

THE PITT PERSPECTIVE PODCAST

By

Abigail Clavijo, Breanna Sapp, Madeleine Saucier, and Meaghan Skelly

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by

Abigail Clavijo, Breanna Sapp, Madeleine Saucier, Meaghan Skelly

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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, our professors in East Carolina University's Honors College challenged us to find an issue that seemed unsolvable because of its complexity, or as many know a "wicked problem." We were then challenged to develop an original solution for it.

The Process: Honors 2000-3000

Through the weeks we used human-centered design by conducting interviews to workshop our ideas for a solution to combat the effects of marginalization and negative race relations. Our journey to a Pitt County-based oral history podcast was not as clean cut as it may seem. One of our original ideas we had come up with was a cultural fair. This idea came from the desire to promote appreciation of cultures that may be unfamiliar to some individuals. We 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. We also wanted to have featured speakers come to share their experiences with race relations.

Due to multiple restrictions from the Covid-19 pandemic, we scrapped this idea in favor of something we could take action with immediately. The group decided to workshop a podcast about racism. The main premise of this podcast would have been to highlight current events regarding marginalization, promote ways to fight systemic racism, and feature the stories of those who have experienced these things. During the workshopping process, we discovered that this idea may have been too 'big.' With a wider audience in mind, we found that there would have been a disconnect between the listener and the events. We were looking for a way to make the podcast more personal and engaging to our listeners.

After brainstorming with Dr. Tim Christensen, we later refined our idea into a locally-based oral history podcast that would focus on marginalized community members in Pitt County. We found that a local interview-based podcast was the best option for us to interact with

the community and to allow us to achieve our goal of highlighting stories of marginalized communities. With little knowledge of the ins and outs of oral history and the available historic resources to Pitt County, our team began our journey to find the information needed to launch the podcast.

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, we 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, we interviewed Pitt County historian John Tucker. To gain perspective about our audience and potential listeners, we interviewed students on campus about what aspects keep them engaged in a podcast. Finally, to gain insight on the state of race relations in Pitt County and ECU, we interviewed figures like former ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard and community figure Roy Rogers. Each of these interviewees provided us incredibly useful information that we used to prepare ourselves for the launch and sustainment of our current podcast, The Pitt Perspective.

The Process: Honors 4500-4550

After gaining that foundation of information that gave us what we needed to create the podcast content. We started our journey in Honors 4500 looking to create the best podcast we

possibly could. In order to do that we realized that the most important aspect of a good podcast is the quality of the interview and the audio quality of the podcast itself. To practice our interview skills we paired up and interviewed each other. We talked about the differences in our upbringings, what causes we are passionate about and why, and our experiences with racism and discrimination. The interview team member Abbie Clavijo did with team member Ahn Overbey was the first interview to be featured on our podcast. The team interviews allowed us to crack open these difficult conversations, improve our interview skills and most importantly learn about each other.

After we learned to develop a solid interview our next step was to produce a podcast with quality audio. We reached out to other members of the honors college to see what kind of equipment they used and what kind of spaces they recorded in to get their products sounding as professional as possible. Without a budget to spend we had to find ways to record the podcast for free. This led us to looking into the recording equipment that was available for us to check out through Joyner library. The first microphone we tried was called an Omnidirectional microphone, we were able to plug it into our computers and record with GarageBand and the voice recording apps. However, we were not satisfied with the results the microphone gave us. It didn't sound much different than the recordings we made with our iPhones. We then tested out a Meteor Mic. This microphone allowed us to control, to an extent, how much outside noise could be picked up during a recording. Though it wasn't the exact sound we were looking for, it was the best option available to us. With a microphone selected, a recording space (third floor study rooms in Joyner Library), and a quality interview done with one of our peers we developed our first episode.

The creation of the first episode, though it took a bit of trial and error, was a much easier process than the following episodes. This was because for the first episode our subject was right in front of us, we knew Ahn because she was a member of our group and could easily contact her. Our biggest struggle was finding people to interview. Without a link into the community or theme for our episodes it was difficult to research interview subjects. It was a lot of searching blindly through Google until we found someone of interest.

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. To prepare us for the tough discussions that can arise from conversations about race and gender, our team began by interviewing our own peers in order to understand the struggles of one another, and the uncomfortability of the interview process. We then shifted to interviews with university faculty and staff, then moved to local politicians, artists, authors, and other community members in the area that we knew had a compelling and unique local perspective.

A notable guest that we featured on an episode was Pamela Tuck, Greenville native and award-winning children's book author. Tuck was our very first guest without ties to ECU to be featured in an episode. Throughout our interview, Tuck discussed her family's history here in Pitt County, North Carolina, specifically her and her father's own experiences with race relations in the Pitt County education system. Tuck described her family as avid participants in the wave of

reforms that took place during the Civil Rights Movement in Greenville, North Carolina. Her grandfather, Moses Teel Sr. was a civil rights activist and well-known storyteller. His traditional stories, family stories, and folktales inspired Tuck to pursue a career in writing and storytelling from an early age. She later interviewed her father's experiences in Pitt County for a children's book story, specifically on his role as a teenager working with his father to desegregate the Pitt County school system in the 1960's. This work later translated into *Teel v. Pitt County Board of Education*, the lawsuit that eventually led to the desegregation of all white schools in Pitt County. Tuck's story book based on this case, *As Fast as Words Could Fly*, was later published and won the Lee & Low's New Voices Award - she is now the author of four successful children's books that focus on black voices and storytelling. Following the interview, our team had conversations about the impact Tuck's family had on Pitt County schools and how much work is left on the path to equitable education.

During Black History Month we also featured Dr. LaNika Wright, the director of Student Health Services at ECU. The theme of black history month 2022 was black health and wellness, so as a team we wanted to highlight the stories of black individuals who worked in health care. Throughout the interview she discussed everyday discrimination she encountered as a black girl growing up in a predominately white town. It was during this part of the interview where we learned what made the conversations on this podcast so impactful. Our team member Ahn Overbey was validating each experience Dr. Wright had undergone, demonstrating that what she had to endure maybe 30 years ago still happens today. Dr. Wright also spoke about her journey into the field of healthcare as a black woman and the trials she faced to get to where she is today working on ECU's campus. Hearing the discrimination and outright racism that she put up with in order to pursue the career Dr. Wright now was inspiring to us. Her ability to be raw and open

about her experiences though they did not take place in Pitt County reminded us why we wanted to develop the podcast in the first place, to bring stories like hers to light.

Another memorable guest featured on the podcast included Pearless Speller, local Greenville black artist and owner of Pearless Speller Studio Inc. A captivating storyteller, Speller discussed his journey as a black man in rural North Carolina to his experiences as a nationally-recognized artist. Raised on a farm in Windsor, North Carolina, Speller told team member Bree Sapp of how he found his passion for art at an early age through cartoons, comic books, and school projects. A memorable detail of the conversation was Speller recounting the day Martin Luther King Jr. died when he was a child, something that reminded every team member how the event wasn't as long ago as one might think. Growing up in the 1960's and 70's, Speller grew up without many black artists to look up to in the mainstream art world until he attended NC A&T University to further his art education. He mentioned various mentors and supporters who encouraged him to pursue his passions, including prominent black artists like John T. Biggers and NC A&T art professors. Speller's art varies in style with a majority of it influenced by black life and culture. One of the most fulfilling conversations our podcast team has had, Speller's story is a great example of why representation is important for young children of color.

Our Perspective:

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

We are now looking to shift our focus deeper into the community to uplift individuals who don't have that kind of platform. After our first few episodes, we came to the conclusion that a greater impact could be made on the community if we pivot to highlighting the stories of common individuals. Listening to their day-to-day experiences as a part of minority communities could have a greater influence on our listeners in order to heighten their awareness of these occurrences. This decision was made in our hopes to better assist in the healing of those that have faced generations of subjugation by the inclusion of more 'ordinary' stories.

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 in the world of higher education. Though this was not our initial goal, 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 reach out into the community to find people who don't have the exposure of authors, doctors and politicians. 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.

After gaining new team members we've been able to test the waters of this new goal. In order to join our team we asked the new members to create an episode of their own. They dove right into the community and through organizations recommended to us by our contacts at Joyner Library, they were able to find an interviewee who grew up and still lives in Greenville. The interview done with Terri Campell-Payton, the creative director at the Greenville Theatre Arts Center, allowed us to create a new kind of conversation and dive deeper into the roots of the oppression within the City of Greenville, which is what we originally set out to do with this podcast.

Since then, the team has interviewed new guests on a monthly basis, including: Tommy Cloyd, who shed light on his experience with his physical disability; Tamilla Wiggins, an African American Pitt County local who suffers from PTSD; Randy Gillen, an Eastern North Carolina native who discussed Native American history in the region; and Laura, also known as Miguel Cornell, who spoke about their experience as a drag king. As we pass on this project to the next group of East Carolina University students who are curious and eager to explore the history around them, we hope the impact that we planned to have at the start of this project becomes visible in the Pitt County community.

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Personal interviews

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Linda Kean (Dean of ECU's College of Fine Arts and Communication) in discussion with Breanna Sapp, February 2021.

Maggie Baile (ECU Honors College Admin Support Associate) in discussion with Breanna Sapp, February 2021.

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