WILMINGTON STUDENT STORIES: VIOLENCE AND DESEGREGATION IN THE US SOUTH, 1968-1971

by

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ABSTRACT

SYDNEY JOHNSON. Wilmington Student Stories: Violence and Desegregation in the US South, 1968-1971.
(Under the direction of DR. KRISTINA SHULL)

From the end of January into the beginning of February 1971, Black students led a boycott of New Hanover and Hoggard High Schools in Wilmington, North Carolina. These events resulted in the conviction and imprisonment of ten individuals who became known as the Wilmington Ten. This thesis focuses on a specific series of events leading up to the arrests of the Ten: the combination of Black student advocacy both inside and outside of the high schools, Black student boycotts of the high schools, and the outbreak of civil unrest and arsons committed by unknown persons during the first week of February 1971 referred to as the 1971 Rebellion. This thesis and public history project examine the experiences of high school students—Black and white—leading up to, during, and after the events of the 1971 Rebellion to provide a community-level view of the complex dynamics of race, violence, and desegregation in the US South. Newspaper articles, yearbooks, and oral histories suggest that the closure of the all-Black Williston High School along with decades of racial trauma led to the events of the 1971 Rebellion. Williston High School was a point of pride for Black Wilmingtonians, not only for the students who attended but for the entire surrounding community. Throughout the era of legally-enforced school segregation, 1896-1954, generations of educators used what resources they had to build Williston into a well-respected institution. Generations of Black Wilmingtonians went to Williston and it was considered a rite of passage for students—whose parents and grandparents went through the school—to graduate from it. Williston united the community through extracurricular activities such as football and choir and it yielded extremely well-educated

students who moved on to higher levels of education. Students were robbed of these experiences with the abrupt and surreptitious closure of the school. The integration of Black students in the remaining white schools of Wilmington cultivated an environment in which Black students experienced displacement and ostracization, fostering hostilities that ultimately led to the 1971 Rebellion. This historical essay serves as a guide to the public history website of this thesis and provides context to the complex racial history of Wilmington, with an emphasis on the legacies of the 1898 massacre, educational experiences during the era of Jim Crow segregation and white imposed integration of those same schools, and ending with a summary analysis of oral histories.

DEDICATION

To my family who are always there for me.

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This project would not have been possible without the endless support and guidance of Dr. Kristina Shull. She consistently pushed me to think harder and dig deeper into my topic which helped to improve my thesis. Dr. Gregory Mixon and Dr. Sonya Ramsey also offered irreplaceable and perceptive feedback which encouraged me to further engage with my historiography and hone my language while writing this thesis. I am also grateful to Tina Wright who taught me the value and complexities of oral history, without which, this thesis would not be what is it. Finally, Dr. Karen Cox introduced this topic to me in the beginning of my time of my studies, and for that I am endlessly grateful.

Oral history interviews were critical to my understanding of the experiences of former students who attended high school in Wilmington, North Carolina from 1968 to 1971. I am deeply appreciative to Ronald Sparks, David Warshauer, Russell Davis, Cynthia Brown, Susan Jarman, and Dr. Paula Newsome for taking the time to reflect their past experiences with me. I am also grateful to Dr. Jan Davidson—historian at the Cape Fear Museum in Wilmington—for her suggestion of people to interview. Along with oral history, digital history is a large component of my thesis. My public history project consists of a website that will house the oral history interviews. Digital history is important to give anyone the ability to engage with history. My hope is that anyone and everyone will be able to hear the stories of these former students and engage in other materials to learn about the 1971 Rebellion. Dr. Shull provided invaluable insight to the importance of digital history which greatly improved my website. The Lower Cape Fear Historical Society archivist Allison Dineen also provided useful sources which aided my research. Finally, I am extremely thankful to Dr. Shull, Dr. Mixon, and Dr. Ramsey for their help

finding secondary sources which proved instrumental to the analysis of my oral history interviews.

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INTRODUCTION

From the end of January into the beginning of February 1971, Black students led a boycott of New Hanover and Hoggard High Schools in Wilmington, North Carolina. They were protesting unfair treatment in the recently desegregated high schools, namely, white school officials favoring white students over Black students, and pointed to the lack of Black history in the curriculum and a day honoring Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.[1] As the boycott continued through the first week of February, a white supremacist paramilitary group, Rights of White People (ROWP), attacked the students' headquarters at Gregory Congregational Church in nighttime drive-by shootings. Black students and community members responded by establishing an armed defense of Gregory Congregational.[2] A result of the disruption in the community was arson and property damage throughout Wilmington, most notable was the destruction of Mike's Grocery.[3] By February 8, the city was put under curfew as a result of the death of two people—a Black student killed by police, and a white man killed by protesters—and instances of arson that caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages.[4] These events resulted in the conviction and imprisonment of ten individuals who were found guilty of "malicious burning and conspiracy as the result of racial violence in Wilmington in February 1971."[5] These ten individuals—eight

[1] Louise Lamica, "Black student group to boycott schools," *Wilmington Morning Star,* January 29, 1971. Accessed through *NewsBank.*
[2] Kenneth Robert Janken, *The Wilmington Ten: Violence, Injustice, and the Rise of Black Politics in the 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 11–12.
[3] Janken, 12. This act of arson was notable because it was the only act of arson that the Ten were charged with. Although there were dozens of other buildings that were burned during the period of unrest—some of which came out to be by the owner(s) for insurance money such as Lum's Restaurant, see Janken 29-30—the Ten were charged with arson of Mike's and no other arsons. There were no other arrests in connection with the other arsons.
[4] John Hendrix, "Curfew proclaimed in city and county," *Wilmington Morning Star,* February 8, 1971. Accessed through *NewsBank.*
[5] Wiley McKellar, "Chavis found guilty: sentencing today in conspiracy trial," *Wilmington Morning Star*, October, 18, 1972. Accessed through *NewsBank.*

Black male students, one Black male pastor, and one white woman—became known as the Wilmington Ten.[6]

Rightly so, the wrongful convictions of the imprisoned Wilmington Ten garnered international media and scholarly attention throughout the 1970s as it came to surface that witness testimony had been false.[7] The Ten came into the light again in 2012 when they received full pardons from North Carolina's governor forty years after their convictions. The story of the Ten is but one of many examples of the injustices facing African Americans during civil rights struggles in the US South during the 1960s and 1970s, and how acts of Black resistance have been criminalized. Here, however, I focus on a specific series of events leading up to the arrests of the Ten: the combination of Black student advocacy both inside and outside of the high schools, Black student boycotts of the high schools, and the outbreak of civil unrest and arsons committed by unknown persons during the first week of February 1971. I argue that this collection of events should be called the 1971 Rebellion to differentiate it from the political and legal event known as the Wilmington Ten. Elizabeth Hinton argues that the term "rebellion" more accurately describes many of the Black-led protests during the end of the 1960s into the early 1970s because many African Americans were "rebelling against a broader system that had entrenched unequal conditions and anti-Black violence over generations."[8] Black students and community members were not boycotting because of a few fights in schools, they were rebelling

[6] Janken, *The Wilmington Ten: Violence, Injustice, and the Rise of Black Politics in the 1970s*, 3. The Ten are Ben Chavis, Reginald Epps, Jerry Jacobs, James McKoy, Wayne Moore, Marvin Patrick, Ann Shepard, Connie Tindall, Wille Earl Vereen, and Joe Wright. Ben Chavis and Ann Shepard were not students. Chavis was a Black leader who was called in by the minister of Gregory Congregational Church to help with the situation, while Shepard was a white woman. The other eight were Black students from both New Hanover and Hoggard High Schools.
[7] Janken, 2.
[8] Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: An Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion since the 1960s* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2021), 7..

against the system that had kept them from equal education and then closed down the school they had worked so hard to establish as a reputable institute.

History is often written by the few to tell the story of the many, however, *alltagsgeschichte*—the history of everyday life—argues the importance of examining the "life and survival of those who have remained largely anonymous in history."[9] By closely observing the life experiences of a few former students, I am able to contribute to the previous scholarship that focuses on the Wilmington Ten and generate another topic of conversation that examines the everyday lives of former students. When the complexities of local narratives are uncovered, they lead to an overall better understanding of the national experience. The stories of former students not only reveal their experiences during the 1971 Rebellion but ultimately also help to reveal the general experience of civil rights and race relations in Wilmington. Further, although these are stories of individuals, the participants ultimately represent the history of their parents and grandparents and offer insight to generations of Black and white community members.

This thesis and public history project examine the experiences of high school students—Black and white—leading up to, during, and after the events of the 1971 Rebellion to provide a community-level view of the complex dynamics of race, violence, and desegregation in the US South. Newspaper articles, yearbooks, and oral histories suggest that the closure of the all-Black Williston High School along with decades of racial trauma led to the events of the 1971 Rebellion. Williston High School was a point of pride for Black Wilmingtonians, not only for the students who attended but for the entire surrounding community. Throughout the era of legally-

[9] Alf Lüdtke, *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3–4. Lüdtke pioneered the field along with Hans Medick in Germany with the examination of people who lived through the Nazi regime. Their studies added complexities to the German experience which had previously been overlooked which is what this thesis aims to do.

enforced school segregation, 1896-1954, generations of educators used what resources they had to build Williston into a well-respected institution. Generations of Black Wilmingtonians went to Williston and it was considered a rite of passage for students—whose parents and grandparents went through the school—to graduate from it. Williston united the community through extracurricular activities such as football and choir and it yielded extremely well-educated students who moved on to higher levels of education.[10] Students were robbed of these experiences with the abrupt and surreptitious closure of the school. The integration of Black students in the remaining white schools of Wilmington cultivated an environment in which Black students experienced displacement and ostracization, fostering hostilities that ultimately led to the 1971 Rebellion.

This thesis is comprised of two components. The first is a historical essay that serves as a guide to the complex racial history of Wilmington, with an emphasis on the legacies of the 1898 massacre, educational experiences during the era of Jim Crow segregation and white imposed integration of those same schools, and ending with a summary analysis of oral histories I conducted with six participants via Zoom and in-person in Wilmington, North Carolina, between February and March 2022. All six of these participants—four Black and two white—attended either New Hanover or Hoggard High Schools from 1968-1973 and offer first-hand experience to the events of the 1971 Rebellion.

[10] Bertha Todd, Research Project for Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, interview by Kris Shepard, June 13, 1995, Lower Cape Fear Historical Society. Ms. Todd was the librarian at Williston and then at Hoggard. She was extremely well respected by the students and faculty. She commented in an interview that, "Williston was a good school. The teachers were good teachers; they pushed those students. Those students had scholarships to all the Ivy League schools (some went to Yale, some to Harvard, all around). One year, because the SAT scored were so high, he [the county superintendent of schools] made the students (seniors) take the test over." This point is also referenced in Wayne Moore's memoir, *Triumphant Warrior: A Soul Survivor of the Wilmington Ten* (Ann Arbor: Warrior Press, 2014), 19. This point emphasizes that although education was separate and *not* equal, decades of work and energy went into making Williston a highly respected school that African Americans cherished.

The second component of the project is a digital history website that presents public audiences with multimedia tools to better illustrate the temporal and spatial elements of the 1971 Wilmington Rebellion, accompanied by excerpts from oral history interviews.[11] The following essay supports the digital elements of the project by contextualizing the broader history of racial trauma in Wilmington leading up to the closure of Williston Senior High School and the subsequent events of the 1971 Rebellion.[12] Together, the complementary essay and website show how personal "microhistories" presented in the experiences of Black students connect to a broader landscape of civil rights-era struggles for racial justice and desegregation, in Wilmington and beyond.[13] A project like this provides a model for a multi-modal community-based public history. While the exact experiences are unique to Wilmington and its history, there are patterns and trends that emerge that can be connected to the broader story of civil rights and desegregation in the US South. Although there have been published scholarly works on the racial history of Wilmington, the stories of students who experienced desegregation and the events of the 1971 Rebellion have gone untold. I ask questions such as: was the 1898 Massacre a shared collective memory among African American residents? What injustices did Black students

[11] Some sources on digital history include: Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki, *Writing History in the Digital Age*; Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*; Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein, *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2019*; and Mats Fridlund, Mila Oiva, and Petri Paju, *Digital Histories: Emergent Approaches within the New Digital History*.

[12] There are resources online to learn about the Wilmington Ten such as the UNC Wilmington Library collection found here: https://library.uncw.edu/guides/the_wilmington_ten_of_1971. There are also articles on sites such as Wikipedia and Britannica along with various news stories about the Wilmington Ten. The main inspiration for making this website came from the site "Wilmington Massacre and Coup d'état of 1898 - Timeline of Events" which can be found here:
https://nhcgov.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=5a4f5757e4904fb8bef6db842c1ff7c3
This site is a timeline of events that took place during the 1898 Massacre. This site is owned by New Hanover County. Although there are resources on the internet about the 1971 Rebellion, there are no interactive websites that engage the public in the same way that I hope to.

[13] Microhistory is closely associated to *alltagsgeschichte* however, it was created by the Italians in the 1970s. Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi are two—out of many—notable microhistorians. Levi characterizes microhistory in his essay "On Microhistory," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Polity Press, 2001), 93-113.

experience or witness, in or outside of school? How did Black and white students feel about the boycotts and protests that occurred from 1968-1971? Why do Black and white students think the boycotts led to arson and civil unrest in February 1971? The responses of former students will aid in a more comprehensive view of the civil rights experience in Wilmington and allow those not commonly heard by the public to have a voice.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Many historians have written excellent accounts of the civil rights movement in the US from a variety of perspectives including economic, social, legal, and political contexts. These works are important to contextualize the story of Wilmington and better understand the factors that were in place at the time. In particular, understanding the history of the city after 1898, including the civil rights movement and controversies surrounding the efficacy of non-violent vs. self-defense, and African Americans' post-1954 ambivalent responses to the school desegregation process. Here, I situate this thesis within this historiography and addresses what this project contributes.

This project is localized in Wilmington and several historians offer an understanding of why local history is important to understanding the national perspective of the civil rights movement. Similar to how this project relies on oral history to underline the significance of "everyday, normal people," *Ground Work: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* edited by Jeanne Theoharis, Komozi Woodard, and Charles Payne offers a collection of essays that highlight everyday people around the country that made the civil rights movement possible. Influenced by John Dittmer's *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, this collection argues that previous histories about key civil rights leaders such as Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X created the "Great Man" concept that people could only be led by important men. The general theme of this collection is that local African Americans, both rural and urban, were acting on their own and that partnerships with nationally recognized leaders and organizations occurred only after these local struggles were well established.[14] These

[14] Jeanne Theoharis, Komozi Woodard, and Charles M. Payne, *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

essays "reveal that the local is where the national and international are located—that national events and policy outcomes are driven by local movements and grassroots people—and that often national mobilizations and even national organizations were created as a way to aid a local front."[15] This collection highlights the importance of understanding local studies which was expressed in the work done by David S. Cecelski, William H. Chafe, Charles W. McKinney, and Sonya Ramsey among many others. By understanding local, specific examples, we are able to better understand a broader landscape.[16]

William H. Chafe focused on Greensboro, North Carolina, in his book *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom.* Written in 1980, Chafe asked many questions about the civil rights movement that had not been previously answered in civil rights scholarship. His questions revolved around "the dialectic of social control and social change on the issue of race."[17] He realized the best way to understand social changes was to focus on one city to better understand how civil rights impacted and altered relations between African Americans and whites and how the local narrative compared to the national narrative. Chafe argued that although North Carolina claimed a progressive outlook, "the twentieth century North Carolina progressive image existed side by side with social and economic facts that contradicted profoundly the state's reputation."[18] White progressives in North Carolina operated under a blanket of civility which represented their lack of understanding for African Americans. Chafe argued that civil rights and civility were not compatible because civility merely "provides

[15] Theoharis, Woodard, and Payne, 7–8.
[16] Theoharis, Woodard, and Payne, 3.
[17] William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 1.
[18] Chafe, 4.

a veneer for more oppress" by those who would "guard power under the guise of sharing it."[19] Chafe's work is extremely relevant to the practice of local history and civil rights historiography as well as understanding African American's mixed feelings about school desegregation in Wilmington.

Similar to Chafe's study of Greensboro, Charles H. McKinney focused on the local history of African Americans in Wilson County, North Carolina from the 1930s through the 1970s in his book *Greater Freedom: The Evolution of the Civil Rights Struggle in Wilson, North Carolina*. In agreement with Chafe, McKinney argued that the North Carolina state government relied on the image of non-violence to show its progressivism. "The state's progressive image—and Wilson's investment in that image—has a pernicious impact on the creation of counter narratives that accurately reflect the reality of African American Life."[20] *Greater Freedom* sheds light on the dynamic interplay between Black agency and white repression and acknowledges the evolving nature of social change in the middle of the twentieth century.[21] McKinney is helpful not only for illustrating an interplay between Black agency and white repression, but also for illustrating, along with other scholars, *how* white repression operated as a combination of overt violence, laws, and court rulings, as well as dominant narratives and stories which repressed Black history.

The story of civil rights includes the story of protesting and violence in various forms, such as self-defense against police and other white supremacists organizations. Historian W. E. B. DuBois is one of the most well-known early African American leaders to comment on the

[19] Chafe, 249.
[20] Charles W. McKinney, *Greater Freedom: The Evolution of the Civil Rights Struggle in Wilson, North Carolina* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, Inc., 2010), 10.
[21] McKinney, 10.

psychological toll of racist (or white supremacist) violence and laws in America which has continued to pervade society in the decades since his writing. In 1920 he published *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* which includes the chapter "The Souls of White Folks." This chapter offers an important commentary on racism in America. DuBois stated, "how easy, then, by emphasis and omission to make children believe that every great soul the world ever saw was a white man's soul." He continued, "If from the world were dropped everything that could not fairly be attributed to White Folk, the world would, if anything, be even greater, truer, better than now."[22] This chapter points to the First World War to comment on the hypocrisy of the US and European countries during World War I condemning the actions of Germany when they themselves held African Americans to a subhuman level. DuBois further argued, "are we not coming more and more, day by day, to making the statement 'I am white,' the one fundamental tenet of our practical morality?"[23] The violence he recounted against African Americans throughout the country is significant and represents a counternarrative to the long-standing dominant narrative of white America.

Contemporary scholarship on white supremacist violence and racism in the US is seen in Carol Anderson's 2016 work *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of our Racial Divide.* Anderson argues that the trigger for white rage is Black advancement. White rage was not only visible forms of violence such as lynching and the Ku Klux Klan, but also, "it works its way through the courts, the legislatures, and a range of government bureaucracies. It wreaks havoc subtly, almost imperceptible."[24] This was also argued by McKinney. In the case of Wilmington, the 1898 massacre was an act of violence perpetrated by whites on African Americans in the wake of an

[22] W. E. B. DuBois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1920).
[23] DuBois.
[24] Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2016), 3.

election that affirmed Black political power — which whites saw Black advancement as a threat. However, Anderson argues that even if local, state, and federal governments were no longer engaging in overt acts of violence, Jim Crow segregation laws and rulings handed down over the next decades continued the dehumanization of African Americans.[25] Understanding the deep-seated racism and legacies of the Jim Crow South helps to better situate why there was a civil rights movement and why that movement resorted to more radical tactics of self-defense in the face of mounting white retaliation towards the end of the 1960s.

Elizabeth Hinton continues this narrative in *America on Fire: An Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion since the 1960s*. Hinton argues that urban violence is deeply politicized and stems from the historical over-policing of Black communities.[26] It is important to understand the difference between the use of the term riots versus rebellions, whereas, Hinton argues the term "riot" de-politicized events and leads people to interpret events as expressions of unjustified anger and frustration which ultimately categorizes Black activists as criminals. When the reality was, African Americans were rebelling against a system of white supremacy that has subjugated Black Americans for centuries.[27] Often these occurrences were sparked by small events such as a traffic stop, where the reality of over-policing becomes too much to bear and sparks action within the community. Ultimately, Hinton concludes, Americans need to re-frame their understanding of why there was an increase in violence at the end of the 1960s and early 70s, and it was not due to Black criminality, but rather a culmination of years of civil rights efforts not changing the de facto treatment of individuals in the African American community.

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[25] James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 4–6.
[26] Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: An Untold Story of Police Violence and Black Rebellion since the 1960s* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2021), 4.
[27] Hinton, 7.

Similar to Hinton's work, *The Great Uprising: Race Riots in Urban America During the 1960s* by Peter B. Levy is a local historical view of racial violence that occurred between 1963 and 1972 which the author has dubbed the "Great Uprising."[28] During the time, over 750 urban revolts occurred throughout America. Levy focuses on three locations—Cambridge and Baltimore, Maryland, and York, Pennsylvania—to trace the impact that this period had on those locations. Levy's ability to contextualize specific local history in the violence of the "Great Uprising" helps to situate Wilmington in a similar way. However, Levy's focus on northern cities misses nuances of Black resistance where school desegregation was often most explosive, namely in the US South. This work also helps to apply the arguments of Hinton and Anderson to specific cities and builds on the importance of local history emphasized by Chafe, McKinney, Theoharis, Woodard, and Payne.

This project in particular focuses on the actions of students in response to desegregation and racism. In *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest* Gael Graham argues that during the 1960s, high school students were not only coping with desegregation and protesting against the war in Vietnam but also were waging an "unprecedented and self-conscious effort to redefine their status and roles…to shed some of the limitations of childhood and gain greater control over their lives."[29] This work sheds light on why the Black students in Wilmington protested the way they did, students everywhere were attempting to gain more rights for themselves and protested what they did not think was right.

[28] Peter B. Levy, *The Great Uprising: Race Riots in Urban America during the 1960s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1.
[29] Gael Graham, *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protests* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 9. Graham discusses students from across the country protesting a number of issues. Her book does not focus on Black students and desegregation, but it is one of the main themes.

Graham's work helps to understand the high school movement throughout the country during this time, which ultimately leads to a better understanding in a local study such as Wilmington.

Contextualizing this project in the historiography of civil rights struggles, retaliatory forms of state-sanctioned and white supremacist violence, and Black resistance is key; however, scholarship around desegregation is also extremely important and many historians have researched the debate among African Americans after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling was handed down in 1954. Although DuBois was writing almost twenty years before *Brown,* he was again a foundational figure in commenting on the complicated relationship African Americans had with school segregation in his article, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?" published in 1935. He argued that Black students would receive a better education in schools run by the Black community. DuBois stated, "I am no fool; and I know that race prejudice in the United States today is such that most Negroes cannot receive proper education in white institutions."[30] He continued emphatically, "The plain fact faces us, that either he will have separate schools or he will not be educated."[31] DuBois articulated one of the main arguments against segregation within the African American community. Although he did not speak for all Black people, this article highlighted the concern that African American parents had about their children being educated under a white system that had systematically held African Americans back from progressing in America.

DuBois is important to understand the debate over school segregation, however, other scholars have since reflected on the entire process of desegregation and how it impacted both the Black and white communities. In *Race and Education in North Carolina: From Segregation to*

[30] W. E. B. DuBois, "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?," *The Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (July 1935): 328–29.
[31] DuBois, 329.

Desegregation, John E. Batchelor used a number of court cases and government documents to argue that the state government did whatever was in its power to slow the integration of schools. In North Carolina, the Pearsall Committee was established by the governor to assess the viability of integration and find ways to work around the legal aspects to keep segregated public schools.[32] Batchelor disagreed with Chafe's assertion that people were willing to desegregate, he stated, "segregationist sentiment permeated every facet of North Carolina's population through the 1950s and later. The state's leaders were not eager to move ahead with school desegregation themselves. But neither was any other significant segment of the white population."[33] This work supports Andersons' argument that whites countered any sort of Black advancement and shows how white oppression persisted in North Carolina not through physical violence, but through rulings state government legislature.

Another scholar who utilized local history to gauge the impact of desegregation in North Carolina is David S. Cecelski's work *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina, and the Fate of Black Schools in the South.* In his well-researched book, Cecelski tells the story of Hyde County, North Carolina. About 180 miles north of Wilmington also along the coast. The story of these two cities could not be more different.[34] However, *Along Freedom Road* offers a well-rounded understanding of how a community can come together and effectively advocate for themselves. Cecelski argues that throughout the state, "instead of reconciling [B]lack and white schools on equal terms, white leaders made school desegregation a one-way street. Black

[32] John E. Batchelor, *Race and Education in North Carolina: From Segregation to Desegregation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 32.
[33] Batchelor, 79.
[34] David S. Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina, and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014). African Americans strongly advocated for the two Black schools in the school district to remain open. They successfully boycotted for a year and were able to keep the schools open.

communities repeatedly had to sacrifice their leadership traditions, school cultures, and educational heritage for the other benefits of desegregation."[35] By illustrating why African Americans of Hyde County fought so hard to maintain their own schools— along with the hesitation to integrate— this work helps to situate the struggle of Wilmington and the importance of Williston and the fact that Black students did not just lose a school, they lost a way of life and a part of their culture.

An equally important aspect of integration was not only the involvement of students, but of teachers. In *Reading, Writing, and Segregation: A Century of Black Women Teachers in Nashville,* Sonya Ramsey told the story of Black women educators in Nashville, Tennessee. She argued that the NAACP efforts to desegregate schools implied that although African American teachers worked hard to ensure Black schools were giving Black children a high-quality education, they were ultimately insufficient which brought their professionalism to question.[36] Nevertheless, Black teachers supported the NAACP and desegregation as the best option for Black students, putting the students before themselves and their ideas of professionalism. Bertha Todd was an important part of desegregation in Wilmington, and Ramsey's work helps to understand the role that Black teachers—especially women— had during this time.

The story of Wilmington race relations begins with the history of the 1898 Massacre. Many historians have written about this topic but two in particular are helpful to understand the impact this event had on African Americans and the white community. *Narrative, Political Unconscious and Racial Violence in Wilmington, North Carolina* by Leslie Hossfeld asks

[35] Cecelski, 7–8.
[36] Sonya Yvette Ramsey, *Reading, Writing, and Segregation: A Century of Black Women Teachers in Nashville*, Women in American History (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 137–38.

questions about how events from the past can impact present-day social situations.[37] Hossfeld approached this story from a sociological perspective but utilized newspaper articles and interviews to understand the dominant narrative about 1898 created by the white community and the "1898 mentality."[38] Her work is key to locating the history of racial tensions in the community and how it impacted later events such as the 1971 Rebellion.

Margaret Mulrooney addresses Wilmington's history and the public remembrance of the 1898 Massacre in her book *Race, Place, and Memory: Deep Currents in Wilmington, North Carolina.* She argues that "In every era whites and [B]lacks fashioned conflicting interpretations of the past in order to defend competing racial and civic identities in their present."[39] Mulrooney specifically commented on the idea of the "present" for Black youth during the 1971 Rebellion. She argued that Black students "deployed the [B]lack counter-narrative of 1898 to critique the white power structure."[40] She continues, "In response, white Wilmingtonians engaged in a kind of deliberate collective forgetting of their most famous 'revolution.'"[41] Both Mulrooney and Hossfeld summarize the public impacts of 1898 in both white and Black communities and how the narratives and memories have changed over time.

Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest by John Godwin offers a thorough account of Wilmington during the time of

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[37] Leslie Hossfeld, *Narrative, Political Unconscious and Racial Violence in Wilmington, North Carolina.* (Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 6.
[38] The term "dominant narrative" has been used by many historians to denote the story told by white Americans about the history of African Americans. The phrase is seen in Hossfeld's work along with Mulrooney, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall uses the term dominant narrative to describe the whitewashing of civil rights history in her article "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233. She explains it as, "distilled from history and memory, twisted by ideology and political contestation, and embedded in heritage tours, museums, public rituals, textbooks, and various artifacts of mass culture," which ultimately, "distorts and suppresses as much as it reveals."
[39] Margaret M. Mulrooney, *Race, Place, and Memory: Deep Currents in Wilmington, North Carolina*, *Race, Place, and Memory : Deep Currents in Wilmington, North Carolina* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018), 5.
[40] Mulrooney, 242.
[41] Mulrooney, 242.

civil rights. Godwin covers the history of Wilmington from 1898 through the 1970s and helps situate Wilmington civil rights leaders in the national context. This book adds to the canon of local civil rights histories previously established by historians such as Chafe and paved the way for Cecelski, McKinney, and Ramsey among others. Godwin provides much needed background information to contextualize my own research and properly gauge strategies and debates surrounding protest within the Black Wilmington community.

Although Godwin discusses the events of the 1971 Rebellion, Kenneth Janken takes a closer look at the event and its political outcome in *The Wilmington Ten: Violence, Injustice, and the Rise of Black Politics in the 1970s.* Janken argues that, "what stimulated the growth of the movement was the appearance of organizations dedicated to breaking through the suffocating restrictions of paternalism that the white elite of North Carolina and elsewhere deployed to manage the change in the racial order that they knew they would not be able to stop."[42] Janken provides important analysis of the political outcome of the Ten using court records to support his claims.

The story of the 1971 Rebellion is steeped within the history of civil rights in North Carolina and throughout the country. As previous historians have argued, local histories are key to better understanding the national civil rights movement. This project seeks to offer a new perspective on the 1971 Rebellion and add to the previous scholarship by focusing on the experiences of former Black and white students who attended Hoggard and New Hanover High Schools between the years 1968 and 1971. The project builds upon Hossfeld, Mulrooney, Godwin, and Janken's work by conducting oral histories with an emphasis on student experience by asking questions about the memory of former students. How did the events leading up to the

[42] Janken, *The Wilmington Ten: Violence, Injustice, and the Rise of Black Politics in the 1970s*, 8.

1971 Rebellion impact their relationships in or outside of school? Was the “1898 mentality” present in Wilmington during this time? How were Black students treated in the newly desegregated schools? Did all Black students participate in protesting? These are a few of the questions I hope to address.

METHODOLOGY

Oral history is a unique historical method in that it allows historians to create original primary sources (and therefore, new historical knowledge) as a collaboration between two individuals—interviewer and narrator.[43] The unique relationship cultivated between interviewer and narrator makes each oral history distinct in its context. There is no separation between historian and source, the source *is* the result of the interaction between historian and narrator.[44] The organic conversation of an oral history interview offers an unadulterated insight into events that have previously been curated to present the information in a specific way.[45] This was the main reason oral history was so attractive to me for this project. It is very easy to read newspaper articles and books written about these events because they are easily available. Those sources offer undeniably rich information about events, yet they are also mediated, edited, and curated to present a top-down understanding of what happened.

Thus far, I have been able to interview six individuals from Wilmington about their experiences during this time. I interviewed two Black men, two Black women, one white man, and one white woman. These individuals were selected based on the recommendation of Jan Davidson, a historian at the Cape Fear Museum in Wilmington, along with reaching out to African American churches in Wilmington. The interviews spanned from forty-five mins to over an hour and a half. Five of the interviews were recorded and will be archived at UNC

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[43] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2016), 24.

[44] Abrams, 58. Abrams offers a great understanding of the role of the interviewer and narrator. Subjectivity is a key point in oral histories as both the interviewer and narrative can bring their own perspectives into an interview. For example, one of my interviewees kept saying, "that's probably not the answer you were looking for." This told me that she had a preconceived understanding of what I—a young white female—wanted to hear. Keeping my age and demographic in mind is also important since I have not experienced the racism that my Black interviewees have and have no way of truly understand that experience. Although some might think these aspects make oral histories unreliable, I believe they only help to add to the individual aspect of oral history interviews.

[45] This refers mostly to newspaper articles published by the *Wilmington Morning Star* which portrayed the negative participation of African Americans in the 1971 Rebellion.

Wilmington while one was not recorded.[46] All of the interviewees are currently in their sixties and went to both Hoggard and New Hanover High Schools, graduating between 1969-1973. These interviews shed light on several gaps in my research that I was curious about in terms of the experience of students during this time, particularly Black students. The general feedback that I received was not what I was expecting. Although there was a general acknowledgment of the events that took place in 1971, none of the students I interviewed actively participated in protesting and they all generally reflected negatively on the actions of their fellow students. This only serves to highlight that oral history can often shed light on experiences of everyday people which might serve to contradict the popular, or dominant narrative.

Although oral history is the central method used in this thesis, I also employed other sources. Newspaper articles from the *Wilmington Morning Star* proved to be extremely helpful to determine a timeline of events and what was being reported as the events were unfolding.[47] Yearbooks were another source that established the student experience that was being documented *by* the students and *for* the students. Interviews conducted by Kris Shepard for the Cape Fear Historical Society in 1994 were helpful particularly since Janken referenced them in his book but being able to read through the transcript myself allowed me to take away other details Janken does not. It also allowed me to better understand important people—such as Emsley Laney, school superintendent during desegregation in Wilmington—who are no longer with us. Memoirs from Hubert Eaton—an important civil rights figure in Wilmington during the 1960s and 70s—and Wayne Moore—a high school student who was a member of the

[46] Russell Davis requested not to be recorded because it did not want his interview to be archived.
[47] William M. Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle: The Chronological and Historical Record of the African-American Community in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1865-1950*, ed. Beverly Tetterton (Wilmington: New Hanover County Public Library, 1998). Reaves' book is an invaluable source, he spent time combing through newspapers in Wilmington to create a detailed account of what was being reported about Black Wilmingtonians from 1865-1950.

Wilmington Ten—offer additional primary source information. Sources such as NAACP papers and school board minutes were not consulted on this project. I acknowledge the importance of these sources and the information that they offer, but relay on secondary sources to inform about the operation of these organizations during the 1960s and ‘70s. The main focus of this project is on the former students and their experience.

Secondary material provided key information about the history of Wilmington and historians offer critical analysis of civil rights, desegregation, and general racial trauma to better contextualize the experience in Wilmington. Combined, these sources have helped establish a well thought out and researched thesis that will hopefully help generations to come learn about these events.

THE LEGACY OF 1898
1898-1940s

Histories of violence against African Americans in Wilmington, and their hauntings, far precede 1971. It is important to understand the deep-seated racism that exists within the city which ultimately led to the events surrounding the Ten—school desegregation, the boycott, racial unrest, and arson/property damage. After the emancipation of enslaved individuals in 1865, African Americans in North Carolina saw tremendous growth socially, economically, and politically.[48] In particular, African Americans became politically active in the Republican Party of North Carolina which was created on March 27, 1867.[49] Black political involvement really started with the spring election of 1868. White Republicans listed all-white candidates on the ballot which Black voters were not happy about and made clear they would not be voting for the white candidates. Knowing that they needed the support of Black voters to win, white Republicans placed Black candidates on the ballot and effectively jumpstarted the career of Black politicians for the next several years.[50]

Along with political involvement, Black Wilmingtonians saw growth throughout the 1869s and '70s. Black Wilmingtonians, businessmen such as Thomas Rivera who was a Black grocer, William Kellogg Jr. who sat on the board of alderman and owned a carriage-making business, and Washington Thomas who was a Black physician led the way for Black progress in the Port City.[51] By 1880 Wilmington had a Black population of roughly 10,400 compared to 6,800 whites, this grew by 1890 to 11,324 African Americans and 8,731 whites.[52] Black leaders

[48] Reaves, 248.
[49] Reaves, 239.
[50] Thanayi Michelle Jackson, "'Devoted to the Interests of his Race': Black Officeholders and the Political Culture of Freedom in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1865-1877" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2016), 1-2.
[51] Mulrooney, *Race, Place, and Memory: Deep Currents in Wilmington, North Carolina*, 108.
[52] Mulrooney, 109–14.

in Wilmington organized the Benjamin Banneker Literary and Library association to inspire Black education and several volunteer fire fighting companies.[53] Other Black businesses grew and there were several Black-owned grocery stores, barbers, restaurants, druggists, and clothing stores.[54]

Although Black Republicans were politically involved in Wilmington, the support began to waver as white Republicans emphasized that, although they believed that all men should be treated equally, wealth, power, and education should determine those in office—privileging those who benefitted historically from systems of white supremacy.[55] This eventually led to a split in the Republican Party as Black politicians formed other parties and political clubs over the next two decades which generally dispersed and weakened Black political power.[56] North Carolina Democrats took advantage of this divide and chose to make white supremacy the core of their 1898 political campaign.[57] During the summer of 1898, white supremacist groups such as the Red Shirts and Rough Riders held parades and rallies advancing white supremacist politics.[58] Throughout this new reign of white terror, Black politicians still held power in Wilmington and New Hanover County. However, that soon changed.

The election of November 8, 1898, saw victory for the Democrats as many Black voters were forcefully kept from voting and Republican ballots were thrown out by white supremacy groups sanctioned by the Democratic party.[59] On November 9, Democrats issued an ultimatum called the "Wilmington Declaration of Independence" which demanded that Alexander Manly—

[53] Mulrooney, 114.
[54] Mulrooney, 114.
[55] Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle: The Chronological and Historical Record of the African-American Community in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1865-1950*, 240.
[56] Reaves, 240–45.
[57] Reaves, 245.
[58] Reaves, 246.
[59] Mulrooney, *Race, Place, and Memory: Deep Currents in Wilmington, North Carolina*, 138.

the editor of the Black newspaper the *Daily Record*—leave the city and that Black politicians vacate their elected positions immediately (although the Democrats won, they were not scheduled to take office until later that year). This was presented to Black leaders and they were given an estimated twelve to fourteen hours to respond.[60] However, on the morning of November 10, 1898, a group of around 500 armed white men gathered outside the Wilmington Light Infantry Armory and proceeded up Market Street and destroyed the *Daily Record*. The Wilmington Light Infantry, the U.S. Naval Reserves, and many members of the Red Shirts, Rough Riders, and other white men marched into the Black neighborhood of Brooklyn where the first death occurred in the day.[61] They continued to inflict terror on African Americans. Later in the day, the Mayor and Board of Aldermen were summoned to City Hall where they were forced to resign and replaced by an all-white board of Democrats.[62] The events resulted in several deaths while scores of Blacks fled the city in fear.[63] Some members of the white community, "reacted with joy," and a dominant narrative created by white elites soon emerged which claimed Blacks were responsible for the violence that occurred and whites were only acting in self-defense.[64] The dominant narrative is important because it represents what the Wilmington community was publicly reading and writing about events. This narrative was controlled by the white voice and dictated how Black Wilmingtonians were treated.

From Emancipation through 1898, African Americans in Wilmington had created a new life for themselves. As the majority population, they held office and had businesses that

[60] Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle: The Chronological and Historical Record of the African-American Community in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1865-1950*, 248–49.
[61] Mulrooney, *Race, Place, and Memory: Deep Currents in Wilmington, North Carolina*, 142.
[62] Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle: The Chronological and Historical Record of the African-American Community in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1865-1950*, 249.
[63] Mulrooney, *Race, Place, and Memory: Deep Currents in Wilmington, North Carolina*, 144.
[64] Hossfeld, *Narrative, Political Unconscious and Racial Violence in Wilmington, North Carolina.*, 40.

flourished. That all changed after 1898. Wilmington regressed in the advancement of African Americans which also explains the slow growth of the civil rights movement. Although the NAACP made headway in the community from the early twentieth century and community leaders such as Hubert Eaton advocated for Black rights, it was not until 1971 when a new, younger generation of Black students—free from the influence of the1898 massacre—stood up against white supremacy in Wilmington.

Race relations in Wilmington remained unsteady following 1898, but Black Wilmingtonians slowly began regaining stature in the city. However, white supremacy was constantly looming. In 1900, several white supremacy clubs were organized throughout the town.[65] Prominent white politicians and members of the white community met at these clubs and continued the narrative of white supremacy commenting on the superiority of whites over Blacks and the need to "control the destiny of North Carolina."[66] These clubs eventually lost popularity and throughout the 1910s and into the '20s while Black businesses and schools began to flourish.

The end of the 1910s into the '20s also saw African Americans begin to advocate for themselves by establishing a branch of the NAACP in 1919.[67] Along with the Wilmington Interracial Committee established in 1923, Black Wilmingtonians slowly set up a system to advance their community. There was, however, the rise of another white supremacy group that terrorized the Black community—the Ku Klux Klan. The activities of the Klan during the '20s were not overtly violent, but continued to instill fear in African Americans and perpetuated Jim

[65] Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle: The Chronological and Historical Record of the African-American Community in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1865-1950*, 262–64.
[66] Reaves, 264.
[67] John L. Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 2000), 23.

Crowism.[68] The decline of visible white supremacists violence in the 1920s contributed to the concept of North Carolina as a progressive state which proved to be how white North Carolinians defined themselves for years to justify their subjugation of the Black community.[69]

Throughout the 1940s, the dominant narrative of 1898 served as a cautionary tale, reminding Blacks that "while 'progress' was the objective, [B]lacks should not necessarily expect it on their own terms."[70] This was exemplified in the beating of Mamie Williamson, a Black woman who sat at the front of a Wilmington bus in 1941. The driver drove to the police station where two officers dragged her off the bus and beat her in front of the remaining Black bus passengers.[71] Such displays of white supremacist violence against African Americans continued to further the 1898 mentality and reinforce longstanding tensions between Blacks and whites in Wilmington.

After World War Two, the country experienced a shift in race relations which was also felt in Wilmington. This was expressly seen through the growth of membership in the NAACP to roughly 600,000 members by 1946, signaling the progress that the organization was making throughout the country.[72] However, African Americans in Wilmington were slow to support the movement. This was due to the cultural paradox that plagued North Carolina, which meant "mythical visions of the plantation era, of Confederate glory, and the 'Revolution of 1898' still endowed many whites with the sense of a distinctive local identity, while racial fears haunted the imagination for both races."[73] The extent of these fears was realized when North Carolina

[68] Godwin, 26.
[69] Progressivism in North Carolina is explored more in Chafe, McKinney, and Batchelor.
[70] Hossfeld, *Narrative, Political Unconscious and Racial Violence in Wilmington, North Carolina.*, 61.
[71] Mulrooney, *Race, Place, and Memory: Deep Currents in Wilmington, North Carolina*, 202–3.
[72] "Our History," NAACP, https://naacp.org/about/our-history
[73] Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 43.

Central University Professor Helen Edmonds—a female Black historian—wrote one of the first books that addressed the history of the 1898 Massacre. *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North* Carolina was published in 1951 and received great reviews throughout the state. Louis T. Moore, a white local historian, was angry about the positive reception and expressed his anger through several letters written to newspapers that published positive reviews. Moore's reaction revealed that the discussion of race and Wilmington's history evoked anger rather than a willingness to examine the experience of African Americans.[74] The 1960s and '70s brought a renewed conversation about school integration that is examined in the next section.[75]

[74] Godwin, 59.
[75] The history of civil rights in Wilmington is much more expansive than what I have provided. Godwin does an excellent job of documenting the details. Due to the constraints of this project, I have included a snapshot of this time period, but for further information consult *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way*.

JIM CROW EDUCATION
1898-1968

Education is one of the most important aspects of any society and has been controlled by governing entities in one form or another all around the world. In the United States, "racial segregation and systematic subordination were elaborately interwoven not only into the nation's culture, but also into its legislative and judicial code, operating not merely as custom but as law."[76] Not only were there laws about who could gain an education and where, there was also an ingrained cultural understanding that certain groups of people were not worthy of higher levels of education. Women and racialized minorities have fought for equality in education since the first schools were opened. It was not until the 1970s and '80s that the United States government finally took active measures to enact educational equality.[77]

Public education for Black students began in Wilmington at the end of the Civil War. The Freedmen's Bureau took a significant role in educating Black Americans and in 1865 the Bureau sent the white first teacher to Wilmington a month after the Union liberators marched through the city.[78] By November 1868, the city hosted six different Black schools housed in churches across Wilmington; these schools served an estimated total of 588 Black students.[79] Wealthy white philanthropists from the North—George Peabody and Samuel Williston—took interest in Black education in Wilmington and donated funds for what they called "free colored schools"; city leaders honored them by naming two prominent schools after the men, one of which developed into an important center for the Black community—Williston.[80] Williston operated

[76] Batchelor, *Race and Education in North Carolina*, 2.
[77] Batchelor, 3.
[78] Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle: The Chronological and Historical Record of the African-American Community in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1865-1950*, 145.
[79] Reaves, 145.
[80] Reaves, 145.

under the American Missionary Association until 1873 when the school was sold to the Wilmington Board of Education for $3,000, becoming the first Black school to be added to the city's system of free public schools.[81]

Although Williston and several other schools in the area offered African American students a good education, there was constant talk of inequality through the doctrine of separate but equal that was established through the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v Ferguson,* which was decided only two years before the 1898 massacre. In *Plessy,* Homer Plessy argued that segregation violated the Thirteenth Amendment's ban against "badges of servitude."[82] The court argued against this, stating, "We consider the underlying fallacy of [Plessy's] argument…to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it."[83] The ruling was first applied to schools in 1899 in *Cumming v. Board of Education* which stated that although Richmond County, Georgia, did not have a Black high school, the board of education was allowed to determine the types of schools that they established and since there was an elementary school for African Americans, they fulfilled their obligation for separate but equal.[84] This set a precedent that would be upheld for over fifty years and plagued African Americans with the overt understanding that they were still inferior to whites.

[81] Reaves, 152–53.
[82] Anderson, *White Rage*, 35.
[83] Anderson, 35.
[84] Mulrooney, *Race, Place, and Memory: Deep Currents in Wilmington, North Carolina*, 6.

In Wilmington, white supremacist violence was evident when there were three attempts of arson at Williston School in 1896 which can be connected to the ruling on *Plessy.*[85] However, Williston persevered and on July 3, 1912, the US Congress donated thirty-four acres of land to Wilmington to the New Hanover County Board of Education for the erection of a new Williston school that was stipulated to become an industrial school.[86] Technical schools had risen in popularity due to Samuel Chapman Armstrong and Booker T. Washington and technical schools provided many Black students with practical skills, however, the Hampton-Tuskegee idea "represented the ideological antithesis of the education and social movement begun by ex-slaves."[87] Technical schools were another way in which governing bodies controlled what was being taught to whom and Williston Technical was no exception. Aside from the ideological arguments of technical schools, Williston thrived in the Wilmington community thanks to Professor D. C. Virgo who became the school's principal in 1915.[88] Virgo was a strong proponent of education in the community and helped increase enrollment by almost 100 percent from 833 students in 1916 to 1,564 students in 1924.[89]

Despite understood inequitable resources and conditions between Black and white schools, North Carolina's Black public schools were ranked among segregated schools as the best in the nation by *The Crisis,* a magazine published by the NAACP.[90] From the 1930s through

[85] Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle: The Chronological and Historical Record of the African-American Community in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1865-1950*, 153.
[86] Reaves, 154.
[87] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 33.
[88] Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle: The Chronological and Historical Record of the African-American Community in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1865-1950*, 155.
[89] Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 21.
[90] Godwin, 22–23.

the 1950s, Williston Industrial remained a pillar in the community.[91] In 1953, however, the city constructed a new building to house Williston Senior High School which transitioned from the industrial school model to a normal school model. Williston served Black students and parents for close to a century and acted not only as a school, but also as a place for Black Wilmington residents to gather and take pride in their community.

Black education was important in Wilmington not only because it offered Black students a way to learn and become productive members of society, but also Black students learned how to be democratic citizens as argued by Vanessa Siddle Walker in *Hello Professor*.[92] The white education system expected Black schools to only educate Black students enough to continue to occupy working-class jobs.[93] This point was reinforced by Ronald Sparks in his oral history interview when he stated that white guidance counselors discouraged him from wanting to become an engineer and instead encouraged him to learn a trade.[94] However, Black educators saw the importance of teaching Black students civil education along with other school topics which would enable Black citizens to productively participate in democracy.[95] Teachers such as Bertha Todd helped Williston to achieve those goals and offered Black students a well-rounded

[91] Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle: The Chronological and Historical Record of the African-American Community in Wilmington, North Carolina, 1865-1950*, 154–61.From 1915-1953 there were four buildings that housed Williston Industrial School. The first was built in 1915 and was called Williston Industrial School, then in 1931 to satisfy a new state law mandatory minimum number of classrooms Williston Industrial High School was built next to the old building. In 1934 Williston Industrial High School was accidentally burned and a new building was completed in 1937. Williston Senior High was established in 1954 and was the school that was closed by the BoE.
[92] Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Hello Professor: A Black Principal and Professional Leadership in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 6.
[93] Walker, 6.
[94] Ronald Sparks, interview by Sydney Johnson, Zoom, February 18, 2022.
[95] Walker, *Hello Professor: A Black Principal and Professional Leadership in the Segregated South*, 7.

education which solidified the importance of Williston to African American students and parents.[96]

Although Williston was a successful school, Black schools were not equal to white schools and the fight for equality became one of the main goals of the NAACP. The fight accelerated under the leadership of Charles H. Houston in the 1930s.[97] Between 1935 and 1950 the NAACP under Houston presented case after case to Southern courts that proved separate was not, in fact, not equal.[98] Anderson argues that, "because the legal bedrock of the South was predicated on that dictum, the proven inability to have both equal and separate simultaneously left Dixie in judicial danger, which was just as Charles Hamilton Houston intended."[99] After years of gathering evidence and creating cases, Houston's protegee—Thurgood Marshall—argued against *Plessy* in 1952 and it took two years for the decision to be handed down on May 17, 1954. Anderson argued that this decision, "was but a declaration of war" for whites in the South.[100] One of the first reactions of those in the South was the continuation of attempts to limit Black people from voting and ensuring those who opposed *Brown* were able to vote their dissatisfaction with the case.[101] In 1956, 101 members of Congress signed the Southern Manifesto that effectively halted *Brown* and gave Southern states time to continue to stall the integration of schools.[102] In Wilmington, "the *Brown* decision opened deep divisions among

[96] Bertha Boykin Todd, Bertha Boykin Todd Interview, interview by Sonya Ramsey, July 15, 1993, Duke University Libraries Repository Collections and Archives. Todd recalls ordering a lot of books that talked about desegregation and the government. She even recalled a civics teacher being watched because he was teaching students about the Constitution which white administrators did not like. They did not want Black students to really know what their rights were.
[97] Anderson, *White Rage*, 67.
[98] Anderson, 71.
[99] Anderson, 71.
[100] Anderson, 75.
[101] Anderson, 76–77.
[102] Anderson, 80.

white leaders, setting in motion a political opposition that remained ideologically aligned with the all-out sectional campaign to stop desegregation."[103] Godwin, Anderson, Cecelski, Batchelor, and others compare this conservative sentiment in the white community to the rise of conservatism in the 1890s that led to the Wilmington Massacre. In both situations, many white people believed that the upward trajectory of Black people within society was a threat to the social order and should be stopped.[104] In 1898, that meant the forcible removal of Black politicians; in the era of segregation, it meant fighting against the integration of schools.

For Black Wilmingtonians, however, the reception of *Brown* was also mixed. Some Black leaders including Dr. Hubert Eaton, *Journal* editor T. C. Jervay, and NAACP president Burdell Harvey were staunch supporters of desegregation and believed that it allowed the African Americans to fight against Jim Crow.[105] Eaton in particular was a devoted advocate of Black education. He fought, and won, a lawsuit in 1952 that argued that the Wilmington schools for Black students were, in fact, not equal to the schools for white students—the suit saw almost $1 million go towards Black schools.[106]

In his memoir, *Every Man Should Try,* Eaton reflected on the reception of his original case after the Board of Education insinuated there were friendly relations between whites and Blacks, "the reference to 'friendly relations' between colored and white people was without doubt veiled intimidation based on the race riot of 1898…"[107] In another meeting with the Board, Eaton described, "Near the close of the meeting, the school board attorney, Mr. Hogue, alluded

[103] Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 80.
[104] Anderson, *White Rage*, 5.
[105] Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 80.
[106] Hubert Eaton, *Every Man Should Try* (Wilmington: Bonaparte Press, 1984), 48.
[107] Eaton, 43.

to the race riots of 1898. However innocuous his intention, his statement was inescapably interpreted as an effort to intimidate—to warn that it could happen again."[108] It is striking that Eaton, a man who did not grow up in Wilmington, but moved to the city in 1943, would suggest not once, or twice, but at least three times in his memoir that events surrounding desegregation were similar to the 1898 massacre. This only helps to support the argument that 1898 impacted Black Wilmingtonians and contributed to the disenfranchisement Black students felt. It also supports Hossfeld's argument that although the narrative of 1898 shifted from the public sphere to the private sphere and even though it was not referenced publicly, it continued to impact African Americans by circulating in prominent Black leaders' memories.

Other members of the African American community saw things differently. As DuBois argued, there was some push back from the older generation of African Americans who felt that integration would not serve the community well.[109] In other words, although there was systemic oppression and segregation of whites and Blacks, many African Americans felt so strongly about Black schools in Wilmington that they were not immediate supporters of this opportunity to fight against segregation. For many Black parents, desegregated schools did not mean equality in education; these schools closely resembled former all-white schools in values, traditions, political sensibilities, and cultural orientation which made it difficult to see how their children would benefit.[110]

Throughout the 1950s, Black schools in Wilmington continued to improve and reached levels of academic excellence which helped further explain the uncertainty and overall character

[108] Eaton, 45.
[109] Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 81.
[110] Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road*, 9.

of the leadership in the Black community.[111] This popularity was particularly strong in regards to Williston. Wayne Moore—who eventually became convicted as a member of the Wilmington Ten—wrote in his memoir, "If this book had a million pages, it still wouldn't be enough to completely convey the bone-deep, heart-deep, pride-deep—love-deep—place Williston Senior High School occupied for generations of us in Wilmington's African-American community."[112] His testament supports the narrative that Williston was not just a school, but the heart of African Americans in Wilmington.[113]

The importance of Williston to Black Wilmingtonians cannot be overstated; therefore, it is crucial for the nuances of these tensions to be accurately conveyed. Some African Americans in Wilmington who considered Williston equal or superior to its white counterparts, expressed their ambivalence towards the Brown decision and some of the negative consequences of desegregation. With both the whites and Blacks unsure of integration, it came as no surprise that it took over a decade for the school system to officially integrate. Cecelski adds, "there emerged a notable continuity between older, more conservative African American voices, which had given the building of strong [B]lack schools priority over desegregation, and the newer 'militant' expressions of black separatism and community control."[114] The paradox of inequality in separation, yet pride in Black schools was deeply felt among Black Wilmingtonians.[115] Undoubtedly, this new desegregation policy was met with skepticism and anxiety. One of the last

[111] Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 81.
[112] Wayne Moore, *Triumphant Warrior: A Soul Survivor of the Wilmington Ten* (Ann Arbor: Warrior Press, 2014), 17.
[113] Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road*, 9. Cecelski argues this point further stating, "when [B]lack schools closed, their names, mascots, mottos, holidays, and traditions were sacrificed with them, while the students were transferred to historically white schools that retained those markers of culture and racial identity."
[114] Cecelski, 10.
[115] This point is also emphasizes in Ramsey's work, Black teachers were proud of their work in Black schools but also supported the NAACP's efforts to integrate schools.

major ruling the Supreme Court handed down on the topic of education was *Plessy*. Many African Americans had to wonder: would *Brown* be different?

North Carolina state officials reacted to the *Brown* decision by forming the Pearsall Committee. The goal of the committee was to find a solution to desegregation that "moderate" North Carolinians would accept. One of the first responses by the committee was to pass the Pupil Assignment Act on March 30, 1955, which gave local governments the authority to assign where students went to school, therefore, eliminating the possibility of a single lawsuit against the state for direct desegregation.[116] The Pearsall Plan ultimately gave whites the authority over the implementation of *Brown* and set up the false democratic choice to ensure racial segregation.[117] The Plan was seen as another example of the moderate progressivism of North Carolina between the two extremes of whites blatantly protesting *Brown* and the NAACP's insistence on the enforcement of *Brown*.[118] The reality of the Pearsall Plan was that it was another veiled enforcement of racist policies.[119]

The first signs of integration in Wilmington came in 1962 when Reverend and Mrs. Aaron McCrae appeared before the Board to request that their children be sent to all-white schools.[120] The Board of Education (BoE) granted approval of the transfer of the McCrae's son, Aaron Jr., to attend an all-white junior high, becoming the first Black student to integrate into

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[116] Batchelor, *Race and Education in North Carolina*, 42. One of several famous cases in North Carolina was *Swann v. Board of Education* which was argued by Julius Chambers in Charlotte in 1969. See *Color and Character: West Charlotte High and the American Struggle over Education Equality* by Pamela Grundy.
[117] Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road*, 26.
[118] Cecelski, 26.
[119] See Anderson, Batchelor, Cecelski, Chafe, and McKinney.
[120] Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 132–33. Aaron McCrae graduated from Williston Industrial in 1938 and served as a Marine in World War II. He did not become active in civil rights until the movement in Wilmington to desegregate the hospitals led by Dr. Eaton. He joined the Wilmington Civic League and NAACP during this time in the early 1960s. McCrae claimed in an interview with Godwin that he was not pressured by Eaton, or any other vocal NAACP members to put in the request for his children to transfer.

Wilmington under the Pupil Assignment Law of 1955 that resulted from the Pearsall Act.[121] By 1964, after another case was brought against the BoE by Eaton, nineteen Black students were attending historically all-white schools.[122] However, this was still very far from full integration of the school system in accordance to *Brown*.

In the years after the *Brown* ruling, the next steps for civil rights activists involved continued advocacy for the complete desegregation of the nation's public schools. Around the country, this was exceedingly complicated and led to years of protest for a delay in the implementation of full integration according to *Brown* from some whites and Blacks. Although the 1898 Massacre impacted the willingness of an older generation of Black Wilmingtonians to participate in the civil rights movement, the younger generation was ready to participate. Starting in 1958, Williston High School students led several unsuccessful attempts to desegregate the public library and boycotted the public bus system.[123] After the Greensboro sit-in in 1960, dozens of Black students from Williston participated in their own sit-ins downtown in the same year with minimal outcome or backlash.[124] Black students primarily adopted non-violent tactics in the early stages of this civil rights era of desegregation.

The most significant acts of protest by Black students occurred after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, just months before Williston would close. The next day, hundreds of students from Williston marched to the courthouse to pray for the loss of the

[121] Godwin, 134.
[122] Eaton, *Every Man Should Try*, 88; Carolyn Eaton et al., Appellees, v. New Hanover County Board of Education, Appellant, No. 71-1890 (United States Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit. April 26, 1972).
[123] Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 108.
[124] "Negro Sit-Down Quiet At City Lunch Counter," *Wilmington Morning Star*, March 20, 1960. Accessed through *NewsBank*.

great leader.[125] Another group of students from Williston went to the all-white New Hanover High School to demand they lower their flag.[126] In the following days' civil unrest broke out in the city and by April 16, over two hundred people had been arrested and there was around $200,000 worth of property damage.[127] The death of Dr. King Jr. signaled a shift in the civil rights movement in America as more than one hundred cities experienced protesting following the death of Dr. King Jr.[128] Hinton argues that "the collective sorrow, anger, and disillusionment that followed King's death was a turning point for the mainstream civil rights movement and its emphasis on nonviolence."[129] Moore agreed that in Wilmington, there was a new sense of anger that was boiling in the Black community. A self-described follower of Dr. King Jr. and the non-violence movement, Moore stated that he, "wanted to be a part of the destruction of anything white. I wanted to be a part of the [B]lack struggle."[130] Older Black Wilmingtonians saw a connection between the destruction and unrest in 1968 to the white supremacist violence that occurred in 1898 but acknowledged the younger generation of African Americans did not harbor the same fear of the white community that previous generations of Black Wilmingtonians had.[131]

The shift in how Black students began to protest was important because for decades previously, Black students did not outwardly protest against segregation within Wilmington. After Dr. King Jr.'s death, and other instances of white supremacist violence such as the

[125] Moore, *Triumphant Warrior: A Soul Survivor of the Wilmington Ten*, 8; Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 217.
[126] Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 217.
[127] Moore, *Triumphant Warrior: A Soul Survivor of the Wilmington Ten*, 10; Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 218.
[128] Hinton, *America on Fire: An Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion since the 1960s*, 21.
[129] Hinton, 21.
[130] Moore, *Triumphant Warrior: A Soul Survivor of the Wilmington Ten*, 8.
[131] Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 219.

Orangeburg massacre at South Carolina State University in 1968, Black students became more willing to stand up against white supremacy and racism and try to achieve the rights that they deserve.

After years of the white community fighting against desegregation, and many African Americans not actively advocating for desegregation—besides a few members of the community such as Eaton and Jervay— the courts intervened. A team of representatives from the Health, Education, and Welfare services (HEW) visited New Hanover County schools in May 1968, the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina under Judge Algernon Butler ordered the school system to file a new system for the schools that would be "unitary" in character.[132] What was the School Board's decision? To close Williston, which they decided after a lengthy Board meeting on June 26, 1968. In the meeting, which was reported on by Carolyn Zimmerman for the *Wilmington Morning Star*, it became clear that the city was torn over what was the best option. The three different plans that were originally laid out included a geographical zone plan between the three high schools (Hoggard, New Hanover, and Williston), transform Lake Forest School into the third high school which would again require geographical zoning, or assigning Williston High School students to Hoggard and New Hanover.[133]

Many Wilmington citizens who spoke out against the plan fixated their anger on HEW and the government. Zimmerman wrote, "Other speakers said that they would pay 'more county taxes and more state taxes' to keep their current school plan; they equated federal desegregation demands to a 'dictatorship' and objected to taking a student from a school in an 'economic area

[132] Godwin, 222–24. For years, similar to many other cities in the country, Wilmington had relied on freedom of choice under the Pupil Assignment Act of 1955. However, on April 27, 1968 *Green v. New Kent County Board of Education* ruled that freedom of choice was no longer an option.
[133] Carolyn Zimmerman, "School Board Votes to Close Williston High," *Wilmington Morning Star*, June 27, 1968. Accessed through *NewsBank.*

to which he is accustomed.'"[134] The divide among African Americans was also present as Aaron McRae—who fought for his son to be the first Black student integrated—stated, "'Too long we have waved a rebel flag,' said McRae, for a 'backward and decadent society.' He declared that 'Negro boys and Negro girls and white boys and white girls can be assigned to Williston High School.'"[135] This was juxtaposed by several Black Williston students who asked the Board why they chose to close Williston over another high school. This was answered by one of the Board members who said, "Williston 'is an inferior school; it always has been and it always will be and no amount of money could ever make it equal' to the other white schools."[136] Meanwhile, another Williston student called on fellow Williston students to show up to the building in September regardless of the Board's decision. The article ended quoting County Commissioner M. H. Vaughan who, "declared that the board 'can't force the type of social relationship in sixty days that hasn't been developed in 100 years."[137]

The various, divergent reactions of Wilmington citizens crucially point to the traumatic long-term impacts of segregation. Many did not agree that the government should be deciding what happens in the schools. Commissioner Vaughan's statement touched on the main issue which was that whites and Blacks did not think that it was ready to take this next step. Although school boards across the country had been desegregating over the previous years, the progress of racial relations in Wilmington had been stunted which, I argue, is related to the trauma caused by the 1898 Wilmington Massacre. As Moore stated, "Wilmington never fully recovered from that day. I know because I was swept up some seventy-three years later in its echo, in a kind of

[134] Zimmerman.
[135] Zimmerman.
[136] Zimmerman.
[137] Zimmerman.

historical aftershock of the Wilmington Race Riot of 1898."[138] This statement from Moore is powerful and underscores the deep-seated trauma inflicted on the community after the 1898 Massacre. Even though African Americans were able to persevere through limits on their social, economic, and educational mobility there was always an underlying tension.

The BoE's decision to close Williston illustrated the reluctance of whites to participate in desegregation and highlighted the inequities between Black and white schools. In several interviews conducted in 1994 for the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society—a Wilmington-based organization—Kris Shepard spoke to several key people involved in the 1971 Rebellion including Emsley Laney, the chairman of the Board. Laney stated that the Board, "felt it would be very difficult to integrate Williston High School and send white students there." He continued, "I would say that we were forced into integration, forced legally into integration because we'd just been brought up differently. The status quo was a dual school system; that's what we inherited, that's what we believed in."[139] Laney's comment supports the idea that not only were white and Black Wilmington citizens not ready for integration, but high-ranking members of the Board itself also did not think the city was ready to integrate. It is also significant that this interview took place several decades after the incident, showing that Laney still believed that integration at that time was not what the community needed or "believed."

After examining the events that led up to the closure of Williston, it should come as no surprise that once Black students began attending New Hanover and Hoggard it was not a seamless transition. While riding the bus to Hoggard on his first day of school, Moore wrote that one of his fellow Black classmates asked, "Man, how we going to get along with those white

[138] Moore, *Triumphant Warrior*, xiv-xv.
[139] Emsley Laney, Research Project for Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, interview by Kris Shepard, June 14, 1995, Lower Cape Fear Historical Society.

people if they don't want us around."[140] Black students understood that even though desegregation was a step in the right direction in terms of equality between races in the United States, it was not a fate that many looked forward to experiencing. Moore elaborated on his experience, stating, "For me, desegregating at New Hanover *and* Hoggard was a disaster. I was at the mercy of people who had no understanding of me as a student or appreciation of me as a person and member of the community of any significance."[141] For white students, it was a mixed reception. Susan Jarman in her oral history interview recounted that she tried to be nice to all students, but that if white students were too nice to Black students, they would be called names and made fun of.[142] The undercurrents of white supremacy and the 1898 mentality were not far away during the process of integration. Even though most of the individuals that I interviewed stated that when they were students in 1968-1971 they did not know about 1898, they later reflected that they realized that the memory still lingered. Jarman in particular recalled growing up in segregated Wilmington and knowing many of the old white Wilmington families who participated in the 1898 Massacre. She stated that they were not taught about 1898, but the sentiments of white supremacy were nonetheless passed down through generations.[143]

Total desegregation under the new school plan seemingly meant eliminating African American schools and the fragmentation of community and school traditions as that had existed for more than a decade.[144] Both Black and white students had to navigate a confusing and painful new world that ultimately led to the 1971 Rebellion. Black students dealt with the death of a

[140] Moore, *Triumphant Warrior: A Soul Survivor of the Wilmington Ten*, 59.
[141] Moore, 60.
[142] Susan Jarman, interview by Sydney Johnson, Zoom, March 9, 2022.
[143] Jarman.
[144] Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest*, 226.

prolific civil rights leader and only months later they learned that their beloved school was closing and they had to relocate to predominately white schools where they may not be wanted. After a slow trickle of civil rights movement and desegregation, the King assassination and Williston closure hit Black Wilmingtonians quickly and left little time to properly mourn the loss of a way of life. As desegregation efforts and Black school closings threatened to discredit and to destroy African American educational institutions, Black students' mounting frustration and anger intensified.

STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF INTEGRATION
1968-1971

After integration, the next few years saw increased conflicts amongst students in the schools.[145] One of the ways that I examined the student experience was by using yearbooks from Williston, New Hanover, and Hoggard—the two white high schools that Black students from Williston integrated into.[146] My process of examining these yearbooks was determined by going through and noting all the clubs and activities and the student demographics for the years 1968 and 1969. These years were chosen because 1968 was the year before full integration, and 1969 was the first year the school system was fully integrated. Unfortunately, the New Hanover yearbook for 1968 is missing online, therefore the previous year, 1967, was examined. These yearbooks are only one way in which to better understand the situation that these students were going through. It is important to remember that, just like newspapers and other print media, yearbooks are edited and therefore might contain biases towards who oversees their publication. In general, they are good sources because almost every single student is printed in the class section which helps to determine how many students moved from Williston to New Hanover and Hoggard, respectively. They also offer a view of the students created by the students. In terms of other images in the book, it is hard to determine if they showcase a completely accurate representation of who was included. Most clubs and organizations take a group photo where

[145] Jarman, interview; Moore, *Triumphant Warrior: A Soul Survivor of the Wilmington Ten*; Todd, Bertha Boykin Todd Interview. This was mostly due to fights occurring in school that would then cause school to close. In her interview with me, Susan Jarman—who attended Hoggard through 1969—stated that fights would happened because of name calling and other comments made by students. There was not an organized movement, but rather small incidents between Black and white students. An interview with Bertha Todd who was a revered Black educator in Wilmington—she first taught at Williston, then moved to Hoggard— comments on the tensions. She commented that, "in the beginning it was everyday. It was worse, the tension was higher sometimes than other times. And of course, when it was very volatile the school just simply erupted."

[146] Pamela Grundy, *Color and Character: West Charlotte High and the American Struggle over Educational Equality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Grundy's book addressing West Charlotte High School utilizes oral history interviews and yearbooks to understand the shift in students and resegregation.

most members are present, but some of the clubs do not and therefore it makes it difficult to establish the demographics of clubs.

Clubs and activities outside of the classroom were vital for the growth of student relationships. Apart from the occasional teacher supervisor, these organizations gave students autonomy to express themselves freely with their peers. Organizations such as the Glee Club and Football team have been referenced as important organizations at Williston.[147] These organizations were not only a place for Black students to gather and connect, but they also had significance in the Black community. When Williston closed, the clubs and organizations where Black students felt welcome vanished along with it. Even if Black students participated in some of the clubs and organizations in New Hanover and Hoggard, their experience was undoubtedly different from what they experienced in Williston. Black students went from "the greatest school under the sun" to schools that did not want them.[148]

The rigors of high school are challenging enough without the factor of being an outsider. Clubs and organizations are essential for students to release the frustration they might feel during the school day and to connect with other students and forge a sense of community. Without that outlet, students turn to other sources and forgo the connection with other students. As demonstrated in the following pages, it is safe to say some Black students participated in some clubs and organizations, but they did not participate on the same level as they did in Williston. There was no chance these two groups of students could effectively become one student body without an eventual buildup of differences, which unfortunately led to the events in 1971.

[147] See Moore and McKinney.
[148] Moore, *Triumphant Warrior: A Soul Survivor of the Wilmington Ten*.

Starting with Williston, in 1968 the school had a total of 584 students, 223 sophomores, 169 juniors, and 192 seniors. Since the seniors were graduating in 1968 that left 392 students displaced for the following school year. Williston was famous for its sports. They had a track and field team; a football team; JV and varsity basketball teams; and a baseball team. They had thirteen clubs and organizations: Student council, National Honor Society, Crown and Scepter Club, Tri-Hi-Y club, Glee Club, Future Teachers of America Club, Future Home-Makers Club, Medical Careers, Spanish Club, Library Club, Chess Club, and Cheerleading. They also had an ROTC group. [149] As previously mentioned, these clubs and organizations were where a student body thrived outside the classroom setting and allowed students to engage with others. These clubs helped to define the Black students of Williston and brought them together as one student body.

John T. Hoggard High School opened its doors in 1967 after the Board decided that the school system needed another high school.[150] The Hoggard student body was significantly larger than Williston with a total of 966 students. 535 sophomores, nine of whom were Black students; 297 juniors, eight of whom were Black students; and 134 seniors, five of whom were Black students for a total of twenty-two Black students. This left 832 students returning for the next school year. Hoggard's sports were similar to Williston's; they had a football team, cheerleaders, track and field, varsity and JV basketball, and golf. It should be noted that there were two Black players for the varsity basketball team. Compared to Williston's thirteen clubs and organizations, Hoggard had thirty-four clubs and organizations. Of those, only three clubs had one Black student who was a member. Although at this time there was a much more limited number of

[149] *The Willistonian*, 1968. Accessed through *DigitalNC.*
[150] "Hoggard High Opens Doors to 1,024 Students," *Wilmington Morning Star*, September 7, 1967. Accessed through *NewsBank.*

Black students in the schools, there were still twenty-two students and the fact that only three of them were in clubs suggests that they were either not interested or did not feel welcome. Many of these clubs were also held at Williston, therefore, it seems that they did not feel comfortable or welcomed.[151]

New Hanover was founded in 1922 and is the oldest school in New Hanover County.[152] Therefore, it had an even larger student body population than Hoggard with a total of 1,957 students. 690 sophomores, fourteen were Black students; 555 juniors, eleven were Black students; and 712 seniors, seventeen were Black students. That left 1,245 students returning the following school year (1968 in this case) and there was a total of forty-two Black students in the school. Due to the age and size of the school, there were quite a few more sports and clubs than in either Williston or Hoggard. Some additions to sports included wrestling and tennis. More Black students participated in sports than in Hoggard. There also were forty-three clubs and organizations. Similar to Hoggard, only two of these clubs had Black students who were members. Again, although the number of Black students was small compared to the rest of the study body, there were still many who did not participate in clubs and organizations.

With public school integration in 1969, Hoggard saw a slight increase of 363 students with a total student body of 1,195 up from 832. The Black student population also increased from twenty-two to 119 students. Despite this increase of ninety-seven Black students, few participated in the school's clubs and sports. There was some growth in Black extracurricular

[151] *John T. Hoggard High School*, 1968. Accessed through classmates.com. Cynthia Brown, interview by Sydney Johnson, Zoom, March 10, 2022. In our interview, Brown recalled inquiring about joining a tennis club for young women. The woman she asked in the office told her that she did not know what club she was talking about. Later, Brown heard some white girls discussing the club and Brown realized that she was simply not welcomed.
[152] Ben Steelman, "What is the History of New Hanover High School?," *StarNews*, http://www.myreporter.com/2010/03/what-is-the-history-of-new-hanover-high-school/.

participations, but there were some clubs such as Future Teachers of America where Williston had a club and yet there were no Black students pictured participating in the club at Hoggard. One notable adjustment was the inclusion of the Tri-Hi-Y club that was at Williston. This club was not at Hoggard before integration, so it seems that it was a gesture of goodwill to include that club. As previously stated, it is important to remember that even if Black students were not pictured in these clubs, it does not mean that they were not involved. For sports, there was a slight increase in Black student-athletes, but nothing significant to report.[153]

In the opening pages of the 1969 New Hanover yearbook, it stated that the student body population grew to 2,400. However, when examining the classes in the yearbook, there was only a total of 1,227 students. This number does not add up since the previous year the total student body was almost 2,000 therefore, a re-count of the students is necessary, potentially in another edition of the yearbook since Yearbooks.com displays multiple copies of the same yearbooks. The total number of Black students expanded from 119 to 154. Again, there is a chance that these numbers are wrong since New Hanover is a very large school, and the total student body population counted was not as it should be. Similar to Hoggard, although the number of Black students increased, those featured in clubs and organizations did not seem to fully reflect those students who joined the school. There was a slight increase of Black student-athletes similar to those at Hoggard.[154]

These yearbooks help to offer a small glance into the lives of students during this period. Although they offer useful statistical information about the study body and helpful insight to the various clubs and organizations, they are not perfect and can only go so far as a primary source.

[153] *John T. Hoggard Yearbook*, 1969. Accessed through classmates.com.
[154] *The New Hanoverian*, 1969. Accessed through classmates.com.

A source that is significant in understanding the integration of schools is an interview conducted by Darrien Bailey, who completed a master's thesis project in 2019 at UNC Wilmington about the integration of schools in the city. He interviewed several members of the community about their thoughts and experiences. Bailey's project offers additional evidence. However, Bailey focused specifically on the closure of Williston and integration of schools and did not take his interviews up to 1971. Therefore, his interviews serve as a primary source providing background information to better understand the conditions of integration that led to the 1971 Rebellion.

One of the project's interviews in particular sheds light on the experience of a Black student in Wilmington during integration. Dr. Earl Sheridan was the NAACP President of New Hanover County from 1987-1996. He also taught political science at UNCW from 1980-2015. Dr. Sheridan grew up in Wilmington and experienced the racial tensions of the Jim Crow South. He commented on the fact that at Hoggard, Black students did not feel like the schools were their schools, he emphasized that extracurricular activities were particularly difficult for Black students to engage in. He said, "The way to have done integration would have been to take a longer time to do it and try to do it in a really gradual kind of way and try to make sure both sides were going to feel like this was their school and that they had a part in it and that kind of thing."[155] This is reflective of other African Americans who did not feel like they were ready for integration as discussed by Godwin and seen in the discussion of the school closure in the newspaper article. He continues, "Even when there were things that would be uniting like the sports teams, there would be things that reminded you that this wasn't really your school with the cheerleading squad."[156] Dr. Sheridan referenced an incident where Black students expressed

[155] Earl Sheridan, interview by Darrien Bailey, February 28, 2019, UNCW, https://thehistoryhub.omeka.net/items/show/98.
[156] Sheridan.

anger about the school's discriminatory practices, which included limiting the number of Black students on cheerleading squads. His interview supports what Moore has also said about integration. White schools were not ready for Black students, and African Americans were not ready for Williston to be closed. Were the schools unequal? Yes, but the closure of Williston was just another example of white dominance in Wilmington that stemmed from the 1898 massacre.

Many pinpoint the initial event that led to the Black student boycott and civil unrest to January 22, 1971, when there was a fight and Barbara Swain—a Black student— was suspended from school.[157] After several other fights, students held a press conference at Gregory Congregational Church on January 28, 1971, where they listed their grievances with the school system.[158] These included the New Hanover principal allowing white non-students onto the school property, suspending Black students without cause, and the principal not listening to each side of the students' disputes. One student commented, "We're supposed to be integrated, but integrated means unity, and there's none between the races at either high school."[159] The following day, Black students met with the Board of Education and said that they would be boycotting the schools until their demands were met.

On February 3, 1971, students marched to Hemenway Hall to speak to Dr. Bellamy, later night several fires occurred throughout Wilmington including L. Schwartz Furniture Store.[160]

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[157] Louise Lamica, "School principals act to punish disturbers," *Wilmington Morning Star,* January 23, 1971. Accessed through *NewsBank.* Janken also points to this moment as the starting point of the violence that occurred during this time period.

[158] Todd, Bertha Boykin Todd Interview. This interview conducted by Ramsey offers a full life history of Todd and goes into further detail of her role during the 1968 Dr. King assassination protests, and the 1971 Rebellion. Todd was an important role model to Black students, and also connected with white students through her position as librarian at Hoggard. She eventually moved to a more administrative role where she attempted to keep the peace between students. Todd went to Gregory Congregational and helped the students articulate what they wanted but afterward led Reverend Templeton she was not going to be able to fulfill that role any longer as she had to focus her attend on the students in Hoggard. She is a very important woman in the history of Wilmington.

[159] Lamica, "Black student group to boycott schools."

[160] Wiley McKellar, "Furniture store is fire bombed," *Wilmington Morning Star,* February 4, 1971. Accessed through *NewsBank.*

During the next several days, many stores throughout Wilmington burned, including Mike's Grocery which survived three previous attempts of arson before being destroyed on February 6, 1971. The arson at Mike's Grocery proved to be one of the main charges brought up against the Ten, along with other charges of misconduct.[161] Gregory Congregational Church became the headquarters for students and members of the community to stave off attacks from the ROWP. In one of these attacks, Harvey Cumber— an armed white man who approached the church— was shot and killed.[162] Although Reverend Templeton of Gregory had called for a city-wide curfew days before Cumber's death, the city did not act until a white man was killed. Along with Cumber, Gibs Stevenson Corbett, a seventeen-year-old Black student was killed leaving the death total at two during the 1971 Rebellion.[163] It would be days until there was peace in the city, and weeks until the Ten would be charged with arson.

Ultimately, the events of 1971 took place because of long-term simmering tensions between white and Black communities. These tensions had built up over the years since 1898 and left Black Wilmingtonians frustrated with how they were treated. They were told that they had to be separate and build up a schooling system that they were proud of and meant something to the community. Williston was torn from them when the white community deemed it "inferior." Black students were forced to enter an environment where they felt they did not belong. It was only a matter of time before the match was lit and the community exploded.

[161] John Hendrix, "One killed, three wounded, as violence enters fourth day," *Wilmington Morning Star,* February 7, 1971. Accessed through *NewsBank.*
[162] Hendrix, "Curfew proclaimed in city and county."
[163] Hendrix, "Curfew proclaimed in city and county."

ORAL HISTORIES

These oral histories provided insight into what it was like to be high school students from the years 1968-1971. Although six interviews represent only a small sample of students, they ultimately provide evidence for what was happening in the schools apart from what was being reported in newspapers. All four of the Black interviewees expressed ultimately enjoying their time in high school despite the unrest that occurred regularly from 1968 to 1972. This seemed evident due to at least one factor, which was they were all extremely focused on their education. Every person I interviewed, both Black and white, had received at least a bachelor's degree and several of them received higher degrees. The interviewees included two doctors and a lawyer, all of this is to say that they prioritized their education and had parents or guardians who also placed an emphasis on their education. Both Cynthia Brown and Paula Newsome, who are Black women, stated that their main focus was education, no matter what.[164] This points to an understanding during this time, in 1971, protesting meant violence against African Americans and police brutality as opposed to the earlier years of the Civil Rights Movement which had an emphasis on nonviolence. Hinton comments that, "'riots' came to be seen as purely criminal, and completely senseless."[165] Some Black students did not want to participate in protesting because of this stereotype, and instead focused on their education.

The curriculum was one of the points that Black student protestors emphasized was lacking in terms of Black history. Ronald Sparks, a Black man, did not necessarily comment on the curriculum, but did state it was evident that white teachers did not expect as much from Black students. Sparks explained, "When there was an all-Black school, children were expected

[164] Brown received several masters' degrees, and Dr. Newsome became the first Black female eye doctor in North Carolina.
[165] Hinton, *America on Fire: An Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion since the 1960s*, 6.

and assumed to be able to succeed." He continued, "In the European guided environment, Black children [were] looked on as those poor children, they got so many setbacks. How [were] they going to make it rather than the reverse? If you do not expect children to learn, they won't."[166] However, this was not the experience of the other Black and white former students that I interviewed. Every other person that I asked if they thought white teachers treated Black students differently said that they had not personally experienced that. A few said they might have heard of others who had that sort of experience, but they personally did not experience it. This point just goes to show that although one person experiences something, high school is still a time in a students' life where they can experience things very differently from others.

This was also the case when it came to experiences during the actual protesting and boycotts that took place in the integrated schools from 1968-1971, in which one interviewee witnessed a boycott being organized first-hand. All of the interviewees stated that they felt uneasy about what might happen in school during this time, but none of them said they were scared for their personal safety. They said they just did not want to be around when there were fights. Russell Davis, another Black man, even stated that he felt the arson and civil unrest was totally unnecessary and nothing good came from the events that took place. Davis was the junior class president at Hoggard in 1971 and he recalled an incident with the cheerleading squad which has been documented in other sources and interviews. As Davis remembered it, there were ten members of the cheerleading squad, nine of them white and one Black, which he—along with other students—did not think was fair. Davis remembered meeting with fellow Black classmates and making the decision that the following day the Black students would not go to class, but rather the Black students would go to school and protest for better representation in clubs and

[166] Sparks, interview.

organizations. The next morning, Davis recalled that he gathered Black students into the gym before classes started and told other Black students to run through the hallways and pull Black students out of their homeroom classrooms to participate with them. Davis' next memory was of the principal and Bertha Todd coming into the gym to speak with them and agreeing that more Black students would be represented in clubs and organizations.[167] Davis gave this story as an example of how he thought students should protest—peacefully. It is a reflection on the negative reception of the violent protesting that was happening around him and an ode to students from the previous decade who utilized peaceful protesting.

The significance of memory is key here because Dr. Newsome offers a different view which does not acknowledge some of the events that other former white and Black students recalled. She started at Hoggard in 1971 during the height of the integration issues in Wilmington. She was also on the cheerleading squad but does not remember Black students protesting representation on the squad. However, she does remember a specific moment. She said:

> So one day I remember vividly some of the African American students coming down the hallway and pulling Black students out of their class and saying, get out of here. You need to come out here and riot with us. Well, I told you, my parents were educated. One of our neighbors was a teacher, Mr. Hassell at the high school. And they were trying to get to me to grab me, to pull me out of class. And he pushed me back in the classroom, said you better stay in here. So I mean, you know, I had people that were looking out for me because it was rough, but I had angels that kind of saw me through. They wanted to make sure I stayed focused and I did.[168]

Since Dr. Newsome was in school in 1971 when Davis was, I can only assume that they are speaking about the same event. However, Dr. Newsome has no memory about what the Black students were protesting about and did not want to be "pulled into" any of the protesting.

[167] Russell Davis, interview by Sydney Johnson, In-person, March 9, 2022.
[168] Paula Newsome, interview by Sydney Johnson, Phone, March 11, 2022.

Yet another example of this same event is recorded from Todd's perspective. She stated in her interview with Ramsey in 1993 and Sheppard in 1995, her memory of the incident was that Black students were "running down the halls, saying, 'we're going to get all the [B]lack kids out of the classrooms.' They didn't know where they were going." Todd then described how she herded the students into the gym to keep them at bay for the rest of the day, finally agreeing to the students' terms of more Black students in clubs and organizations.[169] These three different accounts about the same event highlight the importance of memory and how each person remembers what is important to them. Davis was vehement that the civil unrest that occurred was wrong, so he remembers protesting peacefully. Dr. Newsome did not want to be involved in any protesting that might result in getting in trouble, so she remembers being saved from the protests. Todd was trying to remain relevant in her new school, so she remembers taking charge of the situation. These oral interviews are not meant to clarify facts and details about events, they serve to establish the tone and environment of the situation which ultimately leads to a better understanding of events as a whole.

Reflecting on events that happened over fifty years ago gives a good understanding of what stood out and left a lasting impression and what did not. It is important to note these moments because these were the events that impacted people and helped to form the person they are today. Although Dr. Newsome did not remember that moment of protesting, she recalled being called the N-word and being spat on by a white student when she was in fifth grade. She remembered white students taking her work and making it their own.[170] Those are the types of memories that deeply impact someone. Although the events in 1971 did seem to leave somewhat

[169] Todd, Research Project for Lower Cape Fear Historical Society; Todd, Bertha Boykin Todd Interview.
[170] Newsome, interview.

of a lasting impact on these former Black and white, it did not appear to be to the same degree as others have suggested.

Another key takeaway from these oral histories was seeing how deeply the 1898 mentality ran in the community. One of the few questions I asked every narrator was their memory of 1898 and if they believed the 1971 Rebellion was connected. Cynthia Brown recalled very clearly the moment she realized how much the 1898 mentality was still prevalent in the community. Her father taught her early on about 1898 which was not a well-known topic until later in the century.[171] Brown decided to stop by the library with her friend to get more information about the events. However, the white librarian denied her access to information about 1898. The librarian told her that it was "in the vault" and she was not able to give her that information. Brown commented,

> I had never had any experience with a teacher or a librarian or a school official denying me access to information. And it really burned into my memory base. I remember that, quite well. I will probably carry that to my grave. Not that my feelings were hurt on a personal level, but it was such an affront to what she stood for as a keeper of information. An educator of sorts to deny access to knowledge. I will tell you Sydney, that that's another reason why I have believed that the tenets of 1898 insurrection that white declaration of independence that was pinned, all of that stuff impacted and to an extent still impacts what has happened in Wilmington and the mindsets of people, who have crafted the image of Wilmington and the way in which Wilmington has grown and developed, that incident, roughly 50 years ago, little more than, told me that if there's knowledge of something here and you would deny it and not allow a student seeking information to have access, to digest it in her own way, then some of these same tenets that they wrote about and principals that were engaged are at work.[172]

[171] Besides Brown, none of the other interviewees said they were taught about what happened in 1898. Sparks recalled that older Black members of his church refused to discuss it because of the fear they had of the white community. Others said that they only learned about what actually happened in 1898 when they were older. The 1898 Massacre was not discussed in public until later in the 1980s when historians such as Leon Prather researched the topic for his book *We Have Taken a City: The Wilmington Racial Massacre and Coup* (1984).
[172] Brown, interview.

Other Black interviewees acknowledged 1898 in a similar fashion, however, Brown seemed to have the most significant opinions and insight into how it has impacted the community.

From another perspective, Susan Jarman, the white woman that I interviewed, also commented on 1898:

> I guess I wasn't very much of a history buff or getting into some of that. And, now that I've read and heard more about it, I think it's atrocious. But to be honest with you, that's the way we grew up. And it, it, it was, it, it depends on the family that you grew up in and the ancestors of that family. And if, if the the eighteen hundreds, um, people felt that way, they instilled that in their children who became the nineteen hundreds, and, and that was instilled in, you know, carried on generations. So yes, I do think that that has, um, has done that. Wilmington was always like a little sleepy town. Everybody knew everybody, if you didn't, if you didn't know 'em you knew who the family was or some connection.[173]

Jarman confirmed what Brown was stating but from the perspective of the white community. She offered support that the 1898 mentality was passed down from generation to generation and impacted the generations that experienced 1971. These accounts corroborate the other sources that I have utilized and they help to round out the views of everyday people with those whose voices have been heard in a more public setting.

Although all of my interviews took different directions in terms of what we discussed and the questions that I asked, I did ask one or two questions that were the same to gauge the difference in how these individuals felt. One that I felt was important was, "why do you think Black students were protesting?" Many of their answers involved the idea of fear— from both Blacks and whites— of desegregation. This fear was similar to the fear felt by Black Wilmingtonians from the fallout of 1898. Sparks stated,

> There are other triggers, the simple action of bringing the two schools together and the, the drama that happens at school board meetings, the day it happens back then,

[173] Jarman, interview.

> it's nothing new. Seeing folks stand up and carry on at board meetings, folks, you taking their precious thing, their child and putting their child in an environment that they don't have control over. And, and that fear and my child going to be sitting there and it's going to be, there'll be some little Black boy looking at my little white girl or vice versa, and we going to have to stop it. We going to have to stop it. And so that fear, you know, triggers the bulk of all that.[174]

Dr. Newsome offered another take that the 1971 Rebellion was more due to the fact that Williston closed and Black students lost their position and authority that they had within the school. When Black students moved to Hoggard, "they didn't see themselves as part of the process." Dr. Newsome continued,

> You got a lot of people who are disenfranchised and then you put them around people. We also had people at our school that were wealthy. So you put all those elements together and then you disempower people. And if people felt like they were ignored or not heard, and I'm sure that that was a reality, um, for some people, um, that's just a that's a powder keg. So I do believe that there were some issues around like representation and, and you know, people playing sports and all these other things, um, that are very valid. I'm not discounting any other. I'm just saying it doesn't align with my experiences personally.[175]

This again shows that Dr. Newsome was hesitant to speak about the experience of other Black students since her experience did not necessarily align with instances of racism that some Black students detailed in their account to the newspaper on January 29, 1971. It is significant to note this because it suggests that over time, she may have come to internalize what other Black students said about experiences of racism in the schools, but these interviews seem to suggest that experiences of overt racism towards Black students were the exceptions, not the norm. Brown also offers her own take on why students were protesting, "I think it was a boil over of

[174] Sparks, interview.
[175] Newsome, interview.

frustration about injustices that were occurring." When asked to clarify what injustices were occurring Brown—who went to New Hanover— said,

> I think that more so at Hoggard than New Hanover, but some at New Hanover, there were specific students who had specific experiences that led to the incident, but I can't speak individually about them because I wasn't, a victim of some of those, mistreatments I'll put it that way. So I, I, I wouldn't be able to give you exact truthful firsthand experiences because I didn't have them directly.[176]

Brown's statement is similar to Dr. Newsome and again points to the fact that the reason the events occurred in Wilmington were the experiences of overt racism towards a few Black students which then led many Black students to ban together and support one another in the fight for better treatment in the schools.

These oral histories shed light on only a few students who experienced desegregation from 1968 to 1971 and the boycotts and civil unrest of the 1971 Rebellion. A future goal is to expand the project and interview dozens of more former white and Black students to try and further the understanding of the local experience. The aftermath of the 1971 Rebellion saw a renewed push by the white community to "reclaim" the history of Wilmington.[177] There were still attempts into the 1980s to keep silence the sordid history of racial violence of 1898 with further applied to events of the 1971 Rebellion.[178] In 1998, several Black and white members of the community attempted to commemorate the centennial of the 1898 Massacre. Although the commemoration eventually occurred, there was not an overwhelming amount of support from

[176] Brown, interview.
[177] Mulrooney, *Race, Place, and Memory: Deep Currents in Wilmington, North Carolina*, 241.
[178] Mulrooney, 242. Leon Prather—a Black historian— for his book, *We Have Taken a City: The Wilmington Racial Massacre and Coup* (1984), was constantly shut down over attempts to locate source material. He was eventually able to produce the most detailed account of the 1898 Massacre since Helen Edmonds book was published in the 1950s.

much of the white community.[179] There is no doubt a shadow is still cast over Wilmington and the reckoning of the experiences of the Black and white communities. The history is there, and projects such as this will help to ensure that the memory of these events will not fade away.

[179] Mulrooney, *Race, Place, and Memory: Deep Currents in Wilmington, North Carolina*. One of Mulrooney's main themes in her book is about the 1998 centennial commemoration of the 1898 Massacre. More can be found in her book.

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