

# The Closing of a School: The History and Legacy of Central High School

Grades 9-12

Lesson Plan to accompany the viewing of the documentary, *The Closing of a School: The History and Legacy of Central High School*. Central High was the only black high school in Hillsborough from 1936-1968. Like many black schools in the South, Central was closed after desegregation. The documentary highlights the African-American community, desegregation and the closing of Central High, and the efforts to preserve Central's legacy. Throughout the documentary, there is a shared universality of other Southern black schools, prior to and after integration. The film was written and directed by Dr. Iris T. Chapman; filmmakers were Teri Burnette and Aniya Bourne. To receive access to a one time showing of the documentary for your students, please email: [programs@orangehistorync.org](mailto:programs@orangehistorync.org) or call the Orange County Historical Museum at (919) 732-2201.

## Lesson

The *Closing of a School* documentary is approximately 90 minutes long. The documentary should then be accompanied by a class discussion about segregation, desegregation and the impact on the local community. Suggested discussion questions, as well as topics for further exploration are below. Before watching the documentary, students should have an understanding of *Brown v Board of Education* (1954), segregation in Orange County, and the struggles of desegregation with Orange County Schools. Read more about phased integration in Orange County Schools: <https://orangenhistory.wordpress.com/2014/02/26/integration-in-orange-county/>

## North Carolina Standards

**AH.B.1.6** Explain how the experiences and achievements of minorities and marginalized peoples have contributed to American identity over time in terms of the struggle against bias, racism, oppression, and discrimination.

**AH.C & G.1.4** Explain how racism, oppression, and discrimination of indigenous peoples, racial minorities, and other marginalized groups have impacted equality and power in America

## Learning Objectives

- Students will listen to first hand accounts of desegregation in Orange County Schools, specifically Central High School in Hillsborough, North Carolina
- Students will think critically about the impact of segregation and *Brown v Board* on local schools and the community
- Students will view, analyze, and interpret personal experiences with school integration

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## Discussion Questions

These questions can be used for class discussion after viewing *The Closing of a School*. If there is not enough classroom time for discussion, students may answer in a paper format or as preferred by the teacher.

1. Were the stories and experiences in *The Closing of a School* surprising? Did you think something like that would happen in your community?
2. What effects did segregation have on southern communities? What impact did it have on Orange County?
3. What role does education play in the development of a person or a society?
4. When education is denied, what are the consequences for a person, a group of people, or a society? How does lack of equal access to education impact local communities?
5. How did segregation shape those who experienced it, specifically in terms of education? How does it impact the local community?
6. Explain generational trauma. How does segregation and what happened with the integration of the schools in Orange County reflect this term?
7. What does the story of *The Closing of a School* suggest about the role of individuals, groups, and organizing in shaping democracy?
8. What role has resistance, activism, and resilience played in fighting injustice throughout history to today?
9. How did desegregation impact Black schools? What happened to Central High School after Orange High School was integrated?
10. How does the story about Central High School fit into the larger Civil Rights Movement? Was there anything surprising about students' experiences?
11. Evaluate the use of "nonviolence" in the school desegregation movements. Why was this method strategically chosen? Do you believe it was effective? Explain. At what point did they turn violent? Why?
12. Some people are uncomfortable talking about racism, or controversial and unjust history such as what happened at Central and Orange High School. Why do you think that is? Regardless, why is it so important to bravely face our shared past history, and talk about these issues? How do we learn from our past mistakes?
13. Was school desegregation successful? Why or why not?
14. In your opinion, what are the components that need to come together for change in schools?

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## Research Links

The Journey of Reconciliation, a freedom ride in 1947 that went from Washington DC to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, inspired the freedom riders in the 1960s. Testing the Supreme Court ruling of Morgan v Virginia (1946) that prohibited segregation on interstate travel, freedom riders, including Bayard Rustin, were arrested in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, tried at the courthouse in Hillsborough, and sentenced to chain gangs throughout the state.

Learn more about the Journey of Reconciliation:

<https://www.ncpedia.org/journey-reconciliation-1947>

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/journey-of-reconciliation-freedom-rides>

Listen to Bayard Rustin reflect on his experience on the Journey of Reconciliation:

<https://chapelboro.com/news/news-around-town/bayard-rustin-jim-crow-and-chapel-hill-remembering-the-journey-of-reconciliation-75-years-later>

Learn about the fight for desegregation in Chapel Hill:

Episode One: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8UNQtFmg14>

Episode Two: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjDMNkn4Irc>

Episode Three: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LogEB8TCqc8>

Read newspaper articles regarding segregation, school desegregation and the fight for civil rights in Orange County:

<https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/search/pages/results/?>

<ortext=desegregation&rows=20&searchType=advanced&dateFilterType=yearRange&county=Orange&date1=&date2=&page=2&sort=relevance>

Read about Martin Luther King, Jr.'s visit to UNC, 1960:

<https://triangleblogblog.com/2023/01/16/the-day-martin-luther-king-jr-came-to-chapel-hill/>

<https://www.dailytarheel.com/article/2014/11/university-baptist-church-honors-martin-luther-king-jr-with-dedication-for-1960-speech>

<https://www.visitchapelhill.org/blog/post/remembering-dr-martin-luther-king-jr/>

Chapel Hill and UNC students react to Martin Luther King's Assassination:

<https://blogs.lib.unc.edu/uarms/2018/04/04/april-1968-carolina-reacts-to-the-assassination-of-dr-martin-luther-king-jr/>

<https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn92073228/1968-04-10/ed-1/seq-2/>

[https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn92073228/1968-04-06/ed-1/seq-](https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn92073228/1968-04-06/ed-1/seq-1/)

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<https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn92073228/1968-04-07/ed-1/seq-1/>

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