**Article of the Week #5**

**Directions:**

1. **Show evidence of a close reading (highlighting key points and making notes in the margins – can be questions, thoughts, confusion, etc.)**
2. **Answer the question at the bottom of the article in paragraph form.**

A Racial Divide Closes as Students Step Up

By [ROBBIE BROWN](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/robbie_brown/index.html)

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ABBEVILLE, Ga. — Mareshia Rucker watched in frustration last weekend as several dozen classmates in tuxedos and gowns walked into an Art Deco theater for her high school’s “white prom.”

Like all black students at Wilcox County High School, she was not invited. The rural county in central Georgia is one of the last pockets in the country with racially segregated proms.

“These are people I see in class every day,” said Ms. Rucker, a senior, who hid in a parked car outside the prom. “What’s wrong with dancing with me, just because I have more pigment?”

But this weekend, after decades of separate proms for white students and black students, Wilcox County will have its first integrated prom.

Organized by students, it is open to all, at a ballroom in nearby Cordele. Nearly half of the school’s 380 students have registered, with roughly equal numbers of black students and white students.

A group of four female students — two black and two white — came up with the idea, and they have received an outpouring of support from across the country. Their [Facebook group](https://www.facebook.com/IntegratedProm2013/info) has 24,000 fans, and it has raised enough in donations to rent a ballroom and buy food and gift bags for every couple.

Disc jockeys from Texas and Atlanta volunteered to play music, a motivational speaker from Florida is delivering a speech, and photographers from New York and Savannah are taking pictures, all without cost. In response, the Wilcox County school board plans to vote this spring on making future proms official school events, which would prohibit racial segregation.

Although events sponsored by the public schools cannot issue invitations on the basis of race, the proms had been organized since 1971, when the schools were desegregated, as private, invitation-only events, sponsored by parents, not the school.

“Let’s face it: It’s 2013. Why are we even having this conversation?” asked Steven Smith, the school’s superintendent. “It became an embarrassment long ago.”

Leaders of the Georgia N.A.A.C.P. have called for the state to ban segregated proms. And the all-white prom has been ridiculed on social media.

But locally, the separate proms have defenders. White residents said members of the two races had different tastes in music and dancing, and different traditions: the junior class plans the white prom, and the senior class plans the black prom.

Wayne McGuinty, a furniture store owner and City Council member, who is white, said he had donated to fund-raising events for both proms in past years and saw no problem with separate proms. They do not reflect racism, he said, but simply different traditions and tastes. When he was a senior in high school, in the 1970s, he said, there were separate proms for those who liked rock music and country music.

“This whole issue has been blown out of proportion,” he said. “Nobody had a problem with having two proms until it got all this publicity.”

Parents who organized the white prom declined to comment, as did students who attended.

Across the South, segregated proms have gradually faded away. In 2008, Charleston, Miss., held its first mixed-race prom after the actor Morgan Freeman, who grew up there, offered to pay for the event. In 2010, Montgomery County, Ga., stopped its segregated proms after they were featured in an [article in The New York Times Magazine](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/24/magazine/24prom-t.html).

Paul Saltzman, who directed a film about Charleston’s desegregation, “Prom Night in Mississippi,” said he did not know of any other proms that were still segregated. He praised Wilcox County students for breaking with tradition.

“Young people see that the rest of the world doesn’t do things this way,” he said. “It’s hard to stick your neck out when you’re up against extreme belief.”

In Wilcox County, where 62 percent of the people are white and 35 percent are black, the effort to integrate the prom has grown far beyond the four students: Ms. Rucker, Stephanie Sinnott, Keela Bloodworth and Quanesha Wallace. Many others have volunteered, selling barbecue chicken to raise money and stuffing gift bags.

“The adults should have done this many, many moons ago, but it had to be the kids,” said Ms. Rucker’s mother, Toni.

Mr. Smith, the superintendent, wrote a statement of support for the integrated prom, saying he considered it “an embarrassment to our schools and community that these events have portrayed us as bigoted in any way.”

After the prom, the school will conduct a survey of students, and then a group of teachers and administrators will recommend a solution. Mr. Smith said he expected that the school would run the prom next year and open it to all students.

“I don’t even like to say ‘integrated’ prom,” he said. “I hope we’ll be announcing soon that there’s just one prom. The prom.”

**Response Question (answer in paragraph form and staple to this sheet): Comment on the following opinion of Wayne McGuinty: “. They [segregated proms] do not reflect racism, but simply different traditions and tastes.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?**