

Teaching Guide:

Desegregation of Charlotte's Public Spaces

Note for Teachers:

This is the Teaching Guide for the Desegregation of Charlotte's Public Spaces Case Study: museumofthenewsouth.org/schools/desegregation-of-charlottes-public-spaces/

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Background Information

The desegregation of public spaces in Charlotte began after World War II as African Americans returned home from military service in other countries and demanded change in their home city. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, civil rights activists in Charlotte organized and carried out a range of successful attacks against segregation and discrimination in the city. In 1951, prominent African American men began fighting for equal rights to play golf at the whites-only Bonnie Brae golf course in Revolution Park. With support from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Bonnie Brae desegregated in 1957. In 1954, four African American men, Dr. Reginald Hawkins, Thomas Wyche, Charles V. Bell, & W.W. Twitty held a sit-in at Charlotte Douglas International Airport's newly-opened Airport 77 Restaurant. The sit-in resulted in a two-year legal battle, in which the court ruled the restaurant was in violation of *Morgan v. Virginia*, a decision of the Supreme Court declaring that all interstate transportation facilities must be desegregated. In 1956, the restaurant was desegregated and began serving Black patrons because it was located in an airport terminal that was built for interstate transportation constructed by the federal government.

By 1960, progress had been made toward the desegregation of Charlotte's public spaces, but some locations, such as theaters, restaurants, and pools remained segregated. On February 9, 1960, Black students at Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU), inspired by the Greensboro sit-ins, launched their own sit-in at the white-only lunch counter at Charlotte's Kress Store. From February through June, students and others who joined them participated in the sit-ins, picket lines, and boycotts of downtown businesses to protest segregation within the city's public facilities. In response, Charlotte's mayor James Saxon Smith formed the "Mayor's Friendly Relationships Committee" to facilitate negotiations to desegregate Charlotte's public spaces. On July 9, 1960, fifteen Black students were served at a whites-only lunch counter, signaling the success of the protests.

Victories against segregation continued with the desegregation of some public parks and swimming pools. In 1961, Joe Perkins held the first "shoe-in" at Charlotte's Greyhound bus station. While traveling with the Freedom Riders, Perkins was jailed for trying to get a shoeshine from a whites-only barbershop. He was released and rejoined the Freedom Riders in Rock Hill, S.C. after a judge upheld his right to use the facility. During this same year, Dr. Hawkins led protests against segregation and discriminatory practices at federally-funded Charlotte-area hospitals. When protesting was not enough, Dr. Hawkins reached out to Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who launched an investigation. The following year, Memorial Hospital and others desegregated.

Even with the successful protests in Charlotte, upscale restaurants still barred African Americans from dining in 1963. In May, Dr. Hawkins organized a four-mile march from JCSU to Charlotte City Hall, demanding the total desegregation of the city's public spaces. Mayor Stan Brookshire and Chamber of Commerce leaders approved a resolution that declared that any

business serving the general public must be open to people of all races. Local white restaurant owners were concerned that desegregating dining rooms would cost them white customers. So, Black protestors, Mayor Brookshire, and the Chamber of Commerce arranged an “eat-in” in which members of the Chamber invited a Black counterpart to lunch across the city’s tablecloth restaurants. On May 29, 1963, just two weeks after the JCSU march, civil rights leaders and white business leaders dined together in Charlotte’s restaurants, peacefully opening the door to desegregation.

Charlotte was nationally recognized and applauded for its desegregation efforts as Charlotte was one of the first major Southern urban hubs to end discrimination in public places. At a gathering of six Black high schools in Charlotte, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., commended the “eat-in” and the work of civil rights activists to end segregation in the city’s public spaces. This work helped set the stage for the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ended segregation in public accommodations across the country.

The city’s efforts to bring about racial equality were not always successful or celebrated. In November 1965, the homes of four civil rights leaders, including Dr. Hawkins, were bombed in the Historic West End area. While no injuries were reported, the coordinated attack showed there was still racial tension in Charlotte. While efforts to desegregate public amenities in Charlotte were largely successful, city officials and planners simultaneously implemented urban renewal and highway construction plans that destroyed historically Black neighborhoods and communities and displaced African Americans throughout the city.

In the 1960s, Charlotte’s Redevelopment Commission literally and figuratively destroyed the city’s Brooklyn neighborhood and other historically Black communities on the West Side. The desegregation of public schools led to the closing of historically Black schools in 1969. Thus, while Charlotte was a progressive leader in desegregation, city council-sponsored growth and development decimated much of the city’s Black community.

Activity Instructions and Rubrics

Timeline

Students should use the evidence they collected during the case study and design an illustrated timeline that answers the question, “What strategies or actions led to the successful desegregation of public spaces in Charlotte?” Timelines should include information about the different actions that led to the successful desegregation of Charlotte’s public spaces. Students can draw these timelines or use digital tools to create them. Students should include a description of the events, as well as an explanation of how civil rights activists and community leaders achieved desegregation. Timelines should include a title.

Modification: Provide a pre-made timeline/graphic organizer for students to fill in.

Extension: Have students imagine they are writing a “Fact Friday” piece for the local news. Examples can be found by doing an internet search for “704 shop fact Friday”. Their topic: “Tell the story of desegregation in Charlotte.” Students can use the timeline they created to write an informational narrative that reflects their understanding of the case study and this moment in Charlotte’s history.

Write an Argument

Using the evidence and information collected throughout the case study and, if applicable, Activity 1, students should write an argument that answers the question, “Which strategies/actions were most impactful in the pursuit of desegregation across Charlotte’s public spaces? Why?”

Modification: Instead of crafting an argument, students could identify advantages and disadvantages to the methods used to desegregate public spaces in Charlotte. Teachers could make a graphic organizer to guide student efforts. Alternatively, students could video or voice record their argument.

Event	Strategies/Actions Used to Desegregate	Advantages	Disadvantages

Extension: Teachers could host a Socratic seminar centered around the compelling question.

Research

While Charlotte city leaders and civil rights activists were successful in desegregating Charlotte’s public amenities, the Charlotte Redevelopment Commission, founded in 1957, decimated historically Black neighborhoods in Charlotte in the name of urban renewal and highway construction. Students should search the web for helpful resources (see suggestions below), then answer the question, “Did the desegregation of Charlotte’s public spaces truly bring greater equality to the city of Charlotte? Why or why not?” They must support their arguments with evidence from the documents and the case study.

Search terms and phrases could include:

- Charlotte Redevelopment Commission formed to push for urban renewal
- Urban Renewal Program in Charlotte (from the Google Arts & Culture Institute)
- African American and Civil Rights History in Charlotte (from the Google Arts & Culture Institute)
- Brooklyn: How a black community was erased from uptown Charlotte (from *The Charlotte Observer*)
- Charlotte’s West End Bombings in 1965 (from Google Arts & Culture Institute)

Teachers can use the resources from the above search terms to create a choice board or menu, or teachers can select 1-2 sources on which students can focus. Students should take notes about the sources, trying to understand the impact of Charlotte’s urban renewal policies.

Modification: Students may only be able to analyze the images and sources, rather than write a long piece to answer the question. They can use this See Think Wonder chart to support their analysis of each source. Teachers, again, may select specific sources on which to focus student energy or modify the activity.

Source Title	What do you SEE ?	What does it make you THINK ?	What does it make you WONDER ?	How does this source change your thinking about efforts to desegregate in Charlotte?

Extension: Students could read the article “How bulldozing Brooklyn cost Black Charlotteans millions in generational wealth” (published in the Charlotte Axios) to gather additional insight and evidence. Students can add these events to their illustrated timelines.

Citation: Chemtob, Danielle. “How bulldozing Brooklyn cost Black Charlotteans millions in generational wealth.” *Axios Charlotte*, 27 June 2022, <https://charlotte.axios.com/300420/how-bulldozing-brooklyn-cost-black-charlotteans-millions-in-generational-wealth/>. Accessed 19 June 2023.

Student Objectives

1. Students will be able to identify and describe cause and effect relationships as they relate to civic action and engagement in Charlotte during the Civil Rights Movement.
2. Students will be able to explain the reforms used to address discrimination and oppression in the Charlotte community during the Civil Rights Movement.
3. Students will be able to compare and contrast primary sources and establish an analytical claim based on their findings.

Relevant NC 8th Grade Social Studies Standards

8.B.1 Analyze the impact of group behavior on the development of North Carolina and the nation.

8.C&G.2.1 Summarize the strategies and societal reforms used to address discrimination and oppression in North Carolina and the nation.

8.C&G.2.2 Assess the effectiveness of reforms in terms of the impact on individuals, policies, and institutions in North Carolina and the nation.

8.H.1.4 Explain how recovery, resistance, and resilience to inequities, injustices, discrimination, prejudice, and bias have shaped the history of North Carolina and the nation.

8.H.2.2 Explain the influences of individuals and groups during times of innovation and change in North Carolina and the nation.

Additional Reading & Resources

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