Brewer, 2009). While blacks cheered for Boone, many whites despised him. The same could be said for Yoast, as some could not picture a white and black coach working together (Bruckheimer & Yakin, 2000). Yoast admitted that, in Alexandria, racial tensions were high. "People were being killed in the neighborhood. Our situation was very visible. Race relations aren't a joke. Or football either" (as cited in Sullivan, 2005, p. 48). When the team arrived at camp, fights erupted because blacks and whites had to share rooms (Bruckheimer & Yakin, 2000). Attempts to achieve *equal status* faltered as black players were ridiculed by their white teammates, and vice versa. In the dining hall, segregation prevailed. *Intergroup cooperation* could not be attained under these circumstances (Allport, 1954; Bridges & Tomkowiak, 2010). Players were focusing on physical differences (e.g., color of their skin) instead of embracing diversity (Miracle, 1981). In a moment of sheer disgust, the film portrayed Boone's response, a mandatory three a.m. run through the woods. When they reached their destination, the Gettysburg battlefield, Boone reminded everyone that two armies met at that very site. Although they did not like each other, they shed blood, which was the same color, red. He emphasized how those men fought over many of the same racial issues that plagued the team (Bruckheimer & Yakin, 2000). The next morning, Boone noticed a visible difference in the dining hall. Lewis and Gerry sat with their black teammates and encouraged others to follow suit.

Boone hoped the *intergroup cooperation* displayed in the dining hall would be echoed on the football field. However, the football field was a competitive arena. Robinson and Preston (1976) note that when participants are of unequal status, intergroup contact is likely to increase prejudice and confirm stereotypes. A prime example was when Julius confronted Gerry about the white players who were not being team players. Gerry took Julius' words seriously and later scolded a white player for not pulling his weight on the field. This was when Julius and Gerry made a connection. No longer were they working against each other. They shared a *common goal* of wanting the best for the team. This *intergroup cooperation* would be necessary to keep their eyes on the prize, winning games.

When Sunshine arrived at camp the next day, he was a breath of fresh air. His California suntan and carefree attitude struck a chord with many players. He treated everyone the same. During breaks, he loved to sing and dance with his black teammates. There were no barriers (Slavin & Madden, 1979). As a former quarterback, he had a strong arm. Although Rev. held the position, Boone promised Sunshine he would find a place for him on the team (Bruckheimer & Yakin, 2000). In many ways, Sunshine's no-nonsense attitude served as a great awakening for the team. He did not care how others perceived him (Rokeach, 1968). He just wanted to be an asset. When the film portrayed Sunshine giving Gerry a kiss, teammates were awestruck. Gerry later forgave him, and both vowed to focus on the game. In the midst of their hard work, the players began to bond. Julius and

Gerry led the charge by motivating the team through conversation. They reminded everyone that victory could only be attained by treating everyone with respect, which meant working hard to achieve *common goals*.

School Begins

The first day of school at the consolidated T.C. Williams High School was intense. Picketers canvassed the campus, while many hurled racial epithets (Bruckheimer & Yakin, 2000). Julius and Gerry reminded everyone to remember how they bonded during camp and to remain focused. As blacks and whites shared the same space, Petey had a run-in with a white student for having a conversation with the boy's girlfriend. Gerry came to Petey's defense, diffusing the situation. Gerry reminded his teammate to reserve his heated emotions for the football field instead. This *intergroup cooperation* was necessary because Boone needed the entire team (Miracle, 1981). He did not want any of his players to face suspension.

Although racial tensions in the community were high, the team prepared for its first game amidst a sea of adversity (Patchen, 1982). Many parents were surprised Boone survived camp, and since they had never seen him coach before, they did not know what to expect. In an attempt to force his resignation, the movie depicted someone throwing a brick through his window. Despite the threat, Boone was dedicated to the team and his players (Brewer, 1999). He believed his work would speak for itself, and that he would eventually garner the support of a torn community.

According to Boone, the atmosphere at the first game was unsettling because parents were wearing clothes from the three consolidated schools. They were one ... the T.C. Williams Titans, but very few spectators acknowledged it. He stressed, "The parents were the reason the process of consolidation took so long" (as cited in Joel, 2012, para. 7). This lack of *equal status* and *intergroup cooperation* could have harmed the team, but players decided to show everyone what they could do (Schofield, 1989). After triumphing during their first game, the Titans went on a massive winning streak. The players became closer, and decided to motivate each other with a special warm-up song and dance before each game. "Everywhere we go ... people want to know ... who we are ... who we are ... so we will tell them ... we are the Titans ... the mighty, mighty, Titans" (Bruckheimer & Yakin, 2000). A few weeks later, the atmosphere in Alexandria started to change. Some of the very people who had originally renounced Boone decided to give him a chance. Residents rallied around Boone's home to confess their approval of him and the team. Shop owners hailed the players with motivational messages in their windows, and the town was now embracing a *common goal*, supporting the Titans.

Friendships Emerge

Boone and Yoast eventually reached *common ground*, respecting each other both on and off the field. Although they periodically had differences, they met privately, instead of airing their concerns in public (Bruckheimer & Yakin, 2000). During this time, Yoast's daughter, Sheryl, developed a connection with Boone, commenting on his strategies and commending him for a job well done. As for the players, Petey, Sunshine, and Lewis developed close friendships. One poignant scene from the film was when Julius went to Gerry's house for a visit. His mother initially refused to let Julius in their home, but later relented. One day, when Julius was walking to Gerry's house, a police officer stopped him in the neighborhood. Julius had a *respect for authority*, and asked the officer what he wanted. Instead of wielding harsh words, the officer congratulated Julius and asked him to tell Boone how much he admired the team's progress. This was a prime example that the spirit in Alexandria was changing for the better (Amir, 1976).

Gerry took his position as team captain seriously. His desire was to set a good example for all the players. On one particular occasion, he exercised his respect for Boone by asking if he, not Boone, could release a white player who was not working collaboratively with his black teammates. This was a bold move that proved Gerry realized the importance of *intergroup* cooperation. Boone and Yoast were determined to promote a spirit of unity. Respect of *authority*, including team *rules* and *customs*, could not be taken lightly (Allport, 1954).

Lewis, a white linebacker, developed a special friendship with Boone. The young man never believed he was college material, but Boone encouraged him to study hard and focus on his dream. He and Boone shared a *common goal*, and the hard work produced favorable results. Boone's desire was to have all his players achieve success both on and off the field (Joel, 2012). Lewis started performing better in the classroom, which also improved his confidence on the field. Years later, he would fulfill his dream of playing college football.

An Unexpected Twist

The Titans were on a winning streak. They had just clinched the Northern Virginia championship game, and things were looking good. The players celebrated afterwards, but Gerry decided to leave early. While cruising in his car, he was struck by an oncoming vehicle, paralyzing him from the waist down. During this sad time, Boone and Yoast rallied the troops to support their teammate. The state championship game was on the horizon. Gerry wanted the team to fight hard and bring the trophy home for the Titans (Bruckheimer & Yakin, 2000). During this tragedy, Julius and Gerry bonded more. Gerry's mother treated Julius like another son. They had achieved *equal status*, and both shared a *common goal* of wanting to help Gerry during his recovery.

State Championship

This was the Titans' time to shine. During the championship game, the film portrayed the team trailing 7-0 at halftime. In the locker room, Julius reminded everyone that Boone demanded perfection on the football field. He wanted everyone to *support authority* and remember the principles Boone and Yoast had established. During a poignant scene, the coaches collaborated on the winning sequence that clinched the victory. Petey had previously been benched, but was thrown in to block players on the opposing team. Since Rev.'s wrist had been injured earlier in the season, Sunshine was assuming the quarterback position. Although Rev. was still hurt, both coaches agreed to have him assist the team with a tricky play, a fake 23 pass, backside George reverse. Gerry watched the game from his hospital bed as the Titans clinched the victory.

Since there was *equal status* among the coaching staff and players (Amir, 1976), the team could achieve its *common goal* of winning the state title (Allport, 1954; Miracle, 1981). *Intergroup cooperation* prevailed as personal communication on and off the field yielded positive results (Forsyth, 2009). *Respect for authority* was evidenced by the team's cohesion and Julius' appointment as honorary team captain. With all four criteria of ICT being met, the team had overcome some major obstacles (Allport, 1954; Bronson & Merryman, 2009). The Titans ended the season with a 13-0 record, ranked second in the nation. When reflecting on how the team joined forces to win in the midst of racial adversity, Boone stated, "Because these diverse, unfocused boys were able to talk to each other, they broke the mold in the state of Virginia until they reached the pinnacle of football, the 1971 Virginia State Championship" (as cited in Guttendorf, 2011, para. 34).

Theatrical Elements: Fact or Fiction?

Although Herman Boone and Bill Yoast enjoyed serving as consultants for *Remember the Titans*, both admitted Disney Studios depicted a few inaccuracies on the big screen (Guttendorf; 2011; Sullivan, 2005). One of the biggest scenes in the movie, the three a.m. run in the middle of the night to the Gettysburg battlefield, did not happen that way. Boone admitted he would never get a group of high school boys up in the middle of the night to run in the woods. In reality, he transported them by bus. He jokingly remarked, "That's Disney" (as cited in Guttendorf, 2011, para. 9). In an attempt to force Boone's resignation, a toilet, not a brick, was thrown through his window. Boone commented how studio executives believed the audience would not be able to grasp the concept of a toilet being used in an act of hatred. One malicious event eliminated altogether was the mistaken bombing of a neighbor's house, which was intended for Boone (Guttendorf, 2011).

Another interesting element was that Yoast, a divorced father, had four daughters, not one. Producer Jerry Bruckheimer thought it would be better to portray Sheryl as an avid football fan. Although she liked the sport, her enthusiasm in real life was not as pronounced (Sullivan, 2005). In another scene, the film portrayal of Sunshine kissing Gerry at football camp never happened. Boone still laughs about receiving a call from Sunshine early one morning after the film's release, asking him to set the record straight (Guttendorf, 2011). One of the most interesting revelations was the timing of Gerry's car accident. In the film, it occurred before the state championship game, but in reality, it happened afterwards (Sullivan, 2005). Instead of being struck by an oncoming vehicle, Gerry's accident was caused by a mechanical failure in the motor mount of the car's engine. Although the film depicted the Titans struggling a bit during the 1971 season, this never happened. Most of their games were blowouts (Sanders, 2012).

Where Are They Now?

Herman Boone and Bill Yoast enjoyed successful careers at T.C. Williams High School after the team's 1971 state championship. Boone coached five years, while Yoast served four more years as his assistant. Both men have grown very close, nurturing a friendship that began in a sea of uncertainty (Bruckheimer & Yakin, 2000). It has been over forty years since they first laid eyes on one another, but Yoast still recalls their first meeting. "He introduced himself and I shook his hand. It had a good feel. It was strong and warm. The smile was genuine" (as cited in Sullivan, 2005, p. 47). Since those days on the football field, both men have reminisced about the past while reflecting on ways to impact lives for the better during the present. Their paths have included similarities and differences.

Herman Boone

Boone is retired from coaching and lives in Alexandria, Virginia. He is a prominent speaker and teacher who travels extensively to share his story. His mission is motivating people from all races and diverse backgrounds to achieve their dreams. One of his proudest moments was the establishment of the T.C. Williams Foundation, which raises money to support eligible seniors from T.C. Williams High School by awarding four-year renewable grants (Appendix). Boone continues to work as an advocate for social justice (Joel, 2012).

Bill Yoast

Yoast never imagined his career as a high school football coach would lead to the wonderful life he is experiencing now. The former World War II Air Force Veteran once considered becoming a minister. Although he is not in the pulpit, he believes his divine calling has been on and off the football field, helping shape and mold lives for the better (Sullivan, 2005). After retiring from coaching, he decided to remain in Virginia. He, like Boone, embraces every opportunity to share the team's story.

A compassionate story not portrayed in the film was what happened after Gerry's car accident. Yoast spent four years coaching the young man, preparing him for the Wheelchair Olympics. During that time, both men developed an even stronger bond through the rigorous training regimen. Blood, sweat, and tears prevailed, but the hard work paid off. As a result, Gerry won gold medals in both the shot put and discus throw (Sanders, 2012; Sullivan, 2005). Tragically, in 1981, he was killed by a drunk driver. It was an event that sent shock waves throughout the community. Today, the school's main gymnasium bears this courageous Titan's name (Sanders, 2012). The Gerry Bertier Foundation sheds more light on his impact, not only in Alexandria, Virginia, but around the world (Appendix).

T.C. Williams High School: The Legacy

T.C Williams High School has evolved into an academic and athletic powerhouse in the decades following the school's 1971 football season. Principal Suzanne Maxey is thrilled with the progress. "People from all over the nation stop by and want to see the school. Of course, we have a beautiful new building, so they are seeing a very different looking school" (personal communication, April 11, 2013). When asked how *Remember the Titans* has affected the student body, Maxey admits there are mixed emotions from students and staff:

There are folks who think the movie was about a 1971 football team, and that we need to move away from that. Personally, I think it is a wonderful part of our rich history and should be a stepping-stone for the improvements we have made in the last few years. (personal communication, April 11, 2013)

Principal Maxey said her favorite part of the film was when Coach Boone took the football team to the Gettysburg battlefield to teach them about the importance of working as a group. "I love that scene, and we have actually used it in an assembly with our students to motivate them academically" (personal communication, April 11, 2013). She admits there is also a bit of class competition when students sing the team's pep cheer and do the motivational dance. As the high school transitions into the 21st century, Maxey vows to keep the football team's legacy alive. "We remember the Titans; we imagine the Titans; and we will fulfill the promise to create the best high school in the nation" (personal communication, April 11, 2013).

A Christian Lens

For two high school football coaches who had never worked collaboratively prior to 1971, Boone and Yoast provided the Titans with a sheer example of how individuals from different backgrounds could join forces, set a positive example, and motivate a team to reach its pinnacle, the state championship. Boone attests, "You cannot grow unless you are challenged; you cannot be challenged until you are outside your comfort zone; you cannot grow and be challenged unless you embrace diversity" (as cited in Joel, 2012, para. 30). The Bible reminds us to walk in love and never esteem ourselves higher than others. James 2:9-10 (KJV) states, "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point; he is guilty of all." Yoast believed his character was always on display. "What made the coach special was his integrity. He preached it, he lived it, he protected it. Integrity was everything. For Bill Yoast, integrity was not a means to an end, it was the end" (as cited in Sullivan, 2005, p. 152).

Further Research: Intergroup Contact Theory

Remember the Titans is a salient example of how one movie can be used in a classroom setting to teach students about the importance of accepting people for who they are. Boone attests, "If you look at it closely, that movie is not about football. It's a movie about incredible young boys from Alexandria, Virginia, who decided to celebrate their differences instead of seeing them as a problem that must be solved for them" (as cited in Joel, 2012, para. 3). He adds that anyone viewing this film can learn a valuable lesson about diversity because "it is not about skin color or sexual orientation; it's about your God-given right to be an individual" (as cited in Joel, 2012, para. 5). The various group scenarios depicted in *Remember the Titans* explore all facets of Allport's (1954) Intergroup Contact Theory. Although *equal group status*, *common goals*, *intergroup cooperation*, and *support of authorities, law or customs* did not always happen concurrently, there were highs and lows, which eventually translated into a favorable outcome for the award-winning football team.

Several theorists have explored ways to expand Allport's (1954) Intergroup Contact Theory. Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, and Ropp (1997) proposed the Extended Contact Hypothesis which posits that knowing members of a group who have relationships with those in outgroups can lead to more positive interactions. They believed it could help alleviate reservations about welcoming new members into previously established groups. Crisp and Turner's (2009) Imagined Contact Hypothesis presented the idea that thinking about positive experiences with members of outgroups could promote favorable intergroup attitudes.

Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2005) presented a variation to Allport's (1954) Intergroup Contact Theory. Their Parasocial Contact Hypothesis uses media to help educate people about the ills of prejudicial behavior. It contends that people cognitively process mass mediated interactions in a manner similar to interpersonal contact. This can be achieved through educational programming with messages such as racial harmony. Ortiz and Harwood (2007) examined a similar approach to Parasocial Contact Hypothesis that highlighted diversity. Their intent was to have people observe intergroup interaction in the media by watching television programs (e.g., newscasts, documentaries, and sitcoms) that shed positive light on the issue.

Summary

Intergroup Contact Theory's impact can be evidenced in many aspects of our lives. Just as Herman Boone and Bill Yoast confronted prejudicial obstacles while coaching the T.C. Williams Titans, their determination to create a united front eventually resonated not only on the football field, but throughout an entire community. Boone reminds us that, although some obstacles may seem impossible to overcome, we must persevere. Echoing Dr. Martin Luther King's dream of racial equality, Boone challenges people to judge others on the content of their character, not the color of their skin. "You have to believe because to believe is to have faith. Your beliefs become your thoughts; your thoughts become your words; your words become your actions; your actions become your habits; and your habits become your character" (as cited in Guttendorf, 2011, para. 36).

References

- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.
- Amir, Y. (1976). The role of intergroup contact in the change of prejudice and ethnic relations. In P. A. Katz (Ed.), *Towards the elimination of racism* (pp. 245-308). New York, NY: Pergamon Publishers.
- Bettencourt, B. A., Brewer, M. B., Rogers-Croak, M. R., & Miller, N. (1992). Cooperation and The reduction of intergroup bias: The role of reward structure and social orientation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 28*(4), 301-319.
- Bratt, C. (2002). Contact and attitudes between ethnic groups: A survey-based study of Adolescents in Norway. *Acta Sociologica, 45*(2), 107-125.
- Brewer, M. B. (1999). The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love or outgroup hate? *Journal of Social Issues, 55*, 429-444. doi: 10.1111./0022-4537.00126
- Bridges, D. R., & Tomkowiak, J. (2010). Allport's intergroup contact theory as a theoretical base for impacting student attitudes in interpersonal education. *Journal of Allied Health, 39*(1),29-33.
- Bronson, P., & Merryman, A. (2009, September 8). The four conditions of intergroup contact. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek>
- Brown, K. T., Brown, T. N., Jackson, J. S., Sellers, R. M., & Manuel, W. J. (2003). Teammates on and off the field? Contact with black teammates and the racial attitudes of white student athletes. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 33*, 1379-1403.
- Brown, R., & Hewstone, M. (2005). An integrative theory of intergroup contact. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 37, pp. 255-343). San Diego, CA: Elsevier Academy Press.
- Bruckheimer, J. (Producer), & Yakin, B. (Director). (2000). *Remember the Titans* [Motion Picture]. United States: Disney Enterprises, Inc.
- Byrnes, D. A., & Kiger, G. (1990). The effect of a prejudice-reduction simulation on attitude change. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 20*(4), 341-356.
- Chu, D., & Griffey, D. (1985). The contact theory of racial integration: The case of sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 2*(4), 323-333.
- Cohen, E. G., & Lotan, R. A. (1995). Producing equal status interaction in the heterogeneous classroom. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(1), 99-120.
- Crisp, R. J., & Turner, R. N. (2009). Can imagined interactions produce positive perceptions? Reducing prejudice through simulated social contact. *American Psychologist, 64*(4), 231-240.
- Daugherty, B. J. (2011, April 7). Desegregation in Public Schools. In *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Retrieved from http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Desegregation_in_Public_Schools.
- Dixon, J., Durrheim, K., & Tredoux, C. (2005). Beyond the optimal contact strategy: A reality Check for the contact hypothesis. *American Psychologist, 60*(7), 697-711.
- Dixon, J., Durrheim, K., & Tredoux, C. (2007). Intergroup contact and attitudes toward the principle and practice of racial equality. *Psychological Science, 18*(10), 867-872.
- Ellison, C. G., & Powers, D. A. (1994). The contact hypothesis and racial attitudes among black Americans. *Social Science Quarterly, 75*(2), 385-400.

- Forbes, H. D. (1997). *Ethnic conflict: Commerce, culture, and the contact hypothesis*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Forsyth, D. R. (2009). *Group dynamics* (5th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Furuto, S. B., & Furuto, D. M. (1983). The effects of affective and cognitive treatment on attitude change toward ethnic minority groups. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 7(2), 149-165.
- Guttendorf, A. (2011, February 23). *Herman Boone shares legendary history*. Retrieved from <http://www.gopsusports.com/genrel/022311aab.html>
- Jackman, M. R., & Crane, M. (1986). Some of my best friends are black: Interracial friendship and whites' racial attitudes. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 50, 459-486.
- Joel, B. (2012, January 16). Boone tells own story of equality. *The Dartmouth*. Retrieved from <http://thedartmouth.com/2012/01/16/news/Boone>
- Lowenstein, L. F. (1985). Investigating ethnic prejudices among boys and girls in a therapeutic community for maladjusted children and modifying some prejudices: Can basic prejudices be changed? *School Psychology International*, 6(4), 239-243.
- Massey, G., & Hodson, R. (1999). Ethnic enclaves and intolerance: The case of Yugoslavia. *Social Forces*, 78(2), 669-694.
- Matusitz, J. (2012). Relationship between knowledge, stereotyping, and prejudice in interethnic communication. *Pasos*, 10(1), 89-98.
- Miracle, A. W. (1981). Factors affecting interracial cooperation: A case study of a high school football team. *Human Organization*, 40(2), 150-154.
- Ortiz, M., & Harwood, J. (2007). A social cognitive theory approach to the effects of mediated inter group contact on intergroup attitudes. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 51, 615-631. doi: 10.1080/08838150701626487
- Patchen, M. (1982). *Black-white contact in schools: Its social and academic effects*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.
- Pettigrew, T. F. (1998). Intergroup contact theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49, 65-85.
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 751-783. doi: 10.1037/00223514.90.5.751
- Robinson, J., & Preston, J. D. (1976). Equal-status contact and modification of racial prejudice: A re-examination of the contact hypothesis. *Social Forces*, 54(4), 911-924.
- Rokeach, M. (1968). *Beliefs, attitudes, and values: A theory of organization and change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Sanders, R. (2012, August 6). Top 100: Gerry Bertier, T.C. Williams football, 1972. *Connection Sports*. Retrieved from <http://www.connection-sports.com>
- Schiappa, E., Gregg, P., & Hewes, D. (2005). The parasocial contact hypothesis. *Communication Monographs*, 72, 92-115.
- Schofield, J. W. (1989). *Black and white in school: Trust, tension, or tolerance?* New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sears, D. O., Pepleau, L. A., & Taylor, S. E. (1991). *Social psychology* (7th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- Slavin, R. E., & Madden, N. A. (1979). Social practices that improve race relations. *American Educational Research Journal*, 16(2), 169-180.
- Sullivan, S. (2005). *Remember this titan: The Bill Yoast story: Lessons learned from a celebrated coach's journey as told to Steve Sullivan*. Landham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing.
- Tinuoye, K. (2012, January 13). Coretta Scott King: How she helped keep Martin Luther King's dream alive. *NBC News*. Retrieved from <http://thegrio.com/2012/01/13/coretta-scott-king-how-she-kept-mlk-dream-alive/>
- Wright, S. C. (2009). *Cross-group contact effects*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Wright, S. C., Aron, A., McLaughlin-Volpe, T., & Ropp, S. A. (1997). The extended contact effect: Knowledge of cross-group friendships and prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 73-90.

Appendix

Educational Links

Titan Foundation Scholarship Fund: <http://www.71originaltitans.com/>

Gerry Bertier Foundation: <http://www.gerrybertier.com/news/new-foundation-web-site-launched/>