

GENDER, RACE, AND EDUCATION

Battling State Bigotry and Tyranny in Virginia, 1958

Anna Pope

While the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling called for desegregation with “all deliberate speed” in 1954, many states took drastic actions to prevent racial integration.¹ In Virginia, the movement of Massive Resistance, ignited by US Senator Harry Byrd, opposed federal legislation and continued to fiercely enforce segregation.² Five years after the reversal of the “separate but equal” standard set by *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Norfolk School Board approved the admittance of seventeen African American students (called the “Norfolk 17”) into previously all-white schools. Refusing to allow this act of integration, Virginia governor James Almond assumed “all power and control over such schools.”³ In a letter to the superintendent of Norfolk City Schools, Almond declared Northside and Blair junior high schools, Maury and Granby high schools, and

1 Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. “HISTORY OF BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION.” United States Courts. Accessed February 14, 2015. <http://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/get-involved/federal-court-activities/brown-board-education-re-enactment/history.aspx>.

2 Virginia Historical Society. “Massive Resistance,” accessed February 14, 2015. <http://www.vahistorical.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/civil-rights-movement-virginia/massive>.

3 “Letter to J.J. Brewbaker and the Norfolk School Board from J. Lindsey Almond,” September 28, 1958, in the Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collection, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/sdinv/id/1907/rec/14>.



**WE PROTEST
SCHOOL
SEGREGATION**

St. Louis N.A.A.C.P.

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Norview's middle and high school officially closed and removed from the public school system effective September 29, 1958.⁴ This move, following the policies of Massive Resistance, prevented "one-third of the entire white population" from attending public school.⁵ By blatantly disregarding the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, Governor Almond created a crisis in Norfolk that robbed thousands of students of public education.

In response to this disaster, which crippled the Norfolk community, women united on an interracial front in order to oppose state tyranny and lead the movement to reopen Norfolk public schools by fostering a shared sense of purpose and engaging in social networking, and political activity. In order to challenge the state, Norfolk women connected through social groups that shared the same interest of interracial relations and public education. Founded in 1945, the Women's Council for Interracial Cooperation (WCIC) began with a modest membership of nineteen women, eight black and eleven white, with the priorities of "education, health, and housing".⁶ By the end of that year, the group grew to eighty-six members.⁷ Vivian Carter Mason, a leader in the black community and chairperson of the WCIC, was inspired to organize the Council due to the vast inequalities between the black and white communities. In April 1945, Mason called upon a diverse group of women from various Norfolk civic organizations to join her in the fight for local causes.⁸ Member Edith White recalled in an interview that the Council was a "marvelous opportunity to know people that cross racial lines," as well as to know women with common experiences and interests, such as higher education, civic activism, and passion for the community.⁹

4 "Letter to J.J. Brewbaker," September 28, 1959.

5 Dykeman, Wilma, and Stokely, James, "Report on 'The Lost Class of '59'". Digital Scan. *The New York Times Magazine*, January 4, 29, Old Dominion University Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia.

6 Jan Halecki, "Women's for Interracial Cooperation Papers, 1951-1961/ Special Collections and University Archives", Old Dominion University Patricia W & J. Douglas Perry Library, 2012, accessed February 14, 2015, <http://www.lib.odu.edu/archon/?p=collections/findingaid&id=88&q=>.

7 *Summary of Women's Council's Work for Schools 1945-1959*, 1959, in the Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collection, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/sdinv/id/1665>.

8 Halecki, "Women's Council for Interracial Cooperation Papers".

9 Edith White, interview by Mary Pelham White, *Oral History Interview with*

A primary concern for the Women's Council for Interracial Cooperation was public education, and the women bonded over their shared investment in the needs of equality and improvement in the local education system. Black schools did not have updated technology, such as electric typewriters, that white schools used, and teachers at black schools were deprived of basic supplies and books.¹⁰ Despite their humanitarian purpose, the WCIC met many challenges as well as resistance throughout their existence. One of their earliest challenges proved to be as simple as finding a public meeting place to host the interracial congregation. Private homes were too small and intimate, but many restaurants and churches were unsupportive and unaccepting of their interracial make-up.¹¹ After a disheartening search for "a place where everybody was equally welcome," the WCIC was finally invited to meet at the Unitarian Church.¹² During their first few years of work together, the WCIC began an integrated nursery school, and in order to obtain information, visited and surveyed black schools. The Norfolk Baptist churches were inspired by the WCIC and later established a similar group. The Baptist churches founded an interracial committee "under its women's organization... [which] was sort of autonomous," but still sheltered by the church from social pressures.¹³ Representatives from both black and white Baptist churches would gather twice a year, forming a safe place to meet and address issues in the church and the community.

Once united in female coalitions, women's groups gained popularity and power in Norfolk by capitalizing on social connections to enlist more support. News of these recently-created interracial and social groups spread first by word of mouth. As women reached out to their friends and encouraged them to join, they motivated a previously dormant political base. When Edith White spoke of her work with the local organizations, one friend responded that she would "just love to

Edith White, November 6, 1982, accessed May 2014, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/oralhistory/id/426/rec/2>.

¹⁰ Vivian Carter Mason, interview by Zelda Silverman, *Oral History Interview with Vivian Carter Mason*, Part 3, October 19, 1978, accessed May 2014, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/oralhistory/id/510/rec/1>.

¹¹ Edith White, interview.

¹² Edith White, interview.

¹³ Ruth James, interview by Mary Pelham White, *Oral History Interview with Ruth James*, November 5, 1982, accessed May 2014, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/oralhistory/id/191/rec/1>.

work on it, but [she was] just afraid [she] wouldn't have any friends," fearing she would be out of place in political groups.¹⁴ One woman said she had "let my husband do the voting" because it was not considered the feminine thing to do.¹⁵ Despite living in an era decades after the fight for suffrage, many women in Norfolk still failed to exercise their right to vote or even consider civic activism. Yet, when local Mary Thrasher ran for office in the late 1950s, many women became "politically awakened."¹⁶ In reaction to the 1958 closings, female coalitions resourcefully integrated the recently motivated women of Norfolk to broaden their voting base "so no one could control it," lessening the movement's dependence on the male vote.¹⁷ This female entrance into and interest in local affairs prepared women to take action at the time of the education crisis and defend Norfolk public schools from the state mandate.

After assuming leadership in the effort to reopen the Norfolk public schools, the women's groups continued to expand their base within the community, raise awareness of the detrimental effects of the school closings, and work towards gaining public support. Women on the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools (NCPS) generated a calling center in order to reach out to neighbors, local businessmen, pastors, and other leaders in the community. They discovered "that secretly there were a lot of people in the community" who supported their cause and rejected Governor Almond's authoritarian declaration.¹⁸ In the beginning of the movement, however, business leaders were hesitant to side with the activists, fearing retribution from the state.

While the groups supporting integration received empathy from parents sharing similar fears for their children's disrupted education and compromised futures, the women also faced no shortage of enemies. Edith White and her family were personally threatened, receiving "real hate calls...by the barrel" in response to her activism in the Women's Council for Interracial Cooperation and the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools.¹⁹ Others received discomfiting letters and became estranged from family members

¹⁴ Edith White, interview.

¹⁵ Edith White, interview.

¹⁶ Edith White, interview.

¹⁷ Edith White, interview.

¹⁸ Edith White, interview.

¹⁹ Edith White, interview.

because they did not share the same political ideals.²⁰ Groups like the WCIC and the NCPS struggled against the “staunch Virginia opinion...that things should stay exactly as they were if not moved backward.”²¹ This harsh, yet realistic, sentiment is illustrated in a letter to the editor of the *Virginian Pilot* in September 1959. Mrs. Mildred Kerley wrote zealously that children were learning from this experience, not losing from it, living out a lesson that “all the books in the world can’t teach them.”²² Mrs. Kerley and many others had the “back of [the governor] 100 per cent” and encouraged the drastic measures to prevent desegregation.²³

Whether or not families supported the closings, they were forced to cope with the shut down of the schools, which left 10,000 children without public education.²⁴ Some families moved out of state, arranged for their children to live with relatives, or enrolled them in private schools. Such private institutions included the Tidewater Educational Foundation, Inc. and the Charlottesville Education Foundation, segregated programs supporting Virginia’s Massive Resistance.²⁵ A popular alternative to segregated private schools were tutoring programs, largely established by women who were active in interracial and politically inclined social networks.

These programs were contingency plans drawn up to create a stable environment for children to continue their studies despite the deserted schools. Groups of parents worked together to form tutoring groups and hire teachers left unemployed by the sudden closures. For a small fee, students could join a group and enjoy “the School Board plans, the School Board curriculum, [and] the School Boards’ choice of books,” mimicking the same academic atmosphere

20 Ruth James, interview

21 Edith White, interview.

22 Mildred Kerley, “What Children Are Learning,” *The Virginian-Pilot*, September 17, 1958, in the Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collection, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/sdinv/id/1343/rec/10>.

23 Mildred Kerley, “What Children Are Learning.”

24 Dykeman and Stokely, “The Lost Class of ’59.”

25 “Rallying Point’ for Parents: Committee Is Formed to Keep Schools Open.” *The Virginian-Pilot*, September 19, 1959. in the Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collection, accessed May 2014, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/sdinv/id/4134/rec/1>; Nancy Mason, interview by George Gilliam, 2000. “The Ground Beneath Our Feet” project. Virginia Center for Digital History, University of Virginia. Charlottesville, Virginia.

without the physical school building.²⁶ With some 4,000 students enrolled in these tutoring classes, the groups met wherever there was room—some in churches, others in family basements or attics.²⁷ Despite the availability of tutoring programs, the Norfolk 17 were tutored separately from the white students. Though the black students were invited to join white tutoring groups, they declined, likely in order to strengthen their case and emphasize the need for public integration.²⁸ On the other hand, many seniors of the so-called “Lost Class of ’59” gave up entirely on the idea of completing their academic year and graduating on time. Some married, and others took the GED, enlisted in the military, or moved away.²⁹ Due to civic activism and a high degree of organization, the women were able to provide tutoring groups as an alternative measure of instruction for thousands of students whose educations were abandoned by the state.

The severity of the crisis became more evident when the schools did not reopen in October. At this time, women took collective action through political groups, media coverage, and litigation to raise awareness of the dire situation, gaining national attention for their cause. Many members of the Women’s Council for Interracial Cooperation collaborated with the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools. Edith White, a member of both organizations, recalled in 1982 the “marvelous women who appeared and took leadership roles and responsibilities and helped raise the funds” in the NCPS.³⁰ Through their social connections and other organizations, women were vital in the effort to recruit members and funds for the NCPS, printing ads that called for public action against the state. Women’s reach in these political activities continued to expand, as they held certain influences and positions within the organizations. For example, almost half of the executive members of the NCPS were women: Mrs. Eugene D. Kidd was the second Vice President as well as Stuart School PTA president, and Mrs. Joseph Commander was on the NCPS executive committee and was the former head of the Women’s Division of Civil Defense in Norfolk.³¹ Moreover, Edith

26 Nancy Mason, interview.

27 Dykeman and Stokely, “The Lost Class of ’59’.”

28 Nancy Mason, interview.

29 Dykeman and Stokely, “The Lost Class of ’59’.”

30 Edith White, interview.

31 Forrest P. White, “‘YOU’ Can Do Something About Opening the Schools!” *The Ledger-Dispatch and Star*, September 30, 1958, in the Old Dominion University

Report on 'The Lost Class of '59'

Their high schools closed by Virginia's 'massive resistance' to integration, Norfolk seniors see their chances for diplomas and college going up in the smoke of controversy.

By WILMA DYKEMAN and JAMES STOKELY

NORFOLK, Va. **T**HE had it," a tall, 17-year-old boy said here one afternoon recently. "I've been waiting around since September for schools to open, and now I'm finished with them. I'm going to find me a job."

This boy, who is finished with schools before he has yet had a chance to finish high school, would have graduated next spring. Now, since Norfolk's high schools failed to open last fall, and have still not opened, he is one of the seniors who have become widely known as "The Lost Class of '59."

Unlike the "lost generation," the "lost class" did not come into being through any action or philosophy of its own. Its members are victims of a struggle between the force of Federal law and

Virginia's massive resistance to that law. As a result of that struggle, 10,000 white pupils in Norfolk have been locked out of six of their seven white junior and senior high schools.

What brought about this weird and wasteful situation? What happens to the people directly and indirectly involved—students, teachers, parents, the community as a whole—when a major part of a public school system fails to function? And what forces will influence the final resolution of this major crisis, a crisis under especially close scrutiny today by many Southerners, who may be confronted tomorrow with the same hard choice between public schools as they have always known them and segregation as they have always known it?

The situation in Virginia's largest city (population 291,000) grew from an action of its school board on Aug. 29. Under protest, but also under orders of a Federal District Court, the board assigned seventeen Negro pupils to six white junior and senior high schools. In September, by authority given him under state anti-integration laws enacted two years ago, Gov. J. Lindsay Almond Jr. proclaimed the six schools closed. Since the law covered only those schools "threatened" by integration, one white junior high and all the Negro secondary schools opened on schedule.

"The ironies in this situation!" one Norfolk resident says. "All the city's Negro schools are still running. And just down the street from one of our

big empty high schools is Catholic High, teaching every day, integrated several years ago, and no difficulties!"

When Governor Almond's announcement made it clear that six buildings serving almost one-third of the entire white school population would not open this fall, the high school students were incredulous. "We'd heard discussion about closing our schools," pretty, dark-haired Jamie Whitehall says intensely, "but we just didn't think public schools could stop! And when they were closed, we thought they'd reopen again in two or three weeks. We thought they'd have to!"

MANY adults shared Jamie's shock. "People here didn't believe the public schools could be closed," says Dr. Forrest White, a prominent pediatrician. "Anyone who pointed out that this calamity might come was accused of stirring up trouble. Even now I believe there are many people who won't realize they are closed. I guess these things have to hit personally and hard, through your children or pocketbook, before you'll take any real interest."

When it became apparent that 10,000 children would not be receiving any public education, substitute arrangements for some schooling for some pupils began to take shape. These included neighborhood tutoring groups, foundation of a private academy, attendance at the unaffected schools in and around Norfolk, and transfers to other districts and other states. Let us examine each of these accommodations.

(1) It is estimated that about 4,000 D. P.'s (displaced pupils) are in tutoring groups. These classes are frankly temporary. They make the most of meager resources. Each class is organized by a mother or group of mothers, who bring together from a half dozen to two dozen students to study the same subject. Then a teacher must be found, a classroom improvised, and arrangements made for such tuition as is necessary (\$5 per week for four courses is average, although the amount varies from group to group).

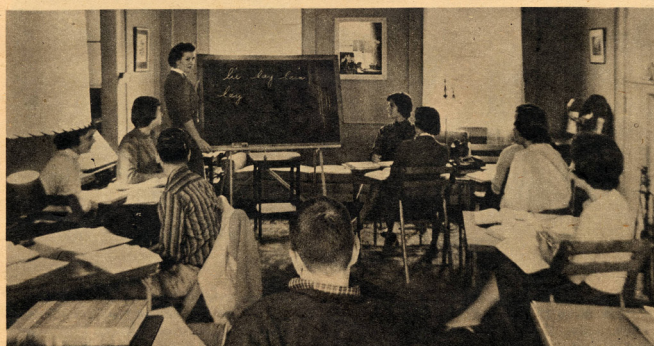
THE teachers for the tutoring classes are drawn from the staffs of the closed schools, who continue to receive their official salaries. A few receive a modest tutoring fee in addition.

These classes occupy a wide variety of buildings. One uses a vacant store. Another, composed of children of the faculty and staff at the Norfolk branch of the College of William and Mary, uses a dilapidated house near the college. ("It's very makeshift," explains College Provost Lewis W. Webb, "but it has a wonderful faculty.")

Still other groups meet in private homes—in basements, in rumpus rooms, in attics and in living rooms. ("I'm having fourteen for dinner tonight," one pleasant (Continued on Page 54)

WILMA DYKEMAN and JAMES STOKELY, a husband-wife writing team, live in Tennessee.

THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE



SCHOOLING WITHOUT SCHOOLS—Most Norfolk white high school students have been kept from classes by a Virginia law closing the schools to forestall integration. The result is empty classrooms (top) and, for some, tutoring in private homes (bottom).

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Figure 1: Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely. "Report on 'The Lost Class of '59'." *The New York Times Magazine*, January 4, 1959, in the Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collection, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/sdinv/id/1451/rec/29>.

White's husband was the president of the NCPS, which influenced and facilitated the Committee's support of the WCIC.³²

In a late September copy of the *Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch and Star*, the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools printed a

Libraries Digital Collection, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/sdinv/id/4085>.

³² Edith White, interview.

VOTE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS
VOTE FOR PETITIONING THE GOVERNOR
NORFOLK SCHOOLS MUST BE OPENED SOON OR

-- **OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM WILL BE CRIPPLED FOR A GENERATION.**
 Unless schools are opened by January, many of Norfolk's best teachers will leave the city. Most tutoring groups will close in January. Our schools must be open by then.

-- **OUR CHILDREN WILL LOSE THE AMERICAN BIRTHRIGHT OF A FREE EDUCATION.**
 Only the wealthy will be able to educate their children. Colleges will not accept students without high school diplomas.

-- **CITY'S ECONOMIC FUTURE WILL BE BLEAK.**
 Any chance of attracting industry will be lost.
 Business leaders say "The economic effect of closed schools is already being felt."

GUIDE BALLOT

City of Norfolk
SPECIAL INFORMATIVE ELECTION
 Tuesday, November 18, 1958

QUESTION—Shall the Council of the City of Norfolk, pursuant to State Law, Petition the Governor to return to the City Control of Schools, now closed, to be opened by the City on an Integrated Basis as Required by the Federal Court?

☒ For Petitioning the Governor
☐ Against Petitioning the Governor

FOR INFORMATION ONLY

NORFOLK COMMITTEE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.
 Composed of Parents, Educators, Business men, Clergymen, and Professional Men and Women who want to preserve our public school system.

Figure 2: VOTE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS. Norfolk, VA: Norfolk Committee for Public Schools, 1958, in the Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collection, accessed February 14, 2015. <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/sdinv/id/1354/rec/4>.

coupon for readers to cut and send to the Committee in order to petition the state government to reopen the schools. The advertisement urged the people of Norfolk to consider “not Massive Resistance, but Intelligence Insistence” as an efficient answer to the education crisis, pleading that the direction of the schools should be returned to the Norfolk School Board and out of state grasp.³³ The ad also invited readers to write to Norfolk’s Mayor Duckworth as well as Governor Almond, which the WCIC did fervently. Activists also wrote to both President Chambers on the Commission for Public Education and Governors Stanley and Almond about improving race relations in Norfolk.³⁴

33 Edith White, interview.

34 Halecki, “Women’s Council for Interracial Cooperation Papers”..

Figure 3: Forrest P. White “YOU Can Do Something About Opening the Schools!” Norfolk, *The Ledger-Dispatch and Star*, September 30, 1958, in the Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collection, February 14, 2015. <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/sdinv/id/1426>.

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

“YOU” CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT OPENING THE SCHOOLS!

The Norfolk Board of Education and the City Council can request the Governor to return the schools to the Norfolk School Board for administration.

Show the Governor and the City Council that you have full faith in the integrity and ability of the Norfolk School Board to operate the Norfolk School System.

Not Massive Resistance, but Intelligent Insistence! Fill out and mail the coupon immediately—or bring it to the Committee for Public Schools, Boush & Brambleton.

Another effective form of political activity during the Norfolk school crisis involved media appearances, which helped the movement evolve from a grassroots effort to a national concern. The state's education injustices became known when a national television documentary, *The Lost Class of '59*, aired on CBS in January 1959.³⁵ In this primetime exclusive, Margaret White, a government teacher at the then-closed Granby High School, delivered a moving speech about the heartless neglect of the education of Norfolk's youth by the state as a result of Almond's actions. She addressed the innate equality of children of different races, describing how black and white students shared academic experiences, such as struggling with the same math problems.³⁶ Margaret was applauded for her stand against segregation across the country, receiving fan mail written the same night the documentary aired. One letter was written by Virginia Walls Jones, a woman who followed the Norfolk crisis through the *New York Times*, describing how "we cheered your speech."³⁷ Another admirer, Ester B., encouraged Margaret for her activism on such an important matter, expressing "what a good politician [she] would make!"³⁸ This media coverage helped propel the local Virginia women's cause onto the national stage.

In addition, the NCPS's efforts and funds also supported lawsuits brought against the state regarding the closures. Besides being the first female student of the Norfolk Division of the College of William & Mary (now Old Dominion University), Ruth James was an NCPS and WCIC member, and her family were the head litigants in a lawsuit to reopen the public schools.³⁹ While unable to bring the suit directly, the NCPS gave support to "these individuals who had the courage and conviction...to restore the rights" of children in public

35 NEA News. "Ed Murrow Airs 'Lost Class of '59'." January 9, 1959, in the Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collection,, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/npsdp/id/1171>.

36 *The Other Face of Dixie*. 57 mm film. (CBS News 1959), accessed May 13, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/the-other-face-of-dixie/>.

37 Virginia Wall Jones, *Virginia Wall Jones to Margaret White*, January 22, 1959, letter, in the Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collection, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/sdinv/id/1406>.

38 B. Ester, letter, Ester B. to Margaret White, January 21, 1959, in the Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collection, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/sdinv/id/1358>.

39 Ruth James, interview.

education, arguing that Governor Almond had violated the 14th Amendment.⁴⁰ Federal judges of the case *James v. Almond* found the school closings to be “unconstitutional and illegal” in January 1959.⁴¹ Moreover, the court ruled that the state “has the obligation to furnish such education...on an equal basis.”⁴² *James v. Almond* was the final effort in the six-month battle against Massive Resistance. A month after the court decision, in February 1959, the schools reopened and the Norfolk 17 were integrated into the public schools, bringing the city’s education crisis to an end.

Despite state and national support, integration was not necessarily the primary goal for all parties. In a 2009 interview with WHRO TV, a Hampton Roads station, surviving members of the Lost Class of 1959 explained that reopening the schools and desegregation were not the same case. They recalled that they were generally not concerned with the controversy of integration, but were instead preoccupied with the movement to return to school. These Norfolk seniors were more interested in graduating on time, regardless of the integrated state of the schools.⁴³

While both blacks and many whites fought to reopen Norfolk public schools, racial tensions existed throughout the process. The Norfolk 17 received nonviolent yet unequal treatment in their new integrated school environment. Patricia Turner, enrolled at Norview Junior High along with Skip Turner, her twelve-year-old brother, had a teacher who wore gloves to collect her papers or had the girl drop them in a basket.⁴⁴ Similarly, Betty Jean Reed, the only black student at Granby High School, was excluded from the prom in 1961, two

40 *Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch*. “Committee Hails Suit on Schools: Only Reopening Hope Rests in Today’s Move, Brewer Says,” October 27, 1958, in the Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collection, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/sdinv/id/3472/rec/10>.

41 “School Desegregation in Norfolk, Virginia: Timeline,” Old Dominion University Libraries, accessed May 13, 2014, <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/timeline/collection/sdinv/>.

42 Walter E. Hoffman, “Three-Judge Federal Court - Text of Integration Case Opinion.” *The Virginian-Pilot* (Norfolk, VA), January 20, 1959.

43 “What Matters—The Lost Class of 1959”, You Tube video, 26:45, posted by WHRO TV, February 10, 2009, file://localhost/. <https://www.youtube.com/watch%3Fv=LojPOdMXA68>.

44 Karen Vaughan, “The Norfolk 17: Patricia Turner”. School Desegregation in Norfolk, Virginia. Last modified 2008, accessed February, 2015. <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/sdinv/id/4409/rec/23>.



Figure 4: “The Norfolk 17.” Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collections. School Desegregation in Norfolk, VA. Accessed February 14, 2015. <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/norfolk17/collection/sdinv/>.

years after integration.⁴⁵ Dolores Johns commuted by car for her own safety after being stalked by six white men while walking to school. Furthermore, a cross was burned at the door of Patricia Godbolt’s home in an attempt to discourage her from attending Norview High school.⁴⁶ While the inequalities in treatment and quality of education in Norfolk public schools persisted, the 1959 integration was a major victory on the eve of the national civil rights movement.

A smooth implementation of integration in Norfolk was far from expected, but the courage and perseverance of the Norfolk 17 resulted in revolutionary advancement for the state of Virginia. Their success is largely due to the support of the unified women’s groups and their political activity, which was essential in mobilizing the community, gaining national media recognition, and funding the lawsuit against Governor Almond that neutralized his executive action to close the schools in September 1958. The unprecedented female empowerment and cooperation that surpassed racial boundaries shown by the women in Norfolk enabled historic progress in the fight to end segregation.

⁴⁵ Karen Vaughan, “The Norfolk 17: Betty Jean Reed”. School Desegregation in Norfolk, Virginia. Last modified 2008, accessed February, 2015. <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/sdinv/id/4411/rec/24>.

⁴⁶ Karen Vaughan, “The Norfolk 17: Patricia Godbolt”. School Desegregation in Norfolk, Virginia. Last modified 2008, accessed February 14, 2015. <http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/sdinv/id/4636/rec/16>.

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