

STALNAKER, ANN, Ed.D. *Desegregating Hickory High School, 1955–1975: Capturing the Untold Stories*. (2013)
Directed by Drs. Rick Reitzug and Craig Peck. 196 pp.

The purpose of this research is to capture for history the events and consequences of the racial desegregation of high school students within the Hickory Public Schools in Hickory, NC. The study includes a retelling of the events surrounding the desegregation of Hickory Public Schools, beginning with the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1955 and going through an analysis of four case studies of student conflict that disrupted daily high school life between 1966 and 1973.

The study is based on primary source documents including school board minutes, school district memos, articles in the local newspaper, and the high school student newspaper. Primary source documents were supplemented by oral history interviews with eight students who attended Hickory High School during the early years of integration.

The central finding is that desegregating Hickory Public Schools was a lengthy, complex process. At every step of the way through the desegregation of Hickory High, the school was left to handle the social changes that the community attempted to avoid. Four themes emerged in the stories of student conflict at Hickory High including loss, resistance, leadership, sports as a catalyst and arena for social change, and the power of symbols to represent a school.

Rather than viewing the student conflicts as examples of what was wrong with Hickory, they are evidence that the students were wrestling to create an inclusive school community that symbolically represented them all.

DESEGREGATING HICKORY HIGH SCHOOL, 1955–1975:
CAPTURING THE UNTOLD STORIES

by

Ann Stalaker

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Greensboro
2013

Approved by

Committee Co-Chair

Committee Co-Chair

© 2013 Ann Stalnaker

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Ann Stalnaker, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-Chairs _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I wish to thank members of my dissertation committee. I could not have completed this historical study without the guidance and feedback from Dr. Craig Peck. Dr. Rick Reitzug, my chair, has been an inspiration and support throughout the doctoral process. Other members of committee, Dr. Larry Coble and Dr. Brian Clarida, also have provided valuable direction.

I acknowledge my mentor and friend, Susan Arrowood, who taught me what it means to be a principal and instructional leader. Susan gave me the inspiration for the dissertation topic and served as a sounding board every step of the way. Another important friend, Julie Morrow, kept me on task and working when I felt unable to continue the dissertation journey.

I am indebted to the oral history participants in this work. These former students of Ridgeview and Hickory High experienced stress, dislocation and social unrest beyond that which students today will face. They did this without choice and in the hopes of better schooling for all. Their remembrances and candor during our interviews are a gift to me and all who may read this work.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their patience and support. My husband, Mark, and daughter, Claire, are my closest companions and loves of my life. They sacrificed countless hours of family time for me to focus on Hickory High, past and present. Thank you both for your love and gift of time. Thanks, also, to my mom for setting standards high when it mattered most.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
I. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY.....	1
Background and Significance	1
Methodology	5
Definitions.....	16
Outline of Chapters	18
II. NATIONAL HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE	20
Public Education Pre- <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i>	21
<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> : 1896	23
<i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> : 1954	26
The Civil Rights Act: 1964	28
Analysis of Efforts to Achieving <i>Brown</i>	31
What Were the Effects of <i>Brown</i> ?	31
Improving Educational Conditions	34
Reducing Racism	36
III. FINDINGS: OVERVIEW OF DESEGREGATION AND RELATED EVENTS IN HICKORY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	41
Early Response to <i>Brown</i> Ruling: 1955–1965.....	42
Creation of a Compliance Plan: April 1965–January 1966	47
Implementing the Student Assignment Plan: February 1966– 1968.....	54
Student Life at Hickory High: 1968–1972.....	59
The <i>Swann</i> Ruling Impacts Hickory: 1972–1973	67
More Racial Conflict at Hickory High: 1973	73
The Southern Regional Council.....	77
Conclusion	82
IV. DESEGREGATION IN ACTION: FOUR CASES OF STUDENT CONFLICT.....	84
Heritage of Ridgeview and Hickory High: Prior to Desegregation	86

Newcomers to Hickory High: A Strange New World	91
What Song Shall We Sing?: The Dixie Conflict	95
Who Plays, Who Cheers?: The Cheerleader Conflict.....	102
The Lead-Up	103
Cheerleaders Cheer	109
The Aftermath.....	114
Is the Pen Mightier than the Sword?: Letters to the Editor	
Conflict	123
Resolution	129
The Aftermath.....	132
 V. WHAT MATTERED IN DESEGREGATION: LOSS, RESISTANCE, LEADERSHIP, SPORTS, AND SYMBOLS.....	139
Losing Ridgeview and the Old Hickory High	140
Resistance: The Unplanned, Unwanted, and Unknown.....	149
Leadership: Defined through Protest	162
Sports as Catalyst for Change	170
Symbols: The Power to Represent.....	174
 VI. CONCLUSION.....	181
 REFERENCES	188

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This dissertation is a report of a historical investigation into the racial desegregation of Hickory Public Schools, spanning the years of 1955 to 1973. The study was based primarily on primary source documents including school board minutes, school district memos, articles in the local newspaper, and the high school student newspaper. Primary source documents were supplemented by oral history interviews with eight students who attended Hickory High School during the early years of integration. This first chapter presents the background and significance of the study, specifies the research question, describes the research methodology used, and defines special terms used.

Background and Significance

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's changed this country in countless ways from big cities to small towns. One important thread within the larger civil rights movement is the story of the fight for school desegregation. This battle was waged in the courts, towns, and classrooms across the United States. Public school desegregation emerged as one of the most significant and lasting changes in public life resulting from the Civil Rights Movement. The story of school desegregation is multi-faceted, illustrating the best and worst sides of people from the bravery of students who were the first to transfer into all-White schools, resistance and racism on the parts of many White

southerners, to conflict within communities that wrestled to come to terms with the social changes. Some stories of desegregation trace the legal battles, others tell the story from a national perspective and still others detail the events in specific communities (Cecelski, 1994; Chafe, 1981; Siddle Walker, 1996). Inductive reasoning tells us that specific stories and details matter as we seek general truths. To apply this thinking to the history of public school integration, we need to consider the many stories of desegregation ranging from big urban school systems such as Charlotte Mecklenburg, NC to small towns like Hickory, NC. This study adds one more chapter to that national history by recounting how school desegregation unfolded in Hickory, North Carolina. This is a story that follows the contours of the national story, yet varies in detail revealing the important contributions of key individuals, the support that a larger movement can provide to local actors, the resilience of a community, and a social struggle that continues to the present.

My interest in this dissertation topic began with puzzlement over why the Hickory Public Schools did not desegregate until well into the 1960s. This question shows my general ignorance of desegregation at the outset of my research. Like others who attended diverse public schools after integration, I thought that the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling simply eliminated school segregation. As Patterson (2001) noted, “some students of American race relations have looked at these developments and concluded that the Bad Old Days of racial discrimination, including segregation in the South, were slowly on their way out in 1954” (p. 3). As I quickly learned, there was much more to the story of public school desegregation than a single court case. Rather, the struggle for school desegregation unfolded over decades through the bravery and persistence of many. The

story of how Hickory High School was desegregated and its impact on the students is a clear and specific example of courage, conflict, and compromise in the face of forced social change.

This dissertation is a historical study situated within the qualitative tradition. The study extends the work of other historians who have examined public school desegregation in school districts across the nation. However, this work focuses specifically on events and student experiences within one small, city school system in Western North Carolina from the early 1960s to 1975 to tell the story of the school system's desegregation and reconciliation after a period of racial violence. It provides a timeline and description of events related to school integration and civil rights events using archival records including school board minutes, newspaper articles, official memos and correspondence. For additional insight into the events, the study includes first hand reflections that capture the everyday memories of students who experienced the desegregation of the Hickory Public Schools. Furthermore, the conceptual perspective of this study captures and interprets the lived experiences of African-American and White students who were brought together within one high school to achieve public school desegregation. The story is told as both an institutional and social history as evidenced by local newspapers, school system records, and oral histories of students.

The purpose of this study is to capture the events surrounding the desegregation of the Hickory Public Schools and to analyze the meaning of those events. This historical period will focus on a span of twenty years, from 1955 until 1975. The central issue of investigation is the institutional and social history of how the school system attempted to

comply with state and federal mandates as well as court orders to integrate the African-American and White public school students. This history encompasses the early phases of desegregation including the transfer of individual African-American students into Hickory High (the White high school) through the closing of Ridgeview High (the Black high school) and the subsequent reassignment of African-American students to fully desegregate the high schools in the district.

This study is important for several reasons. First and foremost, it captures for posterity one school district's story of public school desegregation. Second, through this historical study, one can understand how the Hickory Public Schools' story of school desegregation fits within larger state and national stories. The plaintiff's attorney in the Hickory lawsuit for desegregation was Julius Chambers, the well-known attorney of the *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education* Supreme Court case that impacted school integration across the nation (Gaillard, 1988; Patterson, 2001). This study establishes important links between the Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Hickory Public Schools cases as well as places the Hickory case in context vis-à-vis state and national events.

In addition, this investigation uncovers the history and importance of Ridgeview School, the African-American high school in Hickory prior to desegregation. Ridgeview School was known as one of the excellent African-American schools in North Carolina, until its closing as a result of decisions made to meet requirements of the *Wilson v. Hickory Public Schools* court order in 1966. The history of this school closing provides

important insight into how the African-American community reacted to the loss of a beloved and respected institution.

This study's significance goes beyond systematically recording an untold story and interpretation of those events. This study also offers a considered example of the ways in which race, social class, gender, and personal relationships affected and were affected by public school desegregation in one southern town.

This historical investigation seeks to answer three primary research questions including: 'What actions and events took place to desegregate the high schools within Hickory Public Schools?'; 'How did teachers, principals, students and families navigate and react to legal decisions, policies and events that led to the desegregation of the schools?'; and 'How do the events in Hickory relate to North Carolina and the national picture of school desegregation?'

Methodology

The research questions I sought to address in this study address the complexities of decision-making and human interactions that took place over thirty years ago. These can be scrutinized best using historical research methodology that falls within the larger category of qualitative research design. The methodology is a blend of historical methods that involve primary source research and oral history methods through which former students shared their stories of life at Hickory High School. Based on the foundations of qualitative research that Bogdan and Biklen (2003) outline, the qualitative research tradition best fits this study because the questions focus on the complexities of human behavior, require understanding of the context and the meaning of the data. The research

findings call for rich, thick descriptive detail rather than use of numbers. Historical research is a well-accepted method within the qualitative tradition that uses the same logic, techniques and source materials, but concerns itself with making sense of events from the past (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003).

While Kaestle (1997) points out that there is “no single, definable method of inquiry” for historical research (p. 75), there are several features of historical research that make it especially suited to this study. First, the historian is expected to go beyond simply recording historical events to provide an interpretation of those events. As Rury (2006) explains, historians are expected to “construct a coherent explanation” of the events using evidence found in primary and secondary data sources (p. 324).

Interpretation becomes a methodological issue for historians as they seek to offer evidence and/or support for their explanation. Unlike other methods in which hypotheses are tested through replication, historical research often turns on multiple causes working together. Rury (2006) explains that historical explanations are not formal, but “situational, describing how events grow out of given contexts” (p. 325). This approach fits with the inductive approach to data analysis found within the qualitative tradition. As Bogdan and Bicklen (2003) explain, qualitative researchers “do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built on the particulars that have been gathered and grouped together” (p. 6). This perspective enabled me to reach conclusions about how desegregation took place in Hickory Public Schools after considering the local context and multiple sources of information.

Rury (2006) indicates that another important feature of historical research is its “preoccupation with context” (p. 325). Likewise, qualitative research tends to situate itself in the naturalistic setting in order to fully understand the context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The value of this particular study hinges on exploring the context that contributed to the manner in which events unfolded. The Hickory Public Schools’ story of desegregation is interesting and meaningful inasmuch as the local context is described and analyzed. We already know the general tale of public school integration. Uncovering the unique contours and aspects of the Hickory story reveals something meaningful about the people and place. In this regard, I must engage the historian’s methodology.

At least one important difference exists between historical research and other qualitative traditions. This difference pertains to the fragmentary nature of evidence that a historian gathers. As Rury (2006) explains, “Unlike other social scientists, historians cannot gather evidence up to the point that they feel important questions have been addressed” (p. 325). Instead, historians depend on the information that has survived over time, including archival documents and the memories of people who may have witnessed the events. The historical researcher’s work is much like a scavenger hunt requiring persistence and problem-solving skills to locate and re-assemble fragmentary evidence from a variety of sources. In this regard, the time to engage in this study of the desegregation of Hickory High School is now. Each year that passes, key informants pass away and school documents are cleared, further marring the trail of information on the time period. The story of desegregating Hickory High is a rich one, yet this richness

comes from details of context that are being lost each day. The challenge is to follow a fragmentary trail in archival research and students' memories.

This study depends on two key sources of data: documents and personal interviews. I began the study by reading broadly secondary sources of the historical time period. This included the history of the civil rights movement, school integration, and the history of Hickory Public Schools and Hickory in general. This reading of what others have to say provided insight into the context in which African-American students were re-located to Hickory High to achieve desegregation.

Next, I gathered data from primary source material through archival research seeking official documents related to the desegregation of the Hickory Public Schools. These documents include school board minutes, reports, and memos that served both internal and external communication during the time period. Review and analysis of these documents helped me order and describe the events as well as gain the official perspective on them. I accessed school board minutes and school system documents from the time period. In addition, I accessed microfiche copies of the *Hickory Daily Record* newspapers dating back to the early 1950s.

The third source of data is individual interviews. The evidence I gathered in archival research was enriched by including the lived memories of key participants. I conducted oral history interviews to enhance and corroborate the history of the two high schools within Hickory Public Schools including both Ridgeview High School and Hickory High. As Hyams (1997) points out, the "more subtle aspects of tensions" and politics that emerged as public policy was made real to students could be made clearer by

integrating the recollections of key individuals (p. 93). In addition, the use of oral histories enabled me to “probe into the reactions of the rank and file” to the changes that occurred (p. 93). By incorporating the stories of students, the Hickory Public Schools’ institutional history is better situated within the social and cultural environment of the day.

As a means of gathering these oral histories, I engaged in a series of one-on-one interviews with former students who attended Hickory High School during or right after desegregation. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) include interviews as an important source of data in qualitative research studies. They further point out that the “interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (p. 95). I embarked on the interviews by first identifying the potential interviewees through archival research noting the individuals who appear multiple times in documents. I focused the list of potential interviewees by including community members mentioned or referred to during informal discussions of the historical investigation.

At the outset of the research project, I planned to interview a range of school stakeholders involved during desegregation including school board members, parents, teachers and students. After reflecting on my timeline and notes, I decided to limit the interviews to former students for several reasons. The scope of the project with interviews of individuals representing a range of roles within the school community was too big. In addition, the voices of school system decision-makers including the superintendent, district administrators, and school board members were already captured

to a great extent through the school board notes and local newspaper articles. I discovered an important missing voice, that of the students who directly experienced the school system decisions regarding how desegregation would be handled within the Hickory Public Schools. As a result, I limited my interviews to eight interviews of students (four of whom were African-American and four of whom were White) who attended Hickory High School between 1966 and 1975.

While desegregation came to the entire district of Hickory Public Schools, I chose to limit my focus to conflict and student voice within the high school. I did this for two reasons. First, there were nine elementary and middle schools within the district, making it difficult to represent a range of perspectives within each of those schools. At the secondary level, all Hickory Public Schools students came together under one roof at Hickory High. -Second, I found that the students' stories of desegregation within the Hickory Public Schools played out most at the high school rather than at the middle or elementary levels. As the school board notes, the *Hickory Daily Record*, and the Southern Regional Council Report indicate, Hickory High was the public space in Hickory where student agency with respect to race relations erupted.

I approached the interviews from an ethnographic perspective focusing on the goal, explained by Brenner (2006), of seeking an understanding of "the shared experiences, practices and beliefs that arise from shared cultural perspectives" of a particular time and place (p. 358). To this end, I maintained an inductive approach to the interviews, questioning without working from an explicit theoretical framework. The interviews were semi-structured, opening with a grand narrative question and proceeding

with additional open-ended questions that covered a range of related topics. As Brenner (2006) suggests, I created and used an interview guide that divided the interview into topics with some initial wording of questions and areas to be explored.

The interviews were audio-recorded and I took notes on context, body language, and affect. Given the sensitive nature of the topic and the close-knit nature of the Hickory community, I proceeded delicately with these interviews. In fact, one informant backed away from being interviewed after discussing the project with her husband. While others agreed to engage in the interview, they may have withheld comment on controversial or sensitive points. In this study, gaining access and building trust and rapport for successful interviews was critical.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) state that, “qualitative research involves holding objects and events up to the sensitive instrument of your mind to discern their value as data” (p. 146). Data management and analysis are at the heart of the researcher’s work to discern meaning. There were several phases of data management within this research project. The first phase was building a chronology of events that tell the story of desegregation within Hickory Public Schools. During this phase, I worked with primary source documents. Using school board notes, I created a timeline that included events related to school desegregation and racial tension. In addition to typing each event into an electronic timeline, I copied each school board note to create a chronological record of primary source documents. I learned that the local newspaper, *The Hickory Daily Record*, usually published news from the school board meetings the day after each meeting. As a result, my next step was to search the *Hickory Daily Record* on the day following each

school board meeting for any reference to integration or racial tension. I added this information to the timeline and copied the articles, placing them alongside school board notes in the chronological notebook. News from the *Hickory Daily Record* allowed me to expand my look at the issues beyond the limitations of school board actions. When events played out longer than the single reference, I searched the newspaper for relevant articles every day until the story reached its natural conclusion in the paper. Finally, after creating a timeline with companion notebooks of school board minutes and news articles, I closely analyzed the material to locate the rise and fall of the story of school desegregation.

As the research project unfolded, I found it more comfortable to code primary source documents and interviews directly on hard copy rather than the computer. As a result, I coded directly on copies of interview transcripts, school board notes and copies of news articles. First, I read through these primary source documents several times, noticing emerging themes and codes as I moved through the material. Then, I went back through a third time, color coding documents with themes. These themes included leadership, community and the specific conflicts. In addition, I made notes in the margins of the interview transcripts on specific insights. Interview and document summary files were not necessary as a result of my hand-worked coding and notes. The primary source data was analyzed and included in the dissertation. The taped recordings gathered from the interviews were transcribed and will be destroyed after five years.

As Keeves and Sowden (1997) explain, there are three stages of data analysis including data reduction, data display and drawing conclusions. While these stages may not be cleanly separated in time, I thought of them as separate steps in the process of data

analysis. I used standard Windows programs including Microsoft Word and others to manage, organize and analyze the data collected. I did not utilize software such as NVivo to assist in the data reduction phase. Instead, I read and reread primary and secondary source documents to search for emerging themes. As I continued to work with the data, I employed an inductive approach to coding. I used codes that fit the data rather than applying codes developed prior to data analysis. I reflected on the codes that emerged from the timeline and then planned the interviews, creating a semi-structured interview guide that reflecting insights from the primary source data. I utilized these codes to analyze documents and interviews similarly.

After coding was complete, I considered data display and decided that the story should be told chronologically with focus on four key episodes of conflict. These four episodes are cases where conflict arose among the students after Hickory High School was desegregated and reveal how the whole school community handled discord and disagreement. During this phase data display blended with drawing conclusions as I sought the relationship between the sequencing of events and meanings found within the interviews. Through close consideration of the time ordering, I found student voices commenting on how school district decisions or lack thereof affected daily school life. Work with the data enabled me to draw some conclusions, the third phase of data analysis. I came to a clearer perspective on what happened in the Hickory Public Schools as they sought to desegregate the high school and what meaning we can draw from the events.

How will the readers and I know that the interpretive history of Hickory Public Schools is valid and that the conclusions sound? I took several steps suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984) and Creswell (1998) to confirm the findings including data triangulation, member checking, and peer review. I triangulated the data used for this historical investigation by consulting multiple data sources. I utilized school board minutes, official school documents, local newspapers, the high school student newspaper, and interview data. The primary source data encompass a broad range of perspectives on the events including those of school administrators, school board members, students, and the community. Through the interviews, I gained further detail on the student perspective. This provided an inside view of daily life within Hickory High School right after desegregation. By representing a diversity of perspectives across data sources, there is ample evidence to support my description and interpretation of the events related to the desegregation of Hickory High School.

Another means of quality control I utilized is member checking. After each interview was transcribed, I provided a copy of the transcript to the interviewee. I requested that the interviewees confirm the content of the transcript, allowing them to make corrections or additions to the record. This ensured that I did not distort or change the interview data. By providing respondents an opportunity to provide feedback on the transcript served the purpose, as Keeves and Sowden (1997) explain, of allowing respondents to help me more fully understand the situations I am seeking to describe.

As yet another step to ensure the rigor of my work, I engaged in peer review for an external check of the research process. As Creswell (1998) suggested, I solicited a

close colleague to serve as my devil's advocate, asking the "hard questions about methods, meanings and interpretations" (p. 202). This friend also reviewed the coded interviews as a way of ensuring reliability of interview data suggested by Keeves and Sowden (1997).

In order to address any ethical concerns, I followed university guidelines pertaining to the use of human subjects in the case study as specified by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I received training in IRB procedures and the protection of human participants in research on November 21, 2006 and have a certificate of completion. I renewed this certification in March of 2010. I completed and submitted an application for the IRB Review of Research Involving the Use of Human Subjects. After discussion with the Institutional Review Board, I discovered that because my dissertation research was oral history, IRB approval is not necessary.

One ethical concern of my research stems from my close connection to and role within the school system of study. When I began the study, I was a district administrator in Hickory Public Schools. Before all interviews were completed, I changed jobs to become the principal at Hickory High School. I anticipated the possibility of individual and community questions about the study, beyond necessary conversations with my peer reviewer and work with interviewees. As both a district administrator and high school principal, I addressed community members outside the study as neutrally as possible without sharing significant findings or conclusions until the study was complete. The concern is that potential and actual interviewees may have been influenced in their participation. I was as open and careful as possible to downplay my role within the school

district and make clear that my work as a researcher was separate from my work as a school administrator. This concern lessened when I limited the interviews to former students, none of whom had any current connection with Hickory Public Schools.

Definitions

In the literature on *Brown v. Board of Education* and resulting public school integration, the terms desegregation and integration are often used interchangeably. However, Patterson (2001) and Chafe (1981) offer a fine, yet important distinction between the terms. Patterson specifies that to desegregate is to “break down separation of the races and to promote greater equality of opportunity” (p. 205). He claims that to integrate goes further by seeking:

to bring together people of different colors and ethnic backgrounds so that they associate not only on an equal basis but also make a real effort to respect the autonomy of other people and to appreciate the virtues of cultural diversity (p. 205).

Chafe (1981) defines these terms in a similar fashion noting integration as “the maximum degree of racial interaction thought possible in a given situation” and desegregation as the minimum (p. 6). There are two important differences between the terms here. The first difference is in the degree of interracial contact. The second is also a matter of degree, but this time in attitudinal openness toward interracial contact as well as an appreciation of cross-cultural exchange that can result from interaction. The distinction between terms highlights the impact of attitudes and beliefs on behavior that is forced by legal and governmental action. Put differently, can Patterson’s (2001) definition of integration be realized as a result of a school desegregation order? As the reader encounters the terms

desegregation and integration throughout this study, this question and the precise definitions of Patterson and Chafe are important.

While I use both terms throughout this dissertation, I lean more heavily on use of the term desegregation. While I wish to say that Hickory Public Schools achieved integration at Hickory High School, this is sadly not the case. The school system did achieve a complete racial mixing of students within the school building of Hickory High. There are glimmers throughout this story of true integration where students and adults engaged one another on an equal basis with respect. There are also many examples where students were not racially mixed to the greatest degree possible and operated without equal autonomy and respect for diversity. Integration, by Patterson's definition, was not achieved at Hickory High during the time period of study and is still a goal yet to be fully realized at Hickory High. Desegregation is a more accurate term for Hickory's handling of federal mandates and satisfaction of the lawsuit against the school district.

The label used to describe Black Americans has changed over time and has included Colored, Negro, Afro-American, African-American, and Black. Currently, the two most commonly used terms include African-American and Black. One can find a range of opinion and argument lobbying both for and against usage of each label (Fairchild, 1985; Smith, 1992; Zilber & Niven, 1995, 2000). Throughout this dissertation, I have used African-American most often as the label for the cultural group of Black Americans. I selected this term to show respect for the varied views of members of this cultural group (Smith, 1992; Zilber & Niven, 2000). For historical accuracy and respect

of authors referenced, I have not changed the cultural labels used within any of the quotes.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter II provides an overview of the national and state historical context for public school desegregation and a review of the historical literature. After setting the context in which Hickory Public Schools created a plan to desegregate, chapter three lays out the documentary review of how desegregation unfolded in Hickory Public Schools. Chapter III conveys the local history of the desegregation of the Hickory Public Schools from the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling through creation of a compliance plan that met requirements of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the desegregation of Hickory High and the ensuing student conflicts at Hickory High up through 1973. Chapter IV includes a closer examination of four cases of student conflict at Hickory High after the segregated African-American high school was closed and all high school students attended one school together. After delving deeply into four student conflicts, chapter five provides an analysis of the student conflicts through a focus on the themes that emerged across the conflicts together. These themes include the losses experienced by students including both the loss that African-American students felt as their high school was closed and the loss White students experienced as Hickory High changed through desegregation; the ways in which students, district leaders and community members resisted the social changes that came with desegregation; the leadership of students to remake Hickory High as a shared community of diversity or to maintain old traditions; the role of sports as a

catalyst for change; and the importance of symbols in representing a school and its student body.

CHAPTER II

NATIONAL HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

We, as a people, take the larger institutions of our society, such as government and the public schools, as immutable. These institutions seem so big, so permanent that it is difficult to imagine how they could change in deep and radical ways. It is precisely because bureaucracies change through accretion, slowly over time, that the 1960s are a provocative era for historians. How could the society change so much, so quickly? Even given the commitment of the civil rights heroes and ordinary citizens, the transformation of schools from 1954 to 1975 was remarkable. This time period provides a great example that schools do not operate in a vacuum. The key actors within schools including superintendents, professional educators, parents, and students are part of a larger culture. Like someone tracking mud in from the outside, they bring the views and tensions from the larger culture into the classroom. As a result, the social environment just beyond the schoolhouse door provides important contextual factors to what happens in schools.

This chapter will provide both a historical review of public schools and a contextual overview of the national picture on desegregation. Through a chronological review of public education, I will pay special attention to the ways public schools were structured to serve African-American children in order to outline the long fight that resulted in public school desegregation. We will begin with a brief description of schooling for White and African-American students prior to *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896

and quickly move into a consideration of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, including *Brown I* and *Brown II*, the reaction of schools to the *Brown* ruling, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This look at the national and state picture of how the public schools and the country handled the question of race and racial integration will provide a relevant backdrop for the events surrounding the desegregation of Hickory High School in 1966.

Public Education Pre-*Plessy v. Ferguson*

We know that the public schools were created as an institution to serve the betterment of the society. Horace Mann is credited for calling public schools the balancing wheel of democracy, created to provide the education and skills that would enable the country to flourish economically and socially. In fact, Horace Mann is often referred to as the father of public education. In 1837, he was appointed to serve as the Secretary of Education in Massachusetts where he focused on establishing public elementary schools, or common schools, and ensuring quality instruction in them (Sadker & Sadker, 1991). The common schools movement grew and by the 1890s, the majority of White students attended public schools between the ages of six or seven and twelve. According to Cremin (1988), “the public schools prided themselves on being ‘common’ schools, that is, schools that enrolled children of all races, classes, religions, and ethnic backgrounds and that in the process continually honored and renewed the American commitment to democracy” (p. 551). At that moment in history, the public schools were America’s answer to the question of how to bring people of different backgrounds together in a healthy, mutually supportive community and democracy.

But, did that balancing wheel of public education extend to all Americans? To describe the early public schools as serving the lofty aim of enabling a diverse population to assimilate into American culture says nothing about how the schools were handling the education of African-American students. While there was clear agreement that most immigrants should be assimilated into society through education, this was not the case for all minorities within the United States. According to Tyack (2003), “Black, Japanese and Chinese people were categorized as members of unassimilable and inferior ‘races’” (p. 82), and therefore were kept from the education meant to assimilate immigrants. As a result of overt racist discrimination, Black students in the South were segregated and were relegated to nonacademic tracks of study in the North. As a result of racism toward African-Americans, public schooling was not open to them in the same way it was for other children, nor were African-American children meant to be assimilated into the larger culture like the children of European immigrants.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, newly freed African-Americans established their own schools staffed with African-American teachers, supported financially and otherwise by freed slaves (Anderson, 1978; Banks & Banks, 2004). They resisted efforts of control by outsiders. The government supported education of African-Americans by establishing a Freedman’s Bureau to oversee and establish such schools. From 1867 to 1872, the Freedman Bureau established day schools, night schools and industrial schools. According to Anderson (1978), Northern philanthropists and southern reformers viewed mass schooling of African-Americans “as a means of training efficient and contented black laborers for the Southern agricultural economy” (p. 374). The government had a

vested interest in funding schools for African-Americans so as to provide a source of labor for the industrializing economy.

Even with the work of the Freedman's Bureau, there were far too few schools for African-American students. As Banks and Banks (2004) point out, "in 1915, 90% of African-American children lived in the South, with only 64 public secondary schools available for Blacks" (p. 467). In the decades following Reconstruction, literacy rates were measured in terms of student enrollment in school. From 1860 to 1880, the country saw the greatest increase in literacy among African-Americans which increased from 2% to 34%.

However, there was a backlash toward African-Americans after Reconstruction as evidenced by the emergence of Jim Crow laws in the 1870s. Jim Crow laws consisted of a series of state laws and local ordinances passed in the southern United States that separated African Americans from Whites in schools, housing, jobs and public gathering places. According to Currie (n.d.), the "Jim Crow laws in North Carolina consisted of legislated laws and local customs that permeated daily life, giving minorities the status of second-class citizens" (p. 1). Jim Crow laws made life for African-Americans much harsher and limited their movement including possibilities for schooling. African-American student enrollment in schools showed a decline between 1880 and 1900 as a result of these new laws.

Plessy v. Ferguson: 1896

Though challenged, there is a long tradition of overt racism that runs through the public schools, just as it does through other social institutions. The discriminatory

practice of segregating African-American students from Whites in public schools is addressed in the famous *Plessy v. Ferguson* court case of 1896. In this case, Homer Plessy, an African-American from Louisiana, challenged the practice of segregating train cars such that Black and White passengers were not allowed in the same compartment. The Supreme Court decided that as long as the train cars provided similar amenities, separating African-American and White passengers was acceptable. This ruling, known widely as ‘separate but equal’, was extended to public education to justify the practice of segregation in school. Throughout the South, this meant that African-American students were unable to attend White schools.

In his opinion for the *Plessy* ruling, Justice Brown wrote that:

The object of the [Fourteenth] Amendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but in the nature of things it could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political equality, or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either. Laws permitting, and even requiring, their separation in places where they are liable to be brought into contact do not necessarily imply the inferiority of either race to the other . . .
(*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896)

Justice Brown goes on to comment that, “We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff’s argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with the badge of inferiority” (Morris, 1989, p. 434). In this clear statement, Justice Brown claims that separation of races does not necessarily entail inequality of treatment or resources.

Menchaca (1997) indicates that segregated education was endorsed by the federal government as evidenced by the Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* which:

officially gave the states the right to segregate racial minorities in separate schools. Although the states were already practicing segregated schooling, the significance of *Plessy* was that it made it clear to non-Whites that they did not have any legal recourse against the educational policies of the states. (Menchaca, 1997, p. 37)

“An elaborate set of racist beliefs justified segregation, political subordination, hostile and demeaning stereotypes, and economic exploitation of people of color” (Tyack, 2003, p. 85). The debate made clearer much later is whether separation of the races for schooling is essentially tied to unequal educational opportunities. History shows us that the opportunities and resources for African-American students at that time were grossly unequal and that segregation then was essentially tied to inequality.

However, as the Jim Crow era progressed into the first half of the twentieth century, African-American enrollment in schools slowly increased. Segregated African-American schools operated within and under the auspices of the larger school district, though these schools were semi-independent. As Irvine and Irvine (1983) explain:

under the dual school system in the era of racial segregation, the lack of interest in black schools by all-white boards of education allowed wide latitude to black subordinates to run the black part of the system, so long as no problems became visible. . . . Black schools were for all intents and purposes black-controlled—controlled in the sense that they were administered by black principals, staffed by black teachers and served a black student population. (p. 416)

While the schools were segregated and unequal in terms of resources, African-Americans enjoyed some semblance of control and freedom to operate schools for their children.

Brown v. Board of Education: 1954

The challenges to the 'separate but equal' doctrine mounted over time as individuals made claims that various separate schools were not equal. The challenges culminated in the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* of 1954, also known as *Brown I*. As Morris (1989) explains, the argument of the plaintiffs in *Brown v. Bd. of Education* was that to separate students "from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone" (p. 438). After due consideration, the Supreme Court determined that, in terms of schooling, the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). The underlying assumption of the Brown ruling was that the desegregation of public school would have a positive impact on the life chances of African-American students (Epps, 1999). While this ruling overturned the legal basis for racial segregation in the public schools, it did not spell out the details of how segregation would end.

To address the question of how to end segregated schooling, the court attempted to provide direction one year later in a further Supreme Court ruling of 1955 which is known as *Brown II*. The court was not nearly as aggressive in the second *Brown* ruling, directing schools to desegregate "with all deliberate speed." This vague direction allowed schools to dismantle their segregated schools through locally developed timetables and strategies (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). In his court opinion, Chief Warren stated, in part, that:

The burden rests on the defendant to establish such time as necessary in the public interest and is consistent with good faith compliance at the earliest practicable date. To that end, the courts may consider problems related to administration, arising from the physical condition of the school plant, the school transportation system, personnel, revision of school districts and attendance areas into a compact unit to achieve a system of determining admission to the public schools on a nonracial basis. (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1955)

This ruling as to the way to integrate schools left the door open so widely that states were able to move at a snail's pace toward compliance. As a result, *Brown II* is seen as a political sidestepping and retraction of the charge made clear in *Brown I* (Morris, 1989).

Many school districts in the South took advantage of the open-ended timetable and did not desegregate. According to Morris (1989):

the "all deliberate speed" formula had encouraged some creative lawyers and others dedicated to racial segregation to find ways that might postpone desegregation forever. Progress toward integration was nearly nonexistent and by 1964, with only 2.14% of black students attending desegregated schools in seven of eleven southern states. (p. 444)

One tactic throughout much of the South was to establish "freedom of choice" in the schools, whereby African-American students could choose to transfer to a White school, but not to change the student assignment plan in any significant manner (Cecelski, 1994; Morris, 1989). Other strategies to block segregation included closing public schools and providing grants funding to White children who attended private schools (Morris, 1989).

North Carolina's answer to the *Brown II* ruling was the Pupil Assignment Act of 1955 that spelled out criteria for student transfer, yet delegated all authority for student assignment to local school districts. According to Cecelski (1994), the state went even further toward local control and against the spirit of the *Brown* ruling with the Pearsall

Plan of 1956. Through the Pearsall Plan, each school community was allowed to decide whether to desegregate through a local referendum. This delayed desegregation in much of North Carolina until 1969 when the Pearsall Plan was declared unconstitutional and challenge lawsuits began springing up in various districts across the states. These suits often resulted in a court order to change the student assignment plan to distribute African-American students evenly among schools, thereby eliminating segregated schools. Without a challenge suit and resulting desegregation order, schools in districts across the state could remain virtually segregated regardless of the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The Civil Rights Act: 1964

The move to integrate schools took a giant step forward with the passage of the Civil Rights Act which placed the burden of seeking to protect civil rights on the U.S. Department of Justice rather than on individual African-American families. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act forbade the use of federal funds, including those funds administered through the Department of Education, to be used for discriminatory purposes. In addition, Title IV of the Act authorized the Department of Education to provide technical assistance and incentives for districts engaged in desegregation efforts.

More and more school districts began to desegregate as a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the 1968 *Green v. Cty. Bd of Education* Supreme Court ruling. While the Civil Rights Act was effective in providing a carrot and stick approach, the *Green* ruling ended the strategy of avoiding desegregation through “freedom of choice” plans. The case involved a Virginia school district which allowed students to choose annually

between a White combined school and a Black combined school. By opening the doors and allowing students free choice between the schools, the school board claimed it had fully discharged its duty. The Supreme Court ruled against the school district, stating that their “freedom of choice” plan had come ten years after the Brown ruling and that “their time for mere deliberate speed had run out.” Morris (1989) points out that after the Green case, “federal courts began ordering immediate desegregation, even while litigation was pending. No longer could litigation serve to preserve the status quo until the litigation had ended” (p. 446). This ruling was a significant step forward in the march to integrate schools.

School districts in North Carolina also engaged in “freedom of choice” plans for desegregation. For example, Cecelski (1994) mentions that Hyde County followed the example of other school districts in North Carolina by adopting a “freedom of choice” plan during the summer of 1965. Chafe (1981) discusses Greensboro’s schools use of a “freedom of choice” plan. The Hickory Public Schools board notes also mention a period of “freedom of choice” prior to fully desegregating the schools through revised student attendance zones.

However, with the Green ruling and the Civil Rights Act, school districts dismissed with “freedom of choice” plans and began more fully desegregating the public schools. Klarman (1994) also credits the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare with the increase in public school integration. By the 1968-1969 school year, 32% of southern black children were attending public school with Whites. This percentage rose to 91.3% in 1972-1973.

The stories of many North Carolina school districts including Hickory Public Schools are nested within this larger context of national and state response to court and government action. Three North Carolina school districts served as touchstones and comparison districts for my analysis of desegregating Hickory High. They include Hyde County, Greensboro and Charlotte-Mecklenburg. David Celcelski (1994) captures the story of school desegregation and African-American resistance in Hyde County in his work, *Along Freedom Road*. William Chafe (1981) shares the coming of the civil rights movement to Greensboro in *Civilities and Civil Rights*. Though there are several works on school desegregation in Charlotte, *The Dream Long Deferred* by Frye Gaillard (1988) provides a most comprehensive treatment. There are both striking similarities and important differences between Hickory and these other North Carolina districts in terms of how they approached pressure to desegregate the schools, the compliance plans they created and the reaction of local citizens. Taken all together, these school districts reveal the particular stories that are the flesh on the skeleton of court ruling and government policy.

The Hickory Public Schools operated segregated schools until 1966. The Civil Rights Act placed sufficient pressure on the school district that the school board and district administrators began planning for desegregation. As the plans were nearing completion, a local group of African-American families filed a lawsuit that sought to finish the work of desegregation started by *Brown v. Board of Education*. As a result of the state case, *Wilson v. Hickory Board of Education*, the court mandated specific requirements for desegregating the Hickory Public Schools measured by the racial

balance of African-Americans and Whites in the public schools, both of the student populations and the teacher populations. The court order specified that the racial composition of each school must not vary significantly in proportion from the school district as a whole. After the final ruling of *Wilson v. Board of Education* in 1973 until the 1990s, racial balance of the schools' student and teacher populations was monitored from the central office.

Analysis of Efforts to Achieving *Brown*

The local story of desegregating Hickory Public Schools provides one example of a Southern school district implementing the *Brown* ruling. By considering this story along with other school districts, historians can analyze the outcome and impact of *Brown* on a nation. If we consider the *Brown* ruling along with subsequent supportive rulings and governmental actions as a social experiment, then a natural question to ask is impact. Did the nation accomplish what the courts and the government hoped to accomplish through these efforts? What was the overall impact on schools and society? First, let us remember that the primary aim of the *Brown* ruling was to end public school segregation, and in so doing, to ensure equal educational opportunities for African-American children and improve race relations. In this section, I will consider the impact by analyzing each element in turn, including the status of desegregation, educational outcomes for African-American students, and race relations.

What Were the Effects of *Brown*?

The first question of impact is this: as a result of the *Brown* ruling and subsequent governmental and school actions, were public schools desegregated? Though the question

is straightforward, the answer is not. Yes, the practice of segregating African-American students in separate schools ended for a period of time, especially in the South and in the Border States (Clotfelter, 2004). While *Brown* and ensuing government action effectively ended *de jure* segregation, *de facto* segregation in the northeast was much more difficult to attack. Though there were desegregation orders in the North, the tide shifted by the mid-1970s with the *Milliken v. Bradley* ruling, which “marked the beginning of a retreat from the proactive pursuit of racial balance as a judicial objective” (Clotfelter, 2004, p 31).

In Clotfelter’s (2004) comparison of White and non-White student enrollment information from 1960 to 2001, one finds a mixed answer to the question of desegregation. Clotfelter (2004) found:

Adopting as the benchmark of isolation enrollment in the most highly concentrated schools, black students became dramatically less isolated in the South, the Border, and the Midwest. But in the schools of the Northeast and the West, they became more isolated, at least from whites (p. 57).

Data presented by Clotfelter (2004) suggests two important points. The first is that there was great variation among states and regions as to how much they integrated schools. So, even when schools were most fully desegregated, some regions were not very desegregated. The second is that there was a clear high water mark for school desegregation around 1976. After that time and for a variety of reasons, schools began moving away from plans aimed to fully integrate schools by race. As Patterson (1997) explains:

the Harvard Project on School Desegregation recently warned that political decisions during the eighties, combined with recent Supreme Court rulings, have produced clear signs that progress is coming undone and that the nation is headed backwards toward greater segregation of black students, particularly in the states with a history of de jure segregation. (p. 20)

To be sure, recent trends indicate that schools are rapidly resegregating and gains toward integration are being lost every day across America as schools revise their student assignment plans (Cashin, 2004; Clotfelter, 2004; Frankenberg, & Orfield, 2007; Klarman, 2007; Ogletree, 2004; Orfield, 1993; Patterson, 1997).

The question of whether schools were or are integrated in the spirit of *Brown* becomes murkier still when one considers segregation of students within the school building through academic tracking and ability grouping. For even as schools reached their most integrated status, student interracial contact has been restrained through student academic course placement by racially identifiable patterns (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007; Clotfelter, 2004; Patterson, 1997; Cashin, 2004). In an analysis of North Carolina schools, Clotfelter (2004) shows the extent of within- school racial disparities which intensify as students move toward the upper grades. By the time students reach the tenth grade, two thirds of the classes are totally segregated by race. Based on this data alone, it is safe to say that even when schools are desegregated in terms of total school enrollment, they are still largely segregated at the classroom level.

When one considers the present state of school desegregation broadly to encompass racial composition both within entire schools as well as individual classrooms, one must conclude that we have not achieved this aim of *Brown*. Should we continue to seek the goal of *Brown*? The research and stories within this study suggest

that there are both moral and pragmatic reasons for us to continue to seek full racial integration in each school and classroom. As put by Klarman (2007),

segregated schools are grim propagators of America's most persistent social pathology. The pity is that desegregation has proven, by and large, an effective antidote, yet the nation has been casting it aside as an inconvenience, with no appreciable protest from the black community (p. 773).

Students of all ethnicities benefit academically when educated in integrated classrooms (Brittain, 1993; Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007; Chambers, 1993; Orfield, 1993). Orfield (2007) indicates that, "data shows that integrated classrooms where there is positive student contact produce high academic achievement and access to networks of information and opportunities and that integrated schools tend to lead to integrated lives" (p. 292). Furthermore, the benefits of integration go beyond mere academic gains. African-American students educated in integrated classrooms are more likely develop interpersonal relationships across the color line, work in integrated settings and earn more as adults (Brittain, 1993; Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007).

Improving Educational Conditions

Have we achieved a better education for African-American students as a result of the *Brown* ruling and subsequent governmental actions? Once again, the answer is somewhat unclear depending on the measure of educational achievement one considers as success. First, consider college going rates for African-American students, a measure that has increased sharply. Klarman (2007) notes that in 1950 only 13.7% of African-American students graduated from high school while 30% of the same age group was

attending college by 2000. In a comparative measure against White students, Clotfelter (2004) analyzed the percentage of non-Whites with four or more years of college. In 1950, 6.3% of the White population had attended four or more years of college as compared to 2.1% of non-Whites. By 2000, “the proportional gap between blacks and whites had shrunk dramatically” (p. 38). So, while educational attainment of African-Americans in terms of college attendance has increased, there is still a disparity when compared to Whites. Current data from the Southern Regional Educational Board indicates that in 2009 the college-going rate for 18-24 year old African-Americans was 37 percent compared to 45 percent for White students of the same age (Southern Regional Educational Board, 2009). This same pattern holds true when one considers K-12 educational measures. While African-American student performance has increased on measures such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT), there remains an achievement gap on these as well as other measures of academic success (Cashin, 2004; Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007; Klarman, 2007).

In considering the impact of school desegregation on student success, Epps (1999) begins with a quote from W. E. B. Dubois in 1936 that aptly addresses our question,

Theoretically, the Negro needs neither segregated nor mixed schools. What he needs is education. But he must remember that there is no magic either in mixed schools or in segregated schools. A mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers with hostile public opinion and no teaching concerning Black folk is bad (p. 1).

The few comparisons of NAEP and SAT scores aside, it is difficult to ferret out the impact of integration on student academic achievement when states have differed so much over time in terms of within school and between school racial segregation. For sure, there are questions regarding the extent to which desegregation as an isolated endeavor has improved African-American student achievement. In a meta-analysis, Krol (1980) found no statistically significant research from 1955-1977 to show that desegregation alone positively affected African-American student achievement. Epps (1999) commented that, “we went into desegregation expecting to get access to the same quality of education that White kids were getting, but it has not come to pass” (p. 13). Orfield (1993) and others point out that there is little research in the field based on anything but very short-term academic and social impact that speaks to the impact of desegregation. As a result, it is nearly impossible to sort out whether the gap in achievement is more reflective of school structuring, instructional methods or student performance.

Reducing Racism

Finally, has the social and moral mission of the *Brown* ruling been achieved? Has racism been undone in any way? Yet again, the story on race relations between African-Americans and other populations is mixed. First, let us consider the question in the broadest terms. Are African-Americans better off now than they were before the *Brown* ruling and the ensuing Civil Rights Movement? Yes, by nearly every measure including overall education, housing employment, cultural recognition, and self-concept, African-

Americans fare better in the United States than they did in the early 1950s (Klarman, 2007).

Clotfelter (2004) claims that racial prejudice has declined in the 50 years since *Brown*, as measured by White adult responses to questions of racial attitudes on national surveys. “The percentage of Whites endorsing ‘same schools’ rose from one-third in 1942, to half in 1956, to three quarters in 1970, to 90 percent in 1982. In 1995, more than 95 percent of Whites favored integrated schools” (p. 39). Similar changes over time show up in surveys of White adults’ openness to inter-racial marriage and integration of neighborhoods (Patterson, 1997).

Consider too, the chances for improved race relations when students are educated in integrated environments. Findings from Killen, Crystal, and Ruck (2007) and The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University indicate that “students in desegregated schools have more positive attitudes toward members of other racial groups than do children attending homogeneous schools” (p. 60). The research to support the positive impact that interracial contact has on race relations is plentiful (Banks & Banks, 2004; Cashin, 2004; Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007; Hill & Jones, 1993).

Though increased interracial contact of public school desegregation is positive, it came at a cost for African-American communities. Many good and well-respected Black schools were closed, resulting in the loss of an important focal point for African-American communities (Cecelski, 1994; Siddle Walker, 1993). When these schools were closed, African-American teachers and administrators suffered job losses (Epps, 1999; Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Tillman, 2004). With their schools closed,

the African-American community felt unwelcome in the newly desegregated schools. No longer was there an easy means of ensuring a supportive educational community for African-American students (Ladson-Billings, 2004). As Cecelski (1994) notes, “while African-American scholars and community members may not miss the age of segregation, they do realize that something valuable was lost in the process of integration” (p. 176). The positive of gaining fuller access within the larger society has come with some loss (Hill & Jones, 1993; Klarman, 2007).

Regardless of changes in survey results on racial attitudes or improvements in overall status of African-Americans in America, there is clear evidence demonstrating that African-Americans continue to be confronted by racism on a daily basis. Patterson (1997) estimates that “about a quarter of the Euro-American population harbors at least mildly racist feelings toward Afro-Americans and that one in five is a hard-core racist” (p. 61). Psychologists and educational researchers have shown that both explicit racism and implicit bias still exist throughout our nation’s schools, affecting students on a daily basis (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Hill & Jones, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Lopez, 2003; Valencia, 1999).

Not only do African-Americans face racism in general society, African-American students face racism within schools every day. Schools are far from fully integrated and African-American students are more likely to sit facing a White teacher than a Black teacher in their classrooms. Educating African-American students alongside their White peers introduced race as a confounding variable in the learning environment. According to Irvine and Irvine (1983), integration changed the student teacher interaction patterns

for African-American students. They specified that “teacher pupil interaction relationships changed from an essential two-way interaction, i.e., pupil ability and class, toward a three-way interplay of pupil ability-social class-race interaction” (p. 413). Researchers including Siddle Walker (1996), Ladson-Billings (2004), Cecelski (1994) and others have pointed out the benefits offered to African-American students in the protective environment of some segregated Black schools. As Siddle Walker (1996) explains, “some evidence suggests that the environment of the segregated school has affective traits, institutional policies and community support that helped African-American children learn in spite of the neglect their school received from white school boards” (p. 3). These environments countered racism of the outside world in ways that post-*Brown* classrooms rarely do. These authors suggest that rather than helping African-American students access a better education, desegregating schools may have placed them in a worse learning environment.

In the final analysis, it seems unclear whether the United States clearly has achieved fully the aims of *Brown* and whether the efforts to do so have advanced African-Americans to the extent desired. Certainly, the *Brown* ruling and the ensuing Civil Rights Movement began important work toward creating America as a just society.

R. Carter (1993) eloquently explains the moral weight of the *Brown* ruling:

Brown will always stand at the highest pinnacle of American judicial expression because in guaranteeing equality to all persons in our society as a fundamental tenet of our basic law, it espouses the loftiest values of this nation. In assuming that pursuant to judicial fiat the system can move readily from a racially closed to a racially open society, the decision expresses confidence that ours is a society in which law has subordinated the passions of men. (R. Carter, 1993, p. 93)

The steps taken as a result of the *Brown* ruling have opened new possibilities for African-American students. According to Hill and Jones (1993), the most important consequence of *Brown* was “the increase in morale among African-Americans. It motivated them to seek and obtain equality in other areas of society: racial segregation and discrimination in public facilities, accommodations, and transportation were ruled unconstitutional by federal courts” (p. 16). Likewise, Klarman (2007) suggests that *Brown* inspired African-Americans and shaped their agenda for social change. What African-Americans may have lost from segregated schooling opened opportunities to take their rightful place in integrated and multicultural schools.

The next chapter shifts the focus from the national historical picture of public school integration and broad impacts of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling to one small school district in Western North Carolina. Chapter three tells the story of how Hickory Public Schools desegregated, beginning with the creation of a student assignment plan through the closing of the segregated African-American high school, to the ensuing conflicts of students as they adjusted to school life with close interracial contact.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS: OVERVIEW OF DESEGREGATION AND RELATED EVENTS IN HICKORY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

This first section of findings provides a basic overview and retelling of the events surrounding the desegregation of Hickory Public Schools, beginning with the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1955 and going through 1975. This retelling is a local history using school board notes and newspaper articles to reveal the particular contours of how desegregation came to Hickory Public Schools. This chapter proceeds in a chronological fashion and charts the conflict between groups of people as Hickory Public Schools moved from fully segregated schooling through desegregation to managing the daily business of educating students in a desegregated environment. The focus of action in this chapter is on the school board and how it managed the pressures and competing interests related to desegregation. The school board dealt with conflict from various constituencies both outside and within the district. As a result, the story line jumps between board politics and the students at Hickory High.

In the first section, the school board reacts to federal mandates and court orders to desegregate, finally implementing a plan (1955-1966). Then, the school board manages the resistance of community members who dislike the plan and transfer their children out of Hickory Public Schools (1966). Next, the conflict moves to Hickory High School as African American and White students struggle to navigate daily life with one another (1966-1972). The school board was involved inasmuch as the conflict threatened student

safety and daily operations of the district. The chronological storyline shifts back to board politics as outside pressures require the board to develop another desegregation plan (1972-1973). The story returns to Hickory High as student conflict continues and the board decides to seek outside support to resolve it (1973-1975). The story concludes in 1975 by which time Hickory High had been desegregated for eight years and the issue of school desegregation disappeared from school board notes.

The sequential retelling in this chapter serves three purposes. First, it lays out the sequence of events in Hickory through which the schools were desegregated. Second, it shows the tough job of local citizens serving on a school board to manage demands from competing and disparate audiences. Finally, it conveys important background and context information for a full understanding of what the students at Hickory High experienced. The chapters that follow this historical overview will explicate and analyze four cases of student conflict that occurred during the period of desegregation at Hickory High School.

Early Response to *Brown* Ruling: 1955–1965

The leaders of the Hickory City Schools took their direction from the state on how to respond to the *Brown* ruling. School Board minutes reveal that on July 12, 1955, the Board for Hickory Public Schools established a committee to study the Supreme Court ruling as it applied to the Hickory City Schools. This committee included three board members and was vested with the power to appoint local citizens as additional members (School Board Notes, July 12, 1955). The school board action was in accord with a report from the North Carolina Advisory Committee on Education, a committee appointed by Governor Luther Hodges. The North Carolina Advisory Committee suggested that school

boards form local advisory committees and that they maintain current student assignment plans while these local committees studied the issue of school integration (*Hickory Daily Record*, August 3, 1955).

Before the Hickory committee could make any further progress toward compliance with the *Brown* decisions, North Carolina Governor Luther Hodges went on record against integration. On August 8, 1955, Governor Hodges gave a speech in which he called on both African-Americans and Whites to voluntarily continue to attend separate schools. Hodges urged African-Americans to “take pride in your own race by attending your own schools,” claiming that separate schools are best for both races. He urged the state’s Advisory Committee on Education to promote a program of “encouraging voluntary choice of separate schools” in every school district (*Hickory Daily Record*, August 9, 1955). In the days that followed, African-Americans responded in anger and disagreement. An African-American executive of the NAACP commented that Governor Hodges was “asking Negroes of his state to do what no other American has ever been asked to do, that is, to give up their constitutional rights as American citizens and agree to continue to live under a Jim Crow system” (*Hickory Daily Record*, August 15, 1955).

The public statement was not the end of Governor Hodges’s work against school desegregation. By January 3, 1956, the secretary of the North Carolina Advisory Committee on Education sent a letter to superintendents across North Carolina requesting that local Boards of Education cease all functions of local Advisory Committees until further notice from the state committee (School Board Notes, January 3, 1956). This

directive effectively killed local committee work in Hickory as there is no further mention in the Hickory school board notes of a local advisory committee.

By July 1956, legislation of the Pupil Assignment Act and the Pearsall Plan were in place and squashed movement to desegregate public schools in North Carolina. These legislative mandates gave authority for student assignment planning to local school boards which forced legal challenges to take the form of lawsuits against individual school districts. In addition, the Pearsall Plan created intricate requirements and processes for any appeal of school board assignments. Governor Hodges considered the Pearsall Plan to be an appropriate and moderate response to *Brown*. Compared to many other southern states where the reaction to *Brown* included violence and intimidation, it was (Patterson, 2001). In Arkansas, for example, the Governor went as far as calling out the National Guard to block African-American students from entry into Central High School in Little Rock (Sokol, 2006). However, the Pearsall Plan forestalled any meaningful desegregation of public schools for a decade (Chafe, 1981; Douglas, 1995). This tactic was effective in Hickory Public Schools as there is no mention of desegregation in the school board notes for the nine years that followed, from January 3, 1956 until January 1965.

1965 brought an important change to school desegregation. The Civil Rights Act, legislation that outlawed discrimination against African-Americans, was signed into law on July 2, 1964. Title VI of the Act forbade the use of federal funds for discriminatory purposes and Title IV of the Civil Rights Act provided federal funds to help school boards carry out desegregation programs. These portions of the law were significant

because they provided both a carrot and a stick to enforce desegregation of public schools. The carrot was that school funding would depend on school district planning and progress toward desegregation. The Civil Rights Act also gave the Department of Justice the power to bring lawsuits that would enforce school desegregation. This meant that legal action no longer was dependent on the advocacy of local NAACPs or individuals within the community (Douglas, 1995; Patterson, 2001; Wilkinson, 1979).

Because all three branches of government came together around the Civil Rights Act, this legislation is credited with accomplishing more to promote school desegregation than the courts alone could. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), which oversaw federal spending for public schools, was called into action to create the guidelines for schools. The early guidelines from HEW, issued in January of 1965, were somewhat ambiguous and allowed for both freedom of choice and geographic zoning in district compliance plans (Wilkinson, 1979). Freedom of choice meant that all students were given the opportunity to choose to attend the White school rather than the segregated African-American school. Freedom of choice plans did increase token integration, but still depended on the initiative and advocacy of individual African-American families to opt to send their children to largely White schools. HEW revised the guidelines over time to provide more direction, first in April of 1965 and then again in March 1966 (*Hickory Daily Record*, April 30, 1965; School Board Notes, March 23, 1966). By March of 1966, HEW gave clearer directions on compliance plans which included targets for increasing the percentage of African-American students within the formerly all-White schools. They required districts to move beyond simple freedom of

choice plans to geographic zones which established attendance zones that integrated African-American and White students (Douglas, 1995; Patterson, 2001; Wilkinson, 1979).

In January of 1965, North Carolina schools began receiving the message of the Civil Rights Act's impact on schools. Charles Carroll, State School Superintendent, hosted meetings across the state to explain that schools and other agencies must pledge "assurance of compliance" with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in order to receive federal aid funds (*Hickory Daily Record*, January 13, 1965). The State Board of Education called for pledges of compliance from local school boards in order to receive federal funding. In addition, the state board also had to pledge state-wide compliance with the Civil Rights Act (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 12, 1965). At a meeting with superintendents and school boards hosted at Lenoir Rhyne College in Hickory, Dr. Carroll explained which federal funds were on hold, including dollars for vocational education and school lunch programs, stating that "federal funds to local school units have been held up since January 3, pending a statement of compliance" (*Hickory Daily Record*, January 13, 1965).

Through pledges of compliance with the Civil Rights Act, school systems gave assent to the federal requirement that no child shall be denied the right to attend the school of his/her choice on the basis of race, color, or nationality. If a school system could not pledge that schools were currently in compliance, indicating that students already had freedom of choice to attend any school without regard to race, the system should submit a plan of compliance, outlining how the schools would be desegregated

(*Hickory Daily Record*, January 13, 1965). Though schools did not immediately respond with pledges or plans, by February 18, 1965, the *Hickory Daily Record* noted that no North Carolina school unit had indicated that it would not sign the pledge, and 85 of the state's 170 school units stated that they were at least partially integrated. In March, the school superintendents of the three school districts in Catawba County, including W. M. Jenkins of Hickory Public Schools travelled to Raleigh to work with state officials on problems related to the compliance plans (*Hickory Daily Record*, March 3, 1965). Likewise, Cecelski (1994) notes that the Hyde County school board worked during the summer of 1965 to "develop a plan to abolish the dual school system and show some initial signs of progress" (p. 33).

Creation of a Compliance Plan: April 1965–January 1966

Hickory Public Schools got to work on a compliance plan after the board meeting on April 14, 1965. The board authorized school board attorneys to draft the plan, though little did they know that their work to construct an acceptable plan would take over eight months and involve a federal lawsuit. The first version of Hickory's compliance plan was approved by the school board on April 27, 1965 and submitted to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for submission to the U.S. Office of Education. This compliance plan offered freedom of choice to parents of children entering grades one, seven and ten unless there was overcrowding at the selected school. With the submission of this plan, Hickory Public Schools hoped for re-imburement for milk under school lunch program for the month of April which had been withheld (*Hickory Daily Record*, April 28, 1965).

Prior to the compliance plan, students were assigned to schools based on long established geographic areas which corresponded generally to neighborhoods surrounding each school. There was no geographic zoning for African-Americans because there were only two African-American schools and African-American families lived in close proximity to both schools (Plan for Compliance, p. 6). The Plan for Compliance maintained the geographic assignment areas, but specified that “these attendance areas are to be unitary, non-racial attendance areas for all students living therein” (p. 7). However, students in the stated grade levels who had two schools in their attendance area were given freedom to choose between them. This “freedom of choice” enabled African-American students to opt to attend the previously all-White school rather than the closer, segregated school. The plan also stated that “if a school/grade level is overcrowded, priority will be given to those students living nearest to the school” (Plan for Compliance, p. 8). The plan gave the “freedom to choose” to students entering grades one, seven, and ten as well as to students entering the Hickory Public Schools as newcomers. All other students, those currently enrolled continuing in grades one, two, three, four, five, seven, eight, and ten were to be assigned to the school they currently attended. Students in those grades could request a transfer only to access a particular course of study not available at their current school, such as classes for special needs students (Plan for Compliance, p. 9).

The African-American community noticed the caveat that families could request a transfer to access an enriched course of study. On August 10, 1965, the Community Relations Council of Hickory requested that “the students in the immediate Ridgeview

area (the African-American community) be allowed to attend a school or schools that offer an enriched curriculum” (School Board Notes, August 10, 1965). These citizens claimed that students at Ridgeview had limited advanced course offerings. The board accepted this request and agreed to take it under advisement (School Board Notes, August 10, 1965).

By the end of the month, school districts across the state received from the Department of Public Instruction additional guidelines for compliance plans set forth by Federal Government. Superintendent, Dr. Jenkins commented to the *Hickory Daily Record* (April 30, 1965) that Hickory Public Schools would not amend its plan based on these guidelines unless he received specific instructions from state superintendent to do so. Dr. Jenkins believed that the Hickory plan already met the new requirements (*Hickory Daily Record*, April 30, 1965). However, by May 7, the school board received updated federal guidelines and adjusted the plan to meet them (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 7, 1965). This change extended freedom of choice to 12th-grade students in addition to the grades previously named and added geographic zoning to the lower grades. The plan also specified a schedule to provide choice to students in additional grade levels over time in order to eliminate discrimination totally by the 1967-68 school year (Plan for Compliance, 1965; *Hickory Daily Record*, May 7, 1965).

School Superintendent Dr. Jenkins, and board attorney, Terry Woods, met with Dr. George McGowan, USOE representative, in Raleigh regarding this compliance plan on July 22, 1965. After an hour’s conference, Dr. McGowan told them they were in good shape on the Hickory School Board Plan for Compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights

Act of 1964. No suggestions, additions, deletions or changes were recommended.

However, he did not give them official approval of the plan (School Board Notes, August 10, 1965).

As the summer wore on, compliance plans across North Carolina were approved by the U.S. Office of Education, from 48 out of 169 school districts in the state by August 20, 1965 to 124 of 169 school districts by September 10 (*Hickory Daily Record*, September 10, 1965). Still, the Hickory plan was not approved. As time went by, it became clear that Hickory's plan was held up by a lawsuit filed against the school district and by the changing guidelines of HEW as requirements shifted from freedom of choice plans to geographic zoning plans where all students would be assigned integrated schools. Wilkinson (1979) indicates that HEW allowed the early compliance plans to offer freedom of choice, meaning that African-American students were not denied the right to attend any school, forcing an end to segregation. Later regulations went much further to require substantial racial mixing through geographic zoning. This distinction played out in the evolution of Hickory's compliance plan from a simple freedom of choice plan to a plan that required racial mixing (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 7, 1965).

By September, Hickory Public Schools still lacked state approval for its compliance plan (*Hickory Daily Record*, September 3, 1965). Then, on September 13, 1965, the board learned that Julius Chambers, an attorney representing eight African-American students in Hickory Public Schools, had filed a lawsuit against the school district (School Board Notes, September 13, 1965). Julius Chambers was a young African-American attorney in Charlotte, who was spearheading many civil rights cases

across North Carolina in cooperation with the NAACP. The school desegregation cases he pursued culminated in the *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg* case, which made its way to the Supreme Court and enabled busing as a tool to remedy segregation (Gaillard, 1988; Patterson, 2001).

The legal action, *Wilson v. Hickory Public Schools*, sought entry of eight students to Green Park Elementary, a formerly all-White school. These eight students were not in the grades offered choice through the compliance plan submitted. The Hickory school board attorneys advised against fighting the *Wilson v. Hickory Public Schools* suit by refusing the demands. They advised that the court would likely direct compliance with the demands and other facets of the plan would come under greater scrutiny (School Board Notes, September 13, 1965). The federal government supported Chambers' suit, with a U.S. Office of Education representative reporting by phone that the Hickory plan for compliance would be given favorable consideration with several modifications, including yielding to the demands of Chambers for admission of eight named students to Green Park (School Board Notes, September 13, 1965). The board voted to accept the eight students at Green Park and later that month, the eight students were admitted to Green Park with no trouble cited in board notes (September 21, 1965).

The U.S. Office of Education formalized its stance on the Hickory plan in mid-September, sending a letter to the board that outlined suggested revisions to the compliance plan (School Board Notes, September 21, 1965). The school board attorneys began work to modify the plan, expanding freedom of choice from grades one, seven, ten and twelve to all students in junior and senior high school. In the new plan, all elementary

students would be assigned based on attendance zone, though two of the attendance zones would include choice between the African- American elementary school and a formerly all-White school. In addition, the plan was modified to allow those bumped for overcrowding to choose from any elementary school (*Hickory Daily Record*, October 6, 1965). This new plan was adopted on October 5, 1965 and transmitted to the U.S. Office of Education. As a result of modifications to the compliance plan, the plaintiffs in *Wilson v. Hickory Public Schools* withdrew the motion for injunction. However, the complaint remained on file pending final approval of Hickory's compliance plan (School Board Notes, October 5, 1965; *Hickory Daily Record*, October 4, 1965).

The revised plan still had not received federal approval by December of 1965, when the US Office of Education requested a conference to seek clarity on items within the plan. School superintendent, Dr. Jenkins and school board attorneys, Mr. Grove and Mr. Wood, travelled to Washington, DC on December 20, 1965, to meet with U.S. Office of Education representatives. The U.S. Commissioner of Education summarized concerns shared in the meeting through a letter dated January 5, 1966. He stated that:

Our review of the entire situation leads us to the conclusion that it is not necessary that free choice be offered at this time to all pupils in grades 2 to 6 in view of the stated intention of your system to desegregate grades 1 to 6 by geographic attendance zones in the 1966-67 school year. However, we remain concerned about the nature of the attendance zones to be used, and propose that this matter be considered at a later date. (School Board Notes, January 5, 1966)

The point at issue was whether and how Hickory Public Schools planned to implement a freedom of transfer solution or a geographic solution to segregation. The old requirement was that school systems offer a freedom of choice to African American students who

could select between their previous school and a previously all White school. The new requirement was that school districts create geographic attendance zones that included both African-American and White students who would be assigned to schools without regard to their skin color. Hickory's plan included both freedom of choice and geographic zoning in a confusing combination. It allowed for freedom of choice through the 1965-1966 school year and then transitioned to a geographic zoning plan in 1966-67.

This letter and the proposed plan suggest that a change for the current school year was necessary as a bridge from the freedom of choice plan to the geographic plan that would take effect for the 1966-67 school year. The bridge plan extended freedom of choice to all students in grades 8, 9, and 11 who had not yet had the opportunity to exercise choice for the current school year, but left all other elements of the adopted plan in place. This bridge plan was adopted by the school board at its meeting on January 11, 1966, and by February the federal government gave final approval of the compliance plan. The *Hickory Daily Record* noted that Hickory Public Schools was the last in the state to gain acceptance of its plan for compliance with the Civil Rights Action of 1964 (May 4, 1966).

The back and forth on the Hickory plan for compliance shows how local, state, and federal decision-makers had joint roles in setting the context for school desegregation. Eleven years passed between the federal ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education* and the acceptance of the Hickory compliance plan. Those eleven years were marked by conflict and political deal-making in the federal government that finally resulted in the Civil Rights Act and HEW guidelines that forced school desegregation.

State politics added to the context of conflict with the actions of Governor Luther Hodges and legislation that corresponded with his segregationist views and forestalled any real movement toward desegregation. Finally, local views on integration and politics were important contextual factors in Hickory as plan after plan was created and rejected. Without the pressure of the *Wilson* lawsuit and potential loss of federal funds, no one knows whether and how the plan would have shifted from freedom of choice to geographic zoning. The *Hickory Daily Record* reported that approximately \$90,000 in federal funds was withheld from the Hickory Public Schools between August and December 1965 (January 12, 1966).

Implementing the Student Assignment Plan: February 1966–1968

With little, if any work to prepare the community for any change in pupil assignments, the school board implemented the freedom of choice plan by sending out parent letters for choice in February. The letter specified that African-American students in grades 8, 9, 11, and 12 could choose between Ridgeview School and Hickory High. The school board approved more than 25 requests for transfer. Dr. Jenkins, Superintendent, reported to the board that these reassigned students had all reported to their respective schools by Monday, February 28, and that “no complications of any kind had resulted” (School Board notes, March 1, 1966).

By the end of March 1966, when African-American students were attending previously all White schools as transfer students, the board began work on the next compliance plan. The U.S. Office of Education issued additional guidelines and required an updated compliance plan. This time, the board agreed that a geographical attendance

zone plan would be the best plan for the school district (School Board Notes, March 23, 1966). The new plan, approved on April 5, 1966, for implementation the following school year was based fully on geographic zoning rather than offering freedom of choice. The new plan included ten geographic zones for elementary (grades 1-6) and junior high (grades 7-9).

The new plan closed Ridgeview High School forcing all high school students, African American and White, to attend Hickory High School (Plan for Compliance, April, 1966). There is no information in School Board notes or the *Hickory Daily Record* on how the board reached the decision to close Ridgeview High School and whether other options for desegregation were considered. Given the local pride in each high school, it is surprising that there is no evidence of community discussion about bringing the students from two schools together. The schools themselves were not brought together under the compliance plan, but Ridgeview High was subsumed by Hickory High when the Ridgeview High students were simply transferred from their school into Hickory High without discussion or preparation.

The new plan was received by the U.S. Office of Education. As a result of no communication to the school district from the federal government by August of 1966, the board assumed that the plan met the federal guidelines and had received tacit approval from the US Office of Education (School Board Notes, August 9, 1966).

As Ridgeview High enjoyed spring with its last graduating class and Hickory High finished out a year of token desegregation, there was no news of school conflict. However, school board notes and the *Hickory Daily Record* reveal that there was conflict

in the White community related to the details of the geographic zoning for elementary schools around one specific White neighborhood located near Ridgeview. The all-White neighborhood of Kenworth was located in close proximity to the Ridgeview community. The new district lines zoned the White elementary students living in Kenworth neighborhood to attend Ridgeview Elementary school (Plan for Compliance, April, 1966). While the Kenworth parents never stated that they were reluctant for their children to attend the formerly all-African American school, they voiced displeasure with the new plan. Throughout the spring and summer, White parents protested the compliance plan by attending board meetings, writing letters and submitting petitions to the State Superintendent and legislators (School Board Notes, May 3, 1966; School Board Notes, June 1, 1966; School Board Notes, June 7, 1966; School Board Notes, July 12, 1966; *Hickory Daily Record*, May 4, 1966; *Hickory Daily Record*, June 6, 1966; *Hickory Daily Record*, July 13, 1966; *Hickory Daily Record*, August 10, 1966). The protesting community members were concerned about the attendance zones around the African-American communities and wanted students to be more equally distributed among the elementary schools other than Ridgeview Elementary (*Hickory Daily Record*, June, 8, 1966).

The school board maintained the attendance zones in the compliance plan, though they realized this would not satisfy the concerned parents. At the June 8, 1966 board meeting, school board attorney Smith tried to explain the board's difficult position of seeking to satisfy the conflicting interests. He commented that the board members had:

good faith efforts to comply with the new governing Federal laws and guideline are difficult and thankless tasks imposed upon the Board by virtue of its inherent responsibilities. The problems which confront it are obviously not of its choosing. In the discharge of its responsibilities it is unlikely that the Board can please all concerned equally. This is properly a fixed and perpetual but unattainable goal before you (the board). This committee firmly believes that the Hickory Board of Education has diligently tried and that it will continue to so try to serve the interests of the school children and parents within its administrative unit to the very best of its ability with an even greater devotion to its duties than could reasonably be expected. (*Hickory Daily Record*, June 8, 1966)

By August of 1966, the Hickory School Board had received no calls of concern from the US Office of Education regarding the new compliance plan and the board assumed its tacit acceptance (School board notes, August 9, 1966). There was little direct response from the community captured in school board notes or the *Hickory Daily Record*. However, student transfer requests started flowing. Prior to this time, the school board notes indicate very few student transfer requests, less than five per year. At the August 9th board meeting however, school board notes indicate their approval of thirty nine transfer requests and on the first day of school, enrollment was down by thirty five from the previous year (*Hickory Daily Record*, August 25, 1966). By October 4th, eight more students were granted transfer from the school assigned based on the compliance plan (School Board Notes, September 6, 1966; October 4, 1966) and the overall enrollment had dropped by fifty eight students (*Hickory Daily Record*, September 7, 1966).

White Hickory families continued to resist the movement of their children, either requesting a transfer or withdrawing from the district altogether. By May of the 1966-67 school year, student enrollment was down by two hundred seventy two from the same

month during the previous year (School Board Notes, May 9, 1967). During this same time period a private, all-White school named North State Academy, opened in Hickory. An inspection of permanent student records from North State Academy reveal that 1965-1966 was the first year of student enrollment. Enrollment at North State Academy increased steadily each year from 1966-1967 forward. It is not clear when North State Academy closed, though student records do not indicate enrollment beyond the 1980s.

The U.S. Department of Education held steady with its regulations and approved the same compliance plan for the coming school year (School Board Notes, February 7, 1967). After student assignment letters were sent in April, the volume of transfer requests must have reached critical mass to cause concern. At the April 11, 1967 board meeting, the school board attorney:

pointed out that our Plan for Compliance provides for transfers to schools in attendance areas other than those of the child's parents or guardian. He emphasized that all such requests for transfers must meet the criteria as established by our Plan for Compliance. (School Board Notes, April 11, 1967)

The school board attorney also requested that school district administrators keep the transfer requests for board review at their next meeting (School Board Notes, April 11, 1967). Had the school district administration been listing all transfer requests without screening out those not meeting the criteria set out in the compliance plan? Had the board been allowing transfers that were outside the compliance plan?

With numerous student withdrawals and transfer requests, the pressure on community leaders during this first year of school desegregation must have been great. At the school board meeting on February 7, 1967, Superintendent, Dr. Jenkins announced

that he would retire at the end of the school year (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 8, 1967).

The 1967-68 school year opened with another 27 transfer requests and a new Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Wishon, taking office (School Board Notes, July 7, 1967). Nineteen more families sought transfer at the August 8th board meeting (School Board Notes, August 8, 1967) and others trickled in throughout the year. The school board increased its diligence in checking whether the transfer requests met appropriate criteria outlined in the compliance plan. School board notes from July 7, 1967 and thereafter list more than just student names of those approved, including the criteria for each approval or decline. The secondary students continued to transfer out of the Hickory Public Schools at a rate great enough that by the end of the school year the district would lose state allocation for three high school teachers. These students left the school system for enrollment at North State Academy, a segregated White private school and for enrollment in the more rural county school system (School Board Notes, December 5, 1967).

Student Life at Hickory High: 1968–1972

The spring brought difficult news of Martin Luther King's assassination on April 4, 1968. On April 5, 1968, after Martin Luther King's assassination the previous day, over 100 African-American students from Hickory High marched from the high school to city hall in non-violent demonstration. The group did voice concerns about the schools, sharing "long-standing grievances over conditions at the integrated High school and job discrimination" (*Hickory Daily Record*, April 5, 1968).

Two days later, on April 8, African-American students from Hickory High met with the Hickory Human Relations Council at the Ridgeview Community Center. The Hickory Human Relations Council, started in 1963, was an ethnically and racially diverse group of community leaders who volunteered to work together to promote tolerance, resolve racial conflicts and foster positive relations among racial group. Eight members of the student group charged Hickory Schools with discrimination and listed seventeen grievances (*Hickory Daily Record*, April 17, 1968). A week later, school officials submitted a point by point reply to the student grievances. The seventeen student complaints ranged from generalized prejudice to specific concerns, such as the need for an African-American guidance counselor, harsh treatment of Black students by the coaches, and expression of frustration that African-American students were not equally included in extracurricular clubs, offices, and social activities. In the school district response to the grievances, Dr. Wishon, the superintendent, commended the students on their sincere and orderly presentation made to the board at April 8 meeting. He also commented that the school board “could find no overt and conscious prejudice on the part of the staff or administration.” Rather, the student grievances are rooted in “disengagement and alienation” (*Hickory Daily Record*, April 17, 1968).

During the third year of desegregation, 1968-1969, racial tension in the community and at the high school escalated. Student transfer requests in grades K-12 continued. School board notes indicate that between July and September, 1968, sixty eight students were approved for transfer among the Hickory Public Schools or were released for transfer out of the district (School Board Notes, July 2, 1968; August 6,

1968; September 10, 1968). As evidence of tension, in early August, the Hickory Community Relations Council recommended to City Council that a rumor hotline be installed which would have direct contact with the police department and rescue squad with support from the Community Relations Council (*Hickory Daily Record*, August 8, 1968). In November, Superintendent Wishon reported to the school board that teachers and instructional staff had participated in three sessions of training with the Human Relations and Educational Leadership organization from St. Augustine's College, Raleigh, North Carolina (School Board Notes, November 5, 1968).

December brought the first reported suspension of an African-American student for a physical altercation between the student and a teacher. On December 3, 1968, an African-American student was suspended from Hickory High School indefinitely for striking a teacher. The *Hickory Daily Record* (December 11, 1968) reported that a teacher questioned the student for breaking in the lunch line and the student cursed the teacher. The teacher then slapped the student and the student, in return, slapped the teacher in the face, knocking off her glasses. Principal Miller suspended the student but he returned to campus the next day. A warrant for trespassing was drawn. The *Hickory Daily Record* further reported on December 11, 1968 that two members of Hickory Community Relations Council and the students' grandparents appealed to the School Board at their meeting on December 10th. The school board took no action, citing that any appeal must begin at the school level with the principal (*Hickory Daily Record*, December 11, 1968). Several months later, there was another disciplinary discussion at a school board meeting regarding the dismissals of two African-American male students from the high school for

“repeated violations of the schools’ rules and regulations” (School Board Notes, March 11, 1969).

During this same school year, a conflict arose between a community group and the school board. In February and March 1969, the Hickory Community Relations Council met with the school board and later with members of the African-American community to discuss Black student concerns at the high school. These meetings culminated in a letter from the Hickory Community Relations Council to the school board that made several recommendations. These included establishing an Advisory Committee at the high school and providing workshops on bi-racial relations for teachers, students and parents (School Board Notes, March 4, 1969). The school board rebuffed the overture of assistance. They rejected the idea of an advisory committee and claimed that the district was already implementing the other suggestions. This school board response came across to at least one community member as defensive. Sam Tucker made public comment at a board meeting stating that the Community Relations Council had “forwarded the views of the Negro community because they have been chosen to do just that. [They were] not trying to do your job, but trying to help you” (*Hickory Daily Record*, March 5, 1969).

In April, the high school principal, Mr. Miller, and three student members of the Community Relations Council spoke to the Kiwanis Club about racial issues at Hickory High School. Principal Miller began with an explanation of the way the desegregation had come to the White community, “There were about one thousand White students and they closed Ridgeview High School and sent about two hundred Negro pupils to enter our

school.” He went on to say how different the experience was for the African-American students, “. . . to the Negro, it was a strange world. It was not his school; his friends were few and far apart, and the trophies and old school spirit were gone.” Principal Miller claimed that the students seemed to be getting along all right until the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. The African-American students were “aroused by the slaying” and since that time have been “seeking identity.” One of the students described the work of students on the Junior Human Relations Council including the creation of a new handbook with a process for grievances, drafting of a constitution, and preparing programs on race relations (*Hickory Daily Record*, April 2, 1969).

The 1969-1970 school year opened quietly in Hickory Public Schools. Students continued to seek transfers among and out of the Hickory Schools. By August 26, 1969, seventy two students had school board approval to leave the district or attend a school outside their attendance zone as outlined in the Title VI Compliance Plan (School Board Notes, June 3, 1969, August 5, 1969, August 26, 1969).

In December 1969, the use of the song “Dixie” as Hickory High’s unofficial fight song became the first significant conflict among the students at school. School board records (December 2, 1969) and the *Hickory Daily Record* (December 3, 1969) indicate that a large group of African-American parents and students attended the board meeting and that a student from the high school stated African-American student objections to the playing of “Dixie” during school activities. A student requested that the school board establish a policy regulating this matter. “He pointed out that the song caused friction between the black and white students and expressed the feeling that since “Dixie” is

associated with slavery and depression of our people, the group felt justified in making this request”” (*Hickory Daily Record*, December 3, 1969). The school board decided at a meeting on December 5, 1969 to take no action on the student request, determining that the school principal and teachers should handle the matter within the school (School Board Notes, December 5, 1969; *Hickory Daily Record*, December 6, 1969).

The 1970-1971 school year began with the recently typical requests for student transfer between schools. Between July and the start of school on August 26, 1970, thirty-nine students were approved for transfer between Hickory Public Schools or released to other school districts. Another thirty-nine students were denied transfer on the grounds they did not meet the criteria set forth in the Title VI Compliance Plan (School Board Notes, July 28, 1970; August 4, 1970, August 7, 1970; August 13, 1970; August 24, 1970).

At the school board meeting on August 13, 1970, the Superintendent advised the board that the Black Student Union at Hickory High School had requested changes in the membership of student organizations (School Board Notes, August 13, 1970). The next day, the school board met again. At this meeting, the Superintendent shared news of a request from the Hickory High student council to the principal that African-American students be appointed to the varsity cheerleading squad. This was accepted as information by the Board (School Board Notes, August 14, 1970). Both of these meetings were called meetings and no note of them was made in the *Hickory Daily Record*. However, the request to appoint African-American cheerleaders would grow in significance and attention in the next month as a major conflict over cheerleaders erupted.

During this general time span at Hickory High, cheerleaders were selected through student elections after a school-wide tryout. No African-American girls won the election to claim a spot on the cheerleading squad for the 1970-1971 school year (School Board Notes, September 1, 1970). This frustrated the African-American students and led to the second large scale conflict among the students. In June of 1970, the Black Student Union requested that Principal Miller appoint six African-American girls to the cheerleading squad. Mr. Miller refused to appoint six African-American cheerleaders. After a brief attempt at compromise, the school community came to loggerheads over the issue when six African-American cheerleaders took the field at the first home football game and led about 250 African-American students in cheers (School Board Notes, September 1, 1970; *Hickory Daily Record*, September 2, 3, 4, 5, 1970). The six students were taken off the field and suspended from school for several days. This incident ignited racial tension which led to destruction in downtown Hickory after the game, a student walk-out at Hickory High, and a city-wide curfew lasting three days (*Hickory Daily Record*, September 8, 1970; *The Twig*, September 11, 1970). The struggle to find peace on issues of desegregation at the high school continued through the rest of the school year.

A month after the cheerleading incident on October 6, 1970, eight African-American members of the community approached the school board, charged the board with discrimination and presented a list of grievances related to addressing the needs of African-American students at Hickory High (School Board Notes, October 6, 1970). Many of the items on the list had been presented to the school in August of 1968

(*Hickory Daily Record*, October 7, 1970). A week later, Hickory High teachers submitted a letter to the editor of the *Hickory Daily Record* supporting Principal Miller and asking all members of the community to “take a positive look at those many things that unite us and work to solve the few that divide us” (*Hickory Daily Record*, October 14, 1970). In March 1971, the African-American community group returned to the school board seeking a status update to their grievances and requests. Dr. Wishon responded to the grievances with information on some issues and agreement to study further on other issues (School Board Notes, March 2, 1971). There were no other racial incidents or tensions at Hickory High noted by the School Board, the *Hickory Daily Record* or the student newspaper for the rest of the school year.

The 1971-1972 school year was a quiet one with respect to outward racial conflict at the high school, with no mention of racial tension in school board notes or the *Hickory Daily Record*. An African-American student at Hickory High commented in the 1972 school yearbook on black sentiments about the school year. He stated that,

Heightened school spirit was the major factor of note in this year’s black student body; the HHS Red Tornadoes finished in the State 4-A semi-finals in contrast to last year’s lamentable showing in which black involvement was at the lowest level since desegregation. Mike Robinson became the only Shrine Bowl player we had this year. The Pep Club made its return to the scene as the spirit leaders of the school and the Cheerleading staff boasted three black members. Perry Hodge became the first black Student Council President. Faculty representation however remained at the dismal level of three. Even though six teachers were added this year, none were black, with former black teachers holding other positions. (Hickory Log, 1972, p. 29)

In another section of the yearbook, both African-American and White students made statements on the status of race relations during the school year. A White student said

that, “race relations this year have definitely improved. It was either change or kill each other” (p. 126). An African-American student, shared his viewpoint that “the relationship between black and whites is just great, except for some teachers and students still want to call us colored” (p. 126). One anonymous student was quoted to say that race relations were “fantastic, except for a few redneck white supremacists,” and another anonymous student said that relations were “better, I guess. We haven’t had a riot yet” (p. 126).

These student commentaries in the school yearbook indicate that the school took a few steps forward in race relations and African-American student representation in extracurricular activities during the year. In addition, the Junior Human Relations Council continued to meet regularly. The Junior Human Relations Council was a student group with an equal number of black and white students, whose job was to ease relations between races. Even with these positives, student reflections in the yearbook indicate continuing racial tension and misunderstanding.

The *Swann* Ruling Impacts Hickory: 1972–1973

The more outward racial conflict of the 1971-1972 school year took place at the board level related to desegregation. Busing to achieve desegregation was a national issue during this school year. The Supreme Court case, *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* had been decided on April 20, 1971, near the close of the previous school year. The *Swann* ruling addressed the issue of how much racial mixing must occur within a school to achieve integration and what strategies for achieving racial mixing were acceptable. The justices held, in part, that the school district has the burden of proof to show that schools with student populations of one predominant race are not the result

of discrimination. School districts could use mathematical ratios as a yardstick for measuring degree of desegregation. It further held that busing within a school district to achieve racial mixing was an appropriate strategy for school districts to employ (Morris, 1989). In August of 1971, President Nixon directed federal agencies to work toward desegregation wherever possible but urged against use of busing to achieve desegregation (*Hickory Daily Record*, August 13, 1971). Politicians from the North and South weighed in on either side of busing students for racial integration (*Hickory Daily Record*, September 29, 1971, November 10, 1971).

In February 1972, the *Wilson v. Hickory Public Schools Board of Education* lawsuit re-emerged. The attorney for the plaintiff, Julius Chambers, was also the lead attorney for the plaintiff in the *Swann* case. As a result, Julius Chambers had complete knowledge of the issues raised in *Swann* and the final ruling. Mr. Chambers challenged the Hickory Public Schools on their student assignment plan, their assignment of faculty and staff, and equitable use of bus transportation. At the February 29, 1972 school board meeting, the school board attorney read from Mr. Chambers' letter of inquiry in which he questioned student and teacher assignments based on the *Swann* ruling (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 29, 1972). Attorney Chambers contended that Hickory Public Schools' 1966 student assignment plan was no longer in compliance with the civil rights laws after the *Swann* ruling. He suggested that in order to meet the *Swann* standard, Hickory Public Schools must mix the African-American students from Ridgeview Elementary with the White students at all the other elementary schools. Hickory Public Schools must also

transfer faculty among the schools to achieve racial balance (School Board Notes, March 6, 1972; *Hickory Daily Record*, March 7, 1972).

At the March 6, 1972 school board meeting, members of the public discussed the dilemma with the board. The discussion centered on how the district could achieve a “racial balance of 10% or more, Black to White, a possible applicable factor in the *Swann* ruling” (School Board Notes, March 6, 1972). Various student assignment scenarios were presented and honest conversation revealed tensions among segments of public in attendance. At least one public comment and the *Hickory Daily Record*'s interpretation of the statement indicated reluctance to achieve greater racial mixing. The *Hickory Daily Record* reported that, “There was little cause for laughter at last night's [school board] meeting, but a few chuckles could be heard when somebody remarked, ‘Chambers is going to make us all equal whether we want to be or not’” (March 7, 1972).

Yet another comment made during the discussion showed that some African-Americans felt as if they were bearing the brunt of sacrifices to achieve desegregation. The *Hickory Daily Record* reported that one African-American community member in the meeting wondered:

Have you considered a grammar department (fourth, fifth and sixth grades) at the old High School building? Most of our black young people identify with Ridgeview. They have seen their high school go. Our young adults identify with Ridgeview. They do not want to see our school closed and their young children move out to other schools. They're going to ask where the boundaries are. It seems as if we're having to pay because we're the minority. (*Hickory Daily Record*, March 7, 1972).

Later in March, the school board decided not to act on any of the solutions proposed in the March 7 meeting. Instead, on March 27, 1972, the board chose to issue school assignment notices for the 1972-73 school year using the same attendance areas as used for the 1971-72 year (School Board Notes, March 27, 1972). One of the school board members justified the wait and see approach to creation of a new student assignment plan with the comment that, “pressure of reassigning students has been somewhat alleviated by President Nixon’s recent statement about school busing” (*Hickory Daily Record*, March 28, 1972).

By late April, Attorney Chambers lost patience with the school board and filed a motion for relief in *Wilson v. Hickory Board of Education* (School Board Notes, April 27, 1972). There were additional board discussions of possible solutions to the lawsuit in May, but no plan was approved (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 3, 1972; *Hickory Daily Record*, May 6, 1972; *Hickory Daily Record*, May 12, 1972; School Board Notes, May 2, 1972; School Board Notes, May 5, 1972; School Board Notes, May 9, 1972; School Board Notes, May 11, 1972).

The 1972-1973 school year opened with continued focus on the *Wilson v. Hickory Public Schools* case. In September, the case was placed on the docket of the U.S. District Court in Statesville for the September 29, 1972 session (School Board Notes, September 18, 1972). This began a five month process of court proceedings. In October, school board attorney Terry Wood learned at a pre-trial conference that both parties in the case of *Wilson v. Hickory Public Schools* had until February 1, 1973 to complete discovery

and that the case was scheduled for trial in Statesville at the next regular civil term of court in March 1973 (School Board Notes, October 3, 1972).

A month before the trial, the school board passed a resolution that the board would:

study the feasibility of adopting, and adopt, a comprehensive plan to provide for the most economic use of elementary school facilities within the administrative unit so as to promote the best interests and education of all the students . . . without regard to racial balance as the determinative factor but with regard to the preservation and utilization of facilities available . . ., including the consideration of closing one or more schools and utilization of a portion of the Claremont Central School facilities. (School Board Notes, February 12, 1973)

By the next school board meeting on February 15, 1973, a committee was appointed to offer plans for consideration (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 16, 1973; School Board Notes, February 15, 1973). The committee returned a week later with a plan for student reassignment (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 20, 1973; School Board Notes, February 19, 1973).

The School Board accepted the committee's plan for student reassignment presented at the February 19 meeting. The proposed plan closed four elementary schools and opened another in the old Hickory High School building (School Board Notes, February 19, 1973). A new high school was completed in April 1972 and Hickory High students moved into their new facility with the start of the 1972-73 school year (School Board Notes, April 24, 1972; August 28, 1972). The plan brought the racial balance of African-American students within each elementary school to between 17% and 25% thereby eliminating any school being predominantly one race (School Board Notes,

February 19, 1973). At the same time that the committee was crafting the plan, Hickory Public Schools received national attention when a federal judge ruled that the Hickory schools were among seventeen North Carolina public school units that showed evidence of racial discrimination (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 20, 1973).

Though the board heard the plan for desegregation, it did not officially approve it.

School board attorney Wood told the board:

I don't think you have to say at this point this is exactly what we're going to do. At this point I would say let me see what the plaintiff's attitude is. I'm inclined to say if the plaintiff is unwilling to buy a large part of this plan, negotiations are going to come to a quick halt. The board's acting in just about as good faith as it can be expected to act in. (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 20, 1973)

Wood said he would talk to the counsel for the plaintiff and the judge and report back to the board (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 20, 1973). School board attorney Wood continued to negotiate right up to the last minute before the trial which was pushed back from the last week in March of 1973 to April 5th (*Hickory Daily Record*, March 6, 1973; *Hickory Daily Record*, March 13, 1973; *Hickory Daily Record*, March 20, 1973; School Board Notes, March 12, 1973; School Board Notes, March 19, 1973).

At a special called meeting of the Hickory School Board on April 5, 1973, Attorney Wood advised the board that the matter was still pending for hearing in Federal District Court, but that the school must make definite plans for the assignment of students in the 1973-74 school year. To that end, he offered a resolution that the school board should adopt the student and teacher assignment plan proposed by the committee on February 19, 1973; that he had been instructed to file the plan with the Federal District

Court in the Western District; and that the Superintendent was thereby instructed to implement the plan for the 1973-74, and subsequent school years (School Board Notes, April 5, 1973). The school board approved the resolution and thereby adopted a new plan for student and teacher assignment. A court order in Civil Action 529, *Wilson v. Hickory City Board of Education* was included with the school board notes of April 5, 1973. The court order amended the 1966 student assignment plan to include the detailed plan of the committee which outlined geographic zones for each school such that African-American students were equally dispersed among eight elementary schools. Four elementary schools were closed including Ridgeview Elementary. The court order further outlined transfers of teachers to assign African-American teachers equally among the elementary schools (School Board Notes, April 5, 1973).

More Racial Conflict at Hickory High: 1973

Though the school year had been quiet with regard to student conflict, the year ended with another large scale conflict at Hickory High. On Friday, Friday, May 4, 1973, students at Hickory High engaged in a brawl in the mall area that involved about ten minutes of chair throwing and physical violence. The fight resulted from racial tension that erupted over letters to the editor of the student newspaper, *The Twig*, during April and May (*Hickory Daily Record* May 4, 1973; School Board Notes, May 5, 1973; *The Twig*, May 18, 1973). The first letter in *The Twig*, from an African-American student, claimed that the recent student council elections were “slanted” toward White students. A White student responded with a letter to *The Twig* that elections guarantee equal

representation and that the real problem was lack of African-American student interest (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 5, 1973).

Hickory High was closed for two days after the school board learned of “student assemblies in their respective communities, reportedly, to plan racial conflicts for school on Monday, May 7, 1973” (School Board Notes, May 6, 1973). Classes resumed on Tuesday without incident though tension continued among the students and within the community at large with two more school board meetings called that week to hear from the public. On Thursday, May 10, 1973, the mood at Hickory High shifted when a group of eight student leaders, both African-American and White organized a student assembly to seek reconciliation. Two seniors and basketball teammates, one White and one African-American, addressed their classmates stating that violence was not the way to solve problems and pledging themselves and their group to do all in their power to avoid it (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 10, 1973).

The public reacted to the conflict by addressing the school board in several meetings in which they shared a variety of perspectives. Sam Tucker, representing members of the Ridgeview community, commented that that the letter sent by the White student was not the origin of the trouble. Instead, he spoke of a “dislocation that African-American students feel” at Hickory High due to a lack of African-American teachers and staff on campus and the closure of Ridgeview School (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 15, 1973). A Hickory High teacher, Vivienne Stafford, voiced agreement with Sam Tucker’s comments that there should be “someone black on the faculty who is young enough for the students to relate to” (School Board Notes, May 17, 1973; *Hickory Daily Record*,

May 18, 1973). Other community members expressed views varying from shame over the behavior of students to concerns that there were double standards in administering discipline at Hickory High. The school year ended twelve days later with no further incident or public discussion (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 18, 1973, School Board Notes, May 22, 1973).

The school board began work on easing racial tension as they planned for the 1973-74 school year. On July 16, 1973, the board approved a plan developed by the Hickory Human Relations Council and the school administration to provide workshops to school staff members on “bi-racial instruction” (*Hickory Daily Record*, June 17, 1973). They also established a committee to assist the preparation of a project proposal for federal funding for the Emergency School Assistance Act. These funds were available under the legislation for use by school systems under court ordered desegregation plans (School Board Notes, October 2, 1973; *Hickory Daily Record*, October 3, 1973).

The school year opened on August 21, 1973 with students reporting to schools assigned by the court ordered plan. That plan utilized the old high school campus as a new elementary school, Central Elementary School. According to the *Hickory Daily Record*, the change in student assignments concerned Superintendent Wishon who reported that:

The thing that worries me most is that when you change school attendance patterns as radically as we have had to, the social, economic and cultural effect on the community is bound to be considerable. These effects are not readily apparent at first, but begin to emerge later, and dealing with them will be the real problem. (*Hickory Daily Record*, August 21, 1973)

After a quiet fall with no reported student conflict, there was a fight at Hickory High on December 6, 1973. The fight was a culminating event that stemmed from conflict between African-American and White cheerleaders at a basketball game in Charlotte on Tuesday, December 4th (School Board Notes, December 6, 1973). According to the *Hickory Daily Record*, the dispute among the cheerleaders related to the refusal of three African-American cheerleaders to cheer after they were denied the opportunity to eat their dinner. Though cheerleaders did not typically eat dinner before a game, one of the girls was diabetic and needed food. The chaperones got food for the girls, but it was not what they requested and they refused to eat or cheer (*Hickory Daily Record*, December 7, 1973). Because the girls refused to cheer at this game, they were suspended from the squad for a period of time. On Wednesday, the next day at school, two of the cheerleaders, one African-American and one White, fought during lunch. Later that day, several African-American members of the basketball team sat out of practice in protest of the cheerleaders' suspension. The basketball players' absences were not excused by the coaches or the principal and they, too, were suspended from their team. Both of these conflicts led to a brawl involving 25-50 students at noon on Thursday. The police were called, school was closed and students were sent home (School Board Notes, December 6, 1973; *The Twig*, December 14, 1973). The issue of the basketball players' suspension continued to be a sore spot. They appealed the suspension, and the school board upheld it. The players claimed that they had never been informed of disciplinary consequences for missing practice (School Board Notes, December 12, 1973; *Hickory Daily Record*, December 13, 1973).

The Southern Regional Council

In January, the school board took another positive step toward addressing racial tensions in the district. On January 14, 1974, the board voted to approve a Liaison Task Force Committee that would work to identify causes of racial conflict in the Hickory schools (School Board Notes). The next month, the superintendent reported that the specific duties of the Task Force included identifying one or more reputable firms to study the causes of racial discord in Hickory Public Schools and to recommend a contract with the firm. Then, the School Board would enter into a contract with the selected firm to conduct an independent, thorough and impartial study of racial conflicts in the Hickory City Schools; to evaluate the resulting report; and to implement such recommendations of the firm which are deemed advisable by the Board (School Board Notes, February 11, 1974). In March, representatives from the recommended firm, the Southern Regional Council, addressed the school board regarding their services for conducting research into the causes of and remedies for the racial conflict in the public schools. The school board entered into a contract with the Southern Regional Council (School Board Notes, March 5, 1974; School Board Notes, March 11, 1974).

Happy Lee and Leon Hall, from the Southern Regional Council, spent thirty-eight days during April and May in Hickory working on the Hickory project. Hickory Public Schools supplied the team with an office and a part-time secretary. They interviewed and discussed the project with almost 500 members of the Hickory community. This included school personnel, students, parents, business leaders and other members the community at large (Southern Regional Council, 1974). The *Hickory Daily Record* ran a four part

series on race and the schools related to work being carried out by the Southern Regional Council from May 1 through 4, 1974. In the first *Hickory Daily Record* report, the newspaper noted that the researchers' "impressions at the midpoint of their study indicate that racial misunderstanding and mistrust at Hickory High School and throughout the Hickory community, run very deep indeed" (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 1, 1974). In the second part of the series, the *Hickory Daily Record* article focused on issues of race within the Hickory community at large. Hall and Lee, from the Southern Regional Council, claimed that the Hickory High could not be expected to solve the problems of a whole community. Hall said, "The public schools have been tasked with desegregation. But Hickory hasn't decided it wants to desegregate. As long as there are no disruptions in the schools, the rest of the community really doesn't care whether racial progress is being made in the schools." Lee added that, "The outer hull [of the] community surrounding the school is part of the whole thing, and it is the most important part" (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 2, 1974).

The final report from the Southern Regional Council was dated August 15, 1974 and presented to the school board on September 9, 1974 (Southern Regional Council, p. 1; *Hickory Daily Record*, September 10, 1974). One of the first and major findings was that Hickory Public Schools went about desegregation with no master plan in place to guide the process. "Our research indicates that initial desegregation took place in Hickory despite a lack of planning or agreed upon procedures for preparing the overall community or preparing the faculty, students and parents" (Southern Regional Council, 1974, p. 9).

The researchers reached six conclusions from their investigation and provided recommendations to address each. The conclusions include:

that the faculty have neither been trained, nor have the curricula necessary to educate students on race relations; that school staffs, students, and the community lack knowledge and understanding of the history of the Civil Rights Movement; that the school board is less conscientious about its job than it should be; that the school system has not hired African-American teachers at the rate it should (hiring only nine African-American teachers between 1966 and 1972 compared to one hundred eighty one White teachers during the same time period); that there are too few opportunities for the community to engage with the schools in a positive manner; and that community-based organizations (religious, recreational and planning) have failed to provide interracial activities for the community. (Southern Regional Council, 1974, pp. 46-52)

The *Hickory Daily Record* reported on the Southern Regional Council's presentation to the school board meeting stating that the report (1974) was:

. . . often critical calling on the city's school system to retain school personnel in race related issues and increase emphasis on hiring black professionals in the schools. The board will study the report and discuss the proposal at a future meeting, although no specific time period for examination was set. (*Hickory Daily Record*, September 10, 1974)

In October, the Hickory City Schools Bi-Racial Liaison Task Force presented a letter to the school board requesting "approval on conclusion of their task." The board directed that their work should wait until additional copies of the Hickory Report arrived from the Southern Regional Council (School Board Notes, October 1, 1974). At the next school board meeting, the Bi-Racial Liaison Task Force distributed to board members a "Reactionnaire" to the Hickory Report that would guide their further study and discussion. The board did not make any decision regarding the Reactionnaire, but agreed

to wait for an addendum to the Hickory Report to arrive from the Southern Regional Council (School Board Notes, October 14, 1974). By the November board meeting, the superintendent had received the addendum and provided copies to the board members. The board voted to utilize the Reactionnaire, though they changed its title to “Opinionnaire” (School Board Notes November 5, 1974). Two months later, school board notes indicate that “copies of the response to the Hickory Report by the Bi-Racial Advisory Committee were given to the Board members” (School Board Notes, January 7, 1975). This was the last mention of the Southern Regional Council work or their Hickory Report in school board notes through 1975. Absent any further board discussion of the Southern Region Council report, the school board did not fulfill its obligation stated at the February 11, 1974 meeting to “evaluate the resulting report; and to implement such recommendations of the firm which are deemed advisable by the Board” (School Board Notes, February 11, 1974).

Mr. Lee and Hall returned to Hickory on November 11, 1974 to meet with the Hickory Community Relations Council. The Bi-Racial Advisory Committee and the Hickory Public Schools Task Force Liaison Committee attended as well. The discussion with the three community groups and other citizens present was how to restructure the Community Relations Council in order to address the causes of racial tension. Hall suggested that the current Community Relations Council could not accomplish the work effectively because most of the members were “too busy to deal with the broad area of human relations and race relations.” He went to say that “at least fourteen other cities the approximate size of Hickory were employing paid human relation staffs” (*Hickory Daily*

Record, November 12, 1974). The group brainstormed various strategies for funding one or more human relations positions for the council. The meeting concluded with agreement that there was a need for community coordination (*Hickory Daily Record*, November 12, 1974).

In March of 1975, the Community Relations Council made a formal request to the Hickory City Council that they work toward hiring a professional human relations coordinator to serve Hickory and Catawba County. The *Hickory Daily Record* reported that their “action stopped short of calling for the direct hiring of professional staff [which was] a move that had brought strong opposition from Hickory Mayor Julian Whitener” (*Hickory Daily Record*, March 25, 1975). The suggestion to hire a human relations coordinator was controversial and, as a result, the city drew up a new charter for the Community Relations Council (*Hickory Daily Record*, March 25, 1975). No staff member was added during 1975. More than a year later, in May of 1976, another local newspaper, The *Observer News Enterprise*, reported that the Catawba County Chamber of Commerce had approved a plan to hire a human relations coordinator. The paper called it “a different sort of tactic to obtain a county human relations coordinator” in which the Chamber would hire and supervise a human relations director (*Observer News Enterprise*, May 26, 1976).

On Friday, January 10, 1975, there was a large fight at Hickory High, the first one since 1973. The fight started after a White student threw a biscuit with the crumbs falling over plates of food at a table where African-American students were eating. These students argued with the student who threw the biscuit and the conflict escalated into a

fight. The police were called in to restore order and classes were suspended for the rest of the day (*Hickory Daily Record*, January 10, 1975). The *Hickory Daily Record* reported that the fight was not racially motivated, but the result of horseplay that went too far (*Hickory Daily Record*, January 10, 1975).

A student who was at the fight does not remember the situation as simple horse play. An African-American student remembers the biscuit landing on the plates of those at his lunch table. While it may have seemed funny to the student who threw the biscuit, it was insulting to this student. He said:

These rich white kids want to play with their food and throw it around. A biscuit came and landed in our plates. That's almost like the ultimate disrespect to mess with anybody's food. A lot of kids didn't have food to eat at home. That was some of them their only meal. (Personal Interview, February 4, 2011)

The fight was not reported in school board notes. Superintendent Wishon commented to the paper that, "I'm never surprised at anything, however, yesterday was the first I have heard of troubles of this nature at the school" (*Hickory Daily Record*, January 11, 1975). This fight at Hickory High was the last noted episode of racial tension in the school system for the 1974-1975 school year.

Conclusion

As this overview of twenty years in the Hickory Public Schools indicates, there has been a long history of racial tension in Hickory evidenced through school desegregation. There are many examples of conflict, both direct confrontation, indirect aggression, and power relations. Two narratives are woven through this local history. The first narrative is that of policy work and how local school and community leaders

managed external mandates and relations with one another. The second story is that of students who had no voice in federal, state or local policy-making and how they responded to massive changes foisted upon them. The public documents of school board notes, policy documents and newspaper articles provide a well-developed story of the policy work and views of leaders. However, the voices and experiences of the students are not as clearly articulated in these public documents. To further our understanding of what the students experienced, I have selected four cases of student conflict for deeper analysis. In the next chapter, four episodes from this twenty-year history will be lifted up for closer consideration.

CHAPTER IV

**DESEGREGATION IN ACTION:
FOUR CASES OF STUDENT CONFLICT**

This chapter tells four stories of student strife at Hickory High School during and after desegregation. I selected these four cases of student conflict because they caused significant disruption to daily school life. In all four cases, the students had direct interracial conflict with one another. The conflicts lasted more than a few days and evoked reaction from teachers, parents, the school board and the community at large. The first story conveys the experiences of the first few African-American students who transferred to Hickory High under the freedom of choice plan. The other three stories focus on conflicts between students that erupted around issues important to the students and community. Resolution to those three conflicts came only after a series of post-conflict meetings, discussions and compromise. The conflicts were significant enough to warrant stories in the local newspaper, student newspaper, and to appear in school board notes.

These stories of conflict are messy and show that African-American and White responses to desegregation were complex. One can see through these stories that student reaction to desegregation and life together at Hickory cannot be simply summarized as good or bad or positive or negative. However, these stories show that students were fully invested in student life at Hickory High. African-American students demonstrated their agency by protesting and making their voices heard. White students reacted to African-American protest, resisting the changes that newcomers sought. Change came to Hickory

High as a result of African-American and White student protests found in these four conflicts. The issues at the heart of the conflicts included symbols of the school culture and mattered greatly to the students. Schools are defined by and represented through symbols such as musical selections, cheerleaders, student government and other extracurricular activities. Finally, these stories show the student voice of school desegregation. The students in these stories have developed views, clearly expressed themselves and sought to create Hickory High as they thought it should be.

Prior to 1966, there were two high schools in Hickory including Hickory High and Ridgeview High. Hickory High was the all-White high school that served students in grades ten through twelve from 1924 until 1966. On the eve of desegregation, Hickory High had 1395 students and 54 staff members. Ridgeview School was the segregated school that served African-American students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade from 1926 until 1966. In May of 1965, Ridgeview had 959 students and 35 staff members. Before diving into the stories of student conflict, I have included portraits of these two schools to provide important context for the massive social change that came to the students.

Desegregation of these two high schools was accomplished through implementation of a district plan that closed the junior high and high school portions of Ridgeview School and transferred all of its approximately 200 high school students and high school teachers to Hickory High. There is no information in school board notes, community meeting notes or the *Hickory Daily Record* regarding how or why the board determined that Ridgeview High should be closed and all high school students transferred

to Hickory High rather than another means of desegregating. The Hickory plan for school desegregation was finalized in October 1965 after several years of work, a lawsuit, and the withholding of federal school funds. There was considerable community conflict surrounding the creation of the compliance plan which was reworked several times and never publicly embraced as a positive step for the community. As a result, no preparatory activities for students, teachers or community occurred prior to the transfer of African-American students to Hickory High.

Heritage of Ridgeview and Hickory High: Prior to Desegregation

The school board notes and the *Hickory Daily Record* newspaper make little comment about the significance to high school students of closing Ridgeview School. Though many members of the Ridgeview community desired the educational improvements they thought desegregation would bring, the geographic plan would change their community in ways no one could imagine at that time. Most members of the African-American community in Hickory lived, and many today live, in the Ridgeview neighborhood. Before public school desegregation, the African-American community was largely self-contained within Ridgeview. African-American citizens could meet most of their needs without leaving the area. Hartsoe (2001) describes a thriving business community in her memories of the Ridgeview Community with 34 African-American-owned businesses including a grocery, restaurants, clothing stores, hairdressers, physicians and more. The citizens of Ridgeview had a strong sense of pride about their community. They spoke of successful professionals who lived there, plentiful churches and a community recreational center. Ridgeview High School was the pride of the

African-American community in Hickory, providing a positive focal point around which African-American citizens rallied. One of the first students to integrate during the freedom of transfer period saw the Ridgeview School and the community as one, “Ridgeview was a community and the school was our community”(Personal Interview, February 7, 2011).

Ridgeview School, the oldest African-American high school in Catawba County, opened in 1926 as a re-structure of Catawba Training Academy, and received its accreditation as part of the Hickory City Schools in 1928 (Ridgeview High School Yearbook, 1966). Ridgeview High “was known not only for its achievement in the field of athletics, but also for the academic standings of its students as they continued forth for further study in order to serve the needs of mankind” (Hartsoe, 2001, p. 89). The school boasts alumni who attended colleges across the east including North Carolina A&T, Bennett College, Winston-Salem Teachers’ College, and Shaw University, listing many of them in the yearbook retrospective. Ridgeview took pride in its faculty and administrators, each of whom held a bachelor’s degree or further advanced degree from respected colleges and universities. The school yearbooks list college affiliation of each faculty member.

Every Ridgeview student with whom I spoke shared the same school pride. One said:

The football team we had was one of the number one top football and basketball teams of all black schools. We even had a couple of teams that competed undefeated with zero no scores. The other team didn’t even score. It [Ridgeview] stood out and it had some top notch teachers that went to Howard University and different places and they were great teachers. If they had the equipment that

Hickory High offered, that would have made it better for us and we would have been better prepared. But under the circumstances, we were just as prepared as anybody with what we had to deal with. (Personal Interview, February 7, 2011)

The Ridgeview community took special pride in the athletic accomplishments of its students. The Ridgeview Panthers' football record from 1930 through 1965 was 231-73-11. They had 29 winning seasons, 3 losing seasons, and 4 even seasons. During that time, the Panthers won the conference eleven times and won the state championship five straight years. For three of those years, no team scored against them. The Ridgeview Panthers had players participate in the Shrine Bowl or be designated as All Star Players every year from 1959 through 1966 (Ridgeview High School Yearbook, 1966).

Ridgeview High School produced four students who became professional athletes including Ozzie Clay, Ridgeview all-star in 1960, who played for the Washington Redskins; Ernie Warlick, 1948 graduate who played for the Calgary Stampeders in the Canadian Football League and for the Buffalo Bills; Bobby Warlick, who played in the NBA for the San Francisco Warriors and the Phoenix Suns; and Thurston Warlick, who played basketball internationally in Japan (Hartsoe, 2001; Ridgeview High School Yearbook, 1966).

Given the positive community feeling about Ridgeview School, leaving it was difficult for the students of the Ridgeview community. One said, "It was painful. It was hard. You [were] leaving home, leaving your nest" (Personal Interview, February 7, 2011).

Though the White community was more disparate in geography than the Ridgeview community, an equally proud heritage existed within the White community

for Hickory High School and for its students' academic and athletic merits beginning in 1924. Hickory High gained accreditation with Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in December of 1953. At that time, relatively few high schools in North Carolina were members of the association. Accreditation of the high school meant that Hickory High students could "enter any college or university in the United States without taking entrance exams" (*Hickory Daily Record*, December 10, 1953). In 1959, a check of Hickory High graduates showed that 59% were attending college, 10% were enlisted in the military, and 22% were working. Grades reports on Hickory High graduates attending North Carolina colleges indicated good progress at UNC, Duke, Davidson, and Lenoir-Rhyne College (*Hickory Daily Record*, March 5, 1959). While the state required only 16 units of study to graduate, the 1961 senior class averaged 18.5 units of work (*Hickory Daily Record: Special Supplement*, Spring 1962).

Hickory High had an exceptionally strong reputation for writing instruction and quality student publications. The school newspaper, *The Twig*, was started in 1926 and began winning journalistic awards in 1948. In 1950, *The Twig* was one of 50 school newspapers in America to receive the Gallup Award. In 1951, *The Twig* won an international first place at Columbia University and an All-American rating (*Hickory Daily Record*, October 6, 1951). The Hickory High yearbook, *The Log*, won All-American ratings in 1957-1959, 1961-1962, and 1963-64 as well as first class honors in 1952, 1960, and 1963 (*Hickory Daily Record*, September 11, 1966). Hickory High was also known for athleticism on the football field.

Hickory High also maintained a proud tradition in football. The Tornadoes were undefeated in 1925 and 1928. Later, under Head Football Coach Barger, Hickory High won the state championship in 1959 (*Hickory Daily Record*, June 6, 1970).

Given the pride and reputations of excellence for both Ridgeview and Hickory High, it is interesting that there was so little public discussion of how these schools would come together through desegregation. The four stories of conflict that follow show the results of lack of forethought and planning on behalf of students who came together under one roof. They are stories of interracial student conflict at Hickory High as the school changed from all-White to racially-mixed.

The first story, a story of newcomers to Hickory High, resists easy summary. The story is complicated by the fact that the first African-American students who entered Hickory High volunteered for transfer. Later, in August 1966, all African-American high school students in Hickory were forced to attend Hickory High when Ridgeview High School closed. The small group of transfer students who went early to Hickory High differs from the group of African-American students who waited for forced transfer. The conflict in this first story is more subtle than in the other three, with little outward strife. However, discomfort and dislocation are evident in the feelings of African-American students new to Hickory High are captured.

The second story in this chapter revolves around the conflict of what school fight school should be played at athletic events. A school's musical selections represent that school to the public and make a statement about the school's culture. The story of "Dixie" shows the internal pressure generated by African-American students to change

Hickory High's fight song so that it represents the total school body. The third story of conflict hits another symbolic issue, that of cheerleader selection. Like music, a school's cheerleaders serve as important representatives at every athletic event. The cheerleader conflict is the story of how African-American students sought to find representation on the cheerleading squad and the reaction that followed. The fourth and final story focuses on student conflict around equitable racial representation in student government and clubs. Though equitable participation is the source of conflict, it is a story of student response to use of language and stereotyping one another across racial lines. The four stories of conflict follow.

Newcomers to Hickory High: A Strange New World

In February of 1966, the School Board implemented the freedom of choice plan allowing African-American students grades 8, 9, 11 and 12 to transfer their enrollment to a previously all-White school. For African-American high school students, the only choice was Hickory High. At its February meeting, the school board approved more than 25 requests for student transfer. Dr. Jenkins, Superintendent, reported to the board that these reassigned students had all reported to their respective schools by Monday, February 28, and that "no complications of any kind had resulted" (School Board Notes, March 1, 1966). This short comment misses significant detail regarding the lived experience of students who had no voice in the creation or implementation of the student assignment plan.

Based on interviews with two African-American students who transferred from Ridgeview High School, the African-American high school, to Hickory High, there is

much more detail than “no complications resulted.” Captured here are the oral history remembrances of two students, Mary Jett and Audrey Reeves, both of whom transferred to Hickory High during the 1965-1966 school year under the freedom of choice plan. For high school students, there was just one year between the two plans specifying that African-American students could choose between Ridgeview High School and Hickory High and the obligatory desegregation. The next year, 1966-67, Ridgeview High School would close, forcing all African-American students to Hickory High.

Mary Jett remembered:

We were confronted by the principal at Ridgeview the first year back in 1965 because I went my senior year. And back then, I welcomed the challenge and my main goal was to finish high school. Mr. Broome, [the principal at Ridgeview], was so nice and he wanted to know if any of us wanted to go over to Hickory High. And I went home and I was excited because this was something different. I had good times at Ridgeview, but I wanted to see what it was like to go to another school. [After hearing from Mr. Broome about the opportunity to transfer], then the teachers got with us. We had to decide and then I had to go home and discuss with my parents. And of course, mom and dad prayed about it, because they always pray about everything. But I had made up my mind that I wanted to do this. (Personal Interview, February 21, 2011)

Ms. Jett continued her remembrance:

My mother always stressed to us the importance of getting an education. So I wanted to make my parents proud. So when an opportunity came up for me go to this school, I went home and talked it over with my parents. My sisters had already graduated from Ridgeview and my older sister was at Winston Salem State and my other sister went to Central in Durham and I wanted to go to college too. So, that year that I went to Hickory High, there were five of us [in my class]. We caught the bus at Ridgeview and they took us over there. I didn't really have any problems with the students because I was the only one in my class. I remember some of my teachers. I sat in the front of all my classes. In the lunch rooms, we got to talk [with our friends from Ridgeview]. [Some of the students]

made little smart remarks. We got thrown spitballs from some of the students. Some of the guys did that to us, but we talked it out.

One of my classmates that went with me, she decided she couldn't stick it out. She came back to Ridgeview, but I was determined [that] I was going to make my mom and dad proud. And it was a learning experience. I don't remember any of my classmates' names. I wasn't there to make friends. I was there to finish the 12th grade and I did that. But if it hadn't been for my parents who instilled in me to get an education, who made sure that we all went to school, we all finished high school, I wouldn't be independent today. I didn't follow my so-called friends. It wasn't easy. I did some things that my parents weren't proud of, but we all do. They wanted us all to get an education and we did that. (Personal Interview, February 21, 2011)

Another African-American student, Audrey Reeves, remembers that:

Integration during the time started out from the time of 1965-1966 as an opportunity. It was a scary one and it was something we didn't want to do. I didn't have a choice, because my mother made me. But once you got there, the education part was great. As far as getting to know people and making friends, that was hard, but you got lucky. I had some of the best friends, but there was a few, very few... When we first integrated, 19 of us [among grades 9 through 12] went over there. During that time, my mother worked at Hickory High school. I didn't want to go. I cried [and] fussed [and] begged. They were going to close down the black school which was Ridgeview at the time. It was going to close the following year anyway, [so] I wanted to wait. [My mother said], no, you won't. The opportunity is now. Get your foot in the door. It's historic. When [the choice to transfer was offered], my mother worked in the cafeteria [along with] other parents over there. They had already been discussing with the counselor and the school board about integration and closing down the black school. Well, by them working there, they had a first-hand opportunity to hear and see what was going on. Once they got wind of it, they made a decision for us that we would go ahead. [The school board] left it up to the parents and to the individuals. You didn't have to go there the first year. You had the opportunity to go then or wait until they completely closed the school.

Some of these parents decided [that their children would transfer], and mine was one that decided, yes, ma'am, you [are] going. My mother [thought] it was a better opportunity. The school is going to be closing in another year. [I questioned], well, how come I can't wait? I was in the band and other things and I wanted to wait. She said no. You need to get a head start now. I still resent her for that that and she did it because [she] loved me, but it hurt. It was painful. It was

hard, [because], [I was] leaving home, leaving my nest. When you got 19 and they spread out here now, it was just a scary time, and I wouldn't wish that on nobody. It was different when everyone came there, [and] you knew you had some back up. When you are one of 19 and you go into a classroom [with] 30 in a class and there's just you, 30 white [students] and you. There were so many white students and 19 of us. We had sophomores, juniors, seniors. So we didn't have classes together. And if you got lucky you got one in class where you were sitting maybe up front and the other one in back, so it was really scary. (Personal Interview, February 7, 2011)

What one finds in the lived experiences recounted here is African-American student ambivalence about desegregation. These recollections show that some members of the African-American community did seek out the opportunity to integrate and that those who voluntarily transferred viewed it as an opportunity for a better education, improving one's chances for a better life. While the students who sought transfer desired a better education promised through school integration, some were ambivalent about leaving the comfort and safety of schooling with their African-American peers. The transfer was not easy for these students and they were not wholly welcomed by Whites at their new school. The political and social history captured in chapter three sets a context ripe for conflict as Hickory Public Schools moved from complete segregation to students freely transferring for token desegregation and then to increased racial mixing with a revised compliance plan based on geographic zoning.

During the 1966-67 school year, the first year of high school desegregation, there were no student conflicts referenced in school board notes or the *Hickory Daily Record*. However, Drucella Hartsoe, an African-American parent from the Ridgeview community, remembers that:

The next year, many students from Ridgeview transferred to Hickory High. After a couple of days, all hell broke loose. There were tensions between black and white students and teachers. Parents were called and police were sent on campus. Eventually, parents and students accepted integration. (Hartsoe, 2001, p. 12)

The memories of Ms. Hartsoe, Ms. Reeves and Ms. Jett suggest that there were there issues of loss, resistance and leadership as the first African-American students entered Hickory High, both for the students who went ahead of the others as transfer students and for the students who went as a whole class. The losses relate to loss of a school environment in which students were honored, nurtured and loved for what they had to offer their community of Ridgeview. There is no evidence that the first African-American students were held in high esteem or nurtured by anyone at Hickory High during their transition. The transfer students also lost their peer group for the year they attended Hickory High as a group of nineteen African-American students among a school of White students. In Mary Jett's recollection, there was demonstrated resistance from White students who threw spitballs at their new classmates. Ms. Hartsoe's memories also suggest resistance toward the newcomers in the form of tension and outward conflict. The leadership of the nineteen African-American transfer students and their families is significant. They left the warmth of their 'nest' and their circles of friends for a vision of a better life ahead through integrated schooling.

What Song Shall We Sing?: The Dixie Conflict

The Dixie Conflict is a recounting of the first student-led controversy after desegregation of the two high schools in the Hickory Public School District in Hickory, North Carolina. This story conveys an important episode in the history of Hickory Public

Schools and literature on school desegregation. In addition, it highlights an important misstep in the social creation of a desegregated high school, the importance of symbols within a school community, and the role of leadership in conflict resolution.

A news story of the Kiwanis Club presentation in the *Hickory Daily Record* on April 2, 1969 was the first public report of concerns about use of “Dixie” as the Hickory High school fight song. During 1969-70, the next school year, regular use of the song “Dixie” at ball games became the first significant conflict among the students. By mid-way through the next school year, African-American students decided to take action. On Tuesday, December 2, 1969, the school board records indicate that a group of African-American parents and students attended the board meeting. Community member, Mr. Samuel Tucker, was granted the privilege to speak. He presented Barton Sudderth, a student at Hickory High, who stated that the African-American students at the high school objected to the playing of “Dixie” during school activities, and requested that the Board establish a policy regulating this matter. The *Hickory Daily Record* reported that some thirty-nine parents and high school students of the African-American community were present at the meeting (School Board Notes, December 2, 1969; *Hickory Daily Record*, December 3, 1969). Barton conveyed African-American student frustration to the board, commenting that, “the song caused friction between the black and white students” and explaining that “Dixie” is associated with slavery and depression of our people” (*Hickory Daily Record*, December 3, 1969). The board took the request under consideration, but tabled any action until further investigation.

Three days later, on Friday, December 5, 1969, a group of about two hundred fifty White students staged a school walk-out and paraded through downtown Hickory as an answer to the African-Americans' request. The board called a meeting that day and responded by adopting a resolution that directed the school itself to select the school fight song and resolve the challenge to playing "Dixie." The resolution stated, in part, that "the Board shall depend upon the principal, teachers and students to harmoniously resolve the question without further action by the Board to establish a policy regulating the playing of 'Dixie' as requested on December 2, 1969" (School Board Notes, December 5, 1969). The following day, the *Hickory Daily Record* ran both a story and an editorial about the student concerns. The editorial stated that "trustees of the Hickory School Unit have, rightfully, decided to take no action on the request voiced by some Negro students and their parents to ban the playing of "Dixie" at the schools" (*Hickory Daily Record*, December 6, 1969). The Record went on to say that the board decided "to leave this issue where it is generally believed it belongs: with the Junior Human Relations Council at the High School and the administrative official of the school whose responsibility is the maintenance of order and discipline within the school" (*Hickory Daily Record*, December 6, 1969). The editor made clear his viewpoint on the matter by calling the request from African-American students "strange and belated" given the few times the song had been played at official school functions (*Hickory Daily Record*, December 6, 1969).

The editor commented on the White student walk-out, "Each side now has had its say and we hope that Monday both groups will get back on the job of learning" (*Hickory Daily Record*, December 6, 1969). No further detail on the conflict was published in

school board notes or the newspaper other than an expression of appreciation from the principal at a later board meeting in which he thanked the school board for leaving the decision to his discretion (*Hickory Daily Record*, February 3, 1970). However, the story has a fuller conclusion in *The Twig*, the Hickory High student newspaper (December 12, 1969 and January 16, 1970). According to an article in *The Twig*, the Human Relations Council requested during the previous school year that Principal Miller require additional musical compositions be played alongside “Dixie” at school events. This request was ignored until the issue began interrupting daily life at Hickory High (*The Twig*, January 16, 1970).

The 1969-1970 Hickory High School Annual, *The Log*, reveals that a Junior Human Relations Council was established at the school and given the “job of easing relations between races.” Thirty members, an equal number of black and white students, were chosen for the council. “To further the understanding of human relations, co-chairmen John Brock and Rick Dula attended the bi-monthly meetings of the Hickory Human Relations Council” (p. 132).

After the controversial walkout of students on December 5, 1969, Principal Miller met with each class of high school students to engage in an open discussion of the issue. After the three meetings, students and staff were invited to submit suggestions regarding resolution of the fight song conflict. The Junior Human Relations Council assisted by conducting “open discussions so that every individual might have the chance to express their views” (*The Log*, 1970, p. 132). After reading and sorting some 500 responses, Principal Miller realized that the majority of students favored some sort of compromise.

After considering student input, Mr. Miller issued a letter to the students on December 31, 1969, explaining his decision to continue the playing of “Dixie” along with other musical compositions (*The Twig*, January 16, 1970).

This first significant conflict among the integrated student body speaks directly to two critical themes that play throughout the story of desegregation in Hickory, that is, the symbolism of decisions and choices that represent school culture, and how a school must shift its identity over time to reflect its total student body. Both Hickory and Ridgeview High Schools had well-established school cultures that were supported and reinforced by the community surrounding the schools. When Ridgeview High School was closed and the African-American students transferred to Hickory High, the school needed to establish a more expansive identity for itself, one that included African-American students as well as White. The protest of “Dixie” was a protest against the school maintaining its identity as a White, segregationist institution. The African-American students rejected “Dixie” as a musical symbol of their high school identity.

Students expressed these notions, on both sides of the issue, in *The Twig* on December 12, 1969. Two students made clear that the history and traditions of Hickory should not change just because African-American students were added to the student body. One said, “We’ve played “Dixie” at this school since 1925 and we’re not going to stop now!” Another student argued:

It’s not really the playing of the song “Dixie” or even a matter of principle anymore. It’s whether the blacks or whites will have the upper hand. I’m proud I’m from the South. If you sing it, it upsets somebody. I sympathize with the [White student] walkout, but wouldn’t participate. (*The Twig*, December 12, 1969)

Another White student and council vice-president took an opposing view:

The black students gave up everything to come here. If they feel giving up “Dixie” would unite our school, the least we can do is give it up. It’s not too much compared to their giving up a whole school. When “Dixie” is played at school activities, it reflects a pride in the South felt by the whole school. If they don’t feel the same way, we can’t let “Dixie” represent us. (*The Twig*, December 12, 1969)

Audrey, an African-American student, who enrolled at Hickory High in 1965 as a freedom of choice transfer student, remembered the “Dixie” conflict. She shared that, going into desegregation, the African-American students didn’t know that “Dixie” was the Hickory High school fight song. Instead, they knew of the song because, there “used to be a little snack shop called the Big Rebel. It had a rebel flag and they played “Dixie.” We knew the song was there.” Later, when nineteen African-American students transferred to Hickory High under the freedom of choice plan, they heard the song, “Dixie,” during half time at the ball games. She remembered frustration among the African-American students. “When this band comes out with “Dixie,” I’m thinking that there was one or two of us in the band, I think two of them, they quit. They left, and I’m like, you can’t play that anymore.” When Ridgeview High School closed and all of the African-American high school students were forced to attend Hickory High, the Hickory High band continued to play it for several more years. Audrey recalled:

After a lot of players, football players got on the team, they start taking it out. They finally start taking it out. But the first two years over there, no, that’s what they played. And you know – you just sit there. You took that. [There was] nothing you can do.

Audrey also remembered the efforts of African-American students to change the song as ineffective. She commented that:

We sent a petition to them. We talked to the principal. We talked to the band director. It was like, no, they weren't going to change it. Parents sent letters, went to City Hall and went to board meetings where [they] told how [they] felt about this and expressed opinions. But, [the school leaders] said, that's the school song. Why should we change? What they don't realize [is that] we're making the biggest changes, we're making the biggest sacrifice. Why didn't you leave our school open? Why don't you bus some of the white students over there? (Personal Interview, February 7, 2011)

In the end, the school stopped playing the pep song "Dixie" as a result of student protest and public attention brought to the issue. Principal Miller did not respond to the request of the Human Relations Committee made during the 1968-1969 school year to mix "Dixie" with other pep songs (*The Twig*, January 16, 1970). However, after an African-American student protest to the school board and a walkout of White students brought sufficient spotlight to the controversy, Principal Miller sought compromise. He asked the students for suggestions and took their advice, deciding that "Dixie" should be played only alongside other pep songs (*The Twig*, January 16, 1970). Mr. Miller reported in *The Twig*, that he made his decision based "on these [student suggestion] papers, the discussions, teachers' meetings, and recommendations of the Junior Human Relations Council" (January 16, 1970). Though not reported in any document, Audrey confirmed that over time, "Dixie" was included less frequently among the band's pep tunes and finally dropped off altogether.

An article published years later in the *Hickory Daily Record* pointed out that the Hickory High school song, "Hail, Hickory High" was "forgotten during the 1960's when

“Dixie” was used” (June 1, 1982). The article does not indicate when exactly the band began playing “Dixie” and why they made the switch from “Hail, Hickory High.” Though “Dixie” was never the official school song for Hickory High, its symbolism was so significant that the actual school song was forgotten in its wake. “Hail, Hickory High” was recognized again as the school song only after “Dixie” faded from the band’s play list and the controversy was put to rest. The first student conflict at desegregated Hickory High was about symbols: the power of a symbol to represent a school, the student body and a specific point of view; the particular musical symbol selected by some and then challenged by others; and the symbolism of a principal’s compromise in response to student leadership.

Who Plays, Who Cheers?: The Cheerleader Conflict

Even before the 1970-71 school year started, a second and more significant conflict was brewing among the students and administration. Though the flashpoint of the second conflict was selection of cheerleaders, the larger question expressed during the Dixie conflict presented itself again. That is, how does a desegregated school community define itself? Students express themselves and their school spirit through extracurricular activities, especially the athletic program. Every part of football Friday night, from the band playing the school fight song to the cheerleaders on the sideline, acts as a symbol of the school. When a school becomes racially integrated, how should those symbols change? Should the cheerleading squad change composition to reflect the diversity of the student population? Should the selection process of cheerleaders change to ensure representation of African-American students? How far should students go to express their

opinions on these matters of student life? While a conflict over high school cheerleaders may seem trivial, what unfolded at Hickory High in 1970 is significant to understanding the lived experiences of students during desegregation, including how they were treated and how they defined themselves and their schools.

The Lead-Up

At the close of the 1969-70 school year, Richard Dula, a Hickory High School student, the first starting African-American quarterback for Hickory High, and co-chairman of the Hickory High Junior Human Relations Council, invited Principal Miller to attend a meeting of the Black Student Union at Ridgeview Community Center on June 10, 1970. At this meeting, the African-American students made several requests of Principal Miller that they felt would improve the situation for African-American students at Hickory High. First, the students wanted the school to include six African-American cheerleaders on the squad for the coming school year, or roughly 50% of the 13 member squad. Next, the students requested equal or 50% representation on the student council beginning with the 1971-72 school year. The students considered how to change elections within the school in order to ensure fair representation of minority students. They suggested three methods which would accomplish this aim. These included a precinct or ward system, whereby students would represent the various attendance zones; a provision for the Black Student Union to handle election of the African-American representatives; or weighing the African-American vote according to the ratio of African-Americans to Whites for that year. Third, the students asked that the school increase the number of African-Americans on staff at Hickory High and include more African-Americans in the

general functions of the school. The students concluded their presentation with a plea that Principal Miller should demonstrate his care about the students through deep consideration of the Black Student Union's requests. The students asked for a reply by July 15. Mr. Miller responded with a request that the students submit their request in writing by July 2 (School Board Notes, September, 1, 1970).

Mr. Miller reported to the school board that soon thereafter, he held a conference with Richard Dula to discuss the requests. Principal Miller discussed the importance of election procedures emphasizing that the coming year's activities were always based on election procedures set up and followed in the preceding year and that this should be the case for the coming year. He recounted his conversation with Richard Dula stating that:

Those who were elected or appointed will be expected to serve, and those who were defeated will be expected to serve but not in the main leadership capacity. It behooves all who attend school here, work, along with the interested parents and friends to do everything in their power to see that every boy and girl who attends school here is afforded his opportunity to acquire the best possible education the school can provide. (School Board Notes, September 1, 1970)

Mr. Miller did share with Richard, commonly known as Rick, that changes in the election procedure under consideration for the following spring would ensure the election of African-American representatives to the student council and the cheerleading corps.

Principal Miller further reported that following his meeting with Richard Dula, he conferred with the student council president regarding plans for election procedures to ensure African-American representation on student council and cheerleading corps. He shared his thoughts of compromising by adding African-American members to the cheerleading squad for the coming school term. After discussing these matters with other

members of the student council, the student council president recommended that African-American cheerleaders be added for the 1971-72 school year through an election process rather than the coming year (School Board Notes, September 1, 1970).

Richard Dula added more details on the summer meetings in a letter to the editor of *The Twig*, the student newspaper, in September 1970. Through this letter, Richard Dula responded to claims that the Junior Human Relations Council (JHRC), of which he was the co-chair, did nothing to ameliorate the brewing cheerleader crisis. The Junior Human Relations Council (JHRC) was a student organization sponsored by and working in conjunction with the community Human Relations Council started in 1963 that sought to improve communication among racial groups. Dula explained in *The Twig* that:

The [Junior Human Relations] Council met in the Ridgeview library this summer. We met because the black members knew something was going to happen, so the whole Council set out to do something about it. The White members of the Council were made aware that there was unrest in the black community over the outcome of the spring elections. To prevent any type of racial disturbance, the Council resolved that some black cheerleaders should be appointed (more than two). The Student Council president, also a member of the JHRC was to advise the principal of the meeting and resolution. The chairman of the JHRC heard nothing more on the subject. (*The Twig*, October 9, 1970)

In mid-August, the school board called meetings on two consecutive days. On August 13, Superintendent Wishon advised the board that the Black Student Union at Hickory High School requested changes in the membership of student organizations. Dr. Wishon reviewed administrative procedures related to this request. The next day, the Superintendent shared a request from the Hickory High student council that the principal

appoint Black students to varsity cheerleading squad. The board accepted this request as information.

Following the series of meetings, Principal Miller appointed two African-American senior girls to the cheerleading squad. Both girls had been candidates for the cheerleading squad during elections in the spring of 1970 and one had served as a cheerleader during the 1969-1970 school year. Principal Miller reported to the board that he advised Richard Dula of their appointments and asked that Richard inform the girls. The day after Mr. Miller spoke with Richard Dula, the two girls met with Mr. Miller in his office and refused the appointment to the cheerleading squad. The two girls countered with a request that four rather than two African-American girls be appointed to the squad. Principal Miller refused, explaining that two African-Americans would constitute representation proportional to the racial demographics of the school as a whole. Mr. Miller ended the meeting by asking that the students reconsider. The two students returned later that morning, and again refused the appointment. Mr. Miller left the offer open for the two girls and took no further action (School Board Notes, September 1, 1970).

Dr. Wishon gave the School Board a full report of the situation at its meeting on Tuesday, September 1, 1970. He began with news that no African-American students were elected to either the student council or the cheerleading corps for the 1970-71 school year. In order to comply with a 1968 Board of Education directive, Principal Miller found it necessary to appoint two African-American students to the student council. He shared his work to resolve the cheerleader conflict. The *Hickory Daily*

Record analyzed proportional racial representation of cheerleaders in a news story the next day.

There are 13 active members of the HHS cheerleading squad, and if two Negro girls accepted their appointments, this would create a black-white membership on the squad of 2 out of 15 or some 18.3 percent black membership. The black membership at the high school is 210 out of 1,388 for some 15.85 per cent—not far from their percentage in the school. The two additional requested black members on the cheerleading squad would distort this balance in favor of the blacks. (*Hickory Daily Record*, September 2, 1970)

According to Rick Dula, the Black Student Union requested six African-American cheerleaders, or roughly fifty percent of the squad, because the football team had an even racial composition. The African-American students thought it made sense for the cheerleading squad to match the racial composition of the athletic teams rather than the student body at large (Personal Interview, November 1, 2012).

The *Hickory Daily Record* further reported that since Dr. Wishon's statement had been prepared, all African-American members of the Grandview Junior High School (which had been desegregated much like Hickory High) football team had quit, walking off the practice field last Friday. The African-American members of the team gave no reason for quitting. However, on Monday, Grandview Middle School Principal John Guy received a request that four Black cheerleaders be added to the Grandview cheerleading squad, which presently had no African-American members (School Board Notes, September 2, 1970).

With the news coverage, the conflict quickly began spilling over into the community. The next day, the *Hickory Daily Record* included a letter from its editor

chastising the African-American community for stirring up trouble in the school district. The editor said that certain members of the “Negro community demonstrated lack of cooperation and good-will over the situation at Hickory High” and that their intention was to “cause dissension.” The paper suggested that those protesting constituted a “minute” group of “extremists, long chafing at the bit” who are “likely to be hard to control in the days ahead” (*Hickory Daily Record*, September 3, 1970). The article went on to convey Principal Miller’s reaction to the news that the protesting students might have their own cheering section at the football game on Friday night. Miller said:

We have one team and one authorized group of cheerleaders who will represent the team and the student body. That is all the school will support. If the students want to dress up and cheer in the stands, fine, but we hope they will be cheering for our team. (*Hickory Daily Record*, September 3, 1970)

The next day, a member of the community responded in the Open Forum section of the *Hickory Daily Record*. It is clear from the exchange of opinion that the cheerleader dispute had struck a nerve in both the African-American and White communities of Hickory. The community member began by stating that, “the ‘mass-media’ failed in reporting events leading to the possible confrontation of Black students at HHS.” The author explained that when the students voiced a grievance requesting cheerleaders and only two seats were offered, the students rejected the decision and sat ready for further negotiation which never came. The community member claimed that:

Now, we are involved in a situation that should never have existed. Why didn’t The Record encourage the ‘wise’ superintendent to follow the guidelines set down by the Task Force on student involvement sanctioned by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction? This is declared: Volume 24, Number 24, September 1,

1969 on page 9, Cheerleaders should be selected, not elected. (*Hickory Daily Record*, September, 4, 1970)

The author took a swipe at White paternalism in the close of the letter stating that, “until white folks stop defining what is best for Black people, and accept the fact that Blacks have a ‘Right’ to self-determination will the ‘long chafing at the bit’ be controlled” (*Hickory Daily Record*, September, 4, 1970).

Cheerleaders Cheer

For most White folks in Hickory, Friday, September 4, 1970 started out as an uneventful day. One Ridgeview community member and seventh grader, Allen Mitchell, who would later graduate from Hickory High in 1976 remembers that afternoon well. As a junior high school student and football player, Allan followed Hickory High football closely and was looking forward to attending the first game of the season that night. After leaving Grandview Junior High that afternoon, Allan headed home and encountered the African-American cheerleaders preparing for their act of protest. He recounts it this way:

We were walking back from [football] practice, and we cut through the old A & P building [parking lot]. We would walk through there [to get home] and we seen these older girls and they were dancing. They were doing cheers. I was [younger] and our eyes were like this, because they were up there dancing. What they were doing is they were practicing. They were cheerleaders. We said, cool, they are cheerleaders, so we stopped and watched them for a moment. Then we walked back over to East Hickory where we lived and got ready to go to the football game. I’ll never forget going to all the football games over there at Lenoir-Rhyne College. I remember on that football team, I believe Hickory High has its first starting Black quarterback named Rickie Dula. They had a state championship football team that would have been out of this world. So that was a big thing at that time. I remember the cheerleaders- the spirit leaders, as I believe they were called at that time – their uniforms were even different from the regular cheerleader uniform. I seen these same young ladies up in the stands and each one

was on a step. They were cheering from there and you had your white cheerleaders down on the field cheering. (Personal Interview, February 4, 2011)

The *Hickory Daily Record* reported that:

with about three minutes remaining in the first half of the football game, six Negro cheerleaders appeared on the east end of the College Field and proceeded to lead a group of about 250 black fans in cheers. Hickory High School Principal B.E. Miller confronted the girls and told them to leave the field. He was immediately surrounded by a group of about 100 black fans who poured onto the sidelines. About 25 Hickory police took swift action and encircled the group, trying to keep the disorder from spreading to other parts of the field. No violence flared at that time, but the game was delayed for about 10 minutes before game officials carried the ball to the west end of the field to resume play. During the halftime break, the Negroes returned to the stands and only one fight was reported during the remainder of the contest. (September, 1970)

A White student who was a tenth-grader at Hickory High felt the racial tension leading up to the football game that day. He commented that:

One issue that came up a lot was the cheerleading squad. They, the black community, wanted half the cheerleading squad and the whites felt like you know you're 10 percent of the population and you can go out for it just like everyone else. Why should you get half? There was some tension there. (Personal Interview, February 1, 2011)

He remembers that evening this way:

There was a lot of tension going on at the time and during the game, a bunch of black girls dressed up in cheerleading outfits hopped down onto the field. They weren't supposed to be there. All the blacks were kind of on this side of the field and all the whites were over here. They ended up having to stop the game. It was being played on this side of the field where all the commotion was going on. They just moved to the other side of the field and, after a period of time, they continued playing. I don't remember any fights that day but that was a very, very tense situation. I was pretty nervous. The blacks were pulling off their belts and threatening to use them. There was a lot of cussing and throwing stuff back and

forth. It never really escalated into a bad, brawl-time fight situation. (Personal Interview, February 1, 2011)

The African-American cheerleaders and students who joined in the protest were attempting to address a situation that had been brewing since the elections the previous spring when no African-Americans were elected either to the cheerleading squad or student council. Rick Dula, spokesman for the Black Student Union and starting quarterback on the football team commented, “We’ve done everything we can do. The black people are tired of talking. [The protest] was definitely an accomplishment. We didn’t have any cheerleaders, but now we have our own” (*The Twig*, September 11, 1970).

Though the student protest was controlled during the game, the situation changed after the game ended. A significant number of African-American community members moved to the downtown area of Hickory and then to a nearby shopping center, throwing rocks and breaking glass as they went. They damaged several store fronts and car windshields. Allen Mitchell remembered that the day after the game, they were:

hearing all this ruckus and commotion about downtown being torn up with a path of destruction from Lenoir-Rhyne to here, all of Hickory. I slept through it, but I was over there in East Hickory. I remember listening to a lot of the folks talk. It was scary. It was real scary at that point in time. (Personal Interview, February 4, 2011)

The mayor placed a three day curfew on the city as a result of continued racial disturbance throughout the weekend. The *Hickory Daily Record* commented on “marauding by bands of blacks” moving throughout the city (September 8, 1970). Allen

Mitchell remembered that the curfew “was scary as a kid seeing the National Guard patrolling the neighborhoods. I remember the tension and the unease just rising. It was like a shroud all over the neighborhood” (Personal Interview, February 4, 2011).

School resumed on Tuesday after the Labor Day holiday with 200 African-American students waiting on the front steps of Hickory High for news of the disciplinary action against the six unauthorized cheerleaders. Upon hearing that the girls had received a three day suspension from school, the group walked out en masse returning to the Ridgeview Community. These students would later learn of their own three day suspension for staging a walk-out of school (*Hickory Daily Record*, September 8 and 9, 1970). In addition, all of the African-American football players who participated in the walk-out were removed from the football team for the rest of the year. This included Rick Dula, who was a contender for all-state quarterback that year. As a result of this decision by the head football coach, Rick Dula’s high school football career ended after the first game of the season (Personal Interview, November 1, 2012).

The school board convened a special called meeting mid-day on Tuesday to determine how to resolve the cheerleading controversy. The superintendent began the meeting by presenting recommendations that had emerged from a discussion between several school district leaders, officials from the Human Relations Sub-Committee on Community Affairs and a few selected citizens. The recommendations included: (a) that a cheerleader election be held by Friday, September 11, 1970 to elect two Black varsity cheerleaders and two Black junior varsity cheerleaders. The two junior varsity cheerleaders should come from the sophomore class; and (b) that a new election

procedure will be implemented before April 1971 to ensure Black representation. The elections would be structured either by precinct, ward, elementary school district, or assigned seat arrangement.

The board engaged in a full discussion of pros and cons of this plan. It was brought out during the board discussion that appointing two African-American cheerleaders to the varsity squad would constitute 14% of squad being African-American, which is 1 percent less than the ratio of African-American students to White at the high school. Board member, Mr. Dula, who was a member of Rick Dula's extended family, made a motion that the Board recommend that the Superintendent and principal provide for four Black varsity cheerleaders to be elected at the high school on Friday, September 11. Before the Board could act on this motion, someone alerted the board that there was a fire at Kenworth School, an elementary school near the African-American neighborhood. The meeting was adjourned until 5:30 pm when the emergency was resolved. When the meeting resumed, a motion that the four African-American varsity cheerleaders be elected at Hickory High was voted down. A number of African-American parents and community members left the meeting in protest.

After further discussion, the board passed a motion to endorse the recommendations from the group shared at the outset of the meeting. The motion directed the school administration to conduct cheerleader elections, but did not specify more than two varsity cheerleaders be elected. The board reached consensus that the problem of racial harmony at the high school can be solved best by the principal and his students (School Board Notes, September 8, 1970).

The *Hickory Daily Record* covered the news of the cheerleader incident, the city-wide curfew, the student walkout on Tuesday, the fire set at Kenworth School and the School Board meeting. In addition, the editor shared the sentiments of the paper in a letter on the opinion page. He stated:

We think it is most unfortunate that some of the Blacks in the community have seen fit to listen to the appeal of misguided leaders who feel that a show of might is the only way. We fear that they have created a situation in which someone—probably an innocent person—will get hurt as a result. Hickory can ill-afford the anarchy that has threatened . . . We hope the curfew will be of short duration, but it should continue until some of the more militant change their ways. (September, 8, 1970)

According to the *Hickory Daily Record*, tensions remained high throughout Hickory on the second day of the curfew. There was a bomb threat at College Park Junior High and arson attempts at both Hickory High and Kenworth Elementary. Officers arrested 39 citizens for curfew violations, only five of which were African-American (September 9, 1970). However, by Friday, the crisis had ended. The 200 suspended students returned to school without incident. Mayor Julian Whitener declared the curfew a success. Though he did not cancel the curfew, he relaxed the hours to midnight until six a.m. (September 11, 1970). By start of business on Monday, the curfew ended and there were no restrictions on public movement.

The Aftermath

Though the outward conflict had ended and order had been restored, the issue of African-American student representation continued to divide the students at Hickory High. *The Twig* effectively captured student views on the conflict in its next two editions,

dated September 28 and October 9, 1970. Some of the students took sides, supporting or condemning the protest, but at least as many students asked for compromise and unity among the students.

Students of both sides were concerned with fairness. One African-American student wrote, "I'm the type of person that wants to get along with mostly anyone, black and white alike. I'm not a very violent person, but I do believe in equal rights for blacks."

On the other side, a White student commented:

I am very concerned about the lack of union among White students at Hickory High. It seems that only black views are being heard! There are 1,200 students at this high school who would not agree with six cheerleaders being elected. The reason for my concern is that most whites don't realize how serious the blacks are about their demands. I want to be heard! (*The Twig*, September 28, 1970)

In another letter to *The Twig*, Rick Dula explained his perspective on the protest and how important the issue was for many African-American students.

I can dig on the part of your article that said I was leading a demonstration. You were right to a certain degree. I did not make a move until I had talked to the Student Council, Mr. Miller, and the JHRC. None of them talked the way the blacks wanted them to so we had to act (non-violently).

We came into this thing, integration, expecting to change, but at the same time expecting to be treated as high school students with an equal chance, but we found that "Charlie" had everything set up in a way that would exclude blacks by some means. The way it is now only the "token Negroes" can get anywhere at all at this school. Due to the fact that integration in this case is imitation and assimilation we have screened the "true blacks" from the "Oreos" and "Toms." It is plain to see that the "Toms" are going through a process of being painted with. When will they learn that black is in?

The “pigs” even had the audacity to lock up a few brothers for inciting and engaging in a riot that never occurred. That’s like arresting a man for the murder of a person who’s not dead. We call it “white power.” Another example of this is the suspension of the black varsity and jayvee football players. They guys all want to play ball, but because of the decision of the establishment, we worked out all summer for nothing. Sure we broke rules, but so did a few other guys who remain on the team. The core of our problem still exists. We have no black football players, so we have no black cheerleaders simply because of the personal feelings of a few in power at the school. Several of the present footballers have been injured, but due to the pride of a few, rather than reinstating the blacks, we now have a team of sophomores on the Varsity representing HHS.

We gave all we had, now it’s your turn. Get yourself thoroughly together, or don’t get together at all (*The Twig*, October 9, 1970).

Rick Dula got to the heart of the conflict in this letter to his classmates. Many African-American students went to Hickory High expecting the best of their new school and integration, thinking that they would “be treated as high school students with an equal chance.” When African-American students asked for what they thought was equal representation in an extracurricular activity and received little support, they were disappointed and frustrated. Still, some African American students believed enough in the school and democratic process to stage a protest. When they met with severe discipline for the protest, these students were outraged that their voices were silenced. Rick Dula used the language of the Black Power movement and Black Panther Party by identifying police as “pigs” and the school’s reaction as “white power” (Branch, 2006; Jones, 1998; Joseph, 2006, 2009). Though deeply hurt by the discipline, Rick Dula conveyed concern for his school and the football team. Though jaded after the events, he continued to ask for help in creating Hickory High as an inclusive school community.

While most students expressed feelings about the issue itself, several conveyed fear and shame over what had occurred. One student wrote:

I'm afraid to go to football games anymore. Friday night I was afraid to leave and afraid to stay. No one knew what was going to happen next. That is a terrible feeling. I hope something like that does not happen at games again. (*The Twig*, September 28, 1970)

Another student commented:

Yesterday, I was selling ads for the Log staff. I went to one company to sell. The owner said he would take one this time, but not ever again because of the trouble at the football game. I tried to defend HHS as best I could, but we were at fault in a way. The situation at our only high school has affected all residents of Hickory in a hurting way. (*The Twig*, September 28, 1970)

The predominant theme among the students, Black and White, was a desire for compromise that would enable all to come together as one body. One African-American student expressed it well commenting:

I don't care if there are 12 black cheerleaders. The number of cheerleaders is not the issue. The problem is finding a way to unite our school. When we begin to accept a person as a person and not as black or white, we will solve our problems. The cheerleader issue cannot be solved by one side giving in. We must compromise and then form a relationship which will grow and unite Hickory High. (*The Twig*, September 28, 1970)

A White student echoed the same sentiment:

Sure lots of people said that the blacks were wrong and lots said that the whites were. In my opinion, they both were! I don't believe that there is anyone in Hickory who isn't prejudiced in one manner or the other. We must now start to begin to make this school one again. It will take lots of time, work, feelings will be hurt, and many things will be changed. Let's make it a worthy project to solve

our problems and show others that they can be. Let's pray we don't have another year like this one. (*The Twig*, September 28, 1970)

Tensions remained high in the community as well. A month after the protest, there was still no resolution to the narrow issue of adding African-American cheerleaders to the squad. Right after the protest, the school board had delegated the decision to the principal and school staff. According to *The Hickory Daily Record*, Principal Miller appointed a student committee to explore how to add African-American cheerleaders for the current year and beyond, but no action had resulted. In response to this lack of action, a group of eight Negro citizens attended the school board meeting on October 6, 1970. Their spokesman, Mr. Billy Suddreth, presented a list of Black demands which was strikingly similar to the series of requests presented to the board in August 1968. Though cheerleaders were listed, the requests focused on African-American representation and involvement in decision-making more broadly. The demands included:

1. a Black coach be hired for the High School to assist the High School coach. [The African-American coach at Ridgeview High School was transferred to Grandview Junior High when Ridgeview closed.]
2. a course in Black Studies be added to the curriculum to insure Black students a knowledge of self and kind.
3. a Black Human Relations Counselor be hired for the High School.
4. more buses be added to transport Black students to the High School and the Junior High School.
5. two committees, one chosen by the Black Student Union, and one chosen by the Human Relations Council; with three representatives each, along with Mr. Miller, decide the suspension of students.
6. six Black cheerleaders be added to the cheerleading squad for the school year 1970-71.
7. more Black students are added to the Student Council to fill the vacant seats of the Council. These Black students should be selected by the Black Student Union for the year 1970-71.

8. for the following years, all elections held at Hickory High School be done by either of the systems suggested by the North Carolina Student Task Force.

Mr. Suddreth closed his discussion by accusing the Board, the Superintendent, and the Principal of the High school of discriminating against African-American students (School Board Notes, October 6, 1970).

The next day, October 7, 1970, a letter from the editor of the *Hickory Daily Record* expressed frustration over the protest and offered a solution of discontinuing all extracurricular activities until student protests ended. The editor claimed that sports were non-essential to the basic mission of learning and that sports gave only a “flavor to school life.” He wrote that, “much of the renewed agitation over school integration in Hickory and elsewhere in the South appears to center around what many consider non-essentials—sports activities and their attendant and supporting program.” While he acknowledged that African-American students were understandably upset over the loss of their school, the editor sought a quick solution to their protests over the composition of the cheerleading squad.

One method of meeting these black protests is to eliminate all such programs—football and basketball contests, marching bands, all extracurricular activity. This is, however, a drastic step, and one not designed to find much support among the whites or blacks. If conditions worsen here, this step might be worth considering by school authorities. (*Hickory Daily Record*, October 7, 1970)

The editor named a nearby school system, Rowan County Schools, which banned all extracurricular activities in order to break a student boycott. The focus of the editor’s comment was on squashing student voice rather than hearing the content of the student

concerns. The assumption underlying his comments was that no valid perspective could be found within the protest.

The Hickory High school faculty challenged the negative tone and solution offered by providing their own letter to the editor of the *Hickory Daily Record* on October 14, 1970. It read:

As members of the faculty of [Hickory] High School, we would like to add our voices to that of our principal, Mr. Miller, in challenging members of all groups: students, administration, faculty, and other citizens, to take a positive look at those many things that unite us and work to solve the few that divide us. . . . May each adult think carefully of the influence of our remarks on our young people in order not to add to the list of youngsters in trouble. We approve with Mr. Miller: 'what is needed is both groups pushing for patriotism and loyalty to our school and community', and we pledge ourselves to him in accomplishing this task. (*Hickory Daily Record*, October 14, 1970)

Even with the positive outlook from teachers, the cheerleader dispute remained unresolved for five more months. In early March, the group of eight African-American community members requested a report on what had been done to address their concerns stated to the board the previous October, one of which related to the selection of cheerleaders. The superintendent replied during the March 2 board meeting. Within his response to all the requests, there was a statement regarding the selection of cheerleaders that would ensure representation of African-American students. For the coming school year, 1971-1972, there would be four seats on the varsity squad designated by race, one for an eleventh grade African-American girl, one for a tenth grade African-American girl, one for an White eleventh grade girl and one for a tenth grade White girl. The six remaining seats on varsity would be filled without regard to race. Furthermore, the

election of the upcoming varsity cheerleading squad would take place in the “immediate future” (School Board Notes, March 2, 1971). On the junior varsity squad, out of eight total seats, there would be two seats for African-American cheerleaders and two for White cheerleaders, without regard to grade level. The junior varsity cheerleader elections would take place in the early fall after students returned to school (School Board Notes, March 2, 1971). This plan resulted in four seats for African-American cheerleaders. This was a compromise solution between the six spots requested by African-American students and the two seats offered by the principal upon the original request.

Because cheerleaders for the 1970-1971 school year were not addressed, there is no evidence that African-American cheerleaders were ever added to the squad during that school year. Nothing more on the issue of African-American cheerleaders appears in school board notes or *The Hickory Daily Record*. Because there were no further protests regarding cheerleaders, we can assume that the principal followed through with the plan on designated seats for the election. African-American cheerleaders appear in the school yearbook in all the years that followed. At some point later, the selection of cheerleaders shifted from popular election by students to selection by a panel of judges after a try-out demonstration of cheerleading ability. Cheerleaders at Hickory High are currently selected through a try-out process.

The cheerleading conflict is another important episode in the history of Hickory High and school integration literature. There are several significant themes including delegation of decision-making to the principal, compromise as response to student

protest, student newspaper as an open forum for discussion of ideas, the role of a student leadership, and the important role of extracurricular activities in creating student community.

Though the School Board was pulled into the situation and considered mandating a solution, they delegated the decision back to the principal. On one hand, this was an appropriate response given the school board's function for setting rather than enforcing policy. On the other hand, the board should not flirt with directing the principal and then back off. In both the Dixie and the cheerleader conflict, the principal was left to manage the situation and solution. By coming close to a decision and then backing off, the board appeared weak and members unwilling to get their hands dirty with the political fallout sure to come. Principal Miller seemed less open to seeking a compromise solution to the Cheerleader conflict than he was in the Dixie conflict. He offered a compromise early by offering appointments to two African-American cheerleaders. After the situation exploded, there was no quick action by administration. Instead, Principal Miller made no final decision for many months. When he did, it was a compromise solution that fell between the requested six seats for African-American cheerleaders and his original offer of two.

Student leadership in the Cheerleader conflict is especially clear. Students raised the issue, controlled the negotiations, and propelled the protests. The White adult response in this conflict was not supportive to African-American students. Early in the conflict, the principal and the board were resistant to the request and later, they worked to squelch the protest, especially when it boiled over into the larger community. The student

voices, on both sides of the conflict, were most clearly heard through the student newspaper. *The Twig*, then, served as an important forum through which students could express their views and exert leadership.

Finally, the cheerleader conflict is a second example of the importance of extracurricular activities in building an inclusive school community. Both the African-American and White students obviously drew great meaning from Hickory High's athletic program and how it represented the school's culture. Both groups of students cared about the message conveyed by the composition of the cheerleading squad. The exclusion of African-American students was troubling to its new student population. The adults throughout the community also recognized the importance of sports to students or the paper would not have suggested a possible ban on sports as a means to break the student protest.

Is the Pen Mightier than the Sword?: Letters to the Editor Conflict

Two years after the cheerleader conflict, another conflict arose among the students. This conflict, like the cheerleader and Dixie conflicts, revolved around the extracurricular program. At issue in the letter to the editor conflict was whether African-American students were fairly included in student council and other school leadership positions. Within that issue was an equally important concern about the overall treatment of African-American students by the White students.

African-American students at Hickory High School were just as concerned about being represented on student council as they were about cheerleading. Each time the issue of African-American representation in campus life was raised, student council elections

were paired with election of cheerleaders. On March 2, 1971, when the Superintendent Wishon addressed the board on cheerleader elections, he also explained how Hickory High planned to handle student council elections to ensure African-American representation. Of the six student council seats for seniors, one seat would be designated for an African-American student, one seat would be designated for a White student, and four seats would be open to students without regard to race. The six student council seats for the junior class would be handled in the same way. Student Council elections for the junior and senior classes were scheduled for take place before the end of the school year. The sophomore class had four seats on Student Council with one seat designated for an African-American student, one designated for a White student and two at-large seats. Student Council elections for incoming sophomores would take place when school opened in the fall (School Board Notes, March 2, 1971).

The plan for proportional representation must have satisfied the students to some extent because there is nothing in school board notes, the *Hickory Daily Record* or *The Twig* during 1971 and 1972 that indicates outward conflict on this issue. Was there really no conflict or were the tensions kept out of the media? Had the students reached a *détente* with respect to racial issues or were the African-American students simply not voicing concerns? In either case, the silence was broken in the spring of 1973 with a letter to the editor of *The Twig*. On April 13, 1973, an African-American student expressed his frustration with student council elections, the school newspaper's silence on African-American student issues, and racial slurs written in one of the school bathrooms. His letter follows:

For the past few weeks, I have been trying to overlook the way this school's government has let things happen around the school and how it is being represented in *The Twig*. Correct me if I am wrong, but I do not wish to apologize for any of the things that I am about to say!

First of all, consider the student elections. These elections are primarily for the white students. I know that what I have stated may not be totally true, but in any case, most of the offices are held by whites. My interest is not founded in by whom the offices are held, but why? I seek not to start up any racial tensions between any groups, organizations or personal parties, but I would like to kick things up with somebody.

Why does *The Twig* always have the good along with the not-so-good in its articles? WHAT ABOUT THE BAD? The elections are a big deal for candidates who hang signs and slogans all over the place and write on anything that will show what they stand for, and really say, "Vote for me, I'm white!"

Did you, the whites, really know what you were doing when you invented elections? They are about as slanted as your handwriting. Whites are wrong, but what they stand for is even worse. You cheat, hold contempt for, and stereotype the members of any other race. You do wrong and expect praise for it. I only want to ask *The Twig*, "What the HELL is going on?" Why can't some changes be made?!!

I have talked to the so-called editor of this outstanding newspaper, and even he is dumbfounded. These questions ring throughout the minds of the students and halls of our school. If you think not, go read the writing on the wall – the wall of the men's bathroom in the purple section of the school.

Yes, I am inviting all of you to read and see what is going to be done about this to help "us brothers" live together. Let's hear some of things that go on in the school everybody pretends to be proud of. Tell us what the slurs written on the bathroom wall mean. Why not give us, the students, a bit of counseling?

Maybe if *The Twig* does not feel that it is their responsibility, the students will take it into their own hands, and if they do—look out new high school. (*The Twig*, April 13, 1973)

The African-American student's call to "kick things up with somebody" was answered by a White student who replied with a letter to *The Twig* on May 4, 1973. This letter was equally direct in tone and views on race:

This letter is in answer to the letter of [name deleted]. In his letter he wrote, "Correct me if I am wrong." Well, he was wrong and here are some corrections. In his opening paragraphs he accuses that the student elections are held primarily for benefit of white students. He bases the accusation on the fact that the majority of the offices are held by whites. Let's look at a few of the facts that [he] conveniently pushes under the door.

To begin with, the Student Council has adopted election procedures that guarantee one black and one white student a seat on the Council. A total of four places are open to students of any race. In the last election the incumbent junior black candidate was unopposed and was guaranteed election. In the sophomore class the incumbent black was also unopposed. Only one other black besides the two incumbents sought election for an office.

The spirit leaders [students selected to lead cheers by other student fans within the stands] are elected in the same manner with one guaranteed white and one guaranteed black and two open seats. But as you know, there were no blacks who applied for this position. Is it the fault of white students that blacks show a lack of interest in student affairs? Do blacks expect something for nothing?

In his letter he accuses whites of stereotyping members of other races, while in the same paragraph he stereotypes whites. He implies that whites are wrong and stand for something worse. The very same could be said of blacks. It all depends on whose views are being given. I say stop blaming whites for a lack of interest on the part of blacks. Whites have been scapegoats for faults of blacks long enough.

Finally, I ask the white students of Hickory high school to stop and look at what is going on. Our rights and privileges are being slowly taken away and given to those who misuse and abuse them. It is time for a change. (*The Twig*, May 4, 1973)

Students at Hickory High School responded to the provocative student letters with violence. A fight broke out at 11:00 am on Friday, May 4, 1973, the day the second letter was published. The fight lasted only about 10 minutes, but one student required hospital treatment and school was closed shortly thereafter. The *Hickory Daily Record* reported the fight, linking it to the exchange of letters in *The Twig* (May 5, 1973). The school board met the next day to discuss the incident at Hickory High and decided to reopen

school on Monday, May 7 (School Board Notes, May 5, 1973). However, the board reversed its decision and closed school on Monday after a second school board meeting was called on Sunday (School Board Notes, May 6, 1973).

Board members called the second meeting after hearing of “black and white high school student assemblies [that took place] in their respective communities” on Saturday (School Board Notes, May 6, 1973). At these community meetings, students were reportedly planning to retaliate on Monday. The *Hickory Daily Record* added further detail, reporting that there had been a gathering of approximately 190 White students at the Hickory Foundation Center and about 115 of them signed a pledge to support each other if violence erupted again at the school. Principal Miller said that the pupils “had planned to meet for 10 minutes before school in the parking lot to organize [Monday] morning. Students said that they would obey police and faculty members, but planned to post their own members as hall monitors” (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 7, 1973). The paper also reported “rumors of a black pupil meeting being held with a bonfire at Ridgeview High School” (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 7, 1973).

Though the *Hickory Daily Record* had no details on an African-American student meeting in Ridgeview, a student who was there remembers it. He commented that, “every time something like that happened, there was always a meeting amongst the students. The older students [would] tell us how to watch, how to act, how to do, for our own benefit so we wouldn’t get wiped out.” He recalled that specific conflict and the student meeting:

I came over here and opened up that paper and seen (sic) that picture and the first place I went [was to the home of] Rev. White [who] stayed right across the street over in that parsonage. When he opened his door, I showed it to him. He said,

what you going to do? I said, we already in a meeting. We're just letting you all know what we are doing. So they came. The parents did more arguing amongst themselves. We already knew what the deal was. We are going back to school. We are not going to fight. But we are not going to be bullied and we are not going to be done any certain way. We're going back to talk. Prior to those elections coming up we knew that the elections weren't fair as far as having a number of folks on the cheerleading squad different things like that. (Personal Interview, February 4, 2011)

The picture that the student references from the *Hickory Daily Record* is a photograph from inside the school during the fight on Friday, May 4, 1973. The photograph does not show an inter-racial brawl with both African-American and White students equally involved, but focuses the lens on an African-American student holding a chair over his head, swinging toward a White student. The image is one of an aggressive attacker and represents a one-sided view of the altercation. Twenty-eight years after the event, the African-American student interviewed still had vivid memories of the biased view portrayed by the *Hickory Daily Record*.

It was a difficult weekend in Hickory, to be sure. Though the following events may not have been connected with anything going on at the school, they certainly give context of the unsettled racial environment within Hickory at large. In addition to the racially motivated student meetings held in the White and African-American communities that weekend, a White Hickory youth was shot and killed late Sunday by an African-American youth, apparently following a racial altercation. The *Hickory Daily Record* reported all the details of the shooting, but did not mention whether the teens involved were students at Hickory High. According to the paper, the incident began when a "white youth, Steve Falcone, was accosted by two black youths at a telephone booth

near [his] apartment. Falcone went back to [his] apartment and told his friends, some of whom set out to find the blacks” (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 8, 1973). The story continues later that evening when:

Four carloads of blacks later arrived at the apartment occupied by white youths. Bottles and rocks were thrown by both sides. Then, a black youth jumped out of the lead car with a rifle. [The white youths] ran into the apartment. The last [one] through the doorway was shot. (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 8, 1973)

A White student who was present during the fight at school remembers the tension in the community and the shooting of the White youth by an African-American youth.

Yes, school was closed for that day and I’m not sure [how much longer]. I know there were riots over in the black community the next few nights. Remember [student by name] that I told you about? That weekend, he shot and killed a guy, and went to prison. (Personal Interview, February 1, 2011)

Resolution

While school was closed to students on Monday, State Human Relations consultants conducted sessions with school personnel. There was another special school board meeting at 7:30 pm on Monday night with 150 students, teachers, and citizens in attendance. During the discussion, the African-American and White students present pledged themselves to peaceful conduct when the school opened. The board reached consensus that Hickory High should open on Tuesday, May 8 (School Board Notes, May 7, 1971). The school did open without incident, though neither the issue nor the feelings had been resolved.

According to the *Hickory Daily Record*, tensions remained high in the school on Wednesday, May 9, 1973 with police officers on standby and with representatives from the State Human Relations Council meeting with groups of students and teachers throughout the day. A good portion of the students, about 250, stayed out of school that day. One White student remembers student leaders working with guidance counselors to ease the hard feelings. He commented:

I remember after that riot at the school, they had me and a number of whites and then a number of blacks – some of the leading black students – over to [meet with] the guidance counselor. We talked back and forth some and then they ended up at the end [with] both one white and one black [student who] made a statement. They had an assembly and I think Rick Barnes, who is now the head coach at Texas, made the statement for the Whites. (Personal Interview, February 1, 2011)

The *Hickory Daily Record* reported the student statements made in an article on Thursday, May 10.

A group of four black and four white pupils met in an attempt to reconcile difficulties that have been troubling the school. They decided to ask permission of school authorities to make a joint statement to the student body this morning. Permission was granted and pupils began gathering in the school mall about 9:15 am. Henry Thomas and Rick Barnes, both graduating seniors, were the spokesmen for the group. They [said that] violence was not the way to solve their problems and pledged themselves and their group to do all in their power to avoid it. (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 10, 1973)

Rick Barnes, in a personal interview (July 20, 2012), explained that the group of students who met were members of the Junior Human Relations Council (JHRC) and they met regularly to discuss student relations and to seek ways to improve student climate at Hickory High. Rick Barnes and Henry Thomas were the members of the JHRC who

volunteered to act as spokespersons for the student body to advocate a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The School Newspaper, *The Twig*, published the two students' statements a week later on May 18, 1973. The first statement came from Rick Barnes, a White student athlete who played basketball during all his years at Hickory High. Rick Barnes later earned a scholarship to play basketball in college. Through athletics and growing up not far from the Ridgeview Community, Barnes had established friendships with African-American students on the court (Personal Interview, July 20, 2012). These relationships gave him a credible voice for student reconciliation. Rick began his letter with commentary that showed his belief in the importance of cross-racial friendships:

I believe that both blacks and whites have come to realize that a divided school or community cannot survive. We feel that both groups have realized that school is an institution for gaining an education and developing lasting friendships between students of all back grounds. (*The Twig*, May 18, 1973)

He acknowledged the anger and hurt of students on both sides of the disagreement stating, "I'm sure now both sides feel the tremendous split between old friendships already formed." His request to end the dispute was another appeal for friendship and the importance of a successfully integrated high school.

The time has come to seal those friendships for the final time. I hope all of you, both black and white, will help me in achieving this goal. How well we mend our differences will determine to a large extent the attitude of Hickory High next year. Will it be a racially torn building? Or will it be a true institution of learning with black and white united for common goals. It is our choice. Both sides have now proven their unity, and it is no longer in question. Please hold all students in respect as students and as friends. (*The Twig*, May 18, 1973)

Henry Thomas, an African-American student athlete, was also respected for his ability to establish friendships across racial lines. Thomas began his statement by acknowledging that little had been achieved through racial conflict. “Brothers, Sisters, Class of ‘73, with a few weeks left in school, what have we accomplished with violence? Nothing! It is time now to compromise and think of the last four days.” Though he sought an end to the conflict and violence, Henry did not back off from the sentiment that things were not going well for African-American students at Hickory High:

We, the blacks, have come to the conclusion that violence is not the answer to the problems that are now arising. With this thought in mind, there have to be some changes made for our future brothers and sisters, both black and white. Unity means togetherness. We are together, but are we unified?”

Henry ended his letter with plea that students agree to a peaceful end, “To be true, we declare a state of Peace and will uphold this if you will agree also” (*The Twig*, May 18, 1973).

The Aftermath

Though the student statements were eloquent, it is impossible to know if they were effective. With school summer dismissal just days away, the students were returning to their own communities for a cool down period. While the central issues of this conflict were African-American student participation in campus life, racism on campus and direct racial violence, there was at least one other issue. This incident began with the publishing of inflammatory letters printed in the school newspaper, raising an important question about the role of the media. Do the media simply report the news or do they shape the news by what they choose to print? Do school newspapers bear a different responsibility

than other papers? One student found *The Twig*'s decision to print the letters as written to be irresponsible, voicing this concern in *The Twig* on May 18, 1973. The student claimed support for "editorial freedom" of *The Twig*, but questioned "putting of a few people's rights before the rights of a large group of people." He claimed that by allowing freedom of speech to the two students who wrote inflammatory letters, "the right of the majority of HHS students to receive an education and walk unmolested through the building was infringed upon." The student called for closer oversight of *The Twig*'s editorial board in selection of letters to print. He suggested that the editor could work with students to revise "trouble-making letters" (*The Twig*, May 18, 1973).

Parents and community remained upset and unresolved on the issues, even after calm returned to Hickory High School. School board notes reveal that a spokesperson for members of the Ridgeview community, Sam Tucker, addressed the board on May 14, 1973, stating some of the same concerns that had been shared on several previous occasions. Sam Tucker said that citizens of Ridgeview did not think that the "letter sent by [the White student] was the origin of the trouble. We feel that it was a buildup of some of the same things we asked you for in 1968 and 1970, and we are asking you for now" (*The Hickory Daily Record*, May 15, 1973). His group requested that African-American staff members be hired at Hickory High in order to "make [the African-American] students feel that they are a part of the high school." Tucker went on to say that:

While white pupils find it easy to identify with HHS, it is in a white neighborhood across town from the black community, and that the only school the black students can identify with is Ridgeview Elementary School, which after this year will be closed. (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 15, 1973)

Mr. Tucker attempted to identify the root of the problems at Hickory High:

We feel that our children have not been accepted by the teaching staff and the student body. We feel that what progress has been made at the high school has been made mostly by the students, and very little in the way of the attitude of the staff at the high school has changed. (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 15, 1973)

Mr. Tucker was respectful in tone throughout his comments, while emphasizing that the requests of the African-American community to the school board were not new. He concluded his plea for change stating that:

The students, parents and teachers are not like they used to be in the school system, so we cannot run our school system the way it used to be run. There have to be some exceptions and concessions made. We ask that for change to be made by the administration from the top down be implemented, and not wait for our children to integrate our school. (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 15, 1973)

Three days later, there was another school board meeting and over 200 people attended. They expressed views on a range of points related to student life at Hickory High School. Several community members addressed school rules and the discipline of students. A group of students and adults requested that the Board establish a procedure for improving human relations in the school. A teacher from Hickory High addressed the board in agreement with Sam Tucker, who spoke for the Ridgeview Community on May 14. She suggested that the school needed to hire additional African-American teachers with whom the students could relate (School Board Notes, May 17, 1973; *Hickory Daily Record*, May 18, 1973). There is no evidence that the board made administrative changes that responded to concerns raised at the meeting. However, the board continued to consider ways to improve student relations. In July, the board approved a plan, developed

in conjunction with the Hickory Human Relations Council, to train school staff at all levels in handling issues of diversity (*Hickory Daily Record*, July 17, 1973).

School board notes and local news stories indicate that nothing more was done to address the specifics of the conflict erupting over the student letters. The school year ended and the issue went away during the summer break. The board turned its attention to desegregation of the elementary schools, and preparing a plan so that the school system could receive federal funds through the Emergency School Aid Act. This was not the end of trouble for the students at Hickory High who experienced several more episodes of racial violence including two riots that were covered by the *Hickory Daily Record*. The next racial conflict involved cheerleaders who refused to cheer after a dispute with the coaches over dinner. Later, another fight occurred between White and African-American students at lunch after a White student threw a biscuit and it landed on the lunches of several African-American students. Finally, the board decided to seek a lasting solution to the ongoing racial tension. By the middle of the next school year, in February 1974, the school board voted to seek assistance from an outside agency who would determine the causes of racial conflict in the schools (School Board Notes, February 11, 1974). In March 1974, the school board hired the Southern Regional Council to “conduct an independent, thorough and impartial study of racial conflicts in the Hickory City Schools” (School Board Notes, February 11, 1973; School Board Notes, March 11, 1974). The Southern Regional Council completed the work and submitted a fifty-two page report of insights, conclusions and recommendations. Though the School Board

discussed the report, they never implemented the suggestions offered, nor published any final statement regarding the racial tensions within the Hickory Public Schools.

These four stories of student conflict after the desegregation of Hickory High were selected to illustrate the impact of policy and educational decision-making on the daily lives of the students. Through this examination of how students experienced desegregation, several important themes emerge. The first is that the changes associated with desegregation were messy. There are not clear, simplistic statements to summarize the perspectives of students and other stakeholders. Instead, there was a range of reactions and viewpoints. Some African-American students were pleased with the decision to desegregate and worked to create positive experiences at Hickory High. Other African-American students suffered terribly from the loss of Ridgeview High School and experienced racist treatment at Hickory High. Still many other African-American students experienced some mixture of positive and negative reaction to desegregation.

Likewise, the viewpoints and experiences of White students were equally mixed, ranging between racism and positive acceptance of their new classmates. As student comments in *The Twig* indicate, some White students thought that there should be no changes at Hickory High to adapt for the African-Americans students who joined the student body. The school fight song should not change and neither should there be accommodations for equal representation of African-American students in extracurricular activities such as cheerleading, student government, clubs, or leadership roles. Other White students were neutral on issues affecting African-American students and simply wanted the conflicts to end. Still other White students advocated for their African-

American classmates and actively sought changes that would create an inclusive school community for Hickory High.

Regardless of perspective, the students at Hickory High were making sense of daily student life as defined by political and educational leaders far above them within the school structure. This leads to a second theme within the stories of conflict, that students propelled the protest and compromise. The students at Hickory High demonstrated agency in seeking to create a school community that reflected the new, multi-ethnic student body. While there are examples that some adult decision-makers (school administrators and school board members) muffled student protest and ignored specific community requests for improving race relations, the students actively protested until their voices were heard. The African-American students protested a racist school fight song, the school resistance to select a cheerleading squad that represented the whole school population, and fair representation in student organizations. As Frederick Douglass commented on August 4, 1857, “power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will” (West India Emancipation Speech). The structures of student life at Hickory High did not change to reflect a desegregated student population until African-American students demanded it. Compromise and concession came only after African-American students demanded change through protest. Though White students did not drive protest, their voices of support were important for creating a consensus for necessary change. In both the Dixie and Cheerleader conflicts, the principal and the Junior Human Relations Council worked to gain widespread opinions and seek a consensus for change.

Another theme within these stories of conflict is the power of symbols within a school community. The symbolism of musical selections, cheerleaders, student council elections and the open nature of the school newspaper mattered more to students than what occurred within the classrooms. Relationships and equitable community are created through meaningful student interactions. These stories show us that within high school, this creation of community happens through extracurricular activities. Clubs, sports, and student government are the test labs through which students create school culture. The symbols of that culture matter to students and are worthy of conflict when they do not adequately reflect the students. In the next chapter, these themes will be further explicated and analyzed in light of other historical literature on school desegregation.

CHAPTER V

**WHAT MATTERED IN DESEGREGATION:
LOSS, RESISTANCE, LEADERSHIP, SPORTS, AND SYMBOLS**

The story of desegregation of Hickory Public Schools and four related student conflicts at Hickory High has been shared. This history captures the perspectives of students, administrators, and community members who directly experienced the events that changed a community. Beyond sharing the story of these events, the purpose of this study is to seek patterns within the events and gain a greater understanding of how students, staff and community members were affected. An analysis of the events may help gain deeper insight into the decisions and reactions that changed Hickory High and all those connected to it.

While brief summary analysis followed each story of conflict, this chapter goes into greater depth to consider themes in light of the historical literature on public school desegregation. In order to narrow the focus of historical analysis, I will draw from several sources. First, I will make comparisons to desegregation in other North Carolina school systems including Hyde County, Greensboro, and Charlotte. The desegregation literature on these school districts includes *Along Freedom Road* (Cecelski, 1994), *Civilities and Civil Rights* (Chafe, 1981), and *The Dream Long Deferred* (Gaillard, 1988). In addition, I will compare the experiences of African-American students to the findings of Siddle Walker (1996) who analyzed the closing of Caswell County Training Academy in her work, *Their Highest Potential*. Finally, I will make broad connections to Timothy

Tyson's social commentary on the civil rights struggle of Oxford, North Carolina in *Blood Done Sign My Name*.

Several themes emerged in the stories of student conflict at Hickory High. The first theme to be explored relates to the losses that African-American and White students experienced with the desegregation of Hickory High and the closing of Ridgeview High School. Resistance is the second theme that plays out through the stories of desegregation in Hickory. Resistance marks not only the preparation for implementation of the plan to desegregate, but also characterizes White and African-American student behavior when all students came together at Hickory High. The third theme, leadership, encompasses both the lack of leadership to plan for and create a positive desegregated school community as well as the demonstrated leadership of specific students and adults to deal with issues faced by students at Hickory High after desegregation. The fourth theme is the surprising finding that sports served as a catalyst and arena for social change at Hickory High. Finally, the power of symbols in creating and representing a school emerged as a theme. The important issues at the root of the student conflicts were symbolic in nature and conveyed special meaning about the school culture.

Losing Ridgeview and the Old Hickory High

The *Brown* ruling highlights the highest hopes for school integration. However, the reality in Hickory was something different for the Ridgeview community. The African-American students and their families lost much in the desegregation of Hickory Public Schools. They lost the physical space of Ridgeview High School. Not only were the students transferred, but the high school wing, the newest part of Ridgeview School,

was torn down less than ten years after it was built rather than use it to help achieve desegregation (Personal Interview, July 10, 2012). The students and families lost an important symbol of community pride. Finally and most devastating in terms of academic achievement, the African-American students lost the warmth of institutional care they experienced at Ridgeview High School.

Though African-Americans across the country and in Hickory had great hope of the good that would come of public school desegregation, they also realized significant losses. Cecelski (1994) notes that the closing of African-American schools was part of the pattern of racism that “marred school desegregation throughout the South” (p. 7). This closing of African-American schools robbed African-American communities of important symbols of their educational heritage (p. 9). This was the case for the Ridgeview community, a fact that still plays out in Hickory. A former Ridgeview student and current community resident commented that:

I never thought I would see the Ridgeview area in the shape it is in now. They have taken everything from our children. We had it good back then. The kids now don't know what it was to go through what we went through. And it's a sad situation to look back and see they kind of destroyed, have taken away the Ridgeview area. (Personal Interview, February 21, 2011)

She went on regarding the degradation of the community services:

Integration in Hickory Public Schools took a lot out of all of us. The library, the old library sitting over there, right down Center Street by Friendship Church where I go, it's just sitting there. And just like when they shut the pools down. When my grandson came up here, last year from Georgia, it was on a Saturday. I had to pay \$15 for him to swim for 45 minutes over there at the Y. The kids don't have access. Their parents don't have that kind of money. They don't have. Some don't have cars. So that's a reflection that they don't care anything about blacks

over here in Ridgeview area now. Who can afford to pay \$15? Who can buy a membership? It's sad that they took that. (Personal Interview, February 21, 2011)

Another former student and Ridgeview resident agreed with the steep community cost of desegregation.

We have to account of the blame ourselves because I think we could have did a little more to push it to keep things going. But when you break a person's spirit some, like when Ridgeview closed. It did. You looked forward to the football games, looking for the basketball games. You look for the glee club to sing. You look for the kids to be at the pool and on the corners. And kids on the corners now, they get in trouble. Back then [when] we were on the corners, all you did was sing. If you were on a corner, you were in a group singing this and singing that. That was it. Now they don't even have a chorus. What can you say is Ridgeview, but the name? (Personal Interview, February 7, 2011).

It is clear that the closing of Ridgeview High School to desegregate Hickory High had a negative impact on the African-American community, just as the closings of other Black schools hurt African-American communities across the South. Not only were the students pulled from their beloved school, but also Ridgeview School, a symbol for the community, was torn down several years after the high school students were transferred to Hickory High.

During the work to create the plan for school desegregation, several meetings were held during which public input was sought. The *Hickory Daily Record* reported that during one of these meetings, an African-American community member wondered aloud:

Have you considered a grammar department (fourth, fifth and sixth grades) at the old High School building? Most of our black young people identify with Ridgeview. They have seen their high school go. Our young adults identify with Ridgeview. They do not want to see our school closed and their young children move out to other schools. They're going to ask where the boundaries are. It

seems as if we're having to pay because we're the minority. (*Hickory Daily Record*, March 7, 1972)

Patterson (2001) and Chafe (1981) both note that throughout the south, school officials achieved high school desegregation by sending African-American students to formerly White schools, either closing African-American high schools or converting them to elementary or junior high schools. Likewise, Cecelski (1994) commented that desegregation “did not merge black and white schools” as much as it “obliterated black schools” (pp. 57-58).

More than forty years later, Ridgeview community members still feel resentment and frustration over the closing and demolition of Ridgeview School. A former Ridgeview student commented:

Even after we integrated and they moved us, they had Ridgeview there. The Black families, the community, [and] the one [representative] on the Board got together [with the thought that] let's keep Ridgeview open and change it and start bussing some [students] over there. They just ended up closing it down and tearing it down. And that's sad. Why couldn't [the school system] bus a lot of students over there? I think they [tore it down] because that was a historical place. It should've still been here. If anything, they should have left it up and standing. It was a big issue among neighborhood people. (Personal Interview, February 7, 2011)

In their study of the effects of desegregation on African-American students, Irvine and Irvine (1983) and Siddle Walker (1996) discuss the role of community and how segregated schools within African-American communities served as a channel for enacting collective values, solidarity and shared aspirations. This notion comes through in remembrances of Ridgeview.

We had good Negro leaders. They were very intelligent teachers, smart teachers. There were people in the community who didn't have an education but they had so much wisdom and 'street smarts' they could teach you a lot if you take time to learn. That's why it was a community thing. When you got involved in one thing and if somebody in the community seen (sic) you trying to get ahead, they would help you. Everybody watched over each other. If one went to school, if you got into trouble, if you got a whooping at school, you got a whooping at home. Then, the neighbor might whoop you too. (Personal Interview, February 7, 2011)

Siddle Walker (1996), in her study of one segregated African-American school in the South, concurs that before desegregation African-American communities built up their youth. "Culturally, the community also held common beliefs about children. These community beliefs about the relationship of young people to adults created a web of interdependence in which the responsibility for the raising of children was seen as a joint task" (p. 213). At Ridgeview School, African-American students learned to value education and worked hard to meet the high expectations teachers held for them. A former student explained that the community:

. . . put emphasis on education, on academics 'cause that was a big thing in this community and that community at that time was about education. People that you looked up to were the educated. You weren't going to play sports if you didn't do your school work no matter who it was. That didn't have to come from the school system. That was coming from the parents. And you did not bring a bad grade home when your parents knew that you could do better. That would be another wrath you would have to suffer, because they didn't take nothing. [Education provided] a hope for a certain generation of people. (Personal Interview, February 4, 2011)

Another Ridgeview student emphasized this kind of community support for schooling and the loss that came with desegregation:

There was a strong emphasis on education in the Ridgeview community. So there was more of a hope to raise the people, let's say to integrate. But it did its damages because you took them out of a culture. It wasn't that you put them in another culture, you took them from a way of learning. (Personal Interview, February 21, 2011)

Siddle Walker (1996) describes these expectations as institutional caring, that teachers in segregated African-American schools cared about their students and expected them to learn, regardless of the materials and means available. Institutional caring “encompassed the human relationships that existed between the major participants and the institutional structures created as a result of that caring” (p. 201). This manner of teacher caring drew the students to Ridgeview School like magnets. A former Ridgeview student remembers:

I looked forward to going to school when I was at Ridgeview High. I didn't want to miss a day. When we had snow days, I looked forward to getting [back] and learning. Everybody needs an encouraging word. You are doing good, but you can do a little better. Back then, they had more time to work with us. We didn't miss classes. We looked forward to going to classes. (Personal Interview, February 21, 2011)

Given the positive community feeling about Ridgeview School, there was ambivalence about leaving it for an integrated school experience. Leaving Ridgeview High School was difficult for the students of the Ridgeview community. One said, “It was painful. It was hard. You [were] leaving home, leaving your nest.” Leaving the Ridgeview ‘nest’ is explained by Irvine and Irvine (1983) as African-American students venturing away from the safety of African-American institutional systems and community solidarity into a White community. As Hickory High principal, Mr. Miller

explained to the Kiwanis Club on April 5, 1969, when the African-American students left Ridgeview for Hickory High, they entered “a strange world. It was not his school; his friends were few and far apart, and the trophies and old school spirit were gone” (*Hickory Daily Record*, April 5, 1969). Patterson (2001) cites a similar reaction by an African-American student in Wilmington, NC. She attended the segregated, African American Williston High School until desegregation. She commented on her happiness at Williston, “We were in a cocoon bathed in warm fluid, where we were expected to excel. [After desegregation], we went from our own land to being tourist in someone else’s” (p. 169).

Given the quality education and institutional caring experienced by students at Ridgeview High School as well as the symbolic importance of Ridgeview School within the community, the loss felt by African-American students is clear. Given their loss, it is not surprising that the African-American students were, at best, ambivalent about entering Hickory High.

While there is no doubt about the losses experienced by the African-American students, White students experienced loss as well. Their loss is not parallel to those of the African-American community, but can explain some of the reactions of White students during the events following desegregation. With school desegregation, White students were confronted with information, experiences, and new classmates that necessitated a revised view of African-Americans. Sokol (2006) explains that prior to integration, “White southerners often lived under the spell of their own collective history—or a certain interpretation of it” (p. 6). Tyson (2004) elaborates that “White southerners saw God’s blessing for the social order in the natural world around them. Any challenge to

white supremacy would represent a violation of Gods' eternal laws as fixed as the stars" (p. 183). Some White students at Hickory High believed that African-Americans were inferior to them. After desegregation, White students at Hickory High could not make quick generalizations about their African-American classmates without confrontation. For example, one White student claimed in a letter to the editor of the school newspaper that "the blacks have done very little to 'earn' things [such as] black cheerleaders, black Student Council representatives, black class officers, black coaches, and black history courses" (*The Twig*, March 5, 1971). He claimed that African-American students did not have the grades or work ethic of White students. He questioned, "why should they be 'given' these things when the whites must work hard for them" (*The Twig*, March 5, 1971). This expression of White power elicited many negative responses from his classmates, both African-American and White. Their reactions appeared in the next issue of *The Twig*. Several years later in 1973, similar negative sentiments about African-American students kicked off a riot at school. As a result of desegregation, some White students lost what they considered to be a sanctioned separate school space where racist comments could be expressed without confrontation.

Likewise, Celcelski (1994) found similar expressions of White hegemony during desegregation. School board discussions in Hyde County held during the creation of the Hyde County Schools compliance plan revealed that the some school board members believed that African-American students were less intelligent than their White peers. School board attorney, Davis, claimed that:

If black and white children attended class together, the quality of the education would have to suffer. Either the white children are going to have to wait for the colored to catch up or the colored are going to have to drop back and let the white go on. (as cited in Cecelski, 1994, p. 44)

The school leaders also expressed “serious doubts about the behavior of black children” claiming they would not attend school regularly and would behave in a disorderly fashion (p. 44). These statements about the state of African-American schooling can be seen as a proxy for deeper notions of White supremacy. While we don’t have student comments from Hyde County, it is quite likely that some White students echoed the thoughts of their parents on the school board.

In addition to the notion of superiority among some White students and their families, the White students who had long populated Hickory High had ownership of defining the school culture. White students, teachers and administrators jointly created Hickory High to reflect their customs and values. With desegregation, there were newcomers who might expect to be involved in creating the school culture. As a result, some White students feared the loss of the old Hickory High and the traditional symbols that represented it.

When African-American students protested use of the song “Dixie” to represent a desegregated Hickory High as the school fight song, over two hundred White students pushed back by staging a school walkout. One student commented that “we’ve played ‘Dixie’ at this school since 1925 and we’re not going to stop now!” (*The Twig*, December 12, 1969). Another White student indicated his fear of a changing school culture by commenting that, “the Whites have backed down too damn much” (*The Twig*, December

12, 1969). Patterson (2001), in his study of desegregation as a civil rights milestone, cites another high school protest against Confederate embellishments of the football team and the fears associated with school desegregation. He found numerous interracial struggles at junior and senior high schools related to expressions of school identity.

However, Patterson (2001) also found examples of positive interactions between African-American and White students. He claimed that, at the grass-roots levels, there was evidence that “well-meaning kids backed by enlightened teachers could surmount the racist pressures from prejudiced grown-ups” (pp. 162–167). At Hickory High, there were White students who facilitated compromise and change for the benefit of their new African-American classmates. In each of the four conflicts, there were at least several examples of White students at Hickory High who offered friendship and support to their African-American peers. Simple dichotomies and conclusions do not jibe with the messy reality found in desegregating public schools.

Resistance: The Unplanned, Unwanted, and Unknown

There are many examples of resistance by White and African-American students throughout the story of desegregating Hickory High School. Resistance should be understood here as the refusal to accept or comply with something. In the case of desegregating Hickory High, resistance was expressed toward policies, decisions, groups of people and individual students. Resistance as a general concept includes a range of behavior from polite disagreement to violent aggression and a range of emotional intent from simple ignorance to racist beliefs. At Hickory High, first there were acts of protest against mandates, policies, and specific decisions. Next, there were acts of aggression

toward individual students, both African-American and White. Finally, there were instances of prejudice and generalized negativity toward one racial group or the other.

Resistance began first with the refusal of White school and community leaders to create the state and federally mandated compliance plan for integration. Hickory Public Schools continued with a foot dragging approach to school integration until they were forced through loss of federal funds and court action to create and implement a plan for desegregation. Patterson (2001) notes that, across the South “white leaders kept resisting, complying only grudgingly and slowly to court orders” (p. 167). No evidence exists in the document history to explain the reasons why local leaders resisted implementation of *Brown II* and the Civil Rights Act. However, Patterson (2001) explores motive by pointing out that “White reaction” ranged from racist desires to “maintain social and economic superiority over people of color” to “moderate concerns about the quality of education” (p. 88). No matter the deeper motives of community leaders, the fact that it took Hickory eleven years after the *Brown* decision to create a compliance plan, making it one of the last districts in the state to comply, demonstrates an act of protest against federal and state policy.

One result of resistance by school and community leaders to plan for desegregation was the lack of student and teacher preparation for the social changes that would come to Hickory High. When the court battle was lost and the compliance plan approved in April 1966, school officials had only three months before African-American and White high school students would share one space. While three months was a short time, it still provided time to prepare students and teachers for what was to come.

However, no preparation took place. The Southern Regional Council, outside consultants on desegregation planning who advised Hickory Public Schools in 1974, noted the missed opportunity of preparing for desegregation. “Our research indicates that initial desegregation took place in Hickory despite a lack of planning or agreed upon procedures for preparing the overall community or preparing the faculty, students, and parents” (Southern Regional Council, 1974, p. 9). After reviewing the extensive research on desegregation compiled by the National School Public Relations Association, the Southern Regional Council (1974) determined that “one of the most important findings is the need to develop a basic plan of action” (p. 9). They further commented that:

The Hickory School System did what most other school systems have done during the initial years or the first phase of school desegregation, namely, they opted for dealing with the physical aspects of desegregation and, for whatever reasons, failed to develop any comprehensive plan for dealing with the human aspects, primarily preparing those who were affected directly by the impending changes. (p. 11)

This resistance toward preparing the students was noticed by students. One White student commented:

The summer before [desegregation], it was in the paper [that] this is going to happen and of course everybody chose sides and it was difficult. There wasn't any kind of [preparation with the students]. Well, what do you expect? I figure they probably just were trying to ignore it, they being the City of Hickory. [It was] like it wasn't going to happen [and that] it didn't have to happen to them. But then, they were forced and they had to do it and they probably held their breath to the last minute without really [preparing the students]. (Personal Interview, February 24, 2011)

This former student further commented that, “I don’t remember anybody ever talking to us. I don’t remember anybody saying – now look, these people are coming or look, this is going to change or look, you need to do” (Personal Interview, February 24, 2011).

Timothy Tyson (2004) also wrestles with social change coming to a small town in North Carolina in his work, *Blood Done Sign My Name*. It shows that the dynamics of White resistance toward advancing civil rights for African-Americans in Oxford were similar to Hickory. Tyson (2004) notes that it “became crystal clear to the blacks that there were powerful white people who did not want to see [the White perpetrators of a Black man’s murder] go to jail” (p. 140). As the White community continued to protect the three White men who killed Henry Marrow, the African-American community responded with protest and increasing violence. In Oxford, it took “a murderous and avoidable tragedy to summon the political will” to create social change (p. 252). In Hickory, there was no specific tragedy that brought forth social change, but change came through federal mandates and a court order. No matter the entry port for change, the resistance in Oxford and Hickory were similar. The Southern Regional Council’s (1974) final report noted that:

Throughout our interviews with persons immediately and directly involved with the Hickory City Schools, we were told repeatedly by most of them that there was absolutely too little community support in making desegregation work in the school system. This feeling was most prevalent among teachers and older students. (p. 34)

Once the court order was issued and question of whether desegregation would occur was settled, it became clear that two communities would come together under one roof. The lessons of desegregation in Hickory suggest that the most important task at that moment was blending the two student bodies into a new, shared community of students. The absence of preparation for entry of African-American students into Hickory High and the disregard for careful building of a shared community is the misstep that led to many of the controversies and conflicts that ensued. Given the lack of planning for student transition, the school system seems to have had little empathy for the 200 African-American students entering a White student body of 1,000.

Other examples of resistance toward policies, mandates, and decisions also contributed to the unrest. When the compliance plan was finalized, White parents protested through letters to legislators, verbal expressions at school board meetings, withdrawing their children to the county school system and opening North State Academy, a private segregated school. White families expressed clear refusal to accept the plans to desegregate. Later, there are examples of students expressing resistance to school policy. In a wholly different protest several years later in 1969, a group of 200 White students staged a school walkout over the possible elimination of “Dixie” as the school-fight song. Throughout the early years of desegregation, the Letters to the Editors section of *The Twig* functioned as an open space for written expressions of student protest.

The White students were not alone in displaying resistance after desegregation; they were joined by their African American classmates. Cecelski (1994) notes that in Hyde County like other districts across the South:

Black students within the new biracial schools did not quietly succumb to disillusionment or passively accept racist treatment. Especially from 1969 to 1973, they organized school boycotts and other protests. The spark might be a racial slur, an expulsion, or one of a hundred other incidents, but the underlying issues were always the deep strains of racial prejudice and white cultural arrogance that infected school desegregation. (p. 171)

At Hickory High, African-American students protested when they felt they were not fairly included or represented by the school's symbols and activities. African-American protests focused on a school fight song they perceived to be a racist reminder of the old South, exclusion from fair representation on the cheerleading squad, racist graffiti in the bathroom, and limited African American involvement in clubs and student council. An African-American student who participated in one of the conflicts at Hickory High explained the impetus behind protest.

Whenever you have a riot or anything, it is not the intention to tear up something. I think the intention or the statement that was being made is that we are just as equal as they are down there cheering – we need to be down there. Why are we up here in the stands? I don't know. (Personal Interview, February 4, 2011)

This student's sentiment mirrors Dr. Martin Luther King's comment that "a riot is at bottom the language of the unheard" (Tyson, 2004, p. 165).

At times, resistance toward school policies, practices and decisions turned into an uglier expression of aggression toward individuals. No longer did the protest take the

form of civil disobedience or active political engagement. Instead, students and adults personalized their feelings to treat others with malice. The strong emotions associated with active racism were surely underlying some of this behavior. One African-American student remembers that at the very beginning, it was challenging for both African-Americans and Whites to come together:

We were new. It was a challenge for them, too, for us to be there. The worst thing I remember was that they would throw spitballs at us sometime in the lunch room. And I always made a habit of sitting in the front of my class but other than that, I just ignored it. (Personal Interview, February 21, 2011)

Another African-American student who attended Hickory High before mandated desegregation as a freedom of transfer student remembers being taunted by a White classmate with racial slurs, and she reacted by chasing the student, “all the way from the school up town to First National Bank,” with five of her friends (Personal Interview, February 7, 2011).

While the school riot that began over letters to the editor about student council elections can be understood as protest against school practice, it also reveals individual aggression. The African-American student who began the correspondence in *The Twig* made several inflammatory statements including, “You cheat, hold contempt for, and stereotype the members of any other race. I only want to ask the Twig, ‘What the HELL is going on?’ Why can’t some changes be made?!!” (*The Twig*, April 13, 1973). One particular White student took personal offense and responded with equally provocative statements:

I say stop blaming whites for a lack of interest on the part of blacks. Whites have been scapegoats for faults of blacks long enough. Our rights and privileges are being slowly taken away and given to those who misuse and abuse them. (*The Twig*, May 4, 1973)

The next day, the fight broke out, starting with one of the authors of the letters. In this case, resistance to student practice around elections turned into physical aggression.

A final example of individual aggression relates to excessive punishment of an African-American student during the cheerleader conflict. After the conflict ended and students returned to school, a group of African-American students awaited the principal's decision on discipline of the unauthorized African-American cheerleaders. When the students learned that these girls would have a three-day suspension, 200 African-American students staged a walk-out. When these 200 students returned to school, they, too, received a three-day suspension for their behavior. However, the African-American football players who joined the walk-out received an additional consequence from their coach. These players were kicked off the team for the remainder of the season. For Rick Dula, this constituted the end of his high school football career. Dula, the first African-American quarterback at Hickory High, had been highlighted a month earlier in a Winston-Salem newspaper as a possible All-State quarterback. After just one game of his senior year, he was off the team for participating in a group walk-out. Forty-two years later, Dula still remembers a conversation with the head football coach in which the coach held him personally responsible for the cheerleader incident. The coach was so convinced of Rick Dula's leadership among the African-American students that he thought Rick could have ended their protest at any time. In a personal interview, Mr.

Dula reported having nightmares into adulthood about being removed from the football team (Personal Interview, November 1, 2012).

Finally, there were instances of prejudice toward one racial group or the other. In these cases, negative aggression across racial lines was more subtle than direct. One African-American student recalled that:

Some of the students more so than the teachers made more effort to make [things easier for African-American students]. Some of the teachers didn't a bit more care one way or the other. [They] didn't want it [desegregation], no more than we wanted it, and it was obvious. It showed in their faces, in the way they talked to you. (Personal Interview, February 7, 2011)

African-American student quotes in the 1972 yearbook reveal other evidences of prejudice, "I think that the relationship between black and white is just great, except for some teachers and students still want to call us colored" and the comment that inter-racial relations are "fantastic, except for a few redneck white supremacists" (The Log, p. 126).

The negativity and stereotyping by White students could have resulted from ignorance about their African-American classmates. The lack of interracial contact and preparation for desegregation caused fear and misunderstanding among the students. The White students did not know what to expect from their new classmates. They knew little, if anything, about Ridgeview High School, its warm climate, and its reputation for excellence. They made assumptions that African-American students were eager to attend the previously White school. A White student recalled:

I remember thinking, I remember seeing groups of blacks and they did not want to be there. They were so angry and it was like they had to come, they were being made to come and they just hated it. And I guess everybody was thinking, why

wouldn't you want to come here? But they didn't want any part of it. That [was] just being afraid I'm sure. I think I remember thinking, wow, everybody's just [been] basically picked up and thrown in [together] and you got into an environment that's so cliquey anyway (Personal Interview, February 24, 2011)

This comment reveals questions and confusion of a White student who could not understand the mixed emotions and losses that African-American students experienced as they were forced to leave a school they loved. In addition, the comment assumes that the environment and culture were race neutral. An African-American student challenged this assumption in a letter to the editor of *The Twig* in May of 1971. She explained:

Blacks are not from the same environment as whites. We must leave the environment we love and come to an environment where we are looked upon as inferior. It isn't easy for a black student to turn himself off to the things at home and turn on to being a "carbon copy imitation white" student. Some blacks don't mind trying to be a white while most aren't going to try to fool themselves into being something they're not. Blacks and whites live in two completely different worlds, and who is to say which is right. (*The Twig*, May, 1971)

Not only were White students surprised that African-American students did not wholly embrace their new school and accept White culture, they were threatened by it. A White student commented that, "Everybody was pretty high up on the chain and then all of a sudden somebody, anybody that came into their world that was not in this area was considered probably more of a threat than anything" (Personal Interview, February 24, 2011). Fear and mistrust on both sides affected group behavior. African-American students travelled through the school in groups in order to have the protection and support of their friends. White students, comfortable in the environment of Hickory High; saw the grouping of African-American students as a threat. A White student remembered that:

The blacks always congregated on the steps. They would always congregate on those steps and block the steps. It was always [crowded]. You had to push your way through them. And a lot of the white kids wouldn't do it. And that's another reason why I kind of got a bad name is cause it made me madder than hell, and I would just push my way through. They would try to intimidate you. They would always congregate on those steps and block the steps. (Personal Interview, February 1, 2011)

Another White student noted that:

What amazed me was that [African-American students] went everywhere in groups and if one was attacked they all took up. We, being the white people wouldn't do that. We had little cliques. If somebody picked on you, you would either leave or maybe you might have one or two people but—they did everything in groups. They didn't want to be there. They didn't want to interact with us. They didn't want to have anything to do us. (Personal Interview, February 24, 2011)

Prior to desegregation, the White and African-American communities were socially segregated from one another in terms of housing, church attendance, and recreational facilities. As a result, African-Americans were largely unknown to the Whites, causing more of a shock when African-American students arrived at Hickory High. A White student recalled the racial separation in Hickory:

I was in my own little world—it didn't have an effect on me. They [African-Americans] weren't anywhere, in any type of groups. Now, I remember my grandmother worked at Sears and I remember there was the colored water fountain. I remember that and I remember maybe seeing a few older people in the streets, but I never saw any blacks. In the bigger cities, I'm sure there was interaction. There was never any conflict anywhere else like the things went on at school. In the town, in our daily lives and everything, there was no conflict, there was no interaction. There was no awareness of anybody being around. And all of a sudden, these [African-American] people came like from another world into our world. It was hard to believe. (Personal Interview, February 24, 2011)

Another White student echoed the social isolation from African-Americans.

I lived a little cocoon. I didn't see the rest of the world. There was [an African-American woman] who helped my mom, [who] was my mom's maid and cook and baby sitter when they went out of town. That's about the only involvement with blacks. (Personal Interview, February 1, 2011)

When another White student was asked what she knew of the African-American community in Hickory, she responded that, "They had a pool. That's where all the black people went. That's all I knew about Ridgeview. [I] couldn't even tell you where it was probably to this day. I kind of know where it is" (Personal Interview, February 24, 2011).

The Southern Regional Council report (1974) supports this claim of cultural ignorance.

Most teachers have no feeling, sensitivity or awareness of the historical context in which they operate. They do not recognize that most blacks and whites have a different sense of history, especially different historical experiences which bring us together with different goals, priorities, and attitudes with regard to school desegregation. (p. 39)

When they surveyed teachers and students on a few simple questions related to African-American history, 77% of teachers didn't know what the *Brown* decision was and 73% didn't know there was an African-American Supreme Court justice. Furthermore, not one single student could respond correctly to either question. With increased knowledge of the history and politics of the civil rights movement and concern for African-American students, the transition to a single, integrated high school could have been a smoother process.

These remembrances underscore the separation of races in Hickory as Ridgeview High School was closing. White students had limited control over their lives and the community to gain knowledge of and exposure to African-American youth. Rather, the community leaders had influence and power to provide for cross-racial interaction, extension of civil rights and community preparation for desegregation. What are we to make of the firm racial separation maintained by the White decision-makers in Hickory? Regardless of desire or motive, the civil rights movement came to Hickory bringing all manner of changes with it. Patterson (2001) tells us that it was up to the community leaders to make positive the social changes that came with desegregation. "Change happened peacefully wherever courts and community leaders took pride in their school and held firm for desegregation" (p. 163). While Patterson (2001) notes several positive examples of desegregation, such as Charlotte, NC, there was a range of community responses. Sokol (2006) points out all manner of possible community outcomes of the civil rights movement, "it upended and recast everyday life, White southerners variously accepted, rejected and absorbed the untold effects of that interracial revolution" (p. 357).

While the whole community of Hickory experienced tumult during desegregation, the students bore the greatest burden. In the name of social progress, one group lost their school entirely and others had to re-think Hickory High as a shared community for everyone. The many instances of resistance, in its various forms, were an expression of how the new Hickory High should be, of how a school should reflect the students it serves. The African-American students at Hickory High wanted from desegregation what Darius Swann wanted from it in Charlotte, that is, acceptance of the gifts each student has

to offer. Frye Gaillard (1988), in his historical study of desegregation in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools included a reflection from Darius Swann, the father who brought the lawsuit that forced change in Charlotte. In 1986, Mr. Swann commented that:

People ask me whether I still believe in integration. I answer very guardedly. I believe in the integration that I believed in originally: We come together from different backgrounds, all sharing the gifts that we can offer to a richer society. I *don't believe* in taking a few black children and plopping them down in a white school where none of what they bring with them is accepted. (as cited in Gaillard, 1988, p. xx)

Leadership: Defined through Protest

The third theme that emerges from the social changes of desegregating Hickory High is leadership. The numerous examples of leadership during these events broaden our understanding of leadership in terms of its definition, where it resides and how it is expressed.

According to Bass and Avolio (1993), leadership is the “process of influencing group activities toward the achievement of goals” (p. 49). The goal-directed behavior of leaders is worth emphasis when studying the stories of desegregating Hickory High. What first appears to be a lack of leadership by school district officials can be more accurately understood by considering goal-directed behavior. The Southern Regional Council (1974) found a lack of leadership during the early stages of desegregation in Hickory:

Literally, all in-depth studies of what works and what does not work in desegregating schools conclude that leadership makes a difference in desegregation. Thus, during the crucial stages of implementing the first court order, the Hickory system was crippled by ‘lame duck’ leadership, by the fact that

no previous planning had taken place within the city system, and the failure of NC Office of Public Instruction to provide desegregation assistance to local systems. (p. 9)

Rather than a lack of leadership, school officials were seeking to forestall and sidestep compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Patterson (2001) found similarly that “other southern officials resorted to evasion, or sought to stall for time” rather than comply with the Civil Rights Act (p. 139). In his study of Greensboro, Chafe (1981) also found leadership behavior directed against desegregation. “North Carolina’s progressivism consisted primarily of its shrewdness in opposing racial change” (p. 70). At the state level, the Pearsall Plan was a clear act of leadership to circumvent the *Brown* ruling. Chafe shares the comment of one Little Rock school official to an associate in North Carolina: “You North Carolinians have devised one of the cleverest techniques of perpetuating segregation that we have seen” (p. 70).

To be sure, there was pressure from federal and state government on the School Board and district officials to desegregate the schools. However, local opinions on the matter differed. Members of the White community expressed resistance to the plan to desegregate. The apparent lack of preparation for desegregation was not the lack of leadership but leader behavior directed toward compliance as a last resort. A White student who attended Hickory High in the early days of desegregation commented on the adult leadership going into the first year of desegregation. She reflected that:

As far as being aware of anybody handling it or working on it in as far as leadership, I don’t have that recollection at all. It was more of something they just had to deal with. Not really that they were going to deal with but that it was just

kind of pushed on [them]. Everything seemed to be control, damage control.
(Personal Interview, February 4, 2011)

There are other examples of actions and decisions that highlight the goal-directed behavior of leadership. For example, while district and community leaders remained silent on specific student issues, Mr. Miller, the principal of Hickory High, remained near the center of every storm, providing leadership, sorting out conflict, and seeking compromise that would restore order for instruction. The students noted Principal Miller's leadership during the Dixie conflict in the 1970 Yearbook:

After holding these discussions and absorbing advice lent him through the Jr. Human Relations Council and letters from individual students, [Mr. Miller] brought a sensible compromise to Hickory High's student body. In these capacities the Principal worked for the unity of both the students and the teachers. Over the last few years, Mr. B.E. Miller has invoked his authority and maintained order in several predicaments which were causing turmoil within the school. (The Log, 1970, p. 39)

Though Principal Miller's leadership to forge a compromise was not as evident during the cheerleader conflict, Rick Dula, who was deeply involved in the situation, cites Principal Miller as a positive force seeking resolution and harmony for all students at Hickory High (Personal Interview, November 1, 2012). Mr. Miller's goal of maintaining an orderly and harmonious school is evident in his behaviors.

The Bass and Avolio (1993) definition of leadership as the process of influencing groups toward achieving goals makes no mention of where leadership resides. While many assume that leadership resides primarily in elected officials or otherwise authorized chiefs, the civil rights movement reveals that leadership also resides in ordinary people.

From the North Carolina stories of desegregation, the power of community members to lead is evident. Cecelski (1994) indicates that in Hyde County, when White school officials sought to transfer African-American students to previously all-White schools and close African-American schools, the African-American community formed a delegation that boycotted the school system. This group filed a petition protesting “blacks’ exclusion from the shaping of a desegregation plan” (p. 87). The end result of African-American community leadership was a referendum in which the citizens of Hyde County voted to keep open the two historic African-American schools and the eventual joint creation of an acceptable plan for school desegregation.

Likewise in Greensboro, Chafe (1981) shares many examples of community activism and student leadership to secure desegregation of public facilities. In Oxford, Tyson (2004), too, explores grassroots leadership found in the political activism of the Black Power movement that came to Oxford, NC in the late 1960s. Within the stories of desegregating Hickory High, we find similarly that leadership did not reside solely in school officials. Instead, there is ample evidence of leadership among community members and students.

The African-American community raised its voice numerous times after Ridgeview High School closed, requesting support for African-American students at Hickory High. During the third conflict, an African-American community member Sam Tucker spoke to the school board once again requesting assistance for students. He explained the student conflict as:

. . . a buildup of some of the same things we asked you for in 1968 and 1970, and we are asking you for now: A black counselor that black students can respect and relate to, a black coach or assistant coach, and representation on the boards, clubs and newspaper. [We also want] a black assistant principal, more black teachers and a black secretary. All these things are very vital to our students to make them feel that they are a part of the high school. We ask that a change in the mind of the administration from the top down be implemented, and not wait for our children to integrate our school. (*Hickory Daily Record*, May 15, 1973)

While there is no evidence that their requests were addressed, Sam Tucker and Billy Suddreth provided both public and private leadership of the African-American community.

An important and central finding within the Hickory story of desegregation is the leadership that existed among the students at Hickory High. Even though a developed body of literature on the public school desegregation exists, it largely misses the contributions of students to create a shared school community. The protests, conflicts, and discussions among students at Hickory High are a demonstration of agency and leadership. The students propelled protest and reached compromise on important, symbolic issues.

When African-American students arrived at Hickory High and found no collective welcome, they faced a difficult issue of how to create a school that integrated their heritage and traditions into the established culture of Hickory High. The school fight song is a relevant example of how a school may or may not represent its collective student body. Students voiced their opinions and exerted leadership on seeking resolution to this issue. Consider this letter to the editor of the school newspaper from a White student who was the Student Council vice-president:

The black students gave up everything to come here. If they feel giving up “Dixie” would unite our school, the least we can do is give it up. It’s not too much compared to their giving up a whole school. When “Dixie” is played at school activities, it reflects a pride in the South felt by the whole school. If they don’t feel the same way, we can’t let “Dixie” represent us. (*The Twig*, December 12, 1969)

The 1969-70 school yearbook summarized the progress made by students through the conflict:

With the appearance of confederate flags, the search for an objective solution began as blacks and whites firmly debated the issue of “Dixie”, the traditional pep song. Yet as the year progressed, a feeling of togetherness became analogous to both races as students. (*Hickory Log*, 1970, p. 13)

Student leaders, both African-American and White worked through the Junior Human Relations Council to lead open discussions so that every student might have the chance to express their views (*Hickory Log*, p. 132). Both the process of discussion and the resulting compromise demonstrate commendable student leadership.

Years later, one African-American student at Hickory High remembers the leadership of his classmates during and after various student conflicts:

I thank God for some of those leaders that were there, upper classmen that put us on the bus to come back over here [Ridgeview Community]. Now mind you every time [a physical altercation among students erupted at Hickory High], there was always a meeting amongst the [African-American] students. And the older students told us how to watch, how to act, how to do. In other words, what they were telling us was for our own benefit so we wouldn’t get wiped out. (Personal Interview, 2/4/11)

It is clear that there were African-American students providing leadership and support to one another.

The leadership lesson is that Hickory was no different from other towns in North Carolina during the civil rights era. Leadership did not reside solely within the White community but also within the ranks of ordinary African-American citizens and students. Cecelski (1994) found this type of leadership changed Hyde County forever. “The school boycott changed the county profoundly in ways still evolving . . . There could be no retreat into disenfranchisement and segregation, no return to black deference and powerlessness” (p. 146). Sokol (2006) also noted African-American leadership during this time: “Blacks may not have gained their fair share of economic and political power through the civil rights movement, but they became the primary actors in the region’s drama. They pulled the levers of history” (p. 7).

Finally, the stories of desegregating Hickory High underscore the idea that leadership must find a means of expression. Leadership as a process of influencing others toward a specific goal must have an outward expression. That expression can be through spoken word, direct action or obvious silence. At Hickory High School, leadership was expressed through all the means mentioned here. The school newspaper, *The Twig*, provided an arena for verbal student expressions and the exertion of leadership. Student riots, physical altercations, and walkouts were also expressions of leadership that served to influence fellow students, school staff and members of the community. At times, silence was an expression of leadership including silence by school officials on planning for desegregation and silence by the principal on a resolution to the addition of African-American cheerleaders. In these cases, no response was a clear response.

During the conflicts, both African-American and White students were encouraged to express their views in the school newspaper. The school newspaper, *The Twig*, functioned as a democratic space for student expression and, in so doing, cultivated student leadership. Consider the following excerpts from student letters to the editor of *The Twig* printed after the cheerleader conflict. The first, from a White student:

I sure wish all the trouble would stop, but it won't if the white people don't calm down too. I have heard people talking about how they want to fight, but if they start something, it will just make matters worse and cause more harm than good. (*The Twig*, September 28, 1970)

The next letter is from an African-American student:

The school is supposed to be for blacks and whites. We come to this school but don't consider it ours. We do not have any part of this school. We do not have any black cheerleaders or blacks on the Student Council. Why aren't there more black teachers? Why aren't there black studies? We, the blacks, feel that we have been pushed around and silenced for too long. (*The Twig*, March 19, 1971)

By providing a safe vehicle for student expression and exchange of ideas in *The Twig*, Hickory High supported student agency and leadership. *The Twig* functioned as a catalyst for change at Hickory High and enabled students to make progress in race relations so that an inclusive school community could be created.

In these many and conflicting expressions of leadership, Hickory High showed the community that race relations must be discussed openly. By allowing students to tackle inter-racial issues directly in the school newspaper, in student assemblies and in the sports arena, Hickory High provided leadership to all of Hickory. The community at large realized this as well and placed their hopes for social change on the high school

itself. The consultants from the Southern Regional Council (1974) noted in the final report that “The majority recognizes that all the trouble doesn’t rest with high school and that real race relations can be developed there sooner or more smoothly than they can be within the total community” (p. 38).

Sports as Catalyst for Change

The story of Hickory High adds another unique finding to the literature of public school desegregation. Amid the protest and conflict of bringing two diverse student bodies together, sports acted as an important bonding agent. Both Hickory High and Ridgeview High had long, proud traditions of athleticism. Through desegregation, powerful teams became one force and sought victory together. The Southern Regional Council report (1974) noted sports as a unifier with the survey comment, “Fortunately sports helped get us through the first year” (p. 11). Sports created an inclusive school community at Hickory High in two ways. First, sports provided a space for African-American and White athletes to work together on the field to accomplish a shared goal. This is not to say that all of the experiences around sports at desegregated Hickory High were all positive. However, the relationships among and leadership by student athletes, both African-American and White, demonstrated important lessons to others in an inclusive school setting. Second, the successful teams at Hickory High provided a source of entertainment and pride that brought two communities together in the same school stadium.

The integrated football and basketball teams at Hickory High gave the school a visible example of how students could form successful partnerships across racial lines

and appropriately handle conflicts. In so doing, the athletes became leaders who demonstrated the possibility of healthy interracial relationships. An African-American student spoke of the lessons taught by athletes. “Because they had to be around each other and they knew that each other needed the other in order to be successful or to continue that success that they had—whatever sport or endeavor [it was] that they were actually dealing with” (Personal Interview, February 4, 2011).

While student athletes formed bonds across racial lines, that did not preclude conflict. Student athletes participated in the conflicts and protests at Hickory High. For example, the African-American football players supported the African-American cheerleaders who took the field in 1970. Years later in 1973, African-American basketball players boycotted practice in support of several African-American cheerleaders. In these two instances years apart, the African-American football and basketball athletes felt a stronger pull to protest than to their sports team. As one African-American student observed:

Yes, it was group organized thing. A lot of them [African-American basketball players in 1973] refused to go to basketball practice until something was discussed. It wasn't that, 'I'm quitting or I don't want to play with that team.' Believe you me, they wanted to play ball real bad. They had something special. They wanted to play but [they acted] as a unified group to get their point across at that time. They made the ultimate sacrifice to band together. (Personal Interview, February 4, 2011).

Equally important is the leadership the student athletes provided to their classmates for resolving disputes. The letters to the editor conflict was resolved by two student athletes when basketball players, Rick Barnes and Henry Thomas met with the

entire student body and called for an end to the violence. These student athletes were able to move the student body unlike anyone else could. In another example, African-American student, Marcus Suddreth, underscores the power of sports to bring students together in his 1972 school yearbook reflection. He commented:

Heightened school spirit was the major factor of note in this year's black student body; the HHS Red Tornadoes finished in the State 4-A semi-finals in contrast to last year's lamentable showing in which black involvement was at the lowest level since desegregation. The Pep Club made its return to the scene as the spirit leaders of the school and the Cheerleading staff boasted three black members. (Hickory Log, 1972, p. 29)

Though the positive leadership of student athletes played a critical role in helping build an inclusive school community, the price paid by some of these athletes cannot be ignored. An African-American football player recalled that African-American football players who vocally supported the cheerleaders and participated in the school walkout after the cheerleading incident were removed from the team for the rest of the season. For the seniors on the team, this cut short their high school football career after just one game. Rick Dula, the senior starting quarterback, lost any chance of a college scholarship as a result of being removed from the team and had nightmares into adulthood about the experience (Personal Interview, November 5, 2012). In this case, it does appear to be an ultimate sacrifice. When asked about team commitment in the face of harsh treatment by a specific White coach, Rick Dula reflected that sports are about being a team player:

I was so interested in succeeding in what I was doing that I didn't worry about it and just left it on the field. Athletics is hard. You are sweating, you are tired, someone is yelling at you, and you're trying to get it right. You got all these people out there. You're trying to bond with them and you have a common goal.

You become a team player, basically. That's what I did. On top of being a team player, I had a leadership role as the quarterback. [As a result] there were things I couldn't do, couldn't show. Otherwise, it would leak to the other players and hurt the team. So, I didn't always voice my opinion about certain things. (Personal Interview, November 5, 2012)

These examples suggest that student athletes demonstrated leadership at Hickory High. Their voices were important expressions of solidarity and sacrifice during times of protest and reconciliation.

The second way in which sports served as a catalyst for creating a shared community at Hickory High is by providing focus for interracial pride. Hickory High students, parents, and community members came together to support their winning teams. A White student who entered Hickory High during the early days of desegregation commented that:

I think once everybody knew it was going to be that way, sports was a big common denominator. It was really a big thing. I think it was an area where they [black students] could be accepted and that we [white students] could accept them. Football, basketball and baseball is all there is in high school. We had two or three [African-American students] that were amazing players. As far as the White population, [this] was an area where they could accept them and build on that and see and learn. (Personal Interview, February 24, 2011)

An African-American student who came to Hickory High well after desegregation shared the same viewpoint:

What event that ever comes to mind that would bring a whole community together? A whole city? A championship team! A championship football team, a championship basketball team. Those same kids that were fighting each other, they bring the whole city together. Just look at the history. Look at the last 1996 championship state football team. The city of Hickory was one. If you were at that stadium, I don't care if you and I never spoke to each other, and we were of

different races and if we were on the Hickory side, we were cheering for the Hickory team and we were hugging and were tapping each other we were doing whatever we can. We were one at any given time. (Personal Interview, February 4, 2011)

There is irony in the finding that sports served as a catalyst for positive race relations at Hickory High. In the aftermath of the cheerleader conflict, the editor of the Hickory Daily claimed that sports are non-essential to schooling and that they should be banned as an incentive to resolve conflict. An excerpt of the letter from the editor of the *Hickory Daily Record*:

Much of the renewed agitation over school integration in Hickory and elsewhere in the South appears to center around what many consider non-essentials- sports activities and their attendant and supporting program. One method of meeting these black protests is to eliminate all such programs—football and basketball contests, marching bands, all extracurricular activity. (*Hickory Daily Record*, October 7, 1970)

The sentiment that extracurricular activities are of little importance to school misses what we know about how relationships are formed and school culture is created. It is precisely the opportunity that sports provide to build shared community and pride that that gives excitement and camaraderie to students. Policy analysts and school reformers who seek true school improvement would be wise to consider the role of athletics in building school culture and the lessons of desegregating Hickory High.

Symbols: The Power to Represent

Bolman and Deal (2008) have developed a framework for understanding organizations and leadership. One important perspective within this framework is the symbolic perspective. The symbolic perspective posits that the world is chaotic and

humans must make meaning of the world and life within organizations, such as schools. To make meaning, people interpret facts, direct focus on certain events and elements more than others and value some things over others. “Organizations develop cultural symbols that shape human behavior unobtrusively and provide a shared sense of mission and identity” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 512). In organizations, myths, stories, and other symbols represent what is valued. Bolman and Deal (2008) advise leaders to pay diligent attention to the messages sent through the symbols selected by an organization to indicate what is valued.

When Hickory High opened in August of 1966, the school entered a critical period for establishing the school as an inclusive, multi-racial community. Ridgeview High School, the well-loved segregated African-American high school, had just been closed and its former students were suffering its loss. No students, neither African-American nor White, had received any information or preparation on coming together as an inter-racial school community. This was a missed opportunity for students and the school community. The issues and conflicts that emerged after desegregation revolved around symbols and their role in representing the student body. As Bolman and Deal (2008) point out, high schools represent themselves through the songs they select, the adults and student leaders they uplift, the representatives they select, the way they make decisions, the messages posted in the building and the stories they tell about themselves. Before desegregation, students at Hickory High and Ridgeview High had long attended schools that positively represented their student bodies. The African-American students and their families were proud of the symbols of Ridgeview High School. Likewise, the

students at Hickory High were satisfied with the symbols chosen to represent them. When the students from each school joined into one student body at Hickory High, the African-American students noticed the school symbols that did not represent an inclusive environment and protested. The list of problematic symbols includes musical selection, composition of the cheerleading squad, selection of student leaders, and racial composition of the school staff.

The first student conflict about the school fight song is a striking example of the importance of symbols for creating an inclusive school identity. The selection of the song, “Dixie” as the school fight song offended African-American students as a symbol of the old South and days of slavery. The 1970 school yearbook, the Log, briefly explains the conflict with reference to the offending symbols:

With the appearance of confederate flags, the search for an objective solution began as blacks and whites firmly debated the issue of “Dixie”, the traditional pep song. Yet as the year progressed, a feeling of togetherness became analogous to both races as students. (Hickory Log, 1970, p. 13)

More than forty years later, one African-American student remembers her disconnect from Hickory High as a result of the musical symbol:

And to this day, I don't remember the school song. I never did, never learned it. I didn't want to try. When we went to the auditorium for a pep rally or whatever, I didn't even know the song, even after the one after the integration of school. We always sung (sic) the Ridgeview song. We still [do], I still know Ridgeview's alma mater. I never knew [Hickory High's]. I never knew it. I don't think my sons did either. (Personal Interview, February 7, 2011)

The second conflict also revolved around another important symbol, the students uplifted to represent the school. Cheerleaders were a visible symbol of school spirit. They appear at athletic events, encouraging both the team and the spectators. In addition, cheerleaders are the symbols of beauty and popularity for the students. At Hickory High in 1972, cheerleaders were selected by popular vote rather than through a try-out process. As result, the cheerleaders were a clear representation of what the students valued. The absence of African-American cheerleaders on the squad was offensive to the African-American students who were seeking to find a place at Hickory High. The fact that the adults at Hickory High would not ensure their representation on the squad was also offensive.

In a letter to the editor of the school newspaper, an African-American student explained the symbolic importance of representing all students in leadership roles at an inclusive school.

We came into this thing, integration, expecting to change, but at the same time expecting to be treated as high school students with an equal chance, but we found that 'Charlie' had everything set up in a way that would exclude blacks by some means. The way it is now only the 'token Negroes' can get anywhere at all at this school. (*The Twig*, October 9, 1970)

Even after the cheerleader conflict, the issue of which students were selected to symbolically represent the school as leaders continued to trouble students at Hickory High. Other issues were at play including how a school makes decisions, which students should represent the school, and the basis on which students are valued. A White student explains the perspective of one side in a letter to the editor of the school newspaper.

I think it is time for the blacks to start working for things instead of demanding them. [African-American students] want black cheerleaders, black Student Council representatives, black class officers, black coaches, black history courses, and numerous other things. They have done very little to “earn” these things however. Why should they be “given” these things when the whites must work hard for them? Very few, if any, blacks make the “A:” or “B” honor roll. Very few of them are active on school staffs. Very few of them are active in school clubs. Very few of them participate in the homecoming activities. I could go on and on, but these examples are enough to illustrate that the blacks do nothing but demand. (*The Twig*, March 5, 1971)

This student was making the case that African-American students must “earn” their way into full membership at Hickory High. This sentiment was offensive to African-American students, who had not asked to move to a new school and, by virtue of their attendance, were already full members of the student body. An African-American student provided the rebuttal view in a response, also found in *The Twig*:

When the blacks came to Hickory High, we did not come as new students coming to a new school; we came as a school merging with another school; therefore, why do you refuse to give us our rights because we don’t act like you? Are we just supposed to be satisfied coming over here? If so, we are not! We love Ridgeview just as much as you adore your “dear” Hickory High. Whites seem to think that in our coming to this school we were to give up our activities and just take the “scraps” that you left us. It seems that before a white person will accept a black, the black has to act as the whites do. We feel that we deserve the same rights as you. (May 7, 1971)

As these student letters indicate, the conflicts at Hickory High were touched off by symbols that represented issues of deep meaning to the students.

Finally, the African-American students and parents asked repeatedly for additional African-American staff members at Hickory High. Students even commented on this issue in an African-American summary of the school year found in the 1972

yearbook. “Faculty representation however remained at the dismal level of three. Even though six teachers were added this year, none were black, with former black teachers holding other positions” (p. 29). The African-American students clearly wished for adult role models and mentors, as symbolic representation of themselves among the school staff.

What we learn from student conflicts and expressions in *The Twig* is that a diverse student body needs school symbols that enable everyone to emotionally connect with the school. When a school retains symbols and rituals that exclude diverse populations, the school sends a message of rejection to those students. The African-American students who moved from Ridgeview High School to Hickory High could not connect to their new school in the same way they connected to Ridgeview.

It is easy to cast a backward glance at stories of school desegregation and make judgments about those involved, casting them into roles of hero and villain. What we learn through this analysis of desegregating Hickory High is that easy generalizations are not evident. African-American and White students alike experienced losses and difficulties with the closure of Ridgeview High and desegregation of Hickory High. Both African-American and White students exerted leadership that helped and hurt the creation of an inclusive school culture at Hickory High. After considering their stories that resist quick summary, it is clear that a student’s daily life experiences at school matter in the moment and for a lifetime. Sports and extracurricular activities are just as important to this daily life as are the academics. Students create their community and gain personal meaning through the interactions that occur around extracurricular activities. These

interactions become symbols that reflect the total school population. When a school's symbols do not accurately reflect the school community, the school ceases to demonstrate caring for all of its members. The stories of desegregating Hickory High reveal a complicated, messy reality of a massive social change that we are still seeking to understand.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

My conclusions from this study are many. First, desegregating Hickory Public Schools was a lengthy, complex process. School stakeholders from the governor, district leaders and school board members to students, parents, teachers and community members had a wide range of views on the matter which both helped and hurt the students. Multiple stories and varied interpretations of events play out within the overarching tale of desegregating Hickory High. However understood, as a result of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and *Wilson v. Hickory Public Schools*, social change came to the school system. Some leaders and school personnel resisted the changes through foot dragging compliance, while others displayed more direct animosity toward Hickory High's new students. The decisions and plans made by district leaders impacted students who had no voice in the process. As a result of the compliance plan created, African-American students experienced a great loss in the closing of their beloved Ridgeview High School. Both African-American and White students were put in a situation where they had to make sense of the social change forced on them and find a way to share one school space meant to serve them all.

At every step of the way through the desegregation of Hickory High, the school was left to handle the social changes that the community attempted to avoid. Rather than viewing the student conflicts as examples of what was wrong with Hickory, they are

evidence that the students were wrestling to create an inclusive school community that symbolically represented them all. At times, the price of desegregation paid by individual students at Hickory High was too steep. However, many students and the city as a whole benefitted from the students' experiences of breaking the color line. As Patterson (2001) notes, the racial mixing at public schools throughout the South "dispelled ugly stereotypes" (p. 163) and enabled students to build friendships across racial lines. As students stated in the 1970 school yearbook after the Dixie conflict, "as the year progressed, a feeling of togetherness became analogous to both races as students" (*The Log*, p. 13).

That student feeling of togetherness clearly waxed and waned as evidenced by the eruption of significant student conflicts nearly every school year until 1975. As the historical record shows, the students at Hickory High had agency to act on their individual views about desegregation, interracial contact, and specific issues. As they acted on those views, other students also demonstrated agency. Through desegregation, Hickory High became the most public space in town. Students of every ethnicity and income level inhabit the same space with relative collegiality working toward like goals. Given the human factor, relations continue to be messy and imperfect.

Desegregation of Hickory High School created among the students an important dialogue about school as a community space. Students called into question who has the right to define the Hickory High school community and what views it should exemplify regarding race. This dialogue was verbalized in the hallways, in the student newspaper, and acted out in both subtle tensions and overt violence among the students. The intensity

of the dialogue ebbed and flowed over time, but never reached a conclusion during the time period of this study. In fact, this dialogue and the period of racial conflict at Hickory High School still reverberate in the system today. People in Hickory reference the difficult times at Hickory High. They mention Principal Miller and key students as important characters in a historical period for the school.

Two students in particular served as examples of what Hickory High in the early days of desegregation could produce. Rick Barnes and Rick Dula were both student athletes and leaders at Hickory High during the days of inter-racial conflict. They both graduated from Hickory High and became respected leaders in their chosen fields. Forty years later, they both have clear memories of difficult days at Hickory High and have worked to reach conclusions about the struggles they experienced.

Rick Barnes was a student athlete who exerted positive leadership in resolving the Letters to the Editor conflict at Hickory High in 1973. He and an African-American classmate wrote open letters to the student body and hosted an assembly calling for an end to the violence and inter-racial strife in May of 1973. After high school, Rick Barnes attended college on a basketball scholarship and went on to become a successful and well-respected college basketball coach. He has been recognized as the most successful coach in the history of the University of Texas. Coach Barnes has received awards for coaching success and personal achievement (DeCourcy, 2010).

While at Hickory, Rick Barnes had open-minded and positive views of his African-American classmates. Forty years after his time at Hickory High, he demonstrated the capacity for honest conversation about the causes of conflict at Hickory

High. In a personal interview, he reflected on the events of the time and saw the problems for what they were, recalling that the conflicts started because the African-American students “didn’t feel a part” of Hickory High. He further commented that:

There is a tremendous sense of pride at Ridgeview. They watched their kids come [to Hickory High] and there was nothing and that’s when they said we have to have cheerleaders, we have to be involved in student government. They [the African-American students] weren’t a part of that. (Personal Interview, July 20, 2012)

Rick Dula is another student who played a critical role at Hickory High during desegregation. As the first African-American football quarterback, a popular guy and an exemplary student, Rick Dula was a clear student leader. Throughout his time at Hickory High, Rick Dula was actively engaged in improving inter-racial relations. As co-chair of the Junior Human Relations Council, he worked on resolving both the Dixie conflict and the Cheerleader conflict. He exerted his leadership to push for equal access for African-American cheerleaders and, as a result, suffered loss of his place on the football team. After graduating from Hickory High in 1972, Mr. Dula entered the military and enjoyed a full career that included several foreign tours. He retired from the military and currently works for a communications firm in Fayetteville, NC (Personal Interview, November 5, 2012).

Rick Dula entered Hickory High with idealistic hopes of public school integration. In a recent interview, he reflected on his high school experiences:

We were a little naïve as to the way things worked in the real world, but we were told it was going to be a particular way. Integration in itself said you were going to integrate, going to take some of their culture, some of our culture and mix it up

and be one. That's the way we thought it was going to be, but it didn't turn out that way. (Personal Interview, November 1, 2012)

When the realities of student life at a desegregated Hickory High were far from the vision of integration, Rick Dula worked to make it better. He still bears some of those battle scars today. When asked how the experiences at Hickory High influenced him, he commented that "the football situation [being removed from the team after the first game of his senior year] affected him the most." It made him "cynical and less trusting." Even now, he must push himself to "trust and give folks a chance" without judgment (Personal Interview, November 1, 2012).

However, Mr. Dula also had positive memories of teachers seeking equity for African-American students at Hickory High:

Ms. Allison, Chair of the English Department, had us reading books by black authors about black subjects, some of the classics. It was like when they [White teachers at Hickory High] got the assignment of integration, they went out and they studied the things that would make it work. They studied the stuff they didn't know about. They may have been learning right along with us. They did a great job. (Personal Interview, November 1, 2012)

In sum, "I found my relationships with most of the teachers to be positive and they were pleasant and encouraging to me. In hindsight, I think they viewed me as serious, someone who expected to get something from the educational process" (Personal Correspondence, November 2, 2012).

Both of these students are examples that student life at desegregated Hickory High was a struggle, but was worth the effort for the school as a whole and for some students in particular. These men are evidence that some students gained inter-racial and

interpersonal insight through their efforts to create an inclusive school community that reflected pride in its entire student body. In addition, these men demonstrated agency and leadership through these moments in time, another important part of growing through the teen years. However, there are no simple and easy answers at Hickory High for there were also students who walked away from Hickory High with negative feelings about their high school experience and who continued to harbor ugly racial stereotypes.

By taking a closer look at Rick Barnes and Rick Dula, we see the lifetime impact of high school on a person. These men still have vivid memories of Hickory High over forty years after graduation. They were shaped by the time they spent there. The core mission of a school is supporting students. Changes in a school as significant as those experienced in Hickory between 1965 and 1975 necessarily impact the lives of students. Historians are well served by going to the students when studying schools. The findings of this study are relevant for both historians and school stakeholders. The findings relate to how a school defines itself through symbols, competing notions of community within schools, the power of protesting voices, the importance of student agency and leadership, and the role of sports in creating shared community within a school.

The story of desegregating Hickory High is a story that shows high schools as a source of hope for social change going forward. One African-American student claimed that Hickory High students were made better through their experiences of coming together. She said, “just doing the things that transformed me during that time—just what we went through—it was a pride type thing which a lot of kids don’t have right now” (Personal Interview, February 7, 2011). Another African-American student claimed that

Hickory High students were ahead of the community in race relations. “A lot [of the events] from that time came because the city wasn’t ready; the administration wasn’t ready to handle what they had at that time.” On the other hand, the students “may initiate some type of conversation at that given time and feel comfortable with one another. That happened with the students here” (Personal Interview, February 4, 2011).

While the work of this study is complete, there are many unanswered questions that remain. These questions highlight recommendations for further research. How does the story of Hickory High compare with other desegregated high schools? By researching desegregation stories from other high schools in North Carolina and across the South, we could learn whether other high schools were the leading edge of social change within their communities. Were students in other high schools leading the work of redefining school as an inclusive space? Did the same level of interracial conflict occur in high schools where the African-American high school was part of the plan to desegregate rather than being simply closed down? The role of the student newspaper, *The Twig*, was important in enabling students to wrestle with issues through open expression. Further research is needed on the function of student newspapers during desegregation to give students place for expressing viewpoints and resolving conflicts. Finally, there should be further research that looks into the role that high school sports serves in defining and unifying a school community as well as the role of student athletes as leaders in resolving school conflicts.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, J. D. (1978). Northern foundations and the shaping of southern black rural education, 1902-1935. *History of Education Quarterly*, 18(4), 371–396.
- Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. (Eds.). (2004). *Handbook of research on multicultural education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1993). *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bell, D. A. (1992). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. Boston, MA: Pearson Educational Group.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2008). Leadership and management effectiveness: A multi-frame, multi-sector analysis. *Human Resource Management*, 30(4), 509–534.
- Branch, T. (1988). *Parting the waters: America in the King years, 1954-1963*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Branch, T. (1998). *Pillar of fire: America in the King years, 1963-65*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Branch, T. (2006). *At Canaan's edge: America in the King years, 1965-68*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Brenner, M. E. (2006). Interviewing in educational research. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 357–370). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Brittain, J. C. (1993). Education and racial equity toward the twenty-first century—A case experiment in Connecticut. In H. Hill & J. E. Jones (Eds.), *Race in America: The struggle for equality* (pp. 167–183). Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Brown v. Board of Education*, 374 U.S. 483 (1954).

- Brown v. Board of Education*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955).
- Carter, K. (1993). Racial progress and retreat: A personal memoir. In H. Hill & J. E. Jones (Eds.), *Race in America: The struggle for equality*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Carter, R. (1993). Thirty-five years later: New perspectives on *Brown*. In H. Hill & J. E. Jones (Eds.), *Race in America: The struggle for equality*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Cashin, S. (2004). *The failures of integration: How race and class are undermining the American dream*. New York, NY: Public Affairs.
- Cecelski, D. S. (1994). *Along freedom road: Hyde County, North Carolina and the fate of black schools in the south*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Chafe, W. D. (1981). *Civilities and civil rights*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Chambers, J. (1993). *Brown v. Board of Education*. In H. Hill & J. E. Jones (Eds.), *Race in America: The struggle for equality*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Clotfelter, C. T. (2004). *After Brown: The rise and retreat of school desegregation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cremin, L. A. (1988). *American education: The metropolitan experience*. New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Currie, J. (n.d.). *Civil rights in North Carolina workshop: Issue-segregation*. Retrieved March 12, 2010, from http://ncmuseumofhistory.org/edu/ed_md_tc_cr2.htm
- DeCuir, J. T., & Dixson, A. D. (2004). "So when it comes out, they aren't that surprised that it is there": Using critical race theory as a tool of analysis of race and racism in education. *Educational Researcher*, 33(5), 26–31.

- Douglas, D. M. (1994). The quest for freedom in the post-Brown south: Desegregation and white self interest. *Faculty Publications*. Paper 117. Retrieved from <http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs/117>
- Douglas, D. M. (1995). *Reading, writing and race: The desegregation of the Charlotte schools*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Douglas, F. (1857). *Two speeches by Frederick Douglass*. Rochester, NY: C. P. Dewey Printer.
- Dunn, A. (2010). *North Carolina history project: Pearsall plan*. Retrieved March 12, 2010, from <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/318/entry>
- DeCourcy, M. (2010). 2020 vision. *Sporting News*, 234(4/5), 56–59.
- Dovidio, J. F., & Gaertner, S. L. (Eds.). (1986). *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism*. London, England: Falmer Press.
- Epps, E. G. (1999). *Race and school desegregation: Contemporary legal and educational issues*. Retrieved March 13, 2010 from <http://www.urbanedjournal.org/articles/article003.pdf>
- Fairchild, H. (1985). Black, Negro or Afro-American?: The differences are crucial. *Journal of Black Studies*, 16, 47–55.
- Frankenberg, E., & Orfield, G. (2007). *Lessons in integration: Realizing the promise of racial diversity in American schools*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- Gaertner, S. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (1986). The aversive form of racism. In J. F. Dovidio & S. L. Gaertner (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination and racism* (pp. 184–200). London: Falmer.
- Gaillard, F. (1988). *The dream long deferred: The landmark struggle for desegregation in Charlotte, North Carolina*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Hartsoe, D. S. (2001). *The Hill: Memories of the Ridgeview community*. Hickory, NC: Drucella Sudderth Hartsoe.
- Henry, A. (2006). Historical studies: Groups/institutions. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research*. (pp. 333–355). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Harris, H. N. (1956). Desegregation in North Carolina. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 25(3), 299–306.
- Hickory Daily Record*. (1955-1975). Hickory, NC: Patrick Beaver Memorial Library Microfiche Publications.
- Hickory Log: School Yearbook*, 55. (1970). Hickory, NC: Students of Claremont Central High School.
- Hickory Log: School Yearbook*, 57. (1972). Hickory, NC: Claremont Central High School.
- Hickory Public Schools. (1955-1973). *Meetings of the school board for the Hickory Public Schools*. Hickory, NC: School Board Minutes.
- Hill, H., & Jones, J. E. (1993). *Race in America: The struggle for equality*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Human Relations Council Papers. (September 1-11, 1970). *Crisis Situation, Hickory, North Carolina*. Raleigh, NC: State Archives, Educational Institutions File. Folder: Catawba County, Box: 1.
- Hyams, B. K. (1997). Oral history. In J. P. Keeves (Ed.), *Educational research methodology, and measurement: An international handbook* (pp. 91–95). Tarrytown, NY: Elsevier Science Inc.
- Hyde, Jr., S. C. (2005). Plain folk reconsidered: Historiographical ambiguity in search of definition. *Journal of Southern History*, 71(4), 803–830.
- Hylton, K. (2012). Talk the talk, walk the walk: Defining critical race theory in research. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 15(1), 23–41.
- Jones, C. E. (1998). *The black panther party (reconsidered)*. Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press.
- Joseph, P. E. (2006). *The black power movement: Rethinking the civil rights–black power era*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Joseph, P. E. (2009). The black power movement, democracy, and America in the king years. *American Historical Review*, 114(4), 1001–1016.
- Irvine, R. W., & Irvine, J. J. (1983). The impact of desegregation process on the education of black students: Key variables. *Journal of Negro Education*, 52(4), 410–422.

- Kaestle, C. F. (1997). Historical methods in educational research. In J. P. Keeves (Ed.), *Educational research methodology, and measurement: An international handbook* (pp. 75–81). Tarrytown, NY: Elsevier Science Inc.
- Keeves, J. P., & Sowden, S. (1997). Descriptive data, analysis of. In J. P. Keeves (Ed.), *Educational research methodology, and measurement: An international handbook* (pp. 296–306). Tarrytown, NY: Elsevier Science Inc.
- Killen, M., Crystal, D., & Ruck, M. (2007). The social developmental benefits of intergroup contact for children and adolescents. In E. Frankenberg & G. Orfield (Eds.), *Lessons in integration: Realizing the promise of racial diversity in American schools* (pp. 57–73). Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- Klarman, M. J. (1994). How Brown changed race relations: The backlash thesis. *The Journal of American History*, 81(1), 81–118.
- Klarman, M. J. (2007). *Brown v. Board of Education and the civil rights movement*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kluger, R. (2004). *Simple justice: The history of Brown v. Board of Education and black America's struggle for equality*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Krathwohl, D. R., & Smith, N. L. (2005). *How to prepare a dissertation proposal: Suggestions for students in education and the social and behavioral sciences*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Krol, R. A. (1980). A meta-analysis of the effects of desegregation on academic achievement. *Urban Review*, 12, 211–224.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Just what is critical race theory, and what's it doing in a nice field like education? In P. Lurance, D. Deyhle, & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Race is—race isn't: Critical race theory and qualitative studies in education*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2003). It's your world, I'm just trying to explain it: Understanding our epistemological and methodological challenges. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9, 5–12.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2004). Landing on the wrong note: The price we paid for Brown. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 3–13.
- Lee, C. D., & Slaughter-Defoe, D. T. (2004). Historical and sociocultural influences on African-American education. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 462–490). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Lopez, G. R. (2003). The (racially neutral) politics of education: A critical race theory perspective. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(1), 68–94.
- Lynn, M., & Parker, L. (2006). Critical race studies in education: Examining a decade of research on U.S. schools. *The Urban Review*, 38(4), 257–290.
- Menchaca, M. (1997). Early racist discourses: The roots of deficit thinking. In R. R. Valencia (Ed.), *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice* (pp. 13–40). New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Milner, R. H. (2008). Critical race theory and interest convergence as analytic tools in teacher education policies and practices. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(4), 332–346.
- Morris, A. A. (1989). *The constitution and American public education*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Morris, J. E. (2004). Can anything good come from Nazareth? Race, class, and African-American schooling and community in the urban south and Midwest. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(1), 69–112.
- Myrdal, G. (1944). *An American dilemma: The Negro problem and modern democracy*. New York, NY: Harper Brothers.
- Waynick, C. M., Brooks, J. C., & Pitts, E. W. (Eds.). (1964). *North Carolina and the Negro*. Raleigh, NC: The State College Print Shop.
- Ogletree, C. J. (2004). *All deliberate speed: Reflections on the first half century of Brown v. Board of Education*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company.
- Orfield, G., & Eaton, S. E. (1996). *Dismantling desegregation: The quiet reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Orfield, G., & Frankenberg, E. (Eds.). (2007). *Lessons in integration: Realizing the promise of racial diversity in America's public schools*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- Orfield, G. (1993). School desegregation after two generations: Race, schools, and opportunity in urban society. In H. Hill & J. E. Jones (Eds.) *Race in America: The struggle for equality*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.

- Parker, L., Deyhle, D., & Villenas, S. (Eds.). (1999). *Race is . . . race isn't: Critical race theory and qualitative studies in education*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Parker, L., & Lynn, M. (2002). What's race got to do with it? Critical race theory's conflicts with and connections to qualitative research methodology and epistemology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 7–22.
- Patterson, J. T. (2001). *Brown v. Board of Education: A civil rights milestone and its troubled legacy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Patterson, O. (1997). *The ordeal of integration: Progress and resentment in America's "racial" crisis*. Washington, DC: Civitas/Counterpoint.
- Plan for compliance with Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, adopted by the Hickory Board of Education*. (1965, May). Hickory, NC: Hickory Public Schools.
- Plan for compliance with Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and student assignment policies for the school year 1966-1967 and subsequent school years*. (April, 196). Hickory, NC: Hickory Public Schools.
- Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).
- Ridgeview High School Yearbook. (1966). *Ridgeview High, 1926-1966: Mighty Panthers*. Hickory, NC: Ridgeview School Staff.
- Rury, J. L. (2006). Historical research in education. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 323–332). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Sadker, M. P., & Sadker, D. M. (1991). *Teachers, schools and society*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Siddle Walker, E. V. (1993). Caswell County training school, 1939-1969: Relationships between community and school. *Harvard Educational Review*, 63(2), 161–182.
- Siddle Walker, V. (1996). *Their highest potential: An African-American school community in the segregated south*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Smith, T. (1992). Changing racial labels: From “Colored” to “Negro” to “Black” to “African American.” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 56(4), 496–514.
- Sokol, J. (2006). *There goes my everything: White Southerners in the age of civil rights, 1945–1975*. New York, NY: Knopf.

- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23–44.
- Southern Regional Educational Board. (2011). *SREB fact book on higher education, 2011*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Educational Board.
- Southern Regional Council. (1974). *Tension and conciliation: A report on contributing factors causing racial disagreements and conflicts within the Hickory, North Carolina City Schools*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Council.
- Theoharis, G. & Haddix, M. (2011). Undermining racism and whiteness ideology: White principals living a commitment to equitable and excellent schools. *Urban Education*, 46(6), 1332–1351.
- Thomas, R. M., & Brubaker, D. L. (2000). *Theses and dissertations: A guide to planning, research and writing*. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.
- Thornton, J. M. (2002). *Dividing lines: Municipal politics and the struggle for civil rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.
- Tillman, L. C. (2004). (Un)Intended consequences?: The impact of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision on the employment status of black educators. *Education and Urban Society*, 36(3), 280–303.
- Tyack, D. (2003). *Seeking common ground: Public schools in a diverse society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tyson, T.B. (2004). *Blood done sign my name*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.
- The Twig: Student newspaper of Hickory High School*. (1966-1973). Hickory, NC: Hickory High School.
- Valencia, R. (1999). *The evolution of deficit thinking*. London: Falmer.
- Weinberg, M. (1968). *Integrated education: A reader*. Beverly Hills, CA: The Glencoe Press.
- Wilkinson, J. H. (1979). *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and school integration: 1954-1978*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson v. Hickory City Board of Education*, No. 529 (W.D. North Carolina October 10, 1966 and July 19, 1973).

Zilber, J., & Niven, D. (1995). 'Black' versus 'African American': Are White's political attitudes influenced by the choice of racial labels? *Social Science Quarterly*, 76, 655–664.

Zilber, J., & Niven, D. (2000). *Racialized coverage of Congress: The news in black and white*. Westport, CT: Praeger.