

THE PITT PERSPECTIVE PODCAST

By

Ashley Wolfe and Kamryn Scott

A Signature Honors Project Presented to the

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by

Kamryn Scott and Ashley Wolfe

Greenville, NC

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Approved by:

Tim Christensen

Department of Biology

Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences

Abstract

The Pitt Perspective is an interview-based podcast created to share the stories of minority communities located in Pitt County, North Carolina. Research done by our group showed us that Pitt County's current local histories often miss important information regarding events that have affected various marginalized communities in the area. Our goal has been to amplify the voices of these communities in order to assist in the healing of those that have faced generations of subjugation.

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Key words

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

Podcast

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Introduction

The Pitt Perspective is an interview-based podcast created to share the stories of minority communities located in Pitt County, North Carolina. Research done by our group showed us that Pitt County's current local histories often miss important information regarding events that have affected various marginalized communities in the area. Our goal has been to amplify the voices of these communities in order to assist in the healing of those that have faced generations of subjugation. What began as an effort to create conversations about race on ECU's campus has now transformed into a collection of oral histories given by marginalized community members in Pitt County and a reckoning with the area's untold history. Pitt County's struggle with race relations has only magnified the importance of this focus, and our team aims to assist in the healing of marginalized communities in the area.

In early 2021, the original group was challenged by the professors in East Carolina University's Honors College to find an issue that seemed unsolvable because of its complexity, or as many know a "wicked problem." They were then challenged to develop an original solution for it.

The Process: Honors 2000-3000

Through the weeks human-centered design was used to conduct interviews to workshop ideas for a solution to combat the effects of marginalization and negative race relations. The team's journey to a Pitt County-based oral history podcast was not as clean-cut as it may seem. Originally, they thought of a cultural fair. This idea came from the desire to promote appreciation of cultures that may be unfamiliar to some individuals. It was thought that this idea would improve race relations specifically on-campus at East Carolina University by helping students and faculty learn more about people that they differ from, as many origins of racism come from the fear of the unknown. The plan was for the cultural fair to be a day-long event on campus at ECU with booths representing various cultures showcasing what makes them unique. They also wanted to have featured speakers come to share their experiences with race relations. Eventually, it was decided to go with a podcast after brainstorming with our current mentor, Dr. Tim Christensen.

As part of our course within the Honors College, each team member was required to interview a handful of relevant individuals every week in order to gain insight on how to refine our project. These interviews carried much more impact than we expected. To gain more information on how oral history works and its efficacy, the team interviewed experts like Dr. Ronald Grele, director of the Columbia University Oral History Research Office, and Dr. Seth Kotch, director of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. To learn more about the history of Pitt County specific to marginalized communities, as well as the availability of this information to the public, they interviewed Pitt County historian John Tucker. To gain perspective about our audience and potential listeners, the team interviewed students on campus about what aspects keep them engaged in a podcast.

Finally, to gain insight into the state of race relations in Pitt County and ECU, they interviewed figures like former ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard and community figure Roy Rogers. Each of these interviewees provided useful information that was used to prepare for the launch and sustainment of the podcast, The Pitt Perspective.

The Process: Honors 4500-4550

Both Kamryn Scott and Ashley Wolfe joined the project later on and The Pitt Perspective was not the original wicked problem they chose to solve in Honors 2000 and 3000. This meant that the project served as a passion project. Both members took over from the previous/original group and took on the task of running the project. In the final weeks of the previous group's Honors 4500 course, Ashley and Kamryn were selected to join based on applications that they filled out. The previous members showed Ashley and Kamryn how they ran the podcast but gave them full authority to move forward with the project as they saw fit. Because the foundation had been set, Ashley and Kamryn were able to focus on enriching the content of the podcast and hearing the voices of the community.

After we learned we were given the reigns, we had to decide what direction we wanted to take the podcast. The original members interviewed a lot of people connected to ECU academia but we felt that ECU was only a small key to the community. We wanted to break the barrier between a college town and the local citizens so we decided to reach out to people who truly know Pitt County. We chose to focus on multiple different minorities within the community including members of the LGBTQ+ community and people with disabilities.

After getting over the initial nerves of reaching out to people and interviewing them, it almost became second nature. We are grateful to Tommy Cloyd for letting us interview him about his life growing up with a disability. He was our first solo interview without the previous team and his compelling story made us more eager to go out into the community to hear more.

The Product

As mentioned before, Pitt County has struggled with race relations for decades without many sustainable and effective solutions coming from the city or university. Community-based organizations and individuals have had the most impact, and the need for an outlet for these voices has become more apparent throughout our research. The previous team chose to interview students in order to understand the struggles and the uncomfortability of the interview process. A good amount of their interviews were with university faculty and staff. We decided to focus on local community members in the area to learn about their unique local perspectives.

A notable guest that we featured on an episode was Tamilla Wiggins, an African American Pitt County local suffering from PTSD. Kamryn originally was seeking to speak to someone with a physical disability through the Disability and Advocates Resource Center. Upon contacting the center, she was connected with Tamilla Wiggins who shared that she suffered from mental illness which isn't typically considered a disability. This really opened our eyes to the broad umbrella of disability and mental illness. Tamilla's story is a compelling one of resilience and hidden struggle. She had to fight to get the help she deserved because she is part of a community that often ignores mental illness. Thankfully she was able to get what she needed and dedicated her life to helping others get the resources that they need.

Another person that we also featured was Tommy Cloyd. He was born with a physical disability and we were able to explore how his life was greatly impacted. He spoke on the discrimination that he faced when seeking employment and higher education. He exposed how most buildings and school systems were not disability friendly before the ADA. Tommy may live with a disability but he doesn't let that define his life. He works, loves cars, loves to drive, and many more things. He is a classic example of not judging a book by its cover.

Another memorable guest featured on the podcast included Councilwoman Mary Perkins Williams. She dedicated 30 years of her career to being an employee at ECU and received very little recognition. Her story is mindblowing as she speaks about the tension and struggle of being a black female employee at a predominantly white institution. An institution whose campus African Americans weren't allowed to step foot on when it first opened. Despite the horrendous pay and treatment she received while working at ECU, she went on to become a Councilwoman in Pitt County. Her story was a great way for our group to end our season working on the Pitt Perspective and we can't wait to see where the next group takes it.

Our Perspective:

What we've learned and what we're doing now

We are now looking to open the Pitt Perspective podcast up as an online blog to share weekly stories throughout the entirety of Pitt County. This idea was brought to us by a member that joined in the Fall of 2022, Victor Ihuka. He is a grad student that studies anthropology and is intrigued by the community in Pitt County as he is a foreign exchange student. We know that we are leaving the podcast in great hands with Victor because he is truly passionate about the community. We know that he will be able to take the podcast even further than the campus of ECU.

By sparking these conversations within the Pitt County community, our team has not only created a small collection of oral histories but has also uplifted the voices of marginalized community members. Uplifting these voices within the community has allowed us to learn not only about the trials these people have faced but also how to have these types of difficult conversations about discrimination. Moving forward we want to be able to share these conversations with others and bring more light to the marginalized voices in small rural communities for anyone to hear. Encouraging these individuals to share their stories with us will hopefully allow us to gain more listeners which will then allow us to make the impact we wanted to within the community and possibly across the state and country. We've learned that these conversations don't have to be hard if you're willing to listen, and openly share ideas without arguing or becoming defensive.

As new members, we were tasked to go out into the community. Through research, we were able to find the Disability and Advocates Resource Center where we were connected to

Tommy Cloyd, who shed light on his experience with his physical disability, and Tamilla Wiggins, an African American Pitt County local who suffers from PTSD. We also spoke with Randy Gillen, an Eastern North Carolina native who discussed Native American history in the region, and Councilwoman Mary Perkins Williams, who spoke about her experience as a black woman employee in the early years of ECU. As we pass on this project to the next group, we hope to find members beyond East Carolina University students who are curious and eager to explore the history around them, we hope the impact that was originally sought out becomes visible in the entire Pitt County community.

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