



THE EXCHANGE IN WHITE AMERICA

Kaukauna & King 50 Years Later

Education &
Engagement Resource

Community Conversations

A film by Joanne Williams

CoDirected by Ross Monagle and Tess Bergeson-Gallun

Production Manager and Designer, Kathleen Tank

Education Director, Robert S. Smith, PhD

Curriculum Development, Jennifer Kiefer Fenton, PhD

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry, and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try and understand each other, we may even become friends.

Maya Angelou

This is the story of an exchange program between Black and White high school students in Wisconsin from Rufus King High School in Milwaukee and Kaukauna High School in the Fox River Valley. This exchange occurred in 1966 as the country continued to grapple with meanings of equality during the Civil Rights Movement. This moment witnessed a spirit of anticipation and hopefulness for a more inclusive society, amid the tension wrought by continued racial inequities.

The Exchange. In White America. Kaukauna & King 50 Years Later tells the story of that student exchange program. Black and White students lived in each other's homes, attended classes in each other's schools, and performed Martin Duberman's groundbreaking and controversial play, *In White America*.



This was the first time many of the Kaukauna students had ever seen Black people in person. This was the first time many of the Black and White students from Milwaukee had ever lived in a small, all-white town in central Wisconsin.

Their experiences and histories are captured in this documentary, with hopes that events from 1966 will inspire healthy community conversations about race relations in the past and continuing challenges in our present day. Through theater, the arts, and the moving image, like the students, families and teachers accomplished over 50yrs ago, we hope to inspire meaningful, human-centered exchanges.

...we are under a moral obligation in choosing our experiences, since the result of those experiences must ultimately determine our understanding of life.

Jane Addams

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOANNE WILLIAMS

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER & DIRECTOR

*Joanne Williams has a rich career of anchoring, hosting, and moderating live television shows, video editing for television, and writing for television and radio. She has hosted thousands of thoughtful interviews with artists, writers, thinkers, politicians, activists, and more. In the making of these educational resources, our curriculum development team sat down with Joanne to interview her about the making of the film, *The Exchange. In White America. Kaukauna & King 50 Years Later...**



Why did you want to make this film?

I made this film to revisit a remarkable exchange program that happened between Black and White students from two high schools in Wisconsin in 1966. The inspiration for the film began 6 years ago in my garage. While going through a box labeled “High School Stuff”, I found a clipping from my high school newspaper. It was about an exchange program that happened in 1966, between my alma mater, Rufus King High School in Milwaukee, and Kaukauna High School in the Fox River Valley.

I’ve been a reporter most of my life, and I know a good story when I see it...When I opened that “High School Stuff” box 50 years later, I knew it was a good, and important, story. And I felt like I needed to tell it.

What made you save that newspaper clipping?

It’s interesting. I worked for the school newspaper in high school, and of all the things I saved, that article on the Kaukauna-King student exchange program was the one copy from the school paper that I saved. I’ve been a reporter most of my life, and I know a good story when I see it. I think that at that young age, something told me that this was an important story. When I opened that “High School Stuff” box 50 years later, I *knew* it was a good, and important, story. And I felt like I needed to tell it.

What makes a good, and important, story?

In the early stages of thinking about the film, I was at General Mitchell Airport one day looking through books at the Renaissance Bookstore. There was a whole section of history books, and Wisconsin history books, and I couldn’t find anything about the exchange. Nowhere. Nobody had heard of this story, unless they had participated in it.

I realized that this story is part of Wisconsin's hidden history. There was no written history about it because I was writing the history myself.

What is your relationship with history?

I was always really interested in history. As a kid, I was fascinated by the Renaissance and Egypt. I was an only child, and my parents were older, so I spent a lot of time around adults as a young person listening to stories. I grew up in a culture of storytelling. For example, my father used to tell me about the starting of the NAACP when he was a little kid. They used to dance around in the house as kids singing 'N-double-A-C-P'.

I spent a lot of time around adults as a young person listening to stories. I grew up in a culture of storytelling.

I saw a disparity between the stories I heard at home, and the history I was reading in books. I knew that a lot of things that had happened to Black people

were not documented in those books. I knew because my parents taught me. They say that the victors are the ones who write the history, not the vanquished. News is the first draft of history, so you have to get it right. I always felt that I was reporting it for the day, but also for history.

News is the first draft of history, so you have to get it right. I always felt that I was reporting it for the day, but also for history.

What would you say are the film's main lessons?

The film highlights the importance of rupturing the mindset of, "We don't want to get to know those people, because those people look different." My response to that has always been, "Well, why not? To the other guy, you're the other guy." The best way to understand America is to get to know each other one-on-one. And if you do that, then you'll realize how similar we all are and how we all want the same things, and you'll realize

how patriotic most people are. Interpersonal connection is a crucial component of understanding.

How do you hope the film will inspire people?

One of the things I noticed after some of our first screenings, was that after watching, people immediately started talking to one another about their own experiences in exchange programs, or sharing that they wish they would have had an exchange experience. The film ignites people to think about and talk about their life, their childhood, their families, and their communities. I want people to watch the film and then turn to the people next to them in the theater and start to ask, like Phyllis says in the film, "Maybe I don't want to be thinking what I am thinking."

I found this history in my garage... You have important stories about your history and about Wisconsin's history. So go out and find it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Teens and Adults:

1. What does the director, Joanne Williams, mean when she says this documentary "...is a springboard for some difficult conversations."
2. Describe a moment in the film that you found particularly moving. What about the scene was especially compelling?
3. If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would you ask and what would you ask them?
4. What did you learn from *The Exchange* documentary that you wish more people knew? What do you think could change if more people knew this?
5. What about the film felt familiar to you?
6. Complete this sentence: The story of this exchange is important because _____.
7. Complete this sentence: I am inspired by this film and discussion to _____.
8. If you could require one person (or one group) to view *The Exchange* documentary, who would it be? What do you hope their main takeaway would be?

For Youth K – 8th:

1. If a friend asked you what this film was about, how would you describe it to them?
2. Have you ever been involved in any type of exchange program (like a sleepover, camping), even if for only one day? If so, share your experience. Share one thing about your experience that was really difficult, and one thing that was really rewarding.
3. When asked to watch a documentary, some people say that they are boring or not entertaining. In what ways are documentaries entertaining and/or informative?
4. List three points described in the film that stood out to you. Why do you choose these three?
5. What does the director, Joanne Williams, mean when she says this documentary "...is a springboard for some difficult conversations."
6. If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would you ask and what would you ask them?
7. Complete this sentence: The story of this exchange is important because _____.

QUOTES FROM THE FILM...

"This is a springboard for some really difficult conversations."

Joanne Williams

"You know, the great American myth that you can pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, that there aren't any obstacles to getting ahead like race, class, gender. I mean it's all myth. But it remains the centerpiece of American ideology."

Martin Duberman

"They were very brave to say, *Yes, we're going to do this. This is gonna be exciting. This'll be a real adventure.*"

Christina Kellogg

"The institutionalized racism... it shocked me because it was just so blatant..."

Linda Plutchak

"I think in 1966 the Black population in Kaukauna was 1."

Mary Seleen

"My dad took heat for this. Not everyone agreed with the idea of this play and this exchange. So I know my dad took some heat. And I think he kind of liked that, 'cuz I think it proved his point that we need(ed) this play."

Paula Van de Hey

"This program was undoubtedly the most exciting inter-racial activity in which I have ever been involved."

Ruth Thomas

"People have to learn about each other, before they make decisions about each other. And that takes some work..."

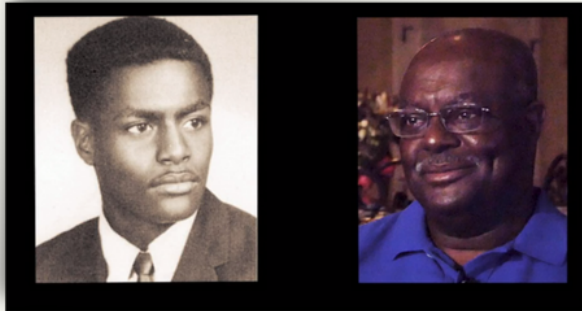
Joanne Williams

WHERE ARE THEY NOW



Bill Derricks

became a teacher and a principal in the Pulaski, Wisconsin school district.



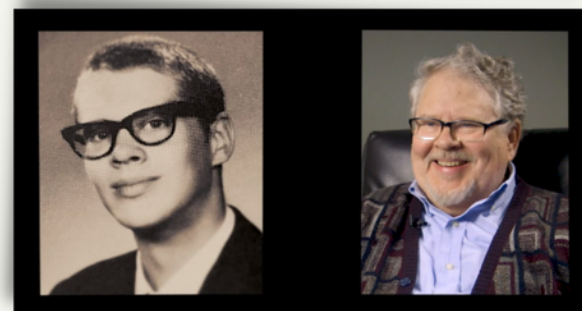
Allen Kemp

became a doctor and managed several medical facilities including as past president & CEO at Centura Health.



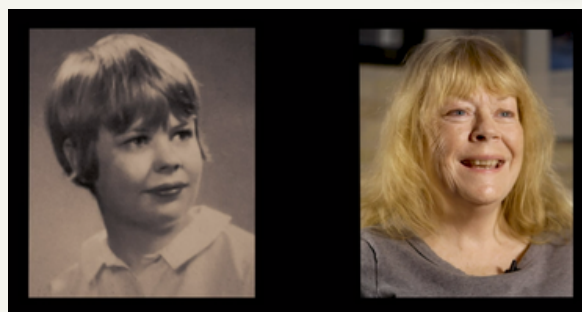
Phyllis Lawhorn-Wilson

became a middle school teacher in Milwaukee.



Joe McCarty

became a social worker and a member of the Louisiana Council on Race Relations.



Linda Plutchak

became an elementary school teacher and reading specialist in Stoughton, Wisconsin.



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