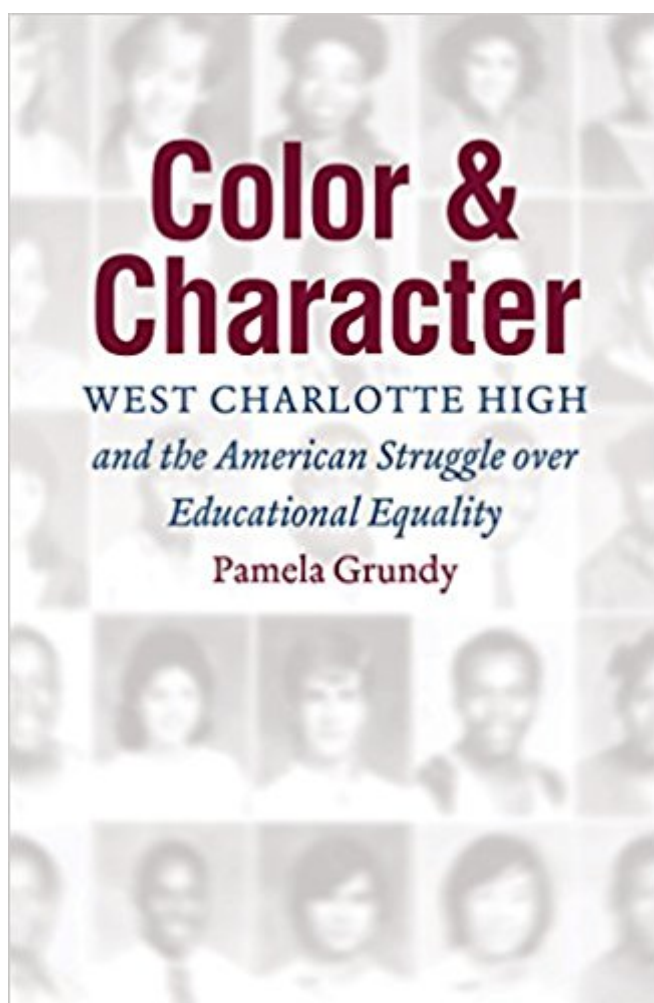


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Color And Character: West Charlotte High And The American Struggle Over Educational Equality



Synopsis

At a time when race and inequality dominate national debates, the story of West Charlotte High School illuminates the possibilities and challenges of using racial and economic desegregation to foster educational equality. West Charlotte opened in 1938 as a segregated school that embodied the aspirations of the growing African American population of Charlotte, North Carolina. In the 1970s, when Charlotte began court-ordered busing, black and white families made West Charlotte the celebrated flagship of the most integrated major school system in the nation. But as the twentieth century neared its close and a new court order eliminated race-based busing, Charlotte schools resegregated along lines of class as well as race. West Charlotte became the city's poorest, lowest-performing high school— a striking reminder of the people and places that Charlotte's rapid growth had left behind. While dedicated teachers continue to educate children, the school's challenges underscore the painful consequences of resegregation. Drawing on nearly two decades of interviews with students, educators, and alumni, Pamela Grundy uses the history of a community's beloved school to tell a broader American story of education, community, democracy, and race—all while raising questions about present-day strategies for school reform.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this remarkably moving book, Pamela Grundy uses vivid accounts from West Charlotte High students, teachers, parents, and community members as a sophisticated lens through which to

understand major changes in national educational policy over the past fifty years.--John Charles Boger, University of North Carolina School of Law

Pamela Grundy has produced a remarkable book, capturing the story of the desegregation and resegregation of one of America's greatest high schools. She brings to life fully the success and failure, joy and pain, hope and despair at the heart of the American pursuit of racial equality. And she shows that the hopes and dreams of millions of children and their advocates depend on the ability of our schools and our society to work for all of us, not just the privileged few.--James E. Ferguson II

Pamela Grundy has written a riveting book. The story of West Charlotte High School is a microcosm of urban education across the nation, demonstrating the advances achieved during desegregation and the backward movement toward resegregation. For anyone interested in contemporary issues of race and education, this book is a must-read.--Diane Ravitch, author of *Reign of Error*

Historian, author, and activist Pamela Grundy lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, where she pursues a variety of writing, teaching, and museum projects. Her previous books include the award-winning *Learning to Win: Sports, Education, and Social Change in Twentieth-Century North Carolina*.

I was delighted to read this comprehensive history of a school I worked in for six glorious years. I must say it is odd to see yourself mentioned and quoted in a book, to be listed in the Index and in the Bibliography. The book chronicles the rise and later decline of West Charlotte High as a brave and groundbreaking experiment in the best way to develop an integrated high school in America. In addition to being part of the golden years-- proudly initiated into the "Order of the Lion" many years ago--I touch two other aspects of the story she tells. Several times in the book, she posits that the start of the International Baccalaureate program at Myers Park helped to drain academic students away from WC, a theory I do not subscribe to. I started the IB program at Myers Park as an effort to bring back strong academics to MPHS, which had faltered some since its glory years. In that we succeeded gloriously with Myers Park becoming one of the top IB schools in the world, but I don't see that success as being at the expense of West Charlotte, a school I dearly love to this day. The other parallel is that when I founded the high school at Northwest School of the Arts--at the original site of West Charlotte High School--my model was largely patterned after my experience and the lessons I learned at WC. The saddest aspect of this story is that the blueprint that Sam Haywood, Jay Robinson, and others developed for this wildly successful integrated school was eventually abandoned, leading to the resegregation. The blueprint still works--offer strong programs of interest to students of all economic and racial parts of the county--when it is followed. Anyone reading this

wonderful new book who is interested in seeing what West Charlotte was like back in the glory years of the 1980's need look no farther than Northwest School of the Arts. The vibe--without the very important influence of athletics that permeated WC--is very much the same at Northwest, truly one of the great public school arts programs in the nation.

Some of the best years of my life were spent as a teacher and coach at this amazing and historic high school. West Charlotte High School is near and dear to many hearts, including mine. Ms. Pamela Grundy's book "Color and Character" truly captures the essence of this unique school and its incredible legacies. The hope is that by reviewing the various stages in this book that the school has experienced, for almost 80 years, will add valuable lessons, insights, and hope for the realm of public education. "Unity through diversity" existed here and it can be established again here and elsewhere. Sadly, our humanity is drifting further apart and we fail to realize that the solutions reside within our own hearts. My life was totally transformed during my 13 years in this remarkable environment and I am forever "Lion-hearted" and a member of the "Pride!" We must do better America! This work is proof that we are indeed capable of so much more and our future generations are owed nothing less. My hope is that others will review, internalize, and respond.

I can't remember the last time I had trouble putting down a history book. But Color & Character is a page-turner that vividly captures compelling stories of students, teachers, principals, and friends of West Charlotte High School over several tumultuous decades. It also tells a story of race in our country that is troubling yet heartening. For a time, people of many races and backgrounds pulled together to make West Charlotte the flagship of Charlotte's integrated school system. They showed us what is possible, and Grundy tells their stories beautifully. She does not oversimplify or preach, but she does inspire. The blurbs on the cover are accurate: Color & Character is "riveting," "remarkable," and "moving."

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