**NSCDA 2018 Scholarship Essay Topic: Ordinary Folk: How they Shaped their Communities in North Carolina**

One of the most prominent African-American persons that helped shape the great city of Winston-Salem in Forsyth County was Professor Simon Green Atkins. Professor Atkins was an effective educator who helped established Slater Industrial Academy, which is presently known as Winston Salem State University (WSSU). Atkins was very instrumental in assisting to mobilize and educate the African-American community during the late 1800s. With the help of John Fox Slater, Atkins founded WSSU in September of 1892, solely to increase literacy and educate the African-American community (Caldwell).

Originally from Chatham County, Professor Atkins was offered a position of being the principal in the public school system at the Depot Street Graded School. The Depot Street Graded School was built in 1887 and was the largest and most significant school for the African-American community in North Carolina. In fact, it was the first public school for the African-American community in Winston-Salem at the time it was built. The build of the Depot Street Graded School was necessary as the city of Winston-Salem grew due to the economic boom of the RJ Reynolds tobacco industry. Because of this, a lot of African-American families moved to the area for employment. Therefore, providing education for the children of the families that would work in the tobacco factories was essential not only to the African-American community, but also to the city and school system (City of Winston-Salem ).

While continuing his work in the public school system, Professor Atkins began to become infuriated by the living conditions of African-Americans at the time. His anger drove him to creating better living conditions for African-Americans that would provide them with the proper sanitation, healthcare, and education they needed in order to progress in life. With the support of many wealthy persons who lived in the town, Professor Atkins was able to begin working on the development of Colombia Heights where Slater Industrial Academy was built and also provided proper housing for African-Americans who were moving to the area. Soon enough more African-Americans followed suit to move to the area designed for the African-American community, as this was the start of the rise for the African-American community. Accordingly, a school along with other businesses and services for the African-American community was needed, and built in the area to help advance its people (Caldwell).

Simon G. Atkins was very strategic in garnering support from the General Education Board, local leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) church and also encouraged other citizens in Winston-Salem to make charitable donations towards the effort of building and sustaining a school for the African-American community. His high self-regard for his commitment to the people helped him to establish Slater Industrial Academy once he made the decision to resign from his position as principal from the school system (Gainor). A school that began with 25 students in a one frame structured home, present day has over 39 buildings on a 117 acre campus with approximately 6000 students, providing them with education and degrees in over forty undergraduate programs. This school, WSSU has continued to educate citizens of Winston-Salem, in particular the African-American community, excelling in programs such as Nursing and Education (Winston-Salem State University).

Because of the dream of Professor Simon G. Atkins in educating the African-American community, a high school is named after him for his notable deeds in being instrumental in accepting the principalship at the first school in Winston-Salem created for the African-American community. Additionally, there are other prominent community centers in the surrounding areas of Winston-Salem also named after Professor S. G. Atkins. As his legacy continues to live on, I Devontae Harrison have committed and been accepted to the illustrious Winston Salem State University. As an African-American male it is important for me to attend a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) so that I can not only learn from people whom look like me but whom have also paved the way for me and others of the African-American community.

Works Cited

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