

# Section 4

## The Civil Rights Movement Comes to North Carolina

This section will help you meet the following objectives:

**8.7.02** Evaluate the importance of social changes to different groups in North Carolina.

**8.7.04** Compare and contrast viewpoints surrounding issues of the post World War II era.

**8.7.05** Evaluate major changes and events that affected the roles of local, state, and national governments.

**As you read, look for:**

- the Greensboro sit-ins and their effect
- federal civil rights legislation
- an important North Carolina case
- vocabulary terms **discrimination, sit-in, freedom riders, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, busing**



**Above:** North Carolina A&T is one of the state's historic black colleges. This is the Dudley Memorial Building, named for the second president of the school. **Opposite page:** Bruce Roberts took this photograph of North Carolina Fund volunteer Suzy Sterling with a young preschooler in Rockingham. It has become a famous symbol of integration in North Carolina.

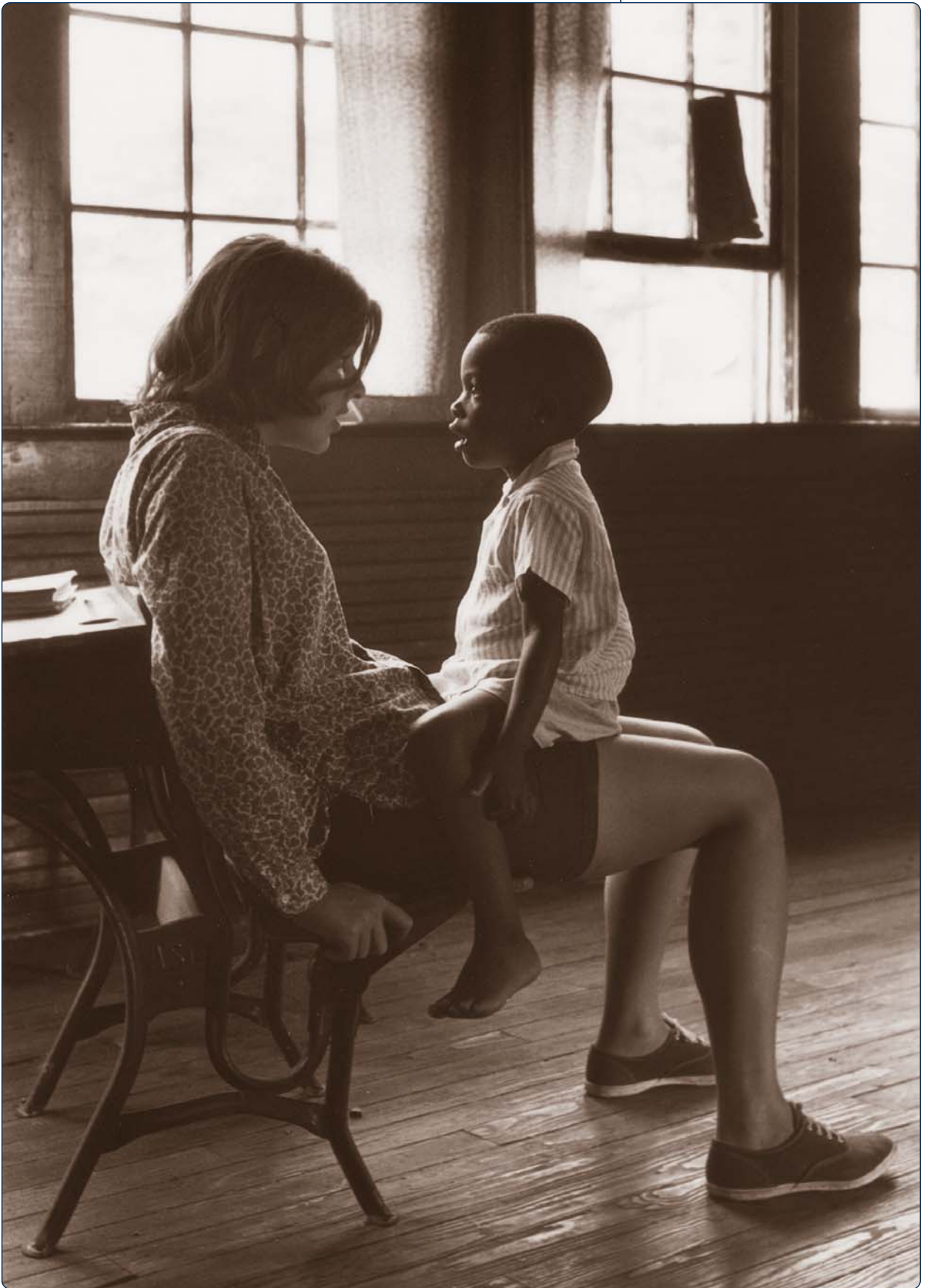
**Phairlever Pearson first saw the black high school** in Newton when he was named principal in 1945. The school had eleven grades in one building. Many of the windows were patched. Most of the lights were bare bulbs hanging from the ceiling. One potbellied stove heated the entire place. The coal delivered by the school system “was so fine it fell through the grate.” There was no refrigerator to cool the milk bottles delivered every day. The high school had a basketball team, but they practiced outside in winter on a dirt court.

Pearson made a choice. He asked the all-white school board to come see the terrible conditions. None of them had ever visited the school. Although one member insulted Pearson for being such “a smart little fellow,” the school board after the war built a gym, a cafeteria, and a shop. Pearson kept his job and helped hundreds of black students make their way. He personally took some of them to places like A&T University in Greensboro to see the choices they could make and the places they could go.

Pearson was one of hundreds of black North Carolinians who helped bring the civil rights movement to the

### Did You Know?

**Phairlever Pearson served as principal of Central High School for twenty-one years.**





**Top:** A crowd of jeering teenagers follows Dorothy Counts, 15, as she leaves Harding High School in Charlotte. The crowd pelted Dorothy with sticks and stones. Dr. Reginald Hawkins is escorting Dorothy. **Above:** Students from North Carolina A&T sit in protest at a Woolworth's lunch counter during the second day of peaceful protests in Greensboro.



when a North Carolina governor, in a speech, referred to them as “Nigras.”

On February 1, 1960, four A&T University students made one of the pivotal choices in American history. Ezell Blair, Franklin McCain, David Richmond, and Joseph McNeil sat down at the lunch counter at the Woolworth's store and asked to be served. When, by custom, they were refused, they came back the next day with more A&T students. Soon, the students occupied every seat at the lunch counter. These “sit-ins” quickly caught the attention of the nation. A **sit-in** occurs when people enter a public facility and refuse to leave until their demands are heard.

Within two months, this new form of protest spread to fifty-four other southern cities, including Winston-Salem and Charlotte. Within a year, college students—black and white—were leading demonstrations in more

state. “The separate but equal thing couldn't go,” he remembered later, “and it didn't go, and we were able to change.” It was a long struggle. In 1959, five years after the *Brown* decision, only 53 of 225 requests for black student “freedom of choice” transfers were approved. Over half of those requests were at Fort Bragg, where federal influence was strong. In 1957, Josephine Boyd of Greensboro had become one of the first “freedom of choice” students to switch from a black to a white high school. She endured taunts and abuse. One boy spit on her in class. She stuck with it and graduated an honor student. She helped create a higher sense of expectation that choice was possible.

### The Greensboro Sit-ins

By the late 1950s, Greensboro was one of the key places for black choice. Blacks had protested the **discrimination** (ill treatment) in stores, restaurants, and other public places. Although one black resident had been elected to the school board, black physicians could not practice medicine in the new Moses H. Cone Memorial Hospital. Students at A&T University had even shuffled their feet in protest



than one hundred cities. In Chapel Hill, UNC students lay down in the street in front of traffic to alert motorists that nearby drug stores would not serve blacks the same way as whites. Some Americans have equated the Greensboro sit-ins of 1960 to the Boston Tea Party of 1773. Each started a wider movement for freedom.

It took almost two years for the blacks of Greensboro to integrate places that served the public. Blacks tried an economic boycott. They refused to do business on any terms with white businesses that continued to discriminate. Then, thousands of local high school and college students marched on downtown businesses day after day. One told a white cafeteria manager, “My father cooks for y’all, and I’d like to come in and eat some of his cooking.” When most of them were arrested during one march, almost every black adult in Greensboro—schoolteachers, doctors, ministers, businessmen, and factory workers—came downtown to protest the next day. By 1963, the restaurants and movie theaters were opened to everyone. Out of these marches emerged Jesse Jackson, who had been the quarterback of the A&T football team. Jackson went on to be an important assistant to the leader of the national civil rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

By 1963, Greensboro was part of the racial change across the South. Dr. King and others had led marches in Birmingham, Alabama, and other southern cities to protest segregation. In North Carolina, young black college students formed the Congress of Racial Equality, generally called CORE, at Saint Augustine College in Raleigh. CORE helped bring freedom riders into the South. **Freedom riders** were whites and blacks who,

**Above:** The F. W. Woolworth Building in Greensboro, where the first sit-ins took place, is in the process of becoming a civil rights museum.

## Did You Know?

The Greensboro Woolworth’s lunch counter and stools became an exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution in 1995.



**Above:** At a signing ceremony televised from the Capitol Rotunda, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

## Did You Know?

**Charlie Scott went on to play professional basketball in the American Basketball Association and the National Basketball Association. He retired in 1980.**

together, rode public buses and attempted to integrate bus stations along their route. One of the first freedom rides passed through North Carolina in 1961. CORE led protests in different North Carolina towns, including Statesville, where the city refused to integrate its public swimming pool. Statesville simply closed down the pool.

Change came very slowly, but there was positive progress. In Rocky Mount, Thomas Pearsall, of the Pearsall Plan, and his wife Elizabeth integrated their family-owned restaurants without demonstration. Mrs. Pearsall convinced her more conservative employees to serve black soldiers from Fort Bragg in the same dining room with whites. She asked the waitresses, “Why, if they are good enough to defend you, are they not good enough to be served by you?”

## The Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965

The bravery of the civil rights demonstrators caught the nation by storm. In 1964, after a long debate, the U.S. Congress passed the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**. That legislation made it illegal for any government office or place of business that served the public to practice segregation. Signs that said “Colored” or “For Whites Only” were made illegal. The next year, Congress passed the **Voting Rights Act of 1965**. This law identified counties throughout the South known to have kept blacks from

registering to vote. It provided for federal enforcement of voting rights that had been set out in the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. (That amendment had been ratified in 1870.)

Although state leaders like Terry Sanford and Bill Friday welcomed the laws, many North Carolina leaders opposed them as going too far too fast. All of the state’s representatives in Congress had voted against the civil rights laws. In the case of the Voting Rights Act, thirty-eight counties in eastern North Carolina were placed under federal supervision. At the time, only one-third of eligible black citizens were registered to vote statewide, only about one-sixth in the Coastal Plain counties.

The civil rights laws had a profound impact upon North Carolina. Black citizens quickly came out to register. Because the Democratic Party in the North had led the effort to pass the laws, almost all of them registered as Democrats. The 1964 law also provided for the federal government to speed up the process of integrating the public schools. More black children applied to and were accepted at white schools. Most of all, black and white families began to interact more closely in public places like movie theaters and restaurants. In 1970, two young black people became state celebrities. Charlie Scott led UNC to the finals of the national basketball tournament, and Pauletta Pearson, daughter of the Newton

principal, was first runner-up in the Miss North Carolina beauty pageant.

By the election of 1968, blacks had become an important part of the electorate in the state. More black leaders sought public office. Dr. Reginald Hawkins of Charlotte, a dentist, ran for the Democratic nomination for governor and received more than 100,000 votes. Hawkins was the first African American in state history to run for statewide office. The same year, Henry Frye, a Greensboro lawyer, became the first black elected to the state legislature since the days of the Fusionists. Howard Lee was elected mayor of Chapel Hill.

### Conservative White Reactions

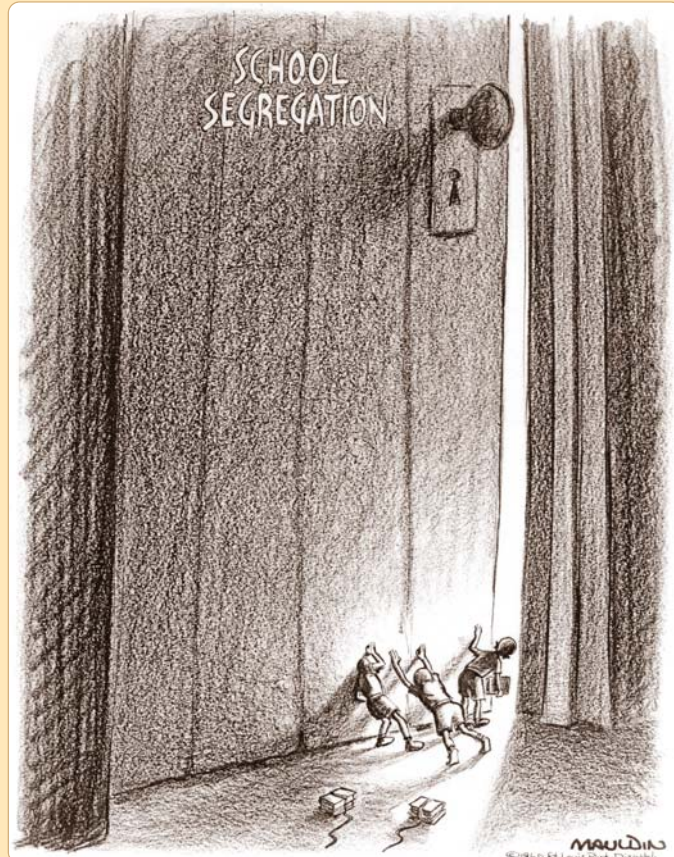
Many North Carolina whites did not easily accept the idea of equality with blacks. Whites born since 1900 had never known anything but segregation. They assumed that racial separation had always been the case. In each election during the period, the more conservative whites had voted for segregationists, leaders who wanted racial matters to remain the same. One of the leading conservatives of the period was I. Beverly Lake, who ran for governor in the Democratic primary against Terry Sanford.

After the civil rights acts were passed by Congress, thousands of Democrats switched to the Republican Party. In the west, voting Republican actually meant a return to pre-1900 voting patterns. In the east, however, many Democrats remained registered in their party, but voted more and more for Republicans.

In 1968, they voted for the national segregationist candidate, Alabama's Governor George Wallace, even though "moderate" North Carolina gave Republican Richard Nixon the state's majority.

The most extreme conservatives joined a revived Ku Klux Klan. The Klan had been somewhat active in the 1950s, but it was embarrassed when it held a rally in Robeson County in 1958, and the Lumbee—who considered themselves an oppressed racial minority—ran them away. As demonstrations mounted in the 1960s, more whites joined a statewide Klan organized by Robert Jones of Granite Quarry, a small Rowan County town.

## THE ART OF POLITICS



Cartoonist Bill Mauldin was a strong opponent of segregation. This cartoon, entitled "Inch by Inch," depicts the struggle to end school segregation as a long, slow push against massive opposition.



**Above:** As a result of the *Swann* case, busing was started in the late 1960s as a means of integrating public schools. These schoolchildren are boarding a bus in Mecklenburg County.

## Did You Know?

Judge McMillan received death threats and was hanged in effigy. The office of the Swanns' attorney was firebombed.

Jones helped conservatives organize counterdemonstrations, one of which was held on the grounds of the State Capitol.

## The *Swann* Case

In 1969, the Justice Department in Washington, D.C., used the authority of the Civil Rights Act to order the closing of black schools throughout the South. A school could only be used if it was fully integrated. Across North Carolina in 1970 all school systems for the first time in state history put white and black children in a district in the same school. In general, integration occurred without violence, although there were demonstrations in some of the consolidated high schools. When disorder broke out in one high school, the principal canceled all dances and other social activities for the school year.

Integration, however, presented a new problem for some black families. Because of segregation, they lived in all-black communities, particularly in the cities. Their school districts were predominantly black, even when integrated. In Charlotte, African American leaders like Kelly Alexander sued the local schools to gain better facilities for blacks.

In 1965, Darius Swann, a professor at Johnson C. Smith University, sued to have his son be admitted to a neighboring white school. In 1969, federal Judge James B. McMillan ruled that the civil rights laws called for “equality.” To give blacks the same “initiative” as whites in education, schools

would have to be mixed according to the racial makeup of the community. That meant, for example, if half the town was black, then black students should make up half the students in most of the schools. To achieve this end, McMillan ordered Mecklenburg County Schools to use **busing** to achieve racial balance. Angry Charlotteans took the case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which, in 1971, sided with McMillan.

The *Swann* case had a profound impact on North Carolina and the rest of the nation. Mecklenburg County soon implemented a busing plan that drove young students all over town to schools miles from their homes. Busing in Charlotte was done without violence, as was the case in Winston-Salem. But, when busing was ordered to integrate northern cities like Boston, violence erupted. In fact, as busing became a national controversy, North Carolina became a model for racial cooperation.

## It's Your Turn

1. Why did college students stage a sit-in in Greensboro?
2. What did the freedom riders hope to do?
3. What is busing?

# HISTORY BY THE HIGHWAY



## John Coltrane

**John Coltrane became one of the most respected** figures in the history of American music during the 1950s and 1960s. After gaining a musical background in his hometown of Hamlet, in Richmond County, he went north for further training. He played with the U.S. Navy band in World War II. After the war, he perfected a new style for playing the saxophone. Coltrane learned to play multiple notes at the same time, changing the depth of the music. His own quartet developed new ways of interpreting jazz that have lasted since his death in 1967.

**Below:** John Coltrane gained worldwide fame for his saxophone playing.

