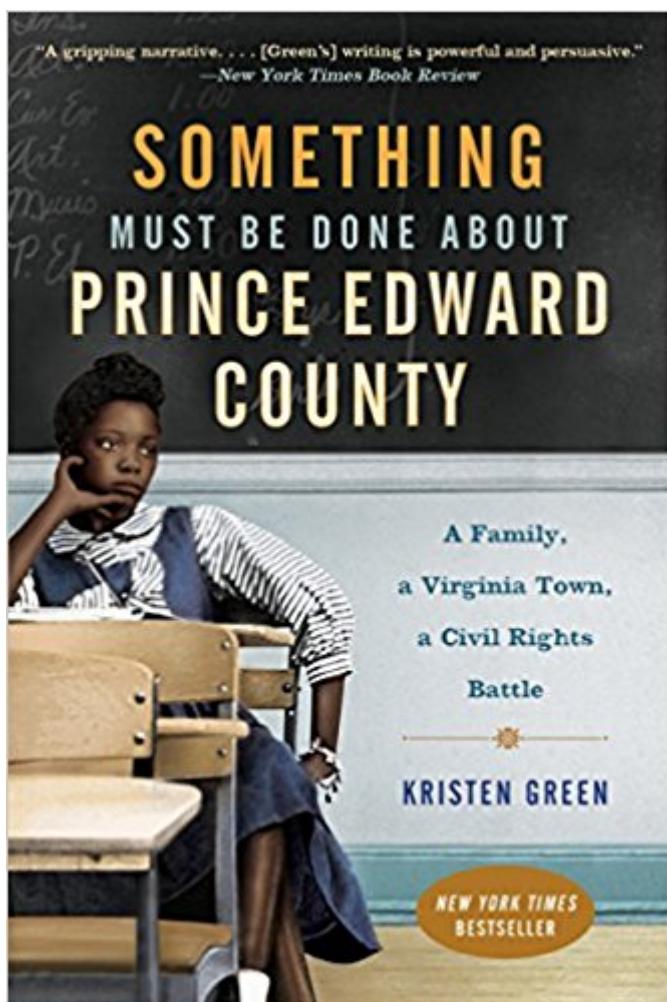


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Something Must Be Done About Prince Edward County: A Family, A Virginia Town, A Civil Rights Battle



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES® A BESTSELLERCombining hard-hitting investigative journalism and a sweeping family narrative, this provocative true story reveals a little-known chapter of American history: the period after the Brown v. Board of Education decision when one Virginia school system refused to integrate. In the wake of the Supreme Court's unanimous Brown v. Board of Education decision, Virginia's Prince Edward County refused to obey the law. Rather than desegregate, the county closed its public schools, locking and chaining the doors. The community's white leaders quickly established a private academy, commandeering supplies from the shuttered public schools to use in their all-white classrooms. Meanwhile, black parents had few options: keep their kids at home, move across county lines, or send them to live with relatives in other states. For five years, the schools remained closed. Kristen Green, a longtime newspaper reporter, grew up in Farmville and attended Prince Edward Academy, which did not admit black students until 1986. In her journey to uncover what happened in her hometown before she was born, Green tells the stories of families divided by the school closures and of 1,700 black children denied an education. As she peels back the layers of this haunting period in our nation's past, her own family's role—no less complex and painful—comes to light. At once gripping, enlightening, and deeply moving, *Something Must Be Done About Prince Edward County* is a dramatic chronicle that explores our troubled racial past and its reverberations today, and a timeless story about compassion, forgiveness, and the meaning of home.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Both intimate and ambitious, this is a far-reaching account of the political and social history of segregation and desegregation in Virginia that also reveals the very real human costs of this history. Moving and clear-eyed, damning and hopeful: this is an essential read.” (Jesmyn Ward, author of *Men We Reaped*) “In an intimate memoir, a journalist explores 1950s school segregation in a small Virginia town, its effects on the children there, and her family’s own connection to the racial divide.” (Entertainment Weekly) “An engaging and well-written book on the impact of school closures, told from a unique biographical perspective. Green delivers a deeply moving portrayal of one of the very sad histories in American race relations. Difficult to put down and a must-read.” (William Julius Wilson, Lewis P. and Linda L. Geyser University Professor, Harvard University) “The story of integrating American public schools has gotten drowned out by that of the Civil Rights movement. Return with Kristen Green to her hometown in Virginia to find out how people she loved and admired could have supported such injustice against children. You’ll be wiser if you do.” (Charles J. Shields, author of *Mockingbird: A Life of Harper Lee*) “Mystery wrapped in history with a touch of suspense and personal horror: Kristen Green’s stunner of a book is a ride back into a past you’ll wish had never happened. This is historical sleuthing at its finest.” (Chris McDougall, author of *Born to Run*) “Powerful. . . . The author movingly chronicles her discovery of the truth about her background and her efforts to promote reconciliation and atonement. A potent introduction to a nearly forgotten part of the civil rights movement and a personalized reminder of what it was truly about.” (Kirkus Reviews (starred review)) “Absorbing. . . . A merger of history both lived and studied, Green’s book looks beyond the publicized exploits of community leaders to reveal the everyday people who took great risks and often suffered significant loss during the struggle against change in one ēœquaint, damaged community.” (Publishers Weekly) “Green’s work brims with real-life detail from the journalist’s eye and ear and joins the likes of Diane McWhorter’s *Carry Me Home* in further developing the dimensions of the South’s desegregation struggle.” (Library Journal) “Kristen Green was born to write this book. [She] deftly interweaves the personal and the historical into a compelling narrative that leaves no stone unturned. [It] is not only fascinating but cinematic. [It] is an award-worthy book.” (Booklist (Top Pick))

A Washington Post Notable Book of the Year—“[Green]’s thoughtful book is a gift to a new generation of readers who need to know this story.” In the wake of the Supreme Court’s unanimous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Virginia’s Prince Edward County refused to obey the law. Rather than desegregate, the county closed its public schools, locking and chaining the doors. The community’s white leaders quickly established a private academy, commandeering supplies from the shuttered public schools to use in their all-white classrooms. Meanwhile, black parents had few options: keep their kids at home, move across county lines, or send them to live with relatives in other states. For five years, the schools remained closed. Kristen Green, a longtime newspaper reporter, grew up in Farmville and attended Prince Edward Academy, which didn’t admit black students until 1986. In her journey to uncover what happened in her hometown before she was born, Green tells the stories of families divided by the school closures and the 1,700 black children denied an education. As she peels back the layers of this haunting period in our nation’s past, her own family’s role—no less complex and painful—comes to light. “Intimate and candid.” —Richmond Times-Dispatch “Not easily forgotten.” —Minneapolis Star Tribune

I have mixed feelings on this one. While I’m giving it 4 stars, this is namely due to the fact that the story of Prince Edward County is riveting. It’s absolutely a piece of history I’m glad to have learned about. The characters felt very real... And for the most part, the author captures them & the own itself in such a way that as a reader, I can visualize the whole thing. What ultimately detracted from the historical aspect was the author herself. For someone who learned quite late in life about how large a world there is outside her small town, I found her self-reflection & judgment on her family, former friends, neighbors, etc. to seem incredibly pompous. Perhaps it’s just me, but when she interviews a teacher who discusses the struggles of teaching in buildings never intended for school & doing so with meager resources, the author is quick to brush her off narrating that the ‘real’ suffering was the 6 year old who didn’t get to go to school. In hearing the story, I personally want to hear from all involved. For better or worse, it’s history. While there was certainly a great injustice to the black residents of Farmville, it became difficult to listen to the author’s so-called ‘white guilt’ & her own steady stream of judgments as she continues on about how different & enlightened she is. As she states, ‘nice doesn’t mean good.’ I would argue that given the culture in the south at that time, there are people with good intentions who do things that ultimately cost us dearly. I don’t see

these people as evil. I see them as tragically uneducated & in some cases, simply a reflection of the era in which they grew up & a culture they never left. I highly recommend this book as a whole. The author & her narrative were too much for me by the time I was 1/2 way through, but as I said above, this is a piece of history that should have its voice heard.

I couldn't approach this book without some preconceived notions as I was born and raised in the town of Farmville, and I could put a face to almost every name in this book. I graduated from Prince Edward Academy 42 years ago, and I never really lived in that town again. My experience was different from the authors because I was taught from a young age that what had occurred in the county was terribly wrong, and I did not have deep family ties to the area. In fact, I was more than ready to flee the hypocrisy that I felt was all around me at age 18. I felt the author has done an excellent job in portraying what happened and in facing the truth that sometimes individuals could be both lovely, nice people and terrible human beings at the very same time. As I was reading the book this weekend, I found an interesting parallel as people are upset that that noble character Atticus Finch could also be portrayed as a racist by Harper Lee in the book coming out this week. There are a lot of people who would like to smooth over the past and put it behind them, but the truth is the past has to be faced if any real progress is going to be realized. This is an important part of history, and this book puts a very human face on it. People who find this interesting might also want to check out the novel "Prince Edward" by Dennis McFarland which covers some of the same territory.

For most of us, it's a staggering truth that there exists somewhere in the United States a county that closed its schools for five years rather than integrate them. Kristen Green introduces us to Prince Edward County, Virginia. Just an hour from Richmond in her haunting book, *Something Must Be Done About Prince Edward County*. A reviewer wrote that Kristen Green was born to write this book, and I'm inclined to agree. She grew up in the county seat of Farmville and her own grandfather was one of the founding members of the segregationist academy that whites in the community scurried to establish during the same summer they closed the public schools. Green's parents attended the segregationist academy and the author and her siblings did as well. Growing up, Green had no clue about her town's history or that Elsie, her grandparents' beloved housekeeper, was one of many, many black county residents forced to send her child away from home to receive an education. The book is

jaw-dropping in that it exposes a history most of us have never learned. But it's the way Green deftly weaves her own family memoir with the stories of Prince Edward County's black residents, shut out of school and still making up for lost time, that makes the book so extraordinarily compelling. The interviews Green conducts would be beautiful to read, even if the content was half as profound.

This is a book about forced school integration in Virginia. I liked the fact that it was written by a white woman whose parents and grandparents had fought integration, even closing down the local public schools. That said, I felt like I have read this story before, in much more engaging fashion. "Simple Justice" by Richard Kluger is far and away the best on this topic. As I was reading Green's book, I was disappointed. Her book was still interesting, but lacked the emotional power of other books. Green moves between historic background and the human drama of Prince Edward County, but something is lost in the way she does that. This is an important book, just not as engaging as others of the genre.

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