

Chapter Summary and Discussion Questions – colorandcharacter.org

Chapter 5: Pulling Apart 1995-1999

Focus: The multiplying challenges to Charlotte-Mecklenburg's busing plan

Covers the rise of Ronald Reagan and a more conservative, individualistic approach to government and society that would have far-reaching effects on Charlotte schools.

Explores persisting obstacles to racial advancement, including shifts in job markets, housing patterns and political priorities that perpetuated income and homeownership gaps into the 1980s and 1990s, and sharpened distinctions between struggling central-city neighborhoods and increasingly prosperous suburban communities.

Traces the national shift in education priorities from promoting integration to a concern with test scores and an interest in "choice," which led Charlotte's business leaders to promote a desegregation plan focused around magnet schools instead of race-based busing.

Examines growing concerns about the performance of African American students in desegregated schools, and about the challenges faced by young black men in urban neighborhoods. These concerns culminated in a dramatic conflict at West Charlotte, in which principal Kenneth Simmons was removed and two-thirds of the staff departed.

Follows the *Capacchione* lawsuit, one of many suits around the country that challenged the use of race in student assignment. In 1999, federal Judge Robert Potter, who had been appointed by Ronald Reagan, ordered Charlotte-Mecklenburg to end its busing plan, an order that would have dramatic consequences for Charlotte's schools.

Questions to explore

How did a new form of housing segregation complicate desegregation efforts?" How did an influx of new residents add to those complications?

What effects did the Reagan Revolution have in political, economic and legal arenas?

What were some of the long-term consequences of the breakup of the black communities created during the Jim Crow era?

Connections

What evidence of the Reagan Revolution do you see around you now?

Should city, state and federal governments have done more to promote economic and racial integration of neighborhoods?

Do you think race should be used in student assignment? Economic status? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these approaches?