

Surrounded: America's First School for Black Girls, 1832

Wilfred Lupano

Stephane Fert, Illustrator

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Black students and their white teacher brave persecution in Wilfred Lupano's moving, enlightening graphic novel *Surrounded*.

In 1832, Prudence Crandall's decision to admit Black girls to her Connecticut boarding school draws the ire of locals. Sarah Harris, curious and intelligent, is the first Black student. As more students enroll, they and their teacher encounter ignorance and prejudice. Crandall engages in legal battles that establish important historical precedents, and discontented townspeople turn to violence. The school's end is tragic, but the education the students gain inspires them to pass along their learning to others.

Crisp conversations, flavored with the sounds and styles of the era, deliver information in the story's engaging flow. A Black child who runs around town reciting lines from Nat Turner's diary is a visceral visual reminder of the anxiety that pervaded race relations at the time.

The base behaviors of humanity are on full display in the book, emphasizing by contrast Harris's earnest desire for knowledge and Crandall's enlightened heroism. Bright, appealing illustrations fill panels with a sense of hope and optimism. The art excels at shocking turns as well, as with a devastating two-page spread showing a mob destroying the school's furniture. The afterword includes short, illustrated biographies of the main characters.

Surrounded is a moving graphic novel about the first integrated school in the US, its founder, and her students.

PETER DABBENE (March / April 2025)

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