

## Chapter Summary and Discussion Questions – colorandcharacter.org

### Chapter 2: Civil Rights 1955-1969

#### Focus: The growing challenges to Jim Crow segregation

Examines the ways that growing up in a supportive, ambitious community spurred Charlotte's young African Americans to question and then challenge inequality.

Highlights key moments in Charlotte's civil rights history, including the furor sparked by Dorothy Counts' efforts to become the first black student at Harding High School in 1957, the sit-ins of 1960, the successful efforts to desegregate restaurants in 1963, and the bombs that exploded at the homes of four civil rights activist families in 1965.

Follows *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg*, the landmark desegregation case filed by civil rights attorney Julius Chambers. In 1969, Chambers convinced federal judge James McMillan to issue a sweeping order that required Charlotte-Mecklenburg to fully desegregate every school in the countywide system, setting the stage for the nation's most comprehensive school busing plan.

#### Questions to explore

What circumstances helped nurture a generation of young civil rights activists?

How did Charlotte's business-focused leaders react to civil rights movement pressure? What role did their concerns about the city's image play?

How did Charlotte's African Americans view the advantages and perils of desegregation?

Why did Vera and Darius Swann want their son to attend a desegregated school?

What reasoning did Julius Chambers use to argue for full desegregation of all Mecklenburg County public schools?

#### Connections

What political forces were at work in the communities where you grew up? What tensions existed?

Was there a push for change, or an acceptance of the status quo?

What kinds of political decisions did you and your parents have to make? What opportunities were there to stand up for your beliefs?

What political forces, tensions and opportunities do you see in the community you live in now?