

Longwood University
Digital Commons @ Longwood University

The Silenced Generation - Growing up after massive resistance and the civil rights movement The Virginia Oral History Collection at Longwood University

Winter 11-30-2015

Charles Williams

Amber N. Brooks

Longwood University, amber.brooks@live.longwood.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.longwood.edu/oralhistsilenced>

 Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brooks, Amber N., "Charles Williams" (2015). *The Silenced Generation - Growing up after massive resistance and the civil rights movement*. Paper 4.
<http://digitalcommons.longwood.edu/oralhistsilenced/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Virginia Oral History Collection at Longwood University at Digital Commons @ Longwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Silenced Generation - Growing up after massive resistance and the civil rights movement by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Longwood University. For more information, please contact hinestm@longwood.edu.

Interviewers: Cameron Campbell, Kylee Carter, Alan Hershberger, Aretha Sykes-Benton
(November 30, 2015)

Interviewee: Charles Williams

Interview Transcription

Recording number 1

(Um's and Uh's were dropped)

Cameron Campbell: Can you please state your name for the record please?

Charles Williams: Charles Williams

CC: Alright, and how old are you?

CW: Twenty-one

CC: Where'd you grow up?

CW: Farmville, Virginia

CC: Alright! What was your family like? Did you have any siblings? Close cousins? Extended family?

CW: I have an older brother and an older sister. I have my little cousins. That's pretty much younger than me. Six, seven. So umm that's about it when it comes to family.

Alan Hershberger: What about like parents? I mean mother, father.

CW: My mother.

AH: Ok

CW: My father, he's originally, from New York, but they separated when I was probably three-

CC: -Ok

CW: And then he moved to Georgia. He got remarried in Georgia, so he's been out there ever since.

AH: Gosh

CC: And you grew up in this area with your mom?

CW: Yes I did.

CC: Alright, she's originally from here?

CW: She's actually originally from Charlotte County. Cullen-

CC: -Ok

CW: And which is like a neighboring, town from Farmville.

CC: Alright, and what schools did you attend growing up

CW: Growing up umm I went to Eureka... in Charlotte County and... well see we moved to Farmville... first grade and I went to Prince Edward from first grade... let's see... to the first semester of my ninth grade year. I went to Prince Edward and then transferred, and finished school and graduated in 2012 from Fuqua School.

CC: Were you aware of the stigma that Fuqua had or the history behind it before you attended?

CW: I did not. Actually, I lived here for, like I said, since first grade. I did not even know Fuqua even existed until seventh, eighth grade maybe. Yeah, I really, I really- Just because like, I mean, like I knew like growing up, like a bunch of the kids that like went to school there. Um we played sports and in my mind like growing up, I never knew what school they went to. I thought maybe they probably went to Cumberland and Buckingham, but come to find out a lot of them went to Fuqua School. So when I transferred over it was kind of, kind of like a nice process for me. Like I said, I knew people when, before I went over, but previously before I went, no, I did not know.

CC: And what's your understanding about the history of the schools closing now?

CW: It's like you said, when 1954 Brown vs Board of education, the schools closed down. From my understanding Prince Edward closed down for four years, so during that time, you know it was really a struggle for a bunch of black families that you know that lived here. And I know like when I was getting interviewed with the Washington Post and you know finding out about the history and everything, a lot of people were still furious about it because they felt like Fuqua, well at the time it wasn't even called Fuqua. It was called Prince Edward Academy and just pretty much like blocked everyone out and so like I know as people would say like it was like more known as a racist school back then and for like that was my biggest understanding like about the school closings and like what was going on about.

CC: Were you taught anything about the school closings like in school or was it all like stuff you had learned from family members or your own research?

CW: My own research. Actually none of my family members like physically went through it because like I said my mother went to – she graduated from Randolph Henry, so and then we moved to Farmville, so we didn't have like much family in Farmville so much of my family wasn't affected by it but, once I started being like well known in the community, my mother started getting to know people. We actually, you know my brother, cause we have different fathers, my brother and sister grandparents was actually affected by it. And so you know, like hearing from their stand point, like I said they were still furious. I actually met a lady that, she loves me to death and when I was playing sports there, she would not come see me just because, you know, with that history, and that past and just because like I said people still felt some type of way because back then it was known as that racist school, so.

CC: How did the people close to you feel about you attending Fuqua; about it being a segregated school?

CW: At the time, people didn't like the decision because like I said, I was a good football player, and when I was at Prince Edward as a freshman, I was a starting quarterback on the varsity team, and so when I left – because it wasn't something that was just planned, it just happened. Because I actually had a friend, his name was Perry Washington. He went to the school before I did. He went actually the first semester. I went the second semester. And when he went in, I was just pretty much introduced to the school. I went there, you know, visited, come to find out, you know, I had a little bit of interest in it but I really wasn't telling anybody about it. Actually, when I went to go visit the school, I didn't even tell my football coaches. Like I skipped practice that day and everything, but I couldn't tell him, "Look, I'm going to look at this school", because right then and there they would've been - but the word got out and I actually met with some of like you know supervisors coaches and you know they, they actually tried to, you know, tell me "This school is this, this school is that. You're not really going to get the opportunity for football. You shouldn't go there. It's a racist school. The history". But, I just felt like, you know – me and my mother we prayed about it, you know we talked about it and just felt like at the time it was going to be the right decision for my future. So a lot of people didn't like it, but at the same time, they didn't have a choice because it's my life. I didn't lose like any friends over it. All my friends were still cool, supportive. The people that was willing to come watch me play there, they came to come watch me play so. It was – people was upset about it at first, but you know, at the long run I could go talk to people about it. They're not like, "Oh, we hate you for going there" or anything. I never got that type of feeling from anyone, from where I'm standing out now.

CC: Why'd you ultimately make the decision to go there?

CW: Like I said, it was just a better choice for me. Like my family, we felt like the school itself would give me a better opportunity with football, opportunity with just having a better school and I'm from here and I don't know if yall know about Prince Edward schooling system. It's –

AH: Yeah, I'm from here too.

CW: Yeah so it has its lows. So like we felt like we had more pros going to Fuqua than we did if I would've stayed at Prince Edward so ultimately we just felt like it was going to be a better choice for me and my future for me to go.

CC: And then, were there any – what long term effects do you think the closing of the public schools had on like the people in the community?

CW: Long term effects? Like I said, people are still affected by it. Because if like I had to really sit there and think about it. If you're in the eighth grade and you pretty much have four years just gone. You supposed to graduate by then and that right there just changes your life significantly. Whereas, some families you know they had to either take their kids, ship them off with other families so they could finish school in like different areas. Or in some families they didn't have the opportunity. They was just out of luck and they just had to start working right then and there. And I know back then it was probably tough. You know, where times were and, like I said, people was really still affected by it and actually the lady I keep referring to, her name is Rita Mosely. She's like one of my mothers, but like I said, she would not come anywhere near

that school and this lady loves me. She was actually one of the, um what is it, the assistant supervisors at Prince Edward and she loved me. Still to this day, still loves me, but she just had that feeling of that school. That burden just still was on her.

AH: And she would've been from this area and would've gone through the school system at that time?

CW: She was. Yup.

CC: Did she ever, besides telling you how she felt, did she ever share like her personal experiences and stories? She went through?

CW: She didn't because like I said, it was a tough time. Especially on your family. You don't know how you're going to finish school and like I said, it was just four years of schooling just taken away from you. I respected her for that and for that I never asked her or begged her anytime to come see me or anything. Once we sat down, we talked about it and I was perfectly fine with it.

CC: How did it feel when the Washington Post wanted to feature you in an article?

CW: Honestly, before that article had even happened, I wasn't, I didn't know. I did not know it was going to be that way. When it first came out, from my understanding, it was my junior year. They came like at the end of the year. What they done was they all called on us in the president's office and they had kids from everywhere. They had kids because you know at Fuqua, you could be from like thirteen different counties and you could all – Everyone commuted so they had kids from Blackstone, Clarksville, Richmond, Powhatan, you know some that spend all their lives – some that came there in middle school, some minority, white, it's just a mixture of people and the, I guess like when, I guess they was asking us questions, you know like, how we felt about it. I guess like I had a great point of view, because I lived in Prince Edward and Fuqua, so I had more of a balance for it and so it just felt like maybe we should tell the story through his eyes or whatever. So when they came back, they actually followed me around – Went to a football game. It was during football season and they just followed me around for the day and actually that Thursday night had the photographer actually come home with me and we had dinner and I never met the writer until that morning. So it was just a normal morning. And you know they just like y'all doing now, just asking me questions like, "How's this?" and I just took them through a normal day and it wasn't – I wasn't too big on it because like I said, I didn't know what exactly, what they was looking for. They just I know they was – wanted to pretty much, from my understanding, they wanted to paint a picture of Fuqua being a new image. And not the same image as it was as Prince Edward Academy. That was my understanding for it. So when the article came out, it was just mind boggling with everything – With all the information and a lot of it – it would pretty much, whatever you want to preserve it as. Because a lot of it was, it was not what it is, and it was just overwhelming when I first read it so. It really was.

AH: So would you say that the article, like are you saying like you didn't think it was very accurate? Or?

CW: Like I said, it wasn't in ways because, like, when they state for some...reasons. When they stated like where I was going to my friend's house because we actually like before every football game, I have my best friend Carter Cunningham and he has a big house, and like his family just well off. I loved their family like, these is actually one of the kids I know before I went to Fuqua because we played sports together. And his family – like his house is my house and I was pretty much raised to always clean up behind you, behind yourself and then like when I go over there I do the same thing because I'm going to treat his house like my house and so it was like one point, like where we all are about to leave and so I had some trash in my hand, so I'm just going around just picking up trash, just cleaning up because it's like twenty of us and we not going to leave this man house like that, like dirty like this and the article, it made it preserve it as, "Oh, we have like this black guy like over here you know picking up behind white kids and like, OK now the one where they had one of the coaches was like, "Things not the same around here. It's just seem like it's changed. It's just one thing about Bozo, if you ever meet him, he, he has acronyms for everything". And one thing I understand what he means by that because he was there all through. And for them to say that like, for him to have that type of mindset it – He was nowhere near racist and to say like things change just, I don't know, things is not the same just seemed changed. It makes it seem like you making him seem like, look I understand things is not the same anymore and we don't want change here. You know what I'm saying, and I just like – It was another part where we said – because down here Virginia Street – like I said I went to Prince Edward and a bunch of my friends like grew up in that area. The author made it – preserved it like I lived there. Mind you, I never lived in the town of Farmville, like I always lived in the country area. So for him I lived in like an eight frame, I don't know, something house. Something he said. He had never been to my house. I had at the time, like my house was gorgeous at the time. I mean, it's just, like I said. ... If you wanted, if you felt like the school was racist, you still going to have that racist feel about it. But I was looking at it from the inside out, and I guess what they was trying to give it as was "We have this black boy right here and he's athletic and he can play football and so we about to use him to pretty much recruit other black kids.; and they was they try to perceive it as.

AH: Right! So that was definitely, from when I read the article that was like the whole reason like Fuqua wanted you to come—

CW: -Wanted me to come there'

AH: Because they wanted to change the community's perception. Like so was that mentioned when you were getting ready to go to Fuqua.

CW: No.

AH: Really?

CW: It wasn't.

Aretha Sykes-Benton: It was your choice to go there right?

CW: It was my choice.

ASB: Completely?

CW: It was my choice like-

ASB: -They didn't recruit you or anything?

CW: like when the offer for me to go, like I said, my friend went before I did and so when- I just got a phone call. It was like "This school's great you know, you should actually come check it out"; and I went to go visit and I- What it was, my scholarship, because you have to pay to go there and they actually gave me- At the time I didn't know it was called like a minority scholarship. A benefactor was willing to pay for it. I don't even know who the benefactor was because they didn't even tell me, and they just, they just gave me an opportunity, and that's what I looked at it as. I didn't look at it as look, I'm here to just, you know, I'm only here just to play football, it was never that. I looked at it as an opportunity to better myself. And for that- And so when people ask me how you like Fuqua, like I always tell them regardless of what, school is going to be school but I felt like, kind of Fuqua had more- they felt more interested in students because like I said it was smaller you know. Most of the kids you're pretty much going to grow up with all through, like you're going to be with them. Because like I said, my graduation class was 29 people, and so I never felt like I had to go out into the community and be like "Look you got to come play over here"; or it was more like when people ask me I would tell them, the pros about it. Also I would tell them the cons about it, it was never "Look I need you to come over here just because we need more black people over here". It was never- I never felt that way about it. Sox for them to say I was like a recruiter, no. But I would say the same thing to a black, white, any type, Chinese. However it doesn't matter because the school itself, it was a good school. That's how I felt. I felt like it gave me a better opportunity to be myself. But they felt like "No, you're using him because like he's good in football, he knows people"; and that's why I said you could perceive that article however you want to. Like what your thoughts was going it to, before it, pretty much wasn't going to change. Because like I said, whatever mindset you had, it didn't really help it. Because if- I'm pretty sure you all have read it. It still made Fuqua like a racist school and I feel like it is not so.

CC: Did you ever find yourself having to defend that to other people? Did like anyone ever get into an argument about that?

Yeah, for the simple fact that I had people actually ask me "Why do you go to that school"; and you know even the comment where my president called me a 25 year old drug dealer. Even though I don't know why she would have said that, but at the time I was like 14 and I had facial hair and like I was, I had just started working out. I wasn't your normal 14 year old. Like I looked like I was more, well that was what she said, "I looked more mature". But she didn't have to call me a 25 year old drug dealer, but at the same time like people would perceive it like "Oh, that's what she looked at everybody". So regardless of I looked like, what every black person in this town looks like a drug dealer. And that's what people took from it and I hate to say it, but like in this town, most of the black people are drug dealers. And for her to say that, it's more of a, just a stereotype of just this area. And I mean I love Ms. Murphy, that's her name, Ruth Murphy. I love her to death. Afterwards you know, she brought me in her office. Told me she

apologized, and you know it was a bad choice of words. Just because you know you don't use that language around a reporter, you know. He's going to [snaps fingers] run with it, and I felt like right then and there he knew that like, where this school still you know, still type of feeling some type of way, but I never felt like- When people ask me about it and they still like "Oh you should- Why do you even talk to her?". Like people say bad things you know, and sometimes they don't really mean it. And like I said, Ruth Murphy, she's a good woman, and I felt like she didn't really mean it. You know, it was just, at that time a bad choice of words. And like I- people was like kind of mad that I defended her, but I knew her. Like I had a relationship with her, and for somebody to look outside in, it was kind of east to point the finger "look you're racist". But I know this woman and I know she wasn't racist. Like I said, it was just a bad choice of words.

AH: Sounded like I mean, like obviously the article, like you said, had its own like agenda it was trying to push kind of. And what I got from the article was that Fuqua was like I said, Fuqua was like trying to help change their image in the community.

CW: Yes

AH: Do you feel like in the community there was an image that Fuqua had that needed to be like fixed? Or needed to be like changed?

CW: I feel like maybe, yeah. Because for the simple fact I think that should be like all schools. I feel like you want your school to have that positive look on it, and so, in this area especially because like I said, before even going to Fuqua I didn't know nothing about it. But now I feel like people know about Fuqua. And it's not even just because of their- Just because of this article, just because of what they do in the community you know. The kids there, like the athletics and how much they've grown since like this incident or even before then. But like I said, I don't know if this community feels like they do need like a better image of Fuqua, because at the end of the day it going to- the schools going to still speak for itself, and I feel like if you go to the school, you have like, you had to have had your own personal opinions if you got to experience it. in order to really understand what they are trying to do.

CC: Looking back on it now, are you satisfied with going there?

CW: Yeah. Honestly I think it was the best decision I could have ever done. For the simple fact, my networking and the people I have met. I even got a full scholarship to go to Liberty from there. Yeah and so- to play football, and to say I got a division one scholarship playing against the opponents that I did, it's a blessing in itself, and I honestly had numerous scouts scouting me at the time and I had one scout come from Liberty for one game. And you know I went there and visited the school and I kind of felt the same vibe that I did when I was at Fuqua, when I first visited. And so right there I knew, like it was a good decision to go to Fuqua and like I said, it's a blessing in itself.

CC: So you stand by that decision?

CW: I do.

CC: Was there anything else you would like to add? Anything like, you think we missed? Or just wanted to add in the interview?

CW: How do you guys feel about it? Do you know anything about Fuqua or been over there?

AH: I'm from the area. I grew up here, moved. I've lived here for about 15 years now.

CW: So you went to Prince Edward?

AH: I was homeschooled.

CW: Homeschooled?

AH: Yeah

CW: Ok

AH: And so I don't, like I didn't go through the school system here, so I'm a little out of the loop. I think, I can say before, I don't know, four or five years ago I was kind of like you. I didn't hear much about Fuqua. I think I knew it was a part of that Brown vs. Board of education decision, but I didn't hear people talk about it. It didn't seem like it was the big problem, but I think it's really coming to the light more now recently, and so I hear a lot more about it. But that's just my experience. What about you guys?

CC: I'm from Northern Virginia, so I'm not from around here. Like three hours north of here. I had never heard anything. Fuqua, about the schools closing down, any of it until I came here and we learned about it in class. So I thought it was really interesting that you know even just being three hours away it's such a huge part of like-

CW: History.

CC: History especially in the state. I was never taught about it. Never. I mean I remember learning about Brown vs. Board of education but never any affects but never going into depth about it. I mean they touched on it in school but never explained like the effect of it on this area.

ASB: Well I live closer, because I'm in Richmond, but I didn't hear about it until the book. Like did you read the book?

CW: I have read the book.

ASB: You did? Did you like it!

CW: It's ok.

ASB: We're not fans of the book. But I hadn't heard anything about it like even the school in general, just from her point of view of the school and talking to people around about it. I didn't know anything about it.

CW: Yeah, so we were pretty much all on the same boat. Because like even when I was in Prince Edward we did not talk about it. From my understanding I never remember a class of like going to, it was like "Yeah, Prince Edward closed down"; and it, never. Even in history class, never,

and like I said we talked about Brown vs. Board of education. I never knew how Prince Edward was really effected. But don't get me wrong, like we had maybe field trips to the Motion museum. And that taught me a little bit about it, but it wasn't something that was significant. Whereas you know, they really applied it or told us really about it like "look, this is Farmville's history"; and this is what happened. That never happened and honestly I didn't get the full details, all everything until I started doing the Washington post, and started all that type of stuff. I really looked into it. Because I really looked into it and it's deep.

AH: Do you think its important? Do you think its something that the Prince Edward school and Fuqua school and everything should include in the classes like make it a big deal?

CW: It is. I wouldn't say make it a big deal but its part of our towns history. And I believe if like, honestly like when I was in Prince Edward we didn't play against Fuqua. I think we played against Fuqua maybe once, but now I feel like they're doing more with each other, and that is really huge. To say its like people feel like they shouldn't play there and even though I'm sure a few of the grandparents have kids in Prince Edward and like I said now Prince Edward and Fuqua play baseball, basketball, a lot of different type of games. I don't know I you ever go to their basketball games. Some games are like packed. Like packed. Like I don't play basketball for both teams and Ive never been to a game where its like the people is coming to really support it. I mean I'm- Even though its like a basketball game, its like so much more. I just feel like that right there is just bringing the town together. Even though you know, you want your team to win, but to have that many people come together for such, you know, a little event. Basketball game, volleyball game, it doesn't matter, it just brings the town together, and I feel like you know, it would just bring the town together if they would like include more together.

CC: Is there anything you guys would want to add?

CW: Anything else?

AH: Yeah this was great, we got a lot of information.

CW: Because like I mean, to bring back to your other question "Did it feel like I was a recruiter?"; I actually had some of my friends that went to Prince Edward that actually looked into Fuqua just because I went there, and I wouldn't say I recruited them because I didn't. They was interested in me because I wouldn't say I, I still had made that path you know. But right there like it gave an interest rate into like the internal city of Farmville. Of like "Look maybe I do want to take my kids to Fuqua"; so. That was really good about it, and like I said, at the time it was actually a minority scholarship and now it's a minority scholarship for like anyone. Tour could be from anywhere, and I guess like since then I believe they gave out like 13. After I talked to Ruthie, Ms. Murphy, she said they gave out only 13 since like I- I didn't know I started it.

ASB: You were the first one?

CW: Yeah, obviously. I didn't know. Yeah it was a minority scholarship. It was- Because Fuqua's small. I mean its young. It didn't start until 1993, that's when I guy named J.B Fuqua brought it over for like 10 million dollars, and that's when he got Ruth Murphy and like I guess

when the image of them trying to you know erase the past. Like the first black person to like- Prince Edward Academy probably opened in the 60's. The first black person didn't attend probably didn't work out until the 90's. So that right there is 20 years of just primary white. It's a touching moment for somebody. Like I said if you went through it, it hurt, but for us I feel like we just need to embrace it because that's our past. I feel like the more we learn about it the more we can handle it instead of, you know being angry about it, and you know pointing fingers and saying you're racist. No, I just feel like if we know more about it, and had more knowledge about, we won't be so quick to point the finger and be like this school did that because of this or. But like I said, if they could just do more with each other, and I feel like they are. Its just bringing the town more together, because we only have the two high schools here. I know for family in this area, the a decision you had to make, and I feel like if they have that camaraderie instead of we don't want you to go to the racist school or just the public school. Its just you going to school. It wouldn't have a label on it so that's the biggest thing. Anything else?

CC: I think all my questions have been answered, I don't know if-

AH: I think that's all we have for you. Was there anything else that you wanted to add?

CW: I mean I could talk about this for days to be honest with you. Because I don't talk about it so much, but I think that's pretty much the gist of it.

[Group thanks Charles]

AH: Thanks for giving us so much information. I think this will really be helpful.

CW: I mean if you need anything else, I'm just a phone call away. If you have any more questions or anything, want me to go in deeper or elaborate anything, I'm more than welcome to try.

[Group thanks Charles again.]