

Color and Character Study Guide

Chapter Overview and Discussion Questions

Chapter 1: An African American School 1936-1954

Focus: Building an African American institution during segregation

Questions to explore

What factors go into building strong communities?

What were the strengths of West Charlotte High during this era?

What kinds of choices did early civil rights advocates face?

Chapter 2: Civil Rights 1955-1969

Focus: The growing challenges to Jim Crow segregation

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 African Americans disagree about the advantages and perils of desegregation?

Chapter 3: Busing 1970-74

Focus: The turbulent end of the Jim Crow era

Questions to explore

As Charlotte sought to desegregate, how did the goals for schooling change?

Which political priorities governed the shaping of school desegregation plans?

How did busing, school closings, and urban renewal affect African American students, teachers and communities?

What factors finally came together to produce a successful busing plan?

**Chapter 4: Building an Integrated School
1975-94**

Focus: Shaping the culture of an integrated West Charlotte High

Questions to explore

What kinds of lessons did West Charlotte students learn from their cross-racial interactions?

What commonalities do you see between the segregated and integrated eras?

How did changes in popular culture affect student life at West Charlotte?

What should a "successfully" integrated school look like?

**Chapter 5: Pulling Apart
1995-1999**

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

Questions to explore

How did a new form housing segregation complicate desegregation efforts?" How did an influx of newcomers 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?

**Chapter 6: Resegregation
2000-2005**

Focus: The end of busing and the rise of resegregated schools

Questions to explore

How did increased "choice" affect struggling schools?

What were some of the factors that came together to create challenges for staff and students at a resegregated West Charlotte?

How did West Charlotte students contend with the resurgence of negative racial stereotypes?

Chapter 7: **Separate and Unequal** 2006-2016

Focus: Efforts to build up a resegregated West Charlotte

Questions to explore

What was the appeal of testing and accountability? Where did it 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?

Final Thoughts: Past, Present, and Future

Focus: Present-day challenges and opportunities, including gentrification and school "choice"

Questions to explore

While discussing gentrification, west side resident J'Tanya Adams referred to capitalism as "a beast." What do you think she meant? Do you agree?

The author argues that "creating racially and economically integrated communities and schools requires deliberate action in multiple areas, from dedicated grassroots community-building to public policies that foster mixed-income housing and integrated schools." Do you agree with this assessment? What if any actions do you think communities should take to promote racial and economic integration in schools and/or housing?

Which parts of West Charlotte High's long history do you think would be most useful to residents seeking to plan for the west side's future?

Methods

Focus: The process of researching and writing *Color and Character*.

Questions to explore

This book covers 80 years, a longer period of time than many historical works. What are the advantages of covering such a long period? What are the disadvantages? How does the overall story look different at different points in the narrative?

Did reading this section change your mind about the book in any way? Why is it important to know about how a book was created? Should this section have been at the front of the book rather than at the end?