

Chapter Summary and Discussion Questions – colorandcharacter.org

Chapter 7: Separate and Unequal 2006-2016

Focus: Efforts to build up a resegregated West Charlotte

Traces the rise of the "corporate reform" approach to school improvement, which involved increased testing and analysis of test data, an intensive focus on separating "good" from "bad" teachers, and efforts to bring "business efficiency" to schools.

Details the work done by principals, teachers and volunteers to create a West Charlotte culture that met the needs of students from often-unstable situations, a local philanthropic effort to improve West Charlotte and its feeder schools, and the dramatic inequalities between West Charlotte and the district's wealthiest schools.

Outlines the challenges of building a stable teaching and administrative staff in such a high-pressure situation, as well as the effects of racial and economic isolation on social mobility – which according to a national study was lower in Charlotte than in any other major American city.

Follows the controversy sparked by a 2010 decision to close several predominantly African American schools and to create K-8 schools in west side neighborhoods.

Considers West Charlotte's enduring cultural strengths, and its continuing links to African American culture, history, and neighborhoods.

Questions to explore

What was the appeal of testing and "accountability"? Where did they fall short?

How did the 2010 school closings symbolize the uneven distribution of political power? How do they compare to the school closings of the 1960s?

What conclusions do you draw from Charlotte's low level of social mobility?

How did the resegregated West Charlotte differ from the West Charlotte of the segregated era? How was it similar?

Connections

Were you surprised to learn about Charlotte's low level of social mobility? Why? Did learning about it make you see the city differently?

What were your impressions of present-day West Charlotte High before you read this book? Have they changed?

Civil right lawyer James E. Ferguson argues that "If we are to move beyond our sorry racial past, we must be willing to have an honest discussion about race,

something we have never had as a community." Do you agree with that statement?
What would "an honest discussion about race" look like?