

AUTHOR USES CITY AS INTEGRATION MODEL - HE DISCUSSES IMPACT OF SCHOOL DESEGREGATION, RESIDENTIAL SEP

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Matt Lassiter sees Charlotte as a Southern city that has emerged - if not whole - at least not as scarred by its racial past as Atlanta or Richmond, Va.

The University of Michigan assistant history professor will speak Tuesday at the Levine Museum of the New South on his book: "The Charlotte Way: Suburban Sprawl, the Silent Integration in the South."

Charlotte has better integration of public schools than Atlanta or Richmond, Lassiter says.

He argues that Charlotte's success in the wake of the Brown vs. Board of Education decision of 1954 is largely driven by three elements: court-ordered busing, a countywide school and progressive annexation laws that prevented a multiplication of districts and lessened the impact of "white flight" to the outlying suburbs.

"In Atlanta in the 1980s, the concept of busing an affluent white student from a northern suburb like Sandy Springs to south Atlanta, to the equivalent of a West Charlotte, well as it was, Charlotte as a city benefited and has emerged on the national stage."

Lassiter says the genesis for his book came about while in graduate school at the University of Virginia.

"I remember watching a civil rights documentary like 'Eyes on the Prize,' and I was struck by how my white, upper middle class students could not relate to white racists like B happened in Mississippi," said Lassiter, who grew up in suburban Atlanta. "It was totally alien to their experience of growing up in the South, how they had largely been isolate with these white moderates and how they didn't speak out either way during this era; they mostly withdrew."

Lassiter describes his book as an exploration of the grass-roots politics produced by residential segregation and suburban sprawl. He writes about whites defending suburban integration not as the result of discriminatory public policies.

Lassiter says Charlotte needs to remain vigilant in order to remain a "progressive edge."

"You could argue that since the court decisions on court-ordered busing five to six years ago, there has been some slippage and resegregation in the schools," he said. "Particular poverty neighborhoods with high populations of Latinos and African Americans. I think Charlotte needs to look deeper at its segregated housing patterns and the implications

Want to Know More?

Lassiter's lecture is at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Levine Museum of the New South. Admission is free but please call (704) 333-1887 ext. 501 for reservations. He's also appearing to Collins" on WFAE (90.7 FM) at 9 a.m.

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Caption: PHOTO:11. Lassiter's book cover shows President Nixon in Charlotte in 1968.

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