

**BLACK EDUCATION IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY, VIRGINIA,
1939-1966**

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the

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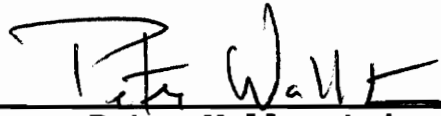
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in

History

APPROVED



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(ABSTRACT)

Black education was unique in Montgomery County, Virginia, during Jim Crow segregation because African American students were able to attend Christiansburg Institute (C.I.), a black secondary school with an excellent reputation. C.I. initially emphasized vocational education, but in the late 1940s administrators expanded the curriculum to include a college preparatory program.

C.I. nurtured black activism and culture. Because it was a regional school, it facilitated the development of an extended black community. Blacks organized first for equalization within segregated schools, and then they challenged segregation itself.

After the Supreme Court declared school segregation unconstitutional in Brown v. Board of Education (1954), white Virginians resisted desegregation. White Montgomery County residents were committed to segregation, yet they were unwilling to commit to Virginia's "massive resistance" to integration. Desegregation came quietly and relatively

quickly to Montgomery County due to bi-racial cooperation, a comparatively small black population, and the growth of the state university located in the county.

Once integration was complete in 1966, the county closed C.I. White Virginians, especially those in eastern Virginia, fought so hard to avoid desegregation; yet in Montgomery County it was black residents who paid the highest price for integration -- their school. An institution that held high expectations for its graduates, while providing them with the tools to succeed in a segregated world, is now gone. This thesis explores the costs, the benefits, and the process of desegregation in one predominantly white county in western Virginia.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my brother, David Ray Brady, who died last year at the age of 37. Although his death was tragic and has filled me with great sorrow, the memories I have of him convince me that we never die in the hearts and minds of those who love us. It is there where we sow the seeds of our own histories.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people for their help with this thesis. First, and foremost, I wish to thank the chair of my committee and my mentor in the History Department, Dr. Peter Wallenstein. His inspiration, insight, and keen interest have guided me through this entire project. Peter answered thousands of my questions over the last two years as I was striving for "Wallensteinian perfection." I have also learned much about the art of teaching history because I worked with Peter as his T.A. for a year and a half. My experiences in graduate school have been pleasurable, interesting, and challenging because of Peter Wallenstein.

I wish also to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Mark Barrow and Dr. Beverly Bunch-Lyons. They read countless revisions, and their criticisms were insightful as well as helpful. I know Mark used up most of the world's red ink in the last few months, but I think it was worth it.

The other people I wish to thank in the History Department are Dr. Burton Kaufman and Dr. Larry Shumsky for teaching me how to write my thoughts cohesively; Rhonda McDaniel, Jan Francis, and especially Linda Fountaine for their support, help, and great listening skills; and finally Jacqui McNulty for keeping me both sane and laughing for two years straight, (well laughing at least).

I would especially like to thank the people who really made this project possible -- those who shared their histories with me and allowed me to incorporate them in this thesis. Not only were all of my interviewees open and gracious to me, they were all excited about the work I was doing. I would especially like to thank Jacqueline Eaves Elaine Carter, and Lucy Harmon. They were invaluable resources, and they helped me find out answers to many questions. If they did not know the answer, they told me who to speak with. They were very kind and extremely supportive of my work. These and others provided me with a picture of the past and a glimpse of the future. Without them, this thesis would not exist.

Finally, I would like to thank my family -- Ed, Edward, Jr. (Boo), and Robbie -- for their support. They gave up their wife and mother for the last year, if not longer, so that I could pursue my goal. Now all they want is for me to make sure there's clean underwear in their drawers and to start cooking again. I also want to thank my parents for their support and confidence: Mom, Dad, I promise to get a job now!

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Introduction

One of the greatest changes in the twentieth-century South has been the dismantling of Jim Crow segregation. From the end of the nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth, white southerners maintained a segregated system which legally sanctioned black political, economic, and social oppression. Segregation was not only detrimental to black southerners, it was detrimental to the entire southern society.

The barriers of Jim Crow would not have come down if it were not for the efforts of black Americans. Without black activism and NAACP litigation, the Supreme Court would never have been able to mandate the end to school segregation in Brown v. Board of Education (1954). Blacks had to be plaintiffs in order to bring the question to the Court. As early as the 1930s, blacks combined protest and litigation to force school equalization. In the early 1950s, black Americans began to directly challenge the validity of school segregation itself. The NAACP's attack on segregation caused the Supreme Court to invalidate the "separate but equal" doctrine outlined in Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896.

The Court's decision in Brown was necessary but not sufficient to end school segregation. The decision marked the end of an old era and the beginning of a long and emotional struggle in the South. Black activism continued to be the driving force in integration. This activism was necessary until the federal government as a whole put its support behind the meaning and implications of Brown.

Although the pace of desegregation varied from state to state, school segregation persisted throughout Virginia until 1959, five years after Brown. Virginia's program of massive resistance prevented integration, even under court order, until that time. For many years after massive resistance ended blacks continued to have to petition school boards in order to transfer to an integrated school.

While desegregation offered black students greater opportunity within white society, this opportunity came with a price. After desegregation, many blacks lost an institution important to their culture - the black school. In addition to this loss, initially black students were often denied participation in social, athletic, and academic activities in the desegregated school system. More importantly, desegregation forced blacks to accept as legitimate the dominant white culture, including white

language, values, and traditions, within the school environment. While the home and church continued to support black culture, the white school experience compelled blacks to manipulate their language and customs during school hours. This often implied that aspects of black culture were illegitimate in society at large.

Various historical interpretations of the southern response to Brown and the struggle to desegregate public schools have focused on four perspectives: white southerners, the NAACP, the judiciary, and black southerners. Initially, interpretations of the struggle to implement Brown were written from the perspective of white southerners.¹ During the mid-1970's, however, historians began to analyze the role of the NAACP in securing and implementing the Brown decision.² Legal historians began to

¹The literature on the white southern response to Brown is quite extensive. Early interpretations include Benjamin Muse, Virginia's Massive Resistance (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961); and Numan V. Bartley, The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950's (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1969).

²Richard Kluger, Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality

analyze the arguments made in Brown and the impact the decision had on the judicial, executive, and legislative branches of the federal government, as well as its impact on state and local governments.³

Most interpretations gave little, if any, attention to local black Americans in the desegregation struggle. Beginning in the 1970s, a few community studies analyzed the contributions of black citizens in the implementation of Brown, yet much of the historiography focused on white southerners, the Supreme Court, and the NAACP litigation.⁴ For the most part, the voices of black students, black parents, and black community leaders remained unheard until

(New York: Vintage Books, 1975); Mark V. Tushnet, The NAACP's Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925-1950 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Mark V. Tushnet, Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936-1961 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

³J. Harvie Wilkinson III, From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration: 1954-1978 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Robert A. Burt, The Constitution in Conflict (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1992).

⁴The studies which describe desegregation efforts within the black communities are Anna Holden's study which included Charlottesville, Virginia and John Egerton's story of the battle for integrated schools in Prince Edward, Virginia. Anna Holden, The Bus Stops Here: A Study of School Desegregation in Three Cities (New York: Agathon Press, 1973); John Egerton, "A Gentlemen's Fight in Prince Edward County, Virginia," in Shades of Gray: Dispatches from the Modern South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1991).

the 1980s. Because of the omission of the black perspective, many early accounts analyze only half of the story of the desegregation struggle.

Most historians did not consider the importance of black communities during desegregation until Aldon D. Morris analyzed black communities in the Civil Rights Movement. Morris, a sociologist, analyzes the origins of black community activism. He explains, "ironically, urban segregation in the South had some positive consequences" because it "facilitated the development of black institutions and the building of close-knit communities" regardless of class.⁵

While historians largely ignored the role of blacks in the struggle for desegregation in the 1950s, Morris emphasizes the role of blacks in the Civil Rights Movement during this important decade. Gradually, historians began to realize that the black community did not stand idly by during the era of massive resistance and token desegregation in the South. Consequently, they began to analyze black social organizations in implementing Brown.

⁵Aldon D. Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change (New York: Free Press, 1984), 3-4.

In the late 1980s and in the early 1990s, historical accounts of local struggles to desegregate contributed significant detail to the historiography. Frye Gaillard's story of desegregation in Charlotte-Mecklenberg, the site of the national test case for busing in Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenberg (1971), provides insight into the hardships of black individuals who desegregated white schools.⁶ Gaillard details the story of Dorothy Counts, the first black student to attend the white high school in 1957. He follows the story of Charlotte-Mecklenberg into the 1970s when the Supreme Court ruled on busing. Gaillard's description is extremely moving because he relates the inner struggles of Counts as she pioneered the integration of a white school. Gaillard tells the story in the context of childhood and describes the true heroes and heroines of the desegregation struggle -- the black children who had the courage to walk into all-white schools.

As the historiography increasingly focused on the black perspective, historians began to realize the impact school desegregation had on black southerners. For example, David S. Cecelski argues that "school desegregation devastated

⁶Frye Gaillard, The Dream Long Deferred (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

black educational leadership."⁷ He contends that blacks lost symbols, mottos, holidays, and other traditions in the process of school desegregation. However, Cecelski argues that blacks did not quietly accept the white hegemonic influences within integrated schools. He discusses boycotts in Hyde County as an example of the ways black students influenced desegregation plans within the community.

Although he did not question the validity of integration, he points out there are social and cultural dynamics that need to be considered. Cecelski relates the struggles of the Brown era to racism in the 1990s. Describing black parents today, he writes, "what most truly seek, however, is more complex even than achieving racial justice. They hope also to recover and adapt for the 1990s something of the lost soul of black schooling."⁸ Critics of the American educational system describe schools as the means by which cultural and economic reproduction continue to legitimize the dominant white culture and repress those

⁷David S. Cecelski, Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina and the Fate of Black Schools in the South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 8.

⁸Ibid., 173.

who deviate from it.⁹ The role schools play in reinforcing the status quo remains a problem for educators in the 1990s.

In many desegregated schools during the 1960s and 1970s, the repression of black culture was overt and widespread.¹⁰ Archie G. Richardson discusses the effects of desegregation in his study of black education in Virginia.¹¹ In his study, Richardson concludes that the effects of school desegregation were "disappointing to Negroes" and that "some of their schools were abandoned, and some were reduced in grades. Some had their names changed and some were closed outright by local school authorities."¹² Richardson no doubt heralded the end to segregation, but saw

⁹Michael W. Apple, Ideology and Curriculum (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1990). Apple argues that American schools serve as a means of cultural and economic reproduction and therefore discriminate against blacks, women, minorities, and the poor. Schools "teach a hidden curriculum that seems uniquely suited to maintain the ideological hegemony of the most powerful classes in this society," 43.

¹⁰Cecelski, 7, 8.

¹¹Archie G. Richardson, The Development of Negro Education in Virginia 1831-1970 (Richmond: Virginia Chapter, Phi Delta Kappa, 1976), iv. In 1936 Richardson was the first black appointed to the State Department of Education.

¹²Ibid., 112.

that blacks also lost an important institution, the black school, because of desegregation.

This thesis will focus on the costs, the benefits, and the process of school desegregation in Montgomery County, Virginia. Montgomery County is located in the New River Valley in Southwest Virginia.¹³ Various historians have studied desegregation in other areas of Virginia with higher percentages of black residents, yet no one has studied the responses of black residents to desegregation where their numbers were small, as was the case in southwestern Virginia.

The efforts of black southwestern Virginians in their struggle to end segregation have long been over-looked. Perhaps this has been because the area is rural. However,

¹³Although the exact location of the New River Valley can be debated, I am referring to an area in Southwestern Virginia near the New River which includes the counties of Montgomery, Pulaski, Floyd, and the city of Radford. I have chosen to include these areas in my description because they utilized Christiansburg Institute as a regional black high school from 1947 until 1966. Other counties in the area, such as Floyd and Giles, used Christiansburg Institute for their black high school. These counties were not involved in the regional plan, but instead paid tuition to Montgomery so that their black students could attend. I use the term "New River Valley" to simplify my description of this area.

as early as 1938 blacks in Southwest Virginia worked with the NAACP for equalization of facilities and salaries. The black residents' fight against Jim Crow in southwestern Virginia is important in understanding segregation because rural blacks maintained much the same activism as urban blacks, although their organizing differed because they were not in an urban environment.

Aldon Morris's argument that segregation facilitated the development of black institutions is relevant not only to urban black communities, but to rural black communities as well. It is clear that segregation mandated the development and fostered the growth of black institutions, particularly the black school, in rural Montgomery County.

Historians need to study both segregation and desegregation across the South in order to analyze the institution of Jim Crow. Some have studied and compared the institution of slavery in various sections of the United States as well as in the Caribbean.¹⁴ From these comparisons, we have acquired greater understanding of the lives of slaves across the Americas. Historians should

¹⁴For example, Herbert S. Klein, Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Ronald L. Lewis, Coal, Iron, and Slaves: Industrial Slavery in Maryland and Virginia, 1715-1865 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1979).

likewise approach the study of Jim Crow and how black citizens dismantled it.

While many aspects of segregation in the county were similar to other areas of the South, black education was not. This was because black residents had the ability to attend a reputable black secondary school, Christiansburg Institute (C.I.). Despite the fact that there were few blacks in the area, C.I. nurtured activism in its students and in the black community. The teachers were well-educated role models who encouraged students to build self-esteem and confidence, despite segregation. Because C.I. served as a regional high school from 1939 to 1947, it facilitated the development of an extended black community in the region. This extended community aided activism and organization during segregation and desegregation.

The black experience in Montgomery County during the 1950s and 1960s supports Morris's contention that blacks were actively fighting Jim Crow during these decades. Black Montgomery County residents began to organize well before the 1960s. Through community activism, they attempted to equalize black schools, increase black voting, and influence state segregation policies.

The desegregation process went smoothly in Montgomery County due to a number of factors unique to the community. Specifically, these factors included C.I.'s excellent reputation, the low percentage of blacks in the area, bi-racial leadership and cooperation, and the influence of educated whites at Virginia Tech. Desegregation began in 1961 in Montgomery County, and schools were completely desegregated in 1966.

Once desegregation began, many black residents were ambivalent because they knew that the end to segregation would mean the end to C.I. Although the integrated schools incorporated blacks into athletic and social activities, an important black cultural institution was lost. Like many southern communities, equal education in Montgomery County seemed to necessitate blacks having to give up one of their most vital institutions -- the black school. There were no formal protests over the school closing, but many black citizens voiced their opposition. Still the school closed its doors with the graduation of its last class in 1966.

Within my study of Montgomery County I do not attempt to make a broad comparison of segregation across the South: however, I do analyze Jim Crow and its effects on one area and on one black institution - the school. This analysis

provides insight into segregation and, perhaps more importantly, an understanding of what blacks gained and what they lost by desegregation.

I cannot make broad generalizations from this study because the black educational experience was no doubt unique in Montgomery County. However, it is necessary to situate this analysis by comparing this experience with other localities within Virginia which had much different conditions during segregation. I hope my analysis is but a beginning to an historical study of the black experience in Virginia, particularly southwestern Virginia, during the 1950s and 1960s.

Chapter One
Segregation and Black Education in
Montgomery County, 1939-1948

The economic and social constraints placed on black residents in Montgomery County were characteristic of many Virginia communities during segregation. White residents of the county, like most of Virginia's whites, did not display the rabid racist attitudes prevalent in the deeper South. Although violence was always a threat in any segregated society, it was not as great a threat in Montgomery County.¹

Race relations were relatively good in Montgomery County because white residents felt little threat from the small percentage of blacks in the area. Contrasted with Prince Edward's black population of 44.6 percent in 1950 and Southampton's 60.9 percent, the southwest counties in the New River Valley had few black residents.² For example, in 1950 Montgomery County had a black population of only 5.3 percent and Floyd County had only 4.3 percent. Pulaski and Radford City had the highest percentages of black residents

¹V.O. Key, Jr., Southern Politics in State and Nation New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 26.

²J. Harvie Wilkinson, III, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 116-117.

in the area with 7.5 percent and 7.0 respectively.³

Since whites in Montgomery County were not threatened by a large black population, segregation was not as overtly oppressive as it was in the deep South. Anne Moody's autobiographical account of the violence in Mississippi contrasts greatly with experiences in the upper South, including Virginia.⁴ Particularly frightening is Moody's description of the murder of Emmett Till, a fourteen year old boy visiting Mississippi from Detroit. Whites brutally murdered Till because he supposedly made a suggestive comment to a white woman. Moody writes, "Before Emmett Till's murder, I had known fear of hunger, hell, and the Devil. But now there was a new fear known to me--the fear of being killed just because I was black."⁵

An example of white intimidation and violence against blacks near Montgomery County is a story behind a sign which hung in Newport, a small town a few miles outside the Montgomery County line. The sign read "No Niggers Wanted Here."⁶ This warning to blacks remained until the early

³Ibid.

⁴Anne Moody, Coming of Age in Mississippi (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968).

⁵Ibid., 125.

⁶Ray Howell, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 16 January 1996.

1970s. A few blacks resided in Newport, only to have their houses burned down as a warning for them to move elsewhere.⁷

Montgomery County was not isolated from the segregationist policies and attitudes of Virginia's leaders. In 1949, V.O. Key described Virginia's political leadership as an "oligarchy" because the "Byrd Machine," headed by Senator Harry F. Byrd, controlled most of the commonwealth's political power.⁸ Key's analysis helps in understanding Virginia's segregationist attitudes. In Virginia, according to Key, "Rabble-rousing and Negro-baiting capacities, which in Georgia or Mississippi would be a great political asset, simply mark a person as one not to the manner born. A public attitude favorable to this type of leadership combined with organization discipline represses most of the crudities thought to be characteristic of southern politics."⁹ White Virginians may have been segregationists, but they were also ladies and gentlemen.

Harry Byrd's influence over Virginia politics, both before and after the Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. Board of Education (1954), illustrates the power that the

⁷George "Snake" Page, interview with author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 2 February 1996.

⁸Key, 26.

⁹Ibid.

"black belt" held over the rest of the Commonwealth.¹⁰ It was the black belt which gave the Byrd machine its winning margins in elections. It was the white residents in the black belt who most feared any talk of integration because, as they saw it, they had so much to lose.

State law mandated segregated facilities and accommodations. Black Montgomery County residents were segregated in restaurants, parks, and theaters. Greeks, a Blacksburg restaurant, forced black patrons to come to the back door to be served.¹¹ Other local restaurants, if they served blacks at all, did the same. Area blacks could not go out to a restaurant and sit down to be served a meal unless they went to black-owned restaurants, which apparently were rare in Montgomery County. Most black

¹⁰Both J. Harvie Wilkinson and Richard Kluger use this term to describe the areas within Virginia which had a large percentage of black residents. The term white belt was used to describe those localities which had a small percentage of blacks. Wilkinson describes Montgomery, Pulaski, Floyd, and Radford as located within the white belt due to their relatively small population of black residents. The terms do not have any other meaning beyond the relative percentage of population of blacks within the county as compared to other sections of the commonwealth. These differences in the percentage of black population greatly affected the localities' response to Brown. Therefore, for convenience, I will utilize Wilkinson's terminology, black belt and white belt, when discussing this difference in population. Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Faces of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 113-154.

¹¹George "Snake" Page, interview with author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 16 January 1996.

residents did not bother going out because of these restrictions.¹²

Segregation touched every aspect of black life in Montgomery County, including recreation. Even the Playground Program was segregated: there was a "Negro playground" and a "white school playground."¹³ Blacksburg's local Movie theater, The Lyric, not only had segregated seating for the black patrons, it had a black cashier to take their money.¹⁴

Elaine Carter grew up in Montgomery County in the 1940s. She remembers the days of segregation in terms of the opportunities denied to blacks. Carter had left the area after graduating from C.I. in 1948 at the age of fourteen. She was forced to leave her friends and family because she had aspirations to go to college. Like many blacks at the time, she went North to attend college in Chicago because she could not be admitted to the all-white schools close by.¹⁵

¹²Rosa Holmes, "Black Appalachian Oral History Project," interview by Michael Cooke, 13 March 1991, Tape Recording, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

¹³Montgomery News Messenger, 3 July 1947.

¹⁴Jacqueline Eaves, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 16 Feb. 1996.

¹⁵Elaine Carter, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 12 March 1996.

Not only were higher education opportunities foreclosed to blacks in the area, but career opportunities were limited as well. As a black woman in the 1940s and 1950s, Carter could have been a domestic or a school teacher in Montgomery County. Neither suited her. She feels that black males were denied opportunities as well. Most worked in the coalmines in the county or at the federal arsenal in Radford. She recalls that the intelligent and educated black men of the community were forced to work with illiterate whites and to consider them peers in the social structure of the segregated society. Both economically and socially, therefore, black males were denied the ability to rise to their potential.¹⁶

John Hope Franklin, a noted black historian, explains that during segregation blacks formed institutions that served the black community alone, such as the church and school. Meanwhile, they needed to negotiate their existence in white society. Franklin explains that this was no small task.¹⁷

Elaine Carter describes how difficult it was for blacks to thrive in white society in Montgomery County. Within a

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 423-432; 264-294.

sociological and psychological context, Carter feels that black accommodation to whites was mandatory. There were only the white paternalistic rewards, which were limited. She says "the fewer you are in number, except at church and the segregated schools, there was no place where you depended on blacks at all ... you knew you had to deal with white people in a very immediate sense of survival. So I think that makes for a psychology among blacks of getting along and putting white people at their ease."¹⁸ In other words, due to the small number of blacks in the area, Carter feels that blacks were dependent on whites except where they were able to have some control over their own institutions within the segregated black world, such as in the black church and the black school.

Carter also remembers her father being upset that her mother had given her brother a convertible. She says that her father had the notion that "the white people are going to be upset. That's how it impressed my family." Carter recalls that during segregation her mother was not accommodating to whites. She feels at the time "that was not helpful."¹⁹

¹⁸Elaine Carter, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 12 March 1996.

¹⁹Ibid.

Segregation gave blacks a thwarted sense of reality. Elaine Carter remembers as a child shopping with her mother in Roanoke, a city about 50 miles from Montgomery. When Ms. Carter and her brother would see people eating at counters in five and dime stores, they would ask their mother if they could please have something to eat because they were so hungry. Ms. Carter's mother would tell them that respectable people did not eat out in public. This was her way of negotiating her children's world in a segregated society.

In the late 1940s when Ms. Carter went to college in the North, friends asked her if she wanted to go get a sundae with them. First of all, she did not know what a sundae was, but went along with her friends to get one. She was completely horrified when she understood that they were going to go to one of these places to eat in public. When she reiterated her mother's philosophy about such things, they laughed. Ms. Carter was just beginning to realize how closed life had been for her in the segregated South.²⁰

²⁰Elaine Carter, telephone interview by author, 3 April 1996.

Public Education in Virginia

Like most of the South, Virginia did not have a public school system until after Reconstruction. Before then only the wealthier residents could afford to attend schools and state law barred slaves from being educated. In 1868 Virginians held a constitutional convention to amend their state constitution. The new constitution mandated a state-supported public school system.²¹

From their inception, public schools in Virginia were segregated. Even though there were 25 black delegates at Virginia's Constitutional Convention in 1867-1868, a "provision for mixed schools failed by a large majority."²² White Virginians begrudgingly took responsibility for the education of blacks and soon schools became a symbol of institutionalized segregation.²³

Public schools were slow to develop in Virginia mainly due to lack of funding.²⁴ Southern states at least had a

²¹William A. Link, A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: Schooling, Society, and Reform in Rural Virginia, 1870-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 8-17; Henry Allen Bullock, A History of Negro Education in the South: from 1619 to Present (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 53.

²²Bullock, 51.

²³Link, 8, 20.

²⁴Ibid.; Bullock, 53.

framework for black schools because the Freedmen's Bureau and other benevolent societies had started schools for blacks in the South following the Civil War.²⁵ A crisis emerged in the mid-1870s when Virginia's leaders attempted to take school funding to pay off the enormous state debt. However, this failed due to the Readjuster Movement in the 1880s. The Readjusters increased state funding to schools by 50 per cent and wrote off three-quarters of the state debt.²⁶

By the turn of the century, regional differences in the Commonwealth promoted disparities in public education within Virginia. Louis Harlan describes regional inequality regarding state funding for schools.²⁷ Blacks in Virginia were discriminated against because of race, but whites and blacks in southwest Virginia were discriminated against because of region. State funds were distributed to localities on the basis of the number of children in the school district, white and black. It was then a local decision as to how the funds were distributed. Localities

²⁵Bullock, 53. According to Bullock 2,677 such schools were in the South. The schools had 3,300 teachers and 150,000 pupils in regular attendance.

²⁶Link, 18.

²⁷Louis R. Harlan, Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958).

could divert appropriations for black schools and utilize them in their white schools.²⁸

According to Harlan, "discrimination against Negro children ... promoted discrimination between white schools."²⁹ Southwest Virginia did not have the political power to obtain the same funding as eastern Virginians. Furthermore, white residents in southwest Virginia did not have a large black population from which to drain school funding. Therefore, inequalities between white and black schools in southwest Virginia were not as drastic as they were in eastern Virginia. Obviously Prince Edward and Southampton, because of their higher percentage of black students, had much more funding than Montgomery and other southwestern Counties that they could divert into white schools.

During the Depression, southern states were hard-pressed to support their schools.³⁰ Responding to this crisis, New Deal legislation provided funding under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) for southern schools. In 1938 President Franklin D. Roosevelt categorized the

²⁸Harlan, 166.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Franklin and Moss, 381-404.

South as the nation's "no. 1 economic problem."³¹ Roosevelt and other liberal Democrats felt that southern problems, such as segregation and white supremacy, would be eradicated by economic development. Therefore, many of Roosevelt's New Deal programs targeted the South and its schools.³² Despite Roosevelt's intentions, many blacks never benefitted from New Deal programs due to the corrupt distribution of funding at state and local levels.³³

Many of Virginia's schools continued to be out-dated and antiquated in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1939 the Roanoke Times reported that "Virginia has forged ahead rapidly in the last few years in providing more nearly adequate school-housing facilities ... yet it is still far behind in the average for the nation." The national average for the value of school buildings was approximately \$252 per pupil and the state average was \$121 per pupil. Virginia had "benefitted generously from the federally aided programs in constructing new buildings," but other states had benefitted as well.

³¹Bruce J. Schulman, From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

³²"School Buildings In Virginia Are Far Behind National Average," Roanoke Times, 19 March 1939; Schulman, 194; Franklin and Moss, 381-404.

³³Schulman, 201-202.

Therefore, the gap between Virginia and the rest of the nation persisted.³⁴

Another article from this time period stated "the log cabin schoolhouse and its early successor, the small frame building off the beaten path, are fast vanishing from Virginia. In their place are rising compact, modernly equipped and centrally located structures." Like other states at the time, Virginia was beginning to update its school system with modern facilities, and funds from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) aided this construction. According to the article, this was being done only for the white schools, but "studies for the negro schools" were in progress.³⁵

Public Education in Montgomery County

Public education in Montgomery County was similar to many rural localities. White and black schools suffered due

³⁴"School Buildings In Virginia Are Far Behind National Average," Roanoke Times, 19 March 1939.

³⁵"Small Schools Are Vanishing," Roanoke Times, 19 March 1939.

to lack of funds. Black elementary schools were even less equipped than white elementary schools in the county.³⁶

From the 1940s until the 1960s the county had six elementary schools and one high school for its black residents.³⁷ Blacksburg Negro Elementary was located on Clay Street in Blacksburg. In 1953, a new school was built on Harding Avenue to replace the school on Clay Street. Although the building was now made of brick, it still had only two rooms for grades 1 through 7.³⁸ Another elementary school for blacks was located in Wakeforest, a black community between Blacksburg and Radford. A third, the Old Hill School, was located next to Christiansburg Institute. This school was closed in 1953 and a new school, Friends Negro Elementary, replaced it in Christiansburg.³⁹ Another school was in Elliston, a rural area in Montgomery. Two others were located in Shawsville and Pinewoods, but these were closed during the 1940s and 1950s due to low

³⁶Elaine Carter, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 12 March 1996.

³⁷Montgomery School Board Minutes, 1936-1966. Charles W. Crush, ed., The Montgomery County Story 1776-1957 (n.p., 1957), 165; Jacqueline Eaves, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 8 March 1996.

³⁸Jacqueline Eaves, interview with author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 8 March 1996.

³⁹Ibid.

enrollment. The students then had to be transported to other area black schools.⁴⁰

Elaine Carter grew up in Elliston during segregation and began public school in 1940. She recalls that her elementary school, Elliston Colored School, had only two rooms and no indoor plumbing, while Elliston's white elementary school in her area was "a much more substantial structure." When Elaine and the other children would see their teacher come up the road, they would run out to help her build the fire for the school room.⁴¹

Although black elementary education was typical in the county, black secondary education was not. Compared to most black schools, and even many white schools, Christiansburg Institute (C.I.) was an excellent institution. C.I. was founded in 1866 by Captain Charles S. Schaeffer, an agent of the Freedmen's Bureau, and for 100 years the Friends' Freedmen's Association supported the school both morally and financially, although its support diminished after the Depression.⁴² According to John Hope Franklin black public

⁴⁰Montgomery School Board Minutes, 1940-1955.

⁴¹Elaine Carter, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 12 March 1996.

⁴²Ann Swain, "Christiansburg Institute: From Freedmen's Bureau Enterprise to Public High School" (master's thesis, Radford University, 1975), 3. The name of the school was Christiansburg Industrial Institute (C.I.I.) until 1950 when the name was changed to Christiansburg Institute. However,

schooling and black colleges were dependent on philanthropy. Support of C.I. by the Friends' Freedmen's Association demonstrates Franklin's assertion that philanthropic organizations were vital to black education.⁴³

Adding to C.I.'s reputation was the fact that Booker T. Washington supervised the school from 1895 until his death in 1915.⁴⁴ The Friends' Freedmen's Association asked Washington to "take charge of the school and organize it on the industrial model of Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes."⁴⁵ Washington was a respected black leader and founder of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.⁴⁶ Due to his responsibilities as principal of Tuskegee, he was unable to leave Alabama. However, Washington did agree to be a consultant to C.I. His involvement brought prestige to the

I will simply refer to the school as C.I. even when discussing the school before this time period. Today there are still older people in the area who refer to the school as C.I.I. I have chosen to call it C.I. just for simplicity's sake.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵James Wesley Smith and Amanda Edwin DeHart, Christiansburg Institute: A Proud Heritage (Petersburg, Virginia: Westar Publishing Company, 1991), 11.

⁴⁶Franklin and Moss, 264-294.

school and he helped to build the school's reputation in vocational education for blacks.⁴⁷

Although Washington's philosophy of self-help and vocational training for blacks remained controversial across the country, it fit well with the regional aspirations of Southwestern Virginians. Because the area was rural, most career opportunities were with railroads, coalmines, Virginia Tech, and eventually the Radford Arsenal. However, Washington's philosophy did limit the school's educational philosophy due to his emphasis on self-help and industrial education. The curriculum was eventually expanded to include more academic classes in 1947.⁴⁸

The philosophy of C.I. was to give young blacks a practical education. An annual catalog of C.I. defined the institution's philosophy: "The object of the institution, aside from literary training, is to give young men and women sufficient knowledge of some industry to earn a living and become intelligent, useful citizens."⁴⁹

⁴⁷Smith and DeHart, 11.

⁴⁸Elaine Carter, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 19 April 1996.

⁴⁹Annual catalog, statement of philosophy, quoted by John Banks, Principal of C.I., "Historical Summary of Christiansburg Institute," in The Montgomery County Story, 1776-1957, 138.

By the mid-1920s, the C.I. campus included "a farm, two school houses, trades building, dormitory, barn, teachers' cottages, outbuildings, tools, equipment and live stock."⁵⁰ During the Depression and into the 1940s, there were between 200 and 250 students enrolled each year. Enrollment peaked at 340 students in the 1956-1957 school year.⁵¹

A majority of the teachers at C.I. were college graduates. In the 1920s most teachers at C.I. were educated at either Hampton or Tuskegee Institutes.⁵² By the 1940s most of C.I.'s teachers came from Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia.⁵³

During the Great Depression the Friends' Freedmen's Association was unable to continue its sole financial support of Christiansburg Institute. The Association wanted to transfer C.I. and its property to Montgomery County with the stipulation that "the recipient promise to use it for Negro education."⁵⁴ In 1934 the Montgomery County School Board decided to lease the property. The Board was still

⁵⁰Edgar A. Long, Christiansburg Industrial Institute (n.p, n.d.).

⁵¹Swain, 249.

⁵²Edgar A. Long, Christiansburg Industrial Institute (n.p, n.d.).

⁵³Smith and DeHart, 57-58.

⁵⁴Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 9 December 1933 as quoted in Smith and DeHart, 52-53.

apprehensive over the stipulation regarding the school's use for only black education, and therefore it decided to lease it for one year.⁵⁵ Pulaski County began to use C.I. as its black high school in 1938 after its secondary school for blacks, Calfee Training School, burned down.⁵⁶

The Great Depression and World War II greatly affected C.I. and other southern schools. John Hope Franklin discusses the hardships placed on black schooling in the South due to the Depression. He says, "While the Great depression hurt education all over the country, it worked a special hardship on Southern black schools. Construction of new school buildings stopped almost entirely ... Southern states curtailed expenditures for black schools in the same or greater proportion that they were curtailed in white schools."⁵⁷

Christiansburg Institute and its students did receive some federal funds under the WPA and other programs. In their book Christiansburg Institute: A Proud Heritage Amanda DeHart, a former cosmetology teacher at C.I., and James W. Smith explain the effect of New Deal programs on C.I.:

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Jacqueline Pleasance, telephone interview by author, 4 March 1996.

⁵⁷Franklin and Moss, 407.

Forty youths (both boys and girls) were brought to the institution and housed on campus to work on the school's farm. They specialized in food and soil conservation, and participated in a bridge project. The youths were paid \$17.50 per month, of which \$12.50 ... was deducted for room and board. This project was followed in 1938 by a Works Progress Administration project. The purpose of this enterprise was to improve the grounds and roads at Christiansburg Institute. These projects were all part of the New Deal programs to alleviate the effects of the Great Depression, and they impacted significantly upon Christiansburg Institute.⁵⁸

There is no mention of WPA building funds, however, and no new construction took place during the 1930s. After the New Deal era it was difficult to obtain the material necessary for building school facilities due to shortages brought about by World War II. By the end of the War, C.I.'s enrollment had outgrown the facilities. Just a couple of months after the war ended, a delegation of black citizens reminded the School Board that C.I. still needed a vocational trade building and an auditorium-gymnasium.⁵⁹

The white schools in Montgomery County needed new facilities as well. At the beginning of the school year in 1948, a first grade class had to be moved to Blacksburg High School due to unexpected enrollments. According to the

⁵⁸Smith and DeHart, 54.

⁵⁹Swain, 236.

principal of the elementary school, "we don't have room for even one more student."⁶⁰

In 1948 an article in The Montgomery News Messenger asserted that Montgomery County needed \$3,343,125 in order to modernize its school system and to provide adequate facilities for students and teachers. The paper stated that \$2,324,500 was required for immediate educational needs, of which \$581,125 could be financed locally. The Montgomery County Board of Supervisors had requested that Governor Tuck call a special session of the General Assembly to address the educational funding issue. Tuck disagreed with the Board's urgency, yet the State Board of Education, after reviewing the county's needs, commented that "It is the conviction of the Board that these needs represent definitely an emergency, the solution of which calls for prompt consideration and immediate action on part of both state and the localities."⁶¹

⁶⁰Principal J.A. Fetter as quoted in Montgomery News Messenger, 16 September 1948.

⁶¹State Board of Education as quoted in Montgomery News Messenger, 2 December 1948.

C.I. as a Regional High School

Montgomery County continued to lease C.I. through the 1930s and 1940s, utilizing the institution as a county high school for blacks. The county was hesitant to take over the deed to C.I. due to the stipulation made by the Friends' Freedmen's Association which stated that the school was always to be used for Negro education.⁶² In 1946 Montgomery County sought the opinion of the Attorney General for the Commonwealth of Virginia regarding the Association's stipulation in the deed agreement. He said, "I know of no reason why the property in question may not be used as one of the schools for colored children and the necessary capital expenditures made in connection with the property."⁶³

The agreement was formalized in 1947 when C.I. officially became a regional high school for blacks. The Friends Freedmen's Association deeded the property, which amounted to 167 1/2 acres, to Montgomery County, Pulaski County, and the City of Radford. A regional board consisting of school officials from the two counties and

⁶²Swain, 236.

⁶³Attorney General for the Commonwealth of Virginia as quoted in Smith and DeHart, 59.

Radford supervised C.I.⁶⁴ The Montgomery News Messenger ran an article on the agreement in May 1947. The article made clear that "the gift ... was conditioned upon continued operation as a Negro high school. Its terms include a provision for revision of the property to the society if it ceases to be used as a Negro school."⁶⁵

Now a regional high school, C.I.'s curriculum gradually changed from an emphasis on vocational studies to a curriculum endorsed by Montgomery County. College preparatory classes were also added to the curriculum.⁶⁶ The school had formerly been named Christiansburg Industrial Institute, but the "Industrial" was dropped from its name by 1950. The name change in 1950 is significant because it demonstrates the changing curriculum of the school.⁶⁷

C.I. had an excellent reputation across the country as well as within the community. In the late 1940s, black students came from across Virginia, Washington, D.C., and northern states such as Connecticut where segregation was not as oppressive as it was in the South.⁶⁸ By 1941, C.I.

⁶⁴Smith and DeHart, 53; Swain, 238.

⁶⁵Montgomery News Messenger, 22 May 1947.

⁶⁶Smith and DeHart, 55-56.

⁶⁷Swain, 238-241.

⁶⁸Ibid., 238; Charles Johnson, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 13 February, 1995.

was "accredited not only by the State Department of Virginia but also by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools."⁶⁹ Few black secondary schools conformed to these standards.⁷⁰

Not only was C.I. a reputable school compared with other black public schools, but it was also thought to be better equipped than the white schools in Montgomery County.

In 1951, the Montgomery County Superintendent wrote that C.I. was "eligible for membership in the Southern Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges, a fact which none of the white high schools in Montgomery County can meet at the present time."⁷¹

In contrast to Christiansburg Institute, Prince Edward's secondary school for blacks was not opened until 1939 and was "inadequate from the start."⁷² Robert R. Moton High School in Prince Edward County, Virginia was designed to hold 180 children, yet by 1947 it had more than twice that number.⁷³ Tarpapered shacks were constructed to

⁶⁹As quoted in Swain, 231.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid., 247.

⁷²Kluger, 459.

⁷³Ibid., 460.

relieve the over-crowded situation in Moton High.⁷⁴ Because of these poor facilities, black students had protested the conditions in the school. These protests led to an NAACP law suit which was incorporated as a companion case in Brown.⁷⁵

The same year that Moton High was opened in Prince Edward County, Esther Jones was entering her senior year at C.I. Now an active member of C.I.'s alumni association, she describes her education at C.I. as "beneficial" and says the experience was the "most enjoyable time of my life because of being in that environment."⁷⁶ In an environment which stressed discipline, devotion to God, and vocational skills, graduates felt privileged to have had the opportunity to attend C.I.⁷⁷

By the 1950s the teachers at C.I. were training students to be professionals. Although C.I. continued to have a vocational curriculum that trained blacks to be barbers and cosmetologists, many students took college preparatory classes. The emphasis on academics enabled blacks to attend college, although many still would go to

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Esther Jones, talk given at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia, 7 February 1995.

⁷⁷Ibid.

segregated black colleges. Because of their academic background, many C.I. graduates attained a higher socio-economic status than other blacks. Furthermore, these college-educated blacks would eventually be able to compete with whites in the workforce.

For example, many graduates from C.I. went on to pursue careers as ministers, doctors, and lawyers.⁷⁸ Alumnus Bernard Wright is currently a minister in Roanoke, Clarence Price is a doctor in California, Jimmy DeHart is a District Attorney in Florida, and Jacqueline Hampton is now a judge in Washington, D.C.⁷⁹ Other alumni have become corporate vice-presidents, psychologists, and bankers.⁸⁰

The limited opportunities afforded to blacks typified southern segregation, yet C.I. was atypical. On April 1, 1948, the Montgomery News Messenger published an editorial commenting on a performance given by the C.I. Glee Club and Band. According to the editorial, the performance was spellbinding. After the editor extolled the beauty of the performances and praised the music professor at C.I., he made the following observation:

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Jacqueline Eaves, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 1 March 1996.

⁸⁰Ibid.

We do not wish to imply that there is no racial problem in Montgomery County. We realize that even here the colored people do not get a fair deal on every score. But because of the intelligence of Christiansburg negroes themselves, our community has less of a problem than do many other places. The deeper south has hostilities between the two races. Northern cities have problems of different nature, but none the less severe.

We have here negro leaders who realize that the eventual solution to the bi-racial problem will have to come from education and culture of both races. We are fortunate in having this type of colored person in Montgomery County. C.I.I. has done, and will do, more to correct the race problem than all the suppression in Georgia and rioting in Chicago will ever do.

The white people can help. They can lend a helping hand to the problem by supporting colored institutions of learning and negro churches.⁸¹

It is clear that at least some white Montgomery County residents viewed their community as unique in comparison with other regions of the country. In the same editorial, the editor describes the leaders of C.I. as "intelligent" and "their teaching and performing" were "doing a lot for the negro race."⁸² This editorial shows that whites in Montgomery County treated blacks with paternalistic condescension and were segregationists, yet the editorial and other articles in the paper refer to the teachers at

⁸¹Montgomery New Messenger, 1 April 1948.

⁸²Ibid.

C.I. as "professors" at a time when most blacks in the South were not even addressed as "Mr." or "Mrs." by whites. It is apparent that C.I. affected not only the black communities it served, but also many white residents and their opinions of blacks, their abilities in education, and their role in society.

Within the environment of Christiansburg Institute, black culture was nourished in Montgomery County. C.I. was an important institution for black residents. Aldon Morris argues that urban segregation facilitated the development of black institutions. C.I.'s influence and reputation demonstrates that Morris's argument extends beyond urban segregation and applies to rural segregation as well.⁸³

Despite the "separate," it appeared that C.I. was more "equal" to white schools than many other black high schools. However, the equality would not have existed if it were not for the growing challenge to Jim Crow on the part of blacks. This challenge had already begun to take shape in the New River Valley in the 1940s. It would become even more definitive in 1949, five years before Brown v. Board of Education.

⁸³Morris, ix-xiv.

Chapter Two

The Road to Brown v. Board:

Black Activism, Litigation, and Equalization

It was no coincidence that southern localities began spending more money on their black schools in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Well before the explosion of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, black Americans fought for their rights and an end to Jim Crow segregation. The seeds were being sown for a revolution in the South. Although Jim Crow persisted in its most overt and oppressive forms, there were signs that segregation might some day be defeated. For the moment, blacks were successfully obtaining equality within a segregated system.

During World War II, many Americans did not have to stretch their imagination very far to make parallels between Nazism in Germany and Jim Crow in the United States. Taking advantage of the war-time atmosphere, blacks began to pressure the federal government for their civil rights. For example, A. Philip Randolph, civil rights and labor activist, successfully demonstrated the power of black America when he threatened President Franklin D. Roosevelt with a "March on Washington" if he did not end discriminatory hiring in defense and federal jobs, and if he

did not desegregate the military.¹ Randolph did not get all of his demands, but Roosevelt did issue executive order 8802 calling for an end to racial discrimination in defense industries and establishing the Fair Employment Practices Committee.²

As Randolph did for blacks in the nation, local black leaders were doing for their communities: they were organizing to affect the society they lived in. There was much for them to do because black Americans continued to live in an oppressed segregated world despite their contributions during World War II. Even in rural Montgomery County, black residents effectively organized for change and were able to influence their community.

Black Activism in Montgomery

Aldon Morris argues segregation facilitated black activism in urban areas; however, black activism existed even in rural areas with low percentages of black residents.³ Montgomery blacks organized to change their

¹Franklin and Moss, 435-438.

²Ibid.

³Morris, 3.

community. Black activism generally focused on education, but their organizing affected other areas of the community too. C.I. aided black activism because it brought together rural communities that would have been otherwise isolated.

On numerous occasions, groups of concerned black citizens approached the Montgomery County School Board to request better facilities. Much like eastern black Virginians in Prince William County, in the 1930s older black members of the community formed the County Wide League.⁴ In Christiansburg, the League supported the black community by helping to pay for a bus and a driver to transport children to school.⁵ Representatives of the League also approached the School Board for assistance. In 1936 P.T. Mallory "asked that the Board appropriate to the County Wide League \$50.00" as they had agreed to pay \$1.00 per capita for all black children to be transported to C.I. Mallory explained that this money was to be used as down-payment on a school bus. The Board agreed to appropriate the money.⁶ Throughout the 1930s, the League was active

⁴Fred M. Alexander, Education for the Needs of the Negro In Virginia (Washington, D.C.: Southern Education Foundation, Inc., 1943), 172.

⁵Wayman Pack, "Black Appalachians Oral History Project," interview by Michael Cooke, 11 March 1991, Tape Recording, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

⁶Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 10 October 1936.

within the community. By the 1940s it had disbanded, yet blacks formed other organizations to take its place.⁷

C.I. school officials encouraged activism in school affairs. For example, Elaine Carter remembers that Professor Leslie Giles (principal of C.I. from 1941 until 1948) visited the black churches in the area "to stimulate people in the community to come to [Superintendent of Montgomery Schools] Shelbourne's office and ask for school buses because at the time, the only way that you could go to high school from Elliston was to either know somebody and live in Christiansburg or to live in the dormitories." Ms. Carter remembers Giles coming to her home to ask her father to go to Mr. Shelbourne's office to ask for buses for the children. Carter's father went to the school board office as well.⁸

Only fortunate students had been able to secure transportation from Elliston to C.I. Ms. Carter remembers that the Elliston families who sent their children to high school generally had one thing in common -- their fathers had good jobs with the railroad. For example, Ms. Carter's

⁷Wayman Pack, "Black Appalachian Oral History Project," interview by Michael Cooke, 11 March 1991, Tape Recording, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

⁸Elaine Carter, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 12 March 1996.

cousin Mary caught the Greyhound bus at 5:30 in the morning to go to C.I. She could do so only because her father worked for the railroad and could afford the bus fare.

The black community in Elliston was eventually successful in obtaining a bus, although it broke down frequently. Ms. Carter's older sister was then able to come home to Elliston and go to school because of the availability of transportation to C.I. She been living with her grandmother in West Virginia in order to attend school there.⁹

In the early 1940s the Montgomery-Pulaski Education and Welfare Organization was formed specifically to increase C.I.'s influence in the community.¹⁰ Members of the committee included "teachers, businessmen, and other interested individuals."¹¹ The committee's main objective was to encourage blacks to register to vote. In order to be affiliated with the committee, blacks had to pay their poll tax and register to vote.¹² While blacks in the deep South were generally barred from voting until the 1960s, Montgomery County blacks were not, and black organizations

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Smith and DeHart, 59.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

encouraged voting by restricting membership to registered voters.

In 1947, blacks requested an additional vocational building, an assembly hall, and an athletic field for C.I..¹³ No capital improvements were made. In 1948 a group of black citizens requested an auditorium, improved athletic facilities, indoor water fountains, lockers, and other minor repairs to existing structures.¹⁴ Again, nothing was done. Not until blacks combined activism and NAACP litigation would improvements be made to C.I.

In the 1930s and 1940s, black activism in the county focused on equalizing school facilities. While this goal would not be abandoned, in the 1950s and 1960s black activism would reach beyond the school and into the community. Blacks would form other organizations, some bi-racial, to challenge segregated facilities in the county.

The NAACP Attack on Segregated Education

Beginning in the 1930s, the NAACP began to chip away at the Plessy Doctrine -- or demand its actual implementation

¹³Smith and DeHart, 60.

¹⁴Ibid., 61.

-- by forcing equalization of teachers' salaries.¹⁵ The first court case in Virginia involving salary equalization came out of Norfolk, Virginia. In Alston v. School Board City of Norfolk (1940), the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ordered salary equalization for black teachers effective, and the order was effected over the next three years. Across Virginia similar cases followed.¹⁶

Even before the Alston case, blacks in southwest Virginia were demanding equalization of salaries and facilities. In 1938 Chauncey Harmon, principal of Calfee Training School, had agreed to be a plaintiff in an equalization law suit for the NAACP.¹⁷ The Board was making plans to rebuild the Calfee school after it burned down, and Harmon wanted better facilities.¹⁸ Attorneys J. Thomas

¹⁵Peter Wallenstein, "'I Went to Law School to Fight Segregation': Oliver W. Hill versus Jim Crow in Virginia," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Atlanta, Nov. 1992, 10-14.

¹⁶Ibid. Doxey A. Wilkerson, "The Negro School Movement in Virginia: From 'Equalization to Integration,'" Journal of Negro Education 29 (Winter 1960): 17-29, reprinted August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, eds., The Making of Black America: Essays in Negro Life and History, vol. 2, The Black Community in Modern America (New York: Antheum, 1969), 261.

¹⁷Letter from Thurgood Marshall to J. Thomas Hewin, 16 June 1938, NAACP Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁸Jacqueline Pleasance, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 4 March 1996; "Milestones in the Roanoke Valley Civil-Rights (sic) Movement," Roanoke Times,

Hewin and Thurgood Marshall threatened to sue the Pulaski School Board on Harmon's behalf.¹⁹

In 1939 Attorney Hewin and concerned citizens marched on the School Board in order to obtain "a well-equipped elementary school, free bus transportation and tuition for their children of high school age."²⁰ Blacks demanded transportation and tuition so that the students could attend C.I. in Montgomery County. The Board agreed to meet the group's requests. Meanwhile the Board tabled a salary equalization demand that another teacher at Calfee, Willis Gravely, had made.²¹

The School Board also promised "as soon as Pulaski could offer enough students of high school age to reach the required minimum of seventy-five, a high school would be launched in the town."²² There would never be another black secondary school in Pulaski, however. From the time that

11 Feb. 1996. Lucy Harmon, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 11 March 1996.

¹⁹J. Robert Smith, "Pulaski Scores in Fight for Schools," Richmond Afro-American, 25 March 1939.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.; Jacqueline Pleasance, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 4 March 1996; "Milestones in the Roanoke Valley Civil-Rights (sic) Movement," Roanoke Times, 11 February 1996; Lucy Harmon, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 11 March 1996.

²²"Pulaski Scores in Fight for Schools."

Calfee burned down in 1938 until desegregation began in 1960, C.I. was the only secondary school for Pulaski's black residents.²³

The NAACP was pushing for equalization in higher education as well. Still they were not attacking segregation head-on.²⁴ In Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada (1938), the Supreme Court declared that Missouri must either build a black law school or allow Lloyd Gaines, a black applicant, to attend the white school.²⁵ In the minds of the NAACP attorneys, enforcing the "equal" of the Plessy Doctrine would pose a financial hardship for states in the Jim Crow South and might force them to abandon segregation altogether.²⁶

Two later court cases demonstrated not only the NAACP's persistence in obtaining equal education for black Americans, but also the willingness of the Supreme Court to uphold their rights for equal education. In Sweatt v. Painter (1950), the court ordered Heman Sweatt's admission

²³Pulaski County School Board Minutes; Montgomery County School Board Minutes.

²⁴Wallenstein, 28-30.

²⁵Kluger, 212-213.

²⁶For a full discussion of the strategies of the NAACP lawyers before Brown, see Tushnet, The NAACP's Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925-1950; Tushnet, Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936-1961 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

to the University of Texas Law School, despite the availability of a new, small black law school in the state.²⁷ The Court recognized the intangible benefits of established "white" graduate education which many new and small Negro universities could not meet. In McLaurin V. Oklahoma Board of Regents (1950), the Supreme Court ordered the university to stop segregating G. W. McLaurin in its classrooms, cafeterias, and libraries. While the Court continued to sidestep addressing the constitutionality of Plessy, it began to widen its interpretation of "equal."

Mark V. Tushnet has written two excellent sources on the NAACP's strategy in attacking segregation. Filling a void left by other historians, Tushnet documents the NAACP's "road" to Brown and explained its strategy of "chipping away" at the "separate but equal" doctrine.²⁸ Tushnet's studies dispel many misconceptions about the origins of Brown. He clearly details the NAACP's decision to move away from insisting on the "equal" to attacking the "separate" in

²⁷Franklin, 410-411; Kluger, 278-282; Wallenstein, 29.

²⁸Tushnet, The NAACP's Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925-1950; Tushnet, Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936-1961 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). For another account of early NAACP litigation and strategies, see Peter Wallenstein, "'I Went to Law School to Fight Segregation': Oliver W. Hill versus Jim Crow in Virginia," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Atlanta, Nov. 1992.

the Plessy doctrine. Tushnet discusses the overall logic in the "equalization" strategy -- the lawyers felt that equalization would cost the states too much and was therefore financially impossible. He describes how the NAACP decided to begin the attack on segregation at the graduate school level, a place where many white southerners felt less threatened.²⁹

The NAACP's attack on segregated higher education affected Virginia's state universities, and the successes blacks had in the courts did cause white southerners to fear elementary and secondary school integration, however. The Supreme Court had liberalized its interpretation of "equal" in higher education. The Court had agreed with the NAACP's argument that even if tangible equality existed in black colleges, there were intangible qualities about white colleges and universities, such as prestige, which were rarely duplicated at the time in black institutions.

Consequently, many white southerners wondered how the court would interpret the "equal" in primary and secondary public education. Virginia's political leaders did not want to find out. To pacify any integrationist sentiment, they began to favor "token" desegregation of state

²⁹Tushnet, The NAACP's Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 77-81.

universities.³⁰ Meanwhile, the Commonwealth set out to "equalize" its public school system.³¹ Virginia's leaders were willing to allow a few blacks to be admitted to graduate and even undergraduate programs at state universities in hopes of keeping segregation intact in public schools and in southern society at large.

Virginia's higher education policy was blatantly intertwined with the fight to keep schools segregated at the secondary and elementary level. In 1950, University of Virginia President Colgate Darden proposed that equalization was a defense against desegregation and that admitting a few black students to white graduate and professional programs was also an excellent line of defense in preserving segregation at the secondary and elementary school level.³² In 1953, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dowell Howard, contacted the presidents of the state universities to coordinate this policy of admitting black students to

³⁰Anthony Blaine Deel, "Virginia's Minimal Resistance: The Desegregation of Public Graduate and Professional Education, 1935-1955" (M.A. Thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1990), 137-140.

³¹Ibid. There are many signs of Virginia's equalization attempt on the state and local level. School Board minutes in Montgomery County describe a sustained building effort in the early 1950s as Brown was making its way to the Supreme Court. Similar evidence is available in other localities, specifically in Prince Edward where a companion case in Brown originated.

³²Ibid., 93-94.

white colleges.³³ Howard would continue his role in maintaining Virginia's segregated school system even after the Brown ruling.³⁴ This line of defense directly affected residents of Montgomery County, black and white.

The Pulaski Court Case:

Corbin v. County School Board of Pulaski County, Virginia

Although Pulaski's black residents felt that they had won when the School Board met their demands in 1939, they found that using C.I. as their high school was extremely inconvenient and unequitable. In March 1946 the School Board received a letter from a law firm in Richmond representing a group of black parents. This letter requested information regarding school facilities for Negro children in Pulaski County as well as any information on future plans regarding Negro education in the county. The school board directed the superintendent of Pulaski County schools to write the law firm and explain Pulaski's agreement to participate in the regional high school plan

³³Ibid., 125-126.

³⁴In the Spring of 1954, Howard issued a ruling that declared that public schools would continue to operate as usual, despite the ruling in Brown. Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 3 June 1954.

with Montgomery County.³⁵

A month later "a delegation of Negro women came before the Board in the interest of establishing a high school for the Negro peoples of Pulaski County ... in Pulaski rather than sending them to Christiansburg" as was being done. The delegation emphasized the early hour in which the children had to leave and the late hour they returned which was "detrimental to their health and discouraging of the children who otherwise would be interested in continuing their high school education." The delegation went on to point out that 19 children in the Empire Mines area of Pulaski were not being picked up by the school bus and therefore were unable to attend school.³⁶

After listening to their complaints, the School Board replied by saying that they fully realized the inconveniences in transportation, but that many white children had greater problems getting to school than the black children. Regarding the students in the Empire Mines, the school board stated that the census records did not show that there were that many children living there, but that they would study the situation. If there were enough children to warrant it, the board would have the station

³⁵Pulaski County School Board Minutes, 3 March 1946.

³⁶Ibid., 4 April 1946.

wagon that currently transported white children in the area come back and make a second trip.³⁷

The Board went on to state that they had discussed, and even then were still discussing, establishing a Negro high school in Pulaski. However, given the small number of Negroes in the area, the Board felt that it would be better for black residents in Pulaski to attend the accredited Christiansburg Institute. Finally, the Board discussed recent legislation which legalized regional schools like Christiansburg Institute.³⁸

In 1947 a number of black parents, on behalf of their children, sued the Pulaski School Board.³⁹ Percy Corbin, a black physician in Pulaski, was named in the suit he filed on behalf of his son, Mahatma Corbin. Dr. Corbin was president of the P.T.A. and had been involved in the earlier complaints with Harmon. Dr. Corbin's daughter, Jacqueline Pleasance, says that her father sued because the elementary school was not suitable and because there was no high school in the county.⁴⁰ NAACP lawyers Oliver Hill and Spottswood

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid. The number of black Pulaski students attending C.I. in 1947 was 101. Pulaski County School Board Minutes, 9 October 1947.

³⁹Ibid., 5 June 1947.

⁴⁰Jacqueline Pleasance, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 4 March 1996.

Robinson came from Richmond to argue the case in the United States District Court in Roanoke, Virginia. The complaints listed in the suit were basically the same as the ones listed by the delegation of black women in 1946.⁴¹

Like the other NAACP lawsuits before Brown, Corbin did not directly attack the validity of segregation, but rather the application of the 14th Amendment under segregation. The plaintiffs in the case charged that they were discriminated against on account of their race because the school board failed "to provide equal facilities for the elementary education of Negro children equal to the facilities afforded to white children" and to "provide transportation to and from school for Negro children equal to such transportation furnished to white children."⁴² Furthermore, the plaintiffs argued that the school board failed to enforce the Compulsory School Attendance Law of the State of Virginia equally. Lastly, the plaintiffs argued that the board discriminated against them "on account of their race, in failing to provide a secondary or high school facilities for Negroes equal to the high school facilities for white children."⁴³ This last complaint would

⁴¹Corbin v. County School Board, 84 F. Supp. 253 (W.D. Va. 1949).

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

directly affect the Christiansburg Institute.

The Pulaski School Board unsuccessfully tried to have the case dismissed.⁴⁴ The United States District Court handed down its decision on May 2, 1949. Concerning Pulaski's elementary schools, District Judge Barksdale found no racial discrimination. Rather, in his opinion Judge Barksdale declared that "the inadequacy of many of its [Pulaski County's] elementary schools for white children is shocking. Very few have modern plumbing; some do not even have their own water supply."⁴⁵

Likewise, Judge Barksdale found no racial discrimination on other grounds, including high school facilities for black residents. Barksdale found no significant differences in curricula and that expenditures per pupil were actually higher at C.I. He declared that "I do not believe that Negro high school pupils of Pulaski County would be benefited by requiring the County School Board of Pulaski County to comply with a decree such as is sought by plaintiffs." In other words, Pulaski did not have to provide a high school for its black residents within the county, but could continue to utilize C.I. as a regional

⁴⁴Pulaski School Board Minutes, 5 June 1947.

⁴⁵Corbin v. County School Board, 84 F. Supp. 253 (W.D. Va. 1949).

high school.⁴⁶

The plaintiffs did not give up. In June 1949 the Pulaski County School Board learned that Hill and Robinson had appealed the case.⁴⁷ Interestingly, Armistead Boothe aided in legal services for Pulaski School Board.⁴⁸ Boothe was from Arlington which was also the site of an NAACP court case in 1949. The black citizens of Arlington "charged the School Board and Superintendent with discrimination in the provision of facilities and program of studies in the Negro High School." The plaintiffs won on appeal in May 1950.⁴⁹

In the 1950 Virginia General Assembly, Boothe would lead a revolt against the Byrd Administration "calling for repeal of the state segregation laws affecting all forms of public transportation and for the establishment of a Virginia Civil Rights Commission to study ... phases of race relations in order to recommend corrective measures."⁵⁰ Boothe would continue to campaign against resistance to integration throughout the 1950s, despite his aiding and

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Pulaski School Board Minutes, 5 June 1949.

⁴⁸Ibid., 5 October 1950.

⁴⁹Wilkerson, "The Negro School Movement in Virginia," 266.

⁵⁰Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1946-1966, 106.

abetting inequalities within Jim Crow in Pulaski in 1949.⁵¹

The plaintiffs in the Pulaski case were more successful on appeal. In October 1949, Judge Dobie handed down his decision for the United States Court of Appeals. Dobie agreed with the lower court's decision regarding elementary schools. He found no evidence of discrimination regarding the Compulsory School Attendance Law because there were both white and black children not attending school in Pulaski due to lack of facilities. In both cases, he felt that these were "isolated instances."⁵²

Dobie did find for the plaintiffs regarding racial discrimination in the high school. Specifically, Dobie found inequalities between C.I. and white Pulaski high schools regarding curriculum, instructional equipment, the distance students traveled to school, athletic facilities, and the availability of summer schooling and extra-curricular activities.⁵³

According to Pulaski School Board minutes, the Pulaski School Board then attempted not only to equalize facilities, but "in many instances to make them superior."⁵⁴ The

⁵¹Ibid.; Pulaski County School Board Minutes.

⁵²Corbin v. County School Board, 177 F. 2d 924 (4th Cir. 1949).

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Pulaski County School Board Minutes, 7 November 1950.

Montgomery School Board had sought to join Pulaski County as a defendant in the law suit, but the judge overruled the request.⁵⁵ The Pulaski School Board, along with the Montgomery School Board, made plans for "extensive improvement to the physical facilities at Christiansburg."⁵⁶

In November 1950, the Pulaski County School Board discussed the ruling of the Court of Appeals in the Arlington case. Then Pulaski School Superintendent Frank J. Critzer "told the Board of the seriousness of the situation and asked their assistance in making decisions in regard to expenditures of money at Christiansburg Institute. He also read a letter from Armistead Boothe in regard to this. The Superintendent reminded the Board that discrimination in elementary schools would come up eventually and called for a survey in order to ascertain if there were any discrimination at all against the Negro elementary students."⁵⁷ The pressure was on school districts to equalize facilities.

In Simple Justice, Richard Kluger briefly discusses the Pulaski case and explains that when a "failure to comply with an equalization decree occurred in Pulaski County, the

⁵⁵Ibid,; Montgomery School Board Minutes, 20 October, 7 November 1950.

⁵⁶Pulaski School Board Minutes, 5 October 1950.

⁵⁷Ibid.

NAACP argued that a contempt-of-order finding was insufficient and demanded immediate integration of the schools as the only solution." This of course was unacceptable to the judge.⁵⁸

In some respects Kluger's work is more thorough than Tushnet's because Kluger includes the histories of black Americans who sought to change race relations in the South and the country. His analysis is not from the point of view of white southerners resisting change, but from those pressing for change. Tushnet describes the black community's role only as it related to the NAACP litigation.

Many historians fail to emphasize that although the Supreme Court, the federal district judges, and the NAACP lawyers all worked towards implementing desegregation, more forces were at work. Without the black community pushing for change, there would have been no cases to litigate and judge and no decrees to implement.⁵⁹ It is clear from the

⁵⁸Richard Kluger's Simple Justice is one of the best sources for understanding the road to Brown v. Board. Kluger focuses on the five court cases which were combined in Brown, the NAACP strategy, and the workings of the Supreme Court during segregation. Kluger, Simple Justice, 472-476.

⁵⁹In his analysis of the NAACP, Jack Greenberg also places the major emphasis of the desegregation struggle on black lawyers. Jack Greenberg, Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution (New York: Basic Books, 1994). Greenberg worked for the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund and thus provides an "insider's" account of the NAACP.

evidence in Montgomery and Pulaski counties that plaintiffs were the motivating force in the battle to equalize public schools.

Christiansburg Institute and its students benefitted directly from this triumph in Corbin. Oddly enough, the NAACP's final attack on segregation in Brown v. Board would prove to be the death of Christiansburg Institute.

Analysis of Equalization in Montgomery County

In the 1930s and 1940s, Montgomery County spent more on its black schools than other counties. The advisory Commission on Education determined that the minimum amount needed for a basic education was \$36 per child in average daily attendance (A.D.A.) in the 1938-1939 school year. No county in Virginia spent this minimum amount for any of its black schools. The average expenditure for the counties was only 28.5 percent of the minimum, or \$12.63 per child in A.D.A. Montgomery spent more than any other county, 81.1 percent of the minimum, or \$29.19 per child in A.D.A.⁶⁰

Doxey Wilkerson has addressed the issue of equalization

⁶⁰Only three cities, Harrisonburg, Williamsburg, and Richmond, spent at least the \$36 minimum. Alexander, 115, 294-296.

of white and black schools in Virginia from 1940 until 1957.⁶¹ Wilkerson describes his measurement of equalization as "the relative status of Negro schools." This measurement takes into account the following:

(a) percent of population aged 7 to 19 in average daily attendance, (b) current expenditures for elementary and secondary teachers' salaries per pupil in average daily attendance, and (c) value of school property per pupil in average daily attendance.⁶²

Out of 79 selected counties in Virginia, Montgomery County ranked first in its relative status of black schools in 1940-1941 and in 1947-1948.⁶³

In the 1950s other Virginia localities, particularly those in the east, rapidly began to equalize their black schools. The following table demonstrates Montgomery's relative standing to three other counties. Note also the increase in the relative status of black schools in Prince Edward and Surry counties in the 1950s. Wilkerson points out that the greatest disparity between white and black schools was in Southside and in Tidewater. In 1940-1941 the status of white schools was nearly twice that of black schools. By 1956-1957 the status of black schools in these

⁶¹Doxey A. Wilkerson, "Some Correlates of Recent Progress Toward Equalizing White and Negro Schools in Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1958).

⁶²Ibid., 15.

⁶³Ibid.

two areas increased to four-fifths of white schools.⁶⁴

Black schools were by no means equal in Montgomery, yet the county did not have to push to equalize at the rapid pace that eastern counties did.

Index of Relative Status of Negro Schools for Four Counties in Virginia: 1940-1941, 1947-1948, and 1956-1957.

Index of Relative Status			
County	1940-1941	1947-1948	1956-1957
Montgomery	139.3	141.2	117.6
Prince Edward	59.4	63.6	86.2
Surry	43.4	58.6	78.8
Pulaski	80.8	97.7	95.8

Source: Doxey Wilkerson, "Some Correlates of Recent Progress Toward Equalizing White and Negro Schools in Virginia," 338-340.⁶⁵

Montgomery County did not equalize black teachers' salaries until 1957. Many eastern counties were forced to

⁶⁴Ibid., 129-130.

⁶⁵Wilkerson provides this information for 79 counties and 22 cities. I have chosen to include four here for comparison with Montgomery County. I chose to include both Prince Edward and Surry due to their larger percentage of black residents, and I have included Pulaski to give a comparable illustration of Montgomery, a county with a low percentage of black residents.

do so under court order years earlier. Teacher salaries are a component in Wilkerson's evaluation of black schools.⁶⁶

State leaders finally responded to the pressing need for educational facilities for both white and black schools in the Commonwealth after the election of Governor John S. Battle in 1950. Battle, a member of the Byrd Machine, "had promised to use the accumulating surplus [in the state treasury] to help meet school room shortages." These funds were desperately needed: "the virtual cessation of school construction during World War II and the school-age population explosion after the war had swamped localities with demands for new construction."⁶⁷

Thus the Battle School Program was born. This program was "an innovation in Virginia public finance" because "the Virginia General Assembly had never before voted outright grants for school construction, though it had long granted low interest loans to localities for the purpose."⁶⁸ In its first year, the program had \$45 million to allocate to

⁶⁶Ibid., 261. The Board of Control for C.I. instructed the Superintendent of Schools in Montgomery County to increase the pay for black teachers to the same level as white teachers in the county. Also, the board requested that black teachers be paid the same \$200.00 allowance if they had a masters degree. Swain, p. 250.

⁶⁷Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 99.

⁶⁸Ibid., 98-99.

school systems.⁶⁹ Montgomery County would be one of many counties and cities to upgrade its schools with "Battle Funds."⁷⁰ Opportunity and emergency combined as Virginia segregationists rushed to use these funds for school equalization in order to appease those pushing for desegregation.⁷¹

Black activism and NAACP litigation combined to improve black schooling in Montgomery County. Concerned citizens continued to press the school board for improved facilities. Finally in 1953 C.I. received funds for a multi-purpose building.⁷² This building was a "combination gymnasium-auditorium and classrooms."⁷³ The additions were financed by public bonds, state grants (probably Battle Funds), and a \$15,000 contribution by the Friends' Freedmen's Association.⁷⁴

Black school facilities never equaled white school

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Montgomery News Messenger, 26 August 1954.

⁷¹Richard Kluger discusses how whites in Prince Edward attempted to obtain \$1.1 million in Battle Funds in order to upgrade Moton High. In doing this, whites would not have to tax themselves (directly at least) to pay for the black high school. Kluger, 465.

⁷²Smith and DeHart, 62.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Between 1950 and 1954, Montgomery County received \$674,682 in Battle Funds. Montgomery News Messenger, 26 August 1954.

facilities in Montgomery County. Alexis Johnson, a 1965 graduate of C.I., recalls that she never had a cafeteria in any of the schools she attended. In 1948 the County had at least one white school with a cafeteria, Auburn High.⁷⁵

The Desegregation of Virginia Tech

While many black Virginians were pushing for school equalization at the elementary and secondary level, others were integrating colleges and universities. Virginia Tech is located in Blacksburg, a town in Montgomery County, and in August of 1953 Tech admitted its first black student.⁷⁶

⁷⁵Alexis Johnson, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 19 April 1996. Elaine Carter, telephone interview by author, 19 April 1996; Montgomery News Messenger, 22 April 1948. Ms. Carter does remember a cafeteria being set up in the cloak room at Elliston Colored Elementary. This was a temporary situation during World War II, however. She attributes it to the free lunches provided with surplus foods during that time.

⁷⁶Deel, 127-128. Virginia Tech has undergone name changes, yet I will refer to it simply as Virginia Tech. A land-grant college, it was initially called Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College. In 1896 the name was changed to Virginia Agricultural Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute. In 1944, the name was changed to Virginia Polytechnic Institute. In 1970, the state legislature passed a bill which changed the school's name to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Duncan Lyle Kinneer, The First 100 Years: A History of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Blacksburg, Virginia: Virginia Polytechnic Institute Educational Foundation, 1972), 41, 163, 332, 465.

Irving L. Peddrew III was not only Tech's first black student, he was also the first black undergraduate admitted to a white institution in Virginia.⁷⁷

Before 1966 there were never more than a few black students at Virginia Tech.⁷⁸ When Matthew Winston came to Virginia Tech in 1955, there were only four black students on campus. Winston, one of the first black graduates from Tech, came to the school to study engineering. He says, "I was not here [at Tech] on a crusade or mission, I just wanted to go to school."⁷⁹

Winston's family in Norfolk was very supportive and proud of him -- so proud, in fact, that his mother happily told her employer where her son was going to college. Winston's mother was a domestic for a man whose son was a Virginia Tech graduate. Angered that she had sent her black son to the same school his son had attended, the man promptly fired her. Such were the tribulations of blacks during segregation: victories could bring dire consequences.⁸⁰

Every aspect of the black student life at Tech was

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Matthew Winston, Sr., interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 20 April 1996.

⁸⁰Ibid.

segregated except the classroom. Winston and the other black students could not live or eat on campus. They boarded with a black woman in town, and they had to go home to eat meals, including lunch. Winston still remembers how cold it was to walk in winter all the way home for lunch. Black students were barred from participating in athletics and social events as well.⁸¹

While Winston never had any problems with the townspeople, he did encounter racism from Virginia Tech administrators. In the Spring of 1958, Winston's junior year, Tech was preparing for its annual ring dance, the biggest social event of the year. Before the dance, the president of Tech, Walter Newman, phoned Winston and asked him to come to his office.

Once there, Newman proceeded to tell Winston that he could not go to the ring dance, that "the townspeople would not stand for it." Newman explained that it was not his idea, but he was answering to "higher ups." Winston feels that Newman was referring to officials of the Byrd organization in Richmond. Newman needed their support in order to keep Tech, a state institution, fully funded. Winston never gave Newman an answer whether was going to go to the dance. Actually Winston never planned on going to

⁸¹Ibid.

the dance because he could not afford it, but he wanted to make Newman sweat it out until the dance was over.⁸²

Winston does not recall any incidents of racism among his fellow white students. He never knew any student who agreed with segregation. Many of his classmates were shocked when he explained that he could not go into a restaurant with them for a cup of coffee due to state segregation laws. They just could not believe it.⁸³

In 1958 Matthew Winston's roommate, Charlie Yates, became the first black graduate at Virginia Tech and was one of six honor graduates in mechanical engineering.⁸⁴ Winston remembers that although Yates graduated with honors, he was not recognized as doing so when his name was called at graduation, as custom should have dictated.⁸⁵

One Montgomery County black resident, George "Snake" Page, remembers when the first black student was admitted to Virginia Tech. Mr. Page grew up in Montgomery County's predominantly black neighborhood, Wake Forest. His three daughters attended C.I. Interestingly, Mr. Page recalls the desegregation of Tech, but has no recollection of the

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid.

Supreme Court's decision to ban segregation in Brown v. Board of Education (1954) less than one year later. Tech's desegregation affected Mr. Page because he never thought of his children going onto college until then. After graduation from C.I., his daughter, Alexis, was one of six of the first black students at Radford College in 1966.⁸⁶

It may be surprising that Mr. Page does not remember when the Brown decision was handed down. However, Page is a third generation coalminer. He had to quit elementary school to take care of his grandmother. His grandfather died in an explosion while working on the railroads of West Virginia.⁸⁷ His experiences and understanding of desegregation point to the class differences within black communities across the South. While black students and professionals, especially those living in metropolitan areas, may have known that Brown had been handed down, other blacks may not have been so well informed. Even if they had been informed, perhaps they would not have believed it would eventually end segregated public schools.

Page looked to more concrete evidence of the death of Jim Crow. He began to find this in the desegregation of Virginia Tech and later would witness it in the

⁸⁶George "Snake" Page, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 2 February 1996.

⁸⁷Ibid.

desegregation of Montgomery County Schools and sit-ins in local restaurants. His memories remind us that not all civil rights battles were necessarily won in the courts, but rather they were won by individuals and the changes they made in the lives of average black Americans.

Chapter Three

Brown v. Board of Education and Massive Resistance in Montgomery County

In 1950 the NAACP strategy of forcing equalization changed to a direct challenge on segregation.¹ Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson were instrumental in not only the Corbin case in Pulaski, but in Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County. In Prince Edward the black students had protested the conditions of Moton High. Hill and Robinson agreed to take the case for the NAACP. The NAACP was not successful at the lower court level, and therefore appealed to the Circuit Court.²

The Circuit Court resisted the NAACP's direct challenge to segregation. Both Corbin and Davis went to the same Circuit Court, and Judge Dobie heard both cases on appeal. While Dobie ruled in part for the plaintiffs in Corbin, he concurred with the District Court's opinion against the plaintiffs in Davis. He had ordered equalization in Pulaski, but was unwilling to compromise segregation when the NAACP directly it in Davis.³

¹Kluger, 480-540.

²Ibid., 451-464.

³Ibid., 472-475; Corbin v. County School Board, 84 F. Supp. 253 (W.D. Va. 1949).

In December 1952 Davis and four other court cases questioning the constitutionality of public school segregation came to the Supreme court for joint argument. Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954) included appeals from Kansas, Delaware, South Carolina, the District of Columbia, and Virginia.

The Supreme Court was divided on the issue of segregation and whether to overrule Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), which held that "separate, but equal," was constitutional. In June 1953 the Supreme Court ordered the cases for reargument for October 1953.⁴ Before reargument, Chief Justice Fred Vinson died. Vinson was a southerner from Kentucky and many felt that he would not have overturned Plessy.

Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed Governor Earl Warren as Chief Justice. Eisenhower believed that Warren was conservative, but to his consternation he found the opposite to be true. Warren was able to unify the justices to make a unanimous decision in the segregation cases. On May 17, 1954 the nation's highest court ruled that "in the field of public education the doctrine of

⁴Kluger, 543-656.

'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."⁵

The Brown decision itself influenced Virginia's response to desegregation. The Supreme Court delayed argument on implementation of desegregation until 1955. This delay gave the South time to garner support for resistance.⁶ As a result, school segregation continued in Montgomery County and Virginia.⁷

The Supreme Court began to hear arguments on implementation April 11, 1955.⁸ Thurgood Marshall, an attorney for the NAACP, summed up the official Southern response to Brown for the court. Marshall stated that the South had been waiting for the court to rule on implementation and the Brown decision "will mean nothing until the time limit is set."⁹

The Court's decision, sometimes referred to as Brown II, was a setback for the NAACP because it encouraged

⁵Ibid, 656-699; Robert A. Burt, The Constitution in Conflict (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1992), 271-310; J. Harvie Wilkinson, From Brown to Bakke, 27-35; Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

⁶Wilkinson, From Brown to Bakke, 6, 46.

⁷Montgomery News Messenger, 10 June 1954.

⁸Kluger, 729.

⁹Ibid., 736.

increased Southern resistance to integration. The justices remanded the cases to the Federal District Courts and gave the local school boards the responsibility to desegregate "with all deliberate speed."¹⁰ The justices had placed the responsibility of implementation in the hands of those who resisted desegregation the most -- Southern localities. The court gave the Federal District Courts the responsibility of enforcement. The federal courts were not sympathetic to desegregation and were strongly influenced by segregationists in the South.¹¹ Blacks continued to bear the responsibility of desegregation. They were forced to apply for transfer to white schools if they wanted integration. The court had not given blacks their rights immediately, but favored a gradualist approach.

Historians have debated Brown's impact on school segregation and the South. Some historians argue that the Supreme Court's weak leadership caused massive resistance and therefore Virginia's resistance was unavoidable.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., 745.

¹¹Robert L. Carter, "Equal Educational Opportunity for Negroes - Abstraction or Reality" in With All Deliberate Speed: Civil Rights Theory and Reality, ed. John H. McCord (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 73-74.

¹²Adolph H. Grundman argued that "massive resistance was unavoidable" and "the Supreme Court's ability to oversee a social revolution, without the full support of Congress and the President, is limited and sometimes counter-productive." Adolph H. Grundman, "Public School Desegregation in Virginia

While J. Harvie Wilkinson, III, refers to Brown as perhaps "the most important political, social, and legal event in America's twentieth-century history," he also points to the "drabness" of the opinion itself and declared that "Brown dealt blacks an unwitting slight" because white hegemony prevented even integration to be equal.¹³

Wilkinson assumes that the Supreme Court had the power to enforce integration throughout the South. He believes that the leadership of the Court would have had an impact on implementing Brown. Although the Supreme Court's vague edict "with all deliberate speed" in Brown II encouraged resistance, the Court provided the impetus in Brown for southern desegregation. Integration depended on individuals in each community to push for change.¹⁴

from 1954 to the Present" (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 1972), iii.

¹³Wilkinson, From Brown to Bakke, 6, 46.

¹⁴For a more thorough and well-balanced account of the Supreme Court and Brown, see Robert A. Burt, The Constitution in Conflict (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1992). For basic documentation, see Richard Bardolph, The Civil Rights Records: Black Americans and the Law, 1849-1970 (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970); Harold W. Horowitz and Kenneth L. Karst, Law, Lawyers and Social Change: Cases and Materials on the Abolition of Slavery, Racial Segregation and Inequality of Educational Opportunity (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969); and Paul Finkelman, ed., Race, Law, and American History 1700-1990, vol. 5, The Era of Integration and Civil Rights, 1930-1990 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.). For a discussion on federal law and violence in the South, see Michal R. Belknap, Federal Law and Southern Order: Racial Violence and Constitutional

Richard Kluger accurately interprets Brown as "nothing short of a reconsecration of American ideals."¹⁵ The Supreme Court's decision to ban racially segregated schools in Brown was necessary, but not sufficient, to end school segregation. Because the Court had no means to enforce its decision in Brown, much of the South defied the Supreme Court ruling. Initially, white residents of Montgomery County followed state leadership into defiance of the Court's decision. The county did not begin desegregation until 1961 and did not completely integrate until 1966.¹⁶ Another reason that Brown was insufficient was that the court had placed the burden of school desegregation on black residents. Blacks had to apply for transfers to white schools in order to force integration.

Conflict in the Post-Brown South (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987).

¹⁵Kluger's analysis is significant to the historiography because he discusses the litigation process before and after Brown, the crucial role that the NAACP played in securing the decision, the argument that the NAACP presented in Brown, the decision-making process that led the justices to the Brown decision, and the social context of America during the fight against Jim Crow segregation. Kluger, 710.

¹⁶Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 1954-1966.

The Response to Brown

Initially the controversy of integration seemingly passed by most Montgomery County residents. As the Brown case worked its way to the Supreme Court in the early 1950s, the most important educational concern black residents had was deciding where the new black elementary school should be located.¹⁷ Blacks wanted the "new modern elementary school" to be built near C.I.¹⁸ With the opening of two new black elementary schools in 1953, it seemed that integration would not be coming to the county any time soon.¹⁹ That year Montgomery County built a black elementary school at Harding Avenue to replace the one on Clay Street, and the county also built Friends' Elementary to replace the Old Hill School near C.I.²⁰

Although school desegregation would have had a limited effect on the white belt communities of Virginia, most white Montgomery residents followed the state's leadership in defiance of the court ruling. The most influential leader during this time was Virginia's Democratic Senator Harry F.

¹⁷Swain, 247.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Montgomery News Messenger, 26 August 1954.

²⁰Ibid.; Smith and DeHart, 62-63.

Byrd. Byrd was a strict segregationist and depended heavily on support from the black belt counties of Virginia. The white residents in these counties staunchly supported Byrd's segregationist policies since they feared integration. Obviously, Byrd did not support the Supreme Court's ruling in Brown.²¹ Montgomery County followed Byrd's leadership by first ignoring, then resisting, and finally delaying desegregation.

A week after the Brown decision was handed down, The Montgomery News Messenger criticized the court's decision. According to the paper, the Supreme Court's application of the equal protection clause under the Fourteenth Amendment was incorrect. Citing Virginia's Attorney General, the paper declared that when ratifying the amendment, at least "23 states understood that the Fourteenth Amendment would NOT abolish segregated schools."²²

Debate over the intent of the Fourteenth Amendment was symbolic since the amendment had been imposed on the southern states during Reconstruction. After Reconstruction, southern whites subverted the Fourteenth Amendment by arguing that it applied to states, not individuals. The Supreme Court ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson

²¹Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 18, 113-154.

²²Montgomery News Messenger, 27 May 1954.

(1896) that facilities for blacks could be "separate, but equal" reinforced the Southerners' argument.²³ In the Brown decision, the court overturned Plessy and stated that segregated education deprived blacks "of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment."²⁴

In the same article, the News Messenger printed another familiar argument. The federal government was treading on the rights of the states by banning segregated schools. "The anti-segregation decision ... asserts the right of the Federal Government to go into a community and tell locally elected school boards how they must assign pupils to the school buildings constructed with local tax funds."²⁵ This was but one reason that the Brown decision did not sit well with white southerners, including white Virginians. The states' rights argument would become a dominant theme in southern opposition to desegregation.

Initially, Virginia politicians responded to Brown with an attitude of "wait and see." Governor Thomas B. Stanley "called for calm consideration of the problems raised by the

²³Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Montgomery News Messenger, 27 May 1954.

court's ruling."²⁶ Stanley would alter his position, however, due to his strong ties with Senator Byrd. Later in the summer, Stanley declared, "I shall use every means at my command ... to continue segregated schools in Virginia."²⁷

Local politicians differed in their responses to Brown. Montgomery County's representative from the Sixth District, Republican Congressman Richard Poff, resembled the Byrd organization ideologically despite the fact that he was a Republican.²⁸ On May 18, Poff stated that Brown was "a complete repudiation of the states rights principal and a reversal of the 'separate but equal' doctrine."²⁹ Another Republican from Radford, State Senator Ted Dalton, called for careful study in order to decide Virginia's course of action.³⁰ Dalton had suggested studying desegregation in the state before the Supreme Court handed down its decision. His suggestion was not adopted.³¹ Dalton, an opponent of the Byrd machine, had lost his bid for the governorship to

²⁶The Roanoke Times, 18 May 1954.

²⁷Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 123.

²⁸Ibid., 73.

²⁹Roanoke Times, 18 May 1954.

³⁰Radford is an independent city within Montgomery County.

³¹Roanoke Times, 18 May 1954.

Stanley a year earlier. Still, Dalton was popular in Montgomery County.³²

At a meeting of the Montgomery County School Board on June 3, 1954, the board members voted unanimously to support the ruling of Dowell J. Howard, Superintendent of Public Instruction. Howard had issued a memo stating that schools should operate on the same basis as always.³³ In other words, schools would stay segregated for the 1954-1955 school year.³⁴

Segregation even persisted in the local newspaper. The News Messenger continued to run its column each week entitled "Christiansburg Colored News."³⁵ School buses also continued to be segregated. If a black child could not make it to the bus stop to catch the "colored bus," the school board suggested the child take a taxi to school.³⁶

³²Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 376.

³³Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 3 June 1954.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Montgomery News Messenger, 10 June 1954.

³⁶Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 2 September 1954.

The Gray Plan

In August 1954 Governor Stanley appointed a commission to study what action Virginia should take in response to Brown. Later that year, the Commission announced the "Gray Plan" which "tacitly admitted the possibility of token integration and urged only that no child be required to attend an integrated school."³⁷ The commission gave two basic recommendations. One was that local school boards should assign students to schools on "the basis of individual health and aptitude, availability of transportation," and "the welfare and best interests of all other pupils attending a particular school."³⁸ Therefore, the local school board would have complete control over the assignment of black students to white schools.

The second recommendation in the Gray Plan was the use of tuition grants.³⁹ These grants would allow white students, at the expense of the locality, to attend a non-integrated school. The commission also recommended the alteration of section 129 of the Virginia Constitution.

³⁷Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 124.

³⁸Report of the Gray Commission as quoted in Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 125.

³⁹Ibid.

This section mandated compulsory public schools in the state. If section 129 were altered, the state could close schools to avoid integration and localities would not have the option to integrate, even if they were ordered to do so by the federal district courts.⁴⁰

Soon after the plan was made public, Governor Stanley called a special session of the General Assembly. The members voted to have a popular referendum for a limited constitutional convention in order to amend section 141 of the Virginia Constitution to make tuition grants legal.⁴¹ Once amended, localities would be able to appropriate money for tuition grants for white students to attend non-public schools. Stanley never addressed directly whether section 129 should be altered. The General Assembly voted to hold the referendum. Dalton, however, voted against it.⁴²

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Treva J. Carter, "Breaking the School Segregation Barrier in the Roanoke Valley" (honors B.A. thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1973), 12-13.

After Brown: Black Protest in Southwest Virginia

In his book Retrospect, Rev. Ellison A. Smyth recalls the days after Brown in Blacksburg.⁴³ Smyth had grown up in the community and became minister of the Blacksburg Presbyterian Church in the mid-1950s. He recollects the beginnings of black protest in Montgomery County in the form of Rev. Archie Richmond. On August 22, 1955 Archie L. Richmond, pastor of Blacksburg's St. Paul's AME Church and elementary teacher at Friends Negro Elementary, took his congregation on a picnic at the Carter Memorial Wayside in nearby Wythe County.⁴⁴ The Carter Memorial was a segregated park for whites, and Richmond's group violated the state's segregation laws. Richmond and members of his congregation did not cross over to the "colored" section of the park, but stayed in the "white" section.⁴⁵

Richmond and approximately 50 members of his congregation entered the "white side" of the park first. Separated from the white section by a creek, the black section had "trash and bare patches of dirt" which

⁴³Ellison A. Smyth, Retrospect: or Growing Up in Blacksburg and Other Tales through a Long Life (Blacksburg, Virginia: Pocahontas Press, 1993), 71-76.

⁴⁴Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 26 September 1955.

⁴⁵Ibid.

contrasted greatly with the cleaner white section of the park.⁴⁶ After looking at the differences between the segregated sides of the park, Richmond recalls that he said to his congregation that they were not going to the side of the park designated for blacks. Even after authorities arrived, Richmond stuck by his conviction to stay in the nicer area designated for whites only.⁴⁷

Richmond was arrested for the violation, and the Montgomery County School Board discussed whether to suspend Richmond's contract due to his infraction of state law. They suspended Richmond until his case was brought before the court.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Richmond met with NAACP attorney Oliver Hill. Hill wrote a letter to S. T. Godbey, Superintendent of Montgomery Schools, and threatened legal action if Richmond was not re-instated.⁴⁹

According to Montgomery County School Board records, Richmond wrote a letter to the School Board in September 1955 explaining that he "had no intentions of teaching against the Constitution of Virginia."⁵⁰ In other words, he

⁴⁶Robert Freis, "A Day to Remember," Roanoke Times, 2 March 1996.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 26 September 1955.

⁴⁹Freis, "A Day to Remember."

⁵⁰Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 16 September 1955.

was not going to violate the state's school segregation laws. The School Board attorney informed the board that "there was not enough evidence to ask for Mr. Richmond's resignation." Therefore, the board allowed Richmond to return to his teaching position, but prorated his salary for the time he had been suspended.⁵¹

A large crowd of supporters came to Wytheville to attend Richmond's trial and he won his case in court. Richmond continued teaching in Montgomery until 1963, when he moved to New Jersey to become the first African-American national executive of the Boy Scouts of America.⁵²

Richmond's actions brought the community together to organize against segregation. After the Wytheville incident, Rev. Smyth asked Richmond to join the Ministers' Association. Smyth and Richmond would continue to work together towards integration through organizations such as the Ministers' Association and the Council on Human Relations.⁵³ According to Smyth, "As we worked for the desegregation movement, we were like twins almost."⁵⁴ Both

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Freis, "A Day to Remember."

⁵³Ibid; Smyth, 70-75; Jacqueline Eaves, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 16 February 1996.

⁵⁴Ellison Smyth, "Black Appalachians Oral History Project," interview by Michael Cooke, 5 March 1991, Tape Recording, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic

worked in their respective communities to ease the transition to integration.

Massive Resistance v. Local Option

While black protest sprung up in Montgomery County, Virginia, Montgomery, Alabama, and other areas of the South, white resistance to Brown grew momentum.⁵⁵ However, in order for resistance to truly be massive, state leaders had to strip decision-making powers from local school officials. Localities could not have the option to integrate if resistance was to be successful.

The threat of losing "local option" affected Montgomery County's commitment to resistance. Months before the referendum on the question whether to amend section 141 of the Virginia's state Constitution, influential white leaders in Montgomery County made their opinion known to the public. Virginia Tech's president, Walter S. Newman, stated that he

Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

⁵⁵A more wide-scale and notorious protest occurred in the mid-1950s in Montgomery, Alabama. Initiated by Rosa Parks and led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Montgomery Bus Boycott lasted for a year and successfully integrated Montgomery's bus system. Aldon Morris describes the boycott as "the watershed of the modern civil rights movement." Morris, 51.

"was not inclined to be critical of legislative efforts now under way to avoid integration in Virginia's public schools."⁵⁶ The President of Radford College, Charles K. Martin, held an opposing view and took "a strong stand against legislation proposed by Gov. Stanley at the special session of the General Assembly."⁵⁷

In January 1956 a public meeting was held in Blacksburg to discuss the referendum. The meeting was the only public discussion held in the county, and speakers included Ted Dalton and Delegate John Whitehead. Both had publicly opposed the Governor's plan to avoid integration.⁵⁸ The Montgomery County School Board also voted whether they favored the constitutional convention. On January 5 a majority of the board voted in favor of the referendum.⁵⁹

On January 9, 1956 Virginians voted two to one in favor of the convention.⁶⁰ However, in Montgomery County, residents voted against it by a margin of 1849 to 1741. The Blacksburg district was decisive in the Montgomery vote. Christiansburg, Auburn, and Allegheny voted in favor of the

⁵⁶Montgomery News Messenger, 6 September 1956.

⁵⁷Ibid. Radford College, now Radford University, is located in Radford, an independent city in Montgomery County.

⁵⁸Montgomery News Messenger, 5 Jan. 1956.

⁵⁹Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 5 Jan. 1956.

⁶⁰Roanoke Times, 10 January 1956.

constitutional convention, while Blacksburg voted 958 to 626 against it, and nearby Radford also voted against the convention, 992 to 662. In contrast, Prince Edward County, with its large percentage of black residents, voted 2,835 to 350 in favor of the convention!⁶¹

Strengthened by the referendum results, Senator Byrd announced in February 1956, "If we can organize the Southern States for massive resistance to this order [of the Supreme Court in the school segregation cases] I think that in time the rest of the country will realize that racial integration is not going to be accepted in the South."⁶² In addition to Byrd, 101 southern congressmen signed the "Southern Manifesto" which articulated this sentiment.⁶³ Massive resistance was thus born in the South, and Virginia led the way.

The results of the Constitutional Convention in March 1956 reinforced massive resistance. The convention unanimously voted to amend section 141 of the state constitution in order to make tuition grants legal for use

⁶¹Montgomery News Messenger, 12 January, 1956. Roanoke Times, 10 January 1956. One would suspect that not many blacks, if any, voted in Prince Edward during the referendum election.

⁶²Harry F. Byrd, quoted in Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 113.

⁶³Ibid., 141.

in non-public schools.⁶⁴ The convention also rejected the notion that localities should have the option to integrate.⁶⁵

Some delegates to the convention did voice opposition to the Gray Plan and its effect on Virginia schools. However, Montgomery's representative was not one of them. Virgil Goode was the delegate for the 21st Senatorial District, representing the counties of Montgomery, Franklin, Roanoke, and the City of Radford.⁶⁶ On the floor of the convention, Goode appealed to the white southerners' sentimentality of the "War Between the States." He said:

It will be as impossible in Virginia to mix the races in elementary public schools as it would be for the Supreme Court to decree that the sun stand still. We must have no mongrel race in our Southland. We must preserve our free schools, and this must be accomplished without mixing the races. There can be no compromise... I would stand unworthy of my heritage if I did not support the principle of segregation.⁶⁷

⁶⁴Treva Carter, 14.

⁶⁵Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 132.

⁶⁶Franklin County had voted 3,321 to 527 in favor of the convention to amend the Constitution; Roanoke 's vote was closer, 3,080 to 2,645 in favor of the convention. The percentages of blacks in the two counties in 1950 were 14.6 and 8.5 respectively. Roanoke Times, 10 January 1956; Wilkinson, 116.

⁶⁷Virgil Goode, Constitutional Convention of The Commonwealth of Virginia, 6 March 1956. Journal of the Constitutional Convention to Revise and Amend Sec. 141 of

The delegates applauded him as he sat down.⁶⁸

Earlier in the day Waynesboro's representative, H. Dunlop Dawbarn, had spoken his mind to the convention. He represented the 22nd Senatorial District, which was in the White Belt. Dawbarn summed up what was to be the central argument during massive resistance, an argument that displayed the split within Virginia that had persisted since slavery. He said to the convention:

I grew up in Maryland, where the problem isn't what it is in Southside Virginia, and therefore I do not feel that I can speak at any authority on their problems I think there are basically three groups on this problem, and there are all shades of each group. But basically we have those on one side ... who feel that one of the greatest problems that can face us is to have an integrated school with just one colored person in it, no matter how many white, and on the other extreme we have a group which seems to go under the leadership of the NAACP who feel that we should integrate no matter what the disruption of our social customs or any other factors involved.⁶⁹

Dawbarn continued to explain that he was in the moderate, or middle, position because he favored local

the Constitution of Virginia (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia Division of Purchase and Printing, 1956), 54.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹H. Dunlop Dawbarn, Constitutional Convention of The Commonwealth of Virginia, 6 March 1956. Journal of the Constitutional Convention to Revise and Amend Sec. 141 of the Constitution of Virginia (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia Division of Purchase and Printing, 1956), 54.

option. His district, like Montgomery County, had few blacks and therefore there would be little interest in building private schools to escape integration.⁷⁰

Furthermore, Dawbarn stated that "under the Gray Plan, you can only give as much as is now being expended in that area for public schools to the students to go to private schools." Dawbarn explained that in his area, the expenditure per child was only \$200, but that the private schools would cost at least \$600. Dawbarn made it clear he was in favor of local option. He said thank you and sat down without applause.⁷¹

This disagreement at the Convention demonstrates the basic differences between the whites in the Black Belt and the whites in the White Belt. The whites in the Black Belt had the power, especially under Byrd, and they feared integration due to the high percentages of blacks in their area. Whites in the White Belt did not want to sacrifice their public education in order to maintain segregation. Goode's position was not a White Belt position. A Franklin County resident, he felt he too needed to protect his home

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

from integration due to the larger percentage of blacks in his county.⁷²

In August 1956 a special session of the General Assembly foreclosed any possibility that Virginia would integrate. The Assembly passed legislation that allowed the Commonwealth to cut state funds to integrated schools. Under the Gray Plan, Virginia organized a state pupil placement board, a clearing house for all applications of transfer, ensuring further state control over integration. Finally, the legislature passed a bill that required any public school which integrated to close.⁷³ Local option was dead.

The election of Democrat J. Lindsay Almond as governor in 1957 further strengthened the segregationists' position. Attorney General Almond, a member of the Byrd organization and a staunch segregationist, ran against State Senator Ted Dalton. Dalton did not favor full integration, but he did not agree with resisting the Supreme Court's ruling.⁷⁴

⁷²The percentage of blacks in Franklin County in 1950 was 14.6. Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 116.

⁷³Treva Carter, 14.

⁷⁴Ibid., 15.

Dalton was firmly against closing schools in order to avoid integration.⁷⁵

Despite Dalton's moderate position, he was labeled an integrationist.⁷⁶ During the campaign, Republican President Eisenhower had sent troops into Little Rock, Arkansas, to enforce a court order to desegregate. This hurt Dalton's campaign and bolstered the position of segregationists in the Democratic party. Many white southerners criticized Eisenhower for encroaching on states's rights.⁷⁷ Almond won 63 percent of the popular vote.⁷⁸

By contrast, Dalton won in Montgomery County. Almond did get the support of the rest of the Sixth District, including nearby Roanoke.⁷⁹ Almond was native to Roanoke, which probably explains his victory in that area, but Montgomery and other southwestern counties in the Ninth District also favored Dalton.⁸⁰ The lines of support for resistance in the state were being drawn with the black belt residents supporting Almond.

⁷⁵Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 138.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., 376.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

Because the segregationists had more influence and power within the state, Montgomery County continued to wait for events to unfold across the Commonwealth. White residents in the county did not demonstrate bitter resistance to integration, but neither did they take any steps toward desegregation.⁸¹ While blacks applied to white schools in other sections of the state, they did not apply to white schools in Montgomery County.

The NAACP had begun to sue for desegregation in Charlottesville, Prince Edward (the site of one of the companion cases in Brown), Arlington, Warren County, and Norfolk.⁸² Prince Edward, Warren County, and Charlottesville all had a higher percentage of black residents than Montgomery County.⁸³ In 1958 Circuit Courts in Virginia ordered desegregation to take place where the NAACP lawsuits had originated.⁸⁴ Gov. Almond cut off funds to these public schools, and he closed the schools in

⁸¹Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 1954-1966.

⁸²Treva Carter, 16.

⁸³Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 116. The percentages of black residents living in these areas in 1950 were Charlottesville, 18.8; Prince Edward, 44.6; Warren, 8.0; Norfolk, 29.7; and Arlington, 4.9.

⁸⁴Ibid., 138.

Charlottesville, Warren County, Prince Edward, Arlington, and Norfolk.⁸⁵ Massive resistance peaked.

Due to these school closings, many white Virginians, including those in Montgomery County, began to oppose massive resistance.⁸⁶ Businessmen from across the state met with Governor Almond to discuss their concerns regarding Virginia's image.⁸⁷ In Blacksburg, Rev. Smyth recalls that at a PTA meeting an officer of the organization cautioned the members to "stay out of the conflict."⁸⁸ Smyth and his wife Mary Linda called for a study of the situation, and many PTA members severely criticized them for their views.⁸⁹

Smyth took a stand that other whites in the community would not, or could not, take. For example, Smyth describes what was a sticky situation for the faculty at Virginia Tech. Since the state university was dependent on state funds from the pro-segregation Byrd machine, many were wary of publicly endorsing integration. While white citizens were divided on the segregation issue per se, many were in

⁸⁵Ibid., 139.

⁸⁶Holden, 28.

⁸⁷Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 145.

⁸⁸Smyth, 71.

⁸⁹Ibid.

agreement that the public schools should not be closed to avoid integration.⁹⁰

During another PTA meeting, the Ministers' Association gave a presentation on the teaching of ethics. Smyth gave the closing presentation which was "a severe indictment of the Byrd Machine, and the closing of public schools."⁹¹ According to Smyth, it was a "stormy session," especially "when one of us made the motion that our PTA petition the Governor and Legislature to re-open the closed schools, and nullify the Massive Resistance laws."⁹²

It was the judiciary that killed massive resistance, however. In Harrison v. Day (1959) the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals ruled that the state must support its public schools and that the cutting of funds violated the state constitution.⁹³ On the same day, a District Court in Norfolk handed down its decision in James v. Almond (1959) which declared that school closings violated the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.⁹⁴ Schools in Virginia must desegregate. Now massive resistance was dead.

⁹⁰Ibid., 70-76.

⁹¹Ibid., 72.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 146; Holden, 28.

⁹⁴Ibid.

Historians have debated the causes of massive resistance in Virginia. In the immediate post-Brown years most historians agreed with V.O. Key that the Byrd machine had tight control of Virginia politics. Benjamin Muse argues the Byrd Organization was more defiant than its constituents in Virginia.⁹⁵ While J. Harvie Wilkinson, III, agrees with Muse that Byrd caused massive resistance, he contends that Byrd's motives were not racist.⁹⁶ Wilkinson writes, "Byrd influenced the development of massive resistance as much as did the structure of his state machine. More than any other individual, Byrd pushed Virginia into defiance."⁹⁶ However, Wilkinson contends that Byrd's resistance to Brown was mainly due to his belief in state's rights and to his conviction that the Supreme Court should not impose its will on Virginia. Wilkinson argues race prejudice was not a "primary factor" in Byrd's push for defiance. To support this, he cites Byrd's leadership in

⁹⁵Although Muse's study continues to be important in the historiography of massive resistance, his analysis is limited. Focusing on the white reaction to the Brown decision, Muse excludes black Americans' push to achieve integration. Published before desegregation began in Virginia, his study does not include an analysis of events after massive resistance. Benjamin Muse, Virginia's Massive Resistance (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961).

⁹⁶Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 151-152.

⁹⁶Ibid., 151-152.

securing an anti-lynching law in Virginia and claimed that Byrd was a leader in massive resistance because he needed the rural white vote.⁹⁸

Wilkinson's interpretation of Byrd's motives is questionable. Byrd's support for anti-lynching laws in Virginia may have been to safeguard the state's image rather than to ensure that blacks were not murdered. Byrd supported these laws three decades before massive resistance. Wilkinson fails to fully analyze the insipid brand of southern racism which Virginians upheld. Although violence may have been limited, blacks were continually denied their right to the opportunities routinely afforded whites.

Numan V. Bartley and James W. Ely both counter Muse's claim that the Byrd machine imposed massive resistance on white Virginians.⁹⁹ Bartley argues the rise of massive

⁹⁸Ibid., 59-60.

⁹⁹Numan V. Bartley, The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950's (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969); James W. Ely, Jr., The Crisis of Conservative Virginia: The Byrd Organization and the Politics of Massive Resistance (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976). Another historian who agrees with Bartley and Ely is Dewey Grantham synthesizes V.O. Key's early political analysis of the South with his own interpretation of massive resistance. He describes the rise of massive resistance in Virginia as being heavily influenced by the Byrd machine, yet he explained that it was also a function of what he referred to as "neobourbonism." Grantham's interpretation of massive resistance incorporates politics and social relations, the southern ideology

resistance was due in part to southern political leadership: yet he also insists that the resistance was possible only with the support of southern institutions and white southerners themselves.

Similarly, Ely claims that Muse over-emphasized the influence the Byrd organization had on Virginia's defiance of Brown and that Muse's analysis was too simplistic. According to Ely, "massive resistance, it seems clear, sprang from a sincere conviction [among whites] that racial segregation was desirable and worth a struggle to retain if at all possible. This opinion in turn rested upon the dual motives of constitutionalism and white racial superiority." Ely asserts that massive resistance was the result of white Virginians' racism in general, not just the racism of their leaders. He also argued that resisters believed the Brown decision to be unconstitutional. While he maintains that Virginia's elite contributed to massive resistance, Ely claims that Muse's research is too limited and his interpretation too critical of Byrd.¹⁰⁰

regarding "big government" and resistance to change. Dewey Grantham, The Life and Death of the Solid South: A Political History (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

¹⁰⁰ Ely, 91.

In a recent study Ronald L. Heinemann agrees with Key's assertion that the Commonwealth had only a few die-hard segregationists, and they were in the Southside. Heinemann argues that Virginia's leaders caused massive resistance and the Byrd Organization used race to retain its political hegemony. Heinemann concludes, "The failure of leadership--the absence of flexibility, foresight, and moral sensitivity--is the real lesson of massive resistance. It is a failure for which Harry Byrd must assume responsibility."¹⁰¹

Heinemann's argument is correct. Virginia's leaders whipped up racial antagonisms and made it difficult for localities to deal with desegregation on their own terms. Massive resistance was not really massive in Montgomery County. Whites in the county had to wait for the state to decide what maneuver they were to use next. Once massive resistance was defeated, desegregation came quietly and relatively quickly to Montgomery County.

In retrospect it seems clear that most white Virginians, including whites in Montgomery, did support segregation but not massive resistance. Whites in

¹⁰¹Robert L. Heinemann, Harry Byrd of Virginia (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 328-356.

Montgomery County were not as committed to segregated schools as whites in Prince Edward or even Charlottesville. White Montgomery residents began to withdraw their support of massive resistance as early as 1956. As shown by the referendum results, when given the choice as to whether to change the state constitution in order to circumvent Brown, the majority of voters in Montgomery said "No."

Fighting Jim Crow in Montgomery County

Initially, at least, reputable white liberals were driving forces in integrating many communities. In Montgomery County Rev. Smyth and his wife, among others, were motivated by a sincere conviction that the system was wrong, and they acted on this conviction. They were more able to do so than blacks at the time because their positions were not as precarious. They might suffer some retribution, but they were not violently or economically intimidated. As the Civil Rights Movement grew momentum, white southern liberals continued to be active, but blacks eventually replaced whites as civil rights leaders in communities.

According to David L. Chappell white southern liberals like Smyth were important to the fight against Jim Crow. He

argues, "their effect on the outcome of the civil rights movement, especially in the early days, was far greater than that of the more numerous, more celebrated northern liberals."¹⁰² Because they were white and southern, they were able to push the segregation barriers. Smyth's position as a minister insulated him from many pressures others faced and reinforced the moral argument that segregation was wrong.

Rev. Smyth played an important role in the formation of the Blacksburg Council on Human Relations. Smyth recalls, "we started at once trying to break down the segregation pattern at our public eating places. We were met usually with the argument that if they started it they would lose all their trade."¹⁰³ In addition, the Council encouraged white residents to shop at the local stores that hired blacks. Smyth remembers, "We finally broke the pattern of Massive Resistance. Many pressures from many sources contributed to this."¹⁰⁴

The President of Virginia Tech, Walter Newman, continued to support segregation, however. Smyth recalls

¹⁰²David L. Chappell, Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), xxii-xxvii.

¹⁰³Smyth, 74.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

that "he and his wife could not break the line, would not break the line."¹⁰⁵ Smyth refers to the "color line" separating the races during segregation. Newman was also an elder in Smyth's church. Consequently, their differences escalated. Newman barred the Association of University Women from meeting at Virginia Tech because Rev. Archie Richmond's wife, India, was a member. Smyth then arranged for the women to meet at his church. All of the elders in Smyth's church agreed to allow blacks into the church, except President Newman. After the others agreed to "an open door policy," Newman left the church and the congregation.¹⁰⁶

By the late 1950s many Montgomery residents must have believed that integration was coming to the county in spite of massive resistance. In 1957 the Virginia Congress of Parents and Teachers held a conference at C.I. The organization had been formed in 1921 in order to improve public education. The theme of the 1957 spring conference was "Building Together" and one of the speakers presented a speech entitled "Preparing for Integration."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵Ellison Smyth, "Black Appalachians Oral History Project," interview by Michael Cooke, 5 March 1991, Tape Recording, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

¹⁰⁶Smyth, 75-76.

¹⁰⁷Swain, 249.

Interestingly, the word "segregation" was not listed in the index for the Montgomery County School Board minutes after 1958, but the word "integration" was.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸Montgomery School Board Minutes, 1954-1966.

Chapter Four

"Freedom of Choice" in Montgomery County, 1959-1966

After the death of massive resistance in 1959, Montgomery County school officials followed the revised state plan which sought to limit integration, yet not blatantly resist it.¹ The plan, known as "Freedom of Choice," limited integration in two ways: first, it gave the control of integration to the state pupil placement board, a clearinghouse for all student school placements, and second, it provided funds for white students to move out of an integrated school system.

Freedom of Choice allowed students to attend another school, but made no mention of race. While a black student could apply for a transfer to an all-white school, a white child could receive a pupil placement "scholarship," regardless of economic need, to attend a private or public school outside of his or her district.² This system allowed whites to flee integration.

¹Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 147-148.

²Anna Holden, The Bus Stops Here: A Study of School Desegregation in Three Cities (New York: Agathon Press, Inc., 1974), 42.

Pupil Placement

Beginning in 1959 Montgomery County used Pupil Placement to coordinate desegregation. While blacks did not apply for transfers to white schools in that year, white students applied for tuition grants to attend private schools. As the cost of education per pupil rose in the county, so did the funds available for tuition grants, or pupil placement scholarships as they later were called. For the 1959-1960 school year, the Montgomery County School Board expected the average cost to the county (exclusive of state or federal funds) to be \$72.00 for each child between the ages of six and twenty in the county. During that school year there were 7,450 children in this age group, totaling \$536,352 for the county contribution in the 1959-1960 session.³ The board agreed to approve 100 pupils for pupil placement scholarships so they could attend a private non-sectarian school in or out of the county for the school year. Thus \$7,200 of local funds were allocated for such use. In 1960 the cost for the county per child rose to \$82.00 per pupil and pupil placement scholarships were still being granted.⁴

³Montgomery School Board Minutes, 15 May 1959.

⁴Ibid., 5 October 1961.

Montgomery allocated these funds for pupil placement scholarships before any desegregation took place. This essentially meant that white residents in the community could begin sending their children to private schools at the taxpayers expense. Even worse, these scholarships benefitted many whites who would have sent their children to private schools anyway. Now they could let the taxpayers foot the bill.

The Commonwealth's use of tuition grants and pupil placement scholarships demonstrates the class differences within the state. Poor whites would not be able to afford the luxury of sending their children to private schools, even if the state and local government footed the bill. There were other expenses to consider - clothes, transportation, etc. - which poor whites could ill afford. Furthermore, eastern Virginians had more money to pour into private schooling due to their larger tax base, their greater influence over state politics, and their extreme willingness to escape integration at any expense.

During desegregation, class and race were both important issues in Montgomery County and Virginia. Robert Pratt's description of desegregation in Richmond demonstrates the complexities of these issues.⁵ Although

⁵Robert A. Pratt, "A Promise Unfulfilled: School Desegregation in Richmond, Virginia, 1956-1986," Virginia

Pratt analyzes Richmond after desegregation, it is clear that much of his argument applies to Virginia during the era of "passive resistance," or token desegregation. Pratt explains how white flight from the inner-city schools essentially led to re-segregation. According to Pratt, white flight drained the city of its tax base which in turn caused the affluent black population to withdraw from the Richmond schools. The scenario that Robert Pratt describes in Richmond in the 1990s happened in Virginia from 1959-1968.⁶ The wealthier whites escaped public schools and left behind poorer whites and eventually blacks, but at this time the state subsidized their flight.

Across the state, local school funds were being used to pay for private school tuition in other localities. Some localities in Virginia subsidized private education for students who attended expensive private schools in other areas of the country such as New England, New York, and Pennsylvania.⁷ In Montgomery, students were able to attend private schools, such as Staunton Military Academy and Augusta Military Academy, with public funds.⁸

Magazine of History and Biography 99, no. 4 (October 1991).

⁶Ibid., 446-448.

⁷Holden, 42.

⁸Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 5 October 1961.

Montgomery County continued to use pupil placement scholarships in 1964, but the school board increasingly restricted their use.⁹ In 1959 the board "voted not to enroll a resident of another school division in Montgomery County schools without first consulting the superintendent of the division from which they come."¹⁰ In January 1962 the board "discussed the desirability of a change in the state law with reference to pupil scholarships" and they "agreed that it was becoming increasingly a more difficult problem to cope with."¹¹ The process cost the locality time and money, and it created additional paperwork because students had to submit applications.

Desegregation Begins

Nearby Pulaski and Floyd Counties began token desegregation as early as 1960.¹² Nine black students transferred from C.I. to the formerly all-white Floyd High

⁹Ibid., 1959-1964.

¹⁰Ibid., 3 September 1959.

¹¹Ibid., January 1962.

¹²Pulaski County School Board Minutes, 1960; Adrienne Bee, "It Was a Quiet Day in Floyd," Roanoke Times, 22 October 1995.

School in January 1961, and fourteen black students began the school year in Pulaski High School in September 1961.¹³ Montgomery County, however, did not begin desegregation until the following school year, when only two black students attended Blacksburg High School.¹⁴

In the Spring of 1961 three black students applied for transfers to Blacksburg High School. The School Board reviewed the three applications at their meeting in May and forwarded them to the Pupil Placement Board in Richmond.¹⁵ The County had agreed to use the Pupil Placement Board in 1959 and therefore was bound by its decisions regarding the assignment of pupils.¹⁶

In July 1961 an NAACP attorney from Roanoke, Reuben Lawson, wrote the school board requesting Blacksburg High School be desegregated. Although the school board was "without authority to act in the matter," it could have been named as a party in a law suit if one was filed in federal court.¹⁷ Litigation was not necessary, however, because the State Pupil Placement Board approved the admission of two of

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Montgomery School Board Minutes, 1961.

¹⁵Montgomery News Messenger, 20 April 1961; 11 May 1961.

¹⁶Ibid., 27 July 1961.

¹⁷Ibid., 13 July 1961.

the three black students to the all-white high school.¹⁸ Christine and Phillip Price were approved for admission to the school for the fall. A third applicant, Jacqueline Lewis, was rejected, however, due to her "lack of academic qualifications."¹⁹

Obviously Virginia was not complying with the intent of Brown. Nowhere in the Brown opinion, or in the Constitution for that matter, does it say that rights are predicated on academic achievement. Instead of admitting a black applicant, regardless of academic achievement, to white schools, the Pupil Placement Board applied a set of criteria which continued to deny blacks their rights under the 14th Amendment.

Walking Through the Schoolhouse Door

School officials took precautions during the first week of school in 1961. In an open letter to the community, Superintendent of Schools E.L. King wrote, "The Montgomery County School Board is making a determined effort to open our schools in an effective manner even though we have some

¹⁸Ibid., 6 July 1961.

¹⁹Ibid., 4 August 1961; Montgomery News Messenger, 27 July 1961.

integration in Blacksburg High School."²⁰ King wrote that there would be no one allowed on school grounds except the students and personnel during the first week. There was to be no loitering and no media interviews. In addition, the school board had two guards placed in the building from 5 pm until 6 am beginning a week before the opening of schools. The desegregation process began without incident.²¹

In 1963 Phillip Price became the first black graduate of Blacksburg High School. Now a minister, Rev. Price remembers his two years at Blacksburg High School quite vividly. Price grew up on Roanoke Street in Blacksburg and attended Blacksburg Graded School, a two-room elementary school for blacks. The elementary school did not have a cafeteria, so students had to pack their lunches and eat at their desks or outside. After graduating from Blacksburg Graded School, Rev. Price went on to C.I. where he completed grades 8 through 10. He played in C.I.'s band and, like Wayman Pack in the 1930s, he also had to hitchhike home from school after practice.²²

Price explains that members of the black community were looking for people willing to attend Blacksburg High School.

²⁰Ibid., 5 September 1961.

²¹Swain, 251.

²²Rev. Phillip Price, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 7 March 1996.

His parents supported the idea. Interestingly, after Price began his school year at Blacksburg High, one of the teachers there explained that he and his sister had been "handpicked" to desegregate the school. Price believes that she meant that he and his sister lived within walking distance of the school, and therefore did not need to be transported. In this way, the school system could avoid the problem of bussing black students.²³

Price does not recall many incidents with white students. While there were some racial slurs, they were kept to a minimum because they had known many of the white students before attending school with them. He does not remember anyone calling black students "niggers" or telling them to "go home," which he had heard happened in other areas at the time.²⁴ He attributes this to the fact that he and his sister had white friends that they played with on Roanoke Street. "When they found out we were going [to Blacksburg High], they'd come up and walk us to school." Rev. Price and his sister did not have to be escorted to school by the police, but they were escorted by their white neighborhood friends.²⁵

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

Price feels that the teachers, who were still all white, treated him fairly during his years at Blacksburg High. "It was a breaking in period for all of us, getting used to the situation Sometimes out of lack of exposure to that kind of situation they'd slip up and say something." One teacher apparently called her delinquent students "black dogs." Price recalls that the teacher put him into the "black dog" group, but he feels that the teacher was simply insensitive to the situation.²⁶

Price did not participate in extra-curricular activities. He did not play in the band at Blacksburg High during his two years there. "I didn't pursue it," says Price. "I was doing all I could to tread water. It was ... the first time that I really had to apply myself to studies. And plus I think it was the stress factor that was the most cumbersome thing."²⁷

Although desegregation went smoothly in Blacksburg, Price says he was distressed by what was happening across the state and in other southern states, like Alabama. Price recalls hearing about beatings and school burnings in Carroll County, Virginia: "It was always in the back of my

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

mind ... because you are one or two of nine hundred and some students."²⁸

Another reason Price did not pursue extra-curricular activities was that he worked two after-school jobs during his years at Blacksburg High. He worked for Guinn Department Stores and the Lyric Theater, where he was the ticket-taker for the black section. He would stand at the top of the stairs in the balcony to take the tickets of black patrons. According to Price, both black and white students from Virginia Tech would sit in the balcony. Many of the white high school students would come up to the balcony as well, although "they weren't supposed to, but nobody said anything to them so they'd come on up and sit with us."²⁹

Rev. Price feels that whites and blacks in his age group were socially integrated during Jim Crow. Although they could not eat at the same restaurants, his white and black friends would get together on the weekends and play softball and football. Price attributes much of this integration to Virginia Tech because of "the influx of the teachers and students from up North."³⁰

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

Rev. Price was not able to walk across the stage to get his diploma during commencement ceremonies in June of 1963. He had failed English in his senior year and was given the option to either take the whole year over again or to attend summer school. He chose the latter and now laughs that he "took his diploma and ran."³¹ According to Price's mother, Christina Price, Phillip did suspect that the English teacher kept him back so that he would not graduate and attend the ceremonies.³²

Although still token, desegregation had begun and would continue. Ten years after Price desegregated the school, his brother Tommy was named All-state in basketball and crowned Homecoming King at Blacksburg High.³³

Montgomery County began to desegregate its schools in 1961, yet only a total of nine black high school students had applied for transfers as late as the 1963-1964 school year. All students except one were granted admission to Blacksburg High School. Blacks did not apply for transfers

³¹Ibid.

³²Christina Price, "Black Appalachian Oral History Project," interview by Michael Cooke, 14 March 1991, Tape Recording, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

³³Ibid.; Rev. Phillip Price, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 7 March 1996.

to Christiansburg High School until 1964, and therefore the school remained segregated until that time.³⁴

Black students in some surrounding areas were desegregating their neighborhood high schools much faster. At the same time that the Pupil Placement Board approved the admission of two black students to Blacksburg High School, the Board approved the admission of twelve black applicants to Pulaski County High School. Pulaski's high school had already been desegregated in January 1960, and blacks in that county continued to seek transfers.³⁵

Montgomery County's black elementary school children were seeking admittance to white schools more actively than the black high school students in the county. During 1963 twenty-two students applied for transfers to Margaret Beeks Elementary School, and the Pupil Placement Board approved twenty applicants for admission. The county had just built Beeks, which may have influenced the increase in applications.³⁶

There are a number of reasons why Montgomery County black high school students did not apply for transfers before 1964. Black students and their parents had to weigh

³⁴Montgomery News Messenger, 16 May 1963.

³⁵Ibid., 27 July 1961.

³⁶Ibid.; Montgomery School Board Minutes, 1963.

their options carefully. Not only was desegregation emotionally and psychologically stressful, it meant giving up opportunities the students had at C.I., including extra-curricular activities. Unlike elementary school students, high school students were active in extra-curricular activities and at C.I. these included football, basketball, band, and forensics.³⁷ Black participation in these activities would no doubt have been inhibited in the desegregated school. As late as 1965, there were no black players on Blacksburg High School's football team. In 1966 two black students played for the 8th grade football team.³⁸

If blacks transferred to desegregated high schools in the county, they would have been denied the benefits of the black school culture. At C.I. blacks were among others with whom they could relate: they had only black classmates and black teachers. There were no black teachers in the desegregated schools until January 1966, and even then they were not in all the schools.³⁹

For these reasons, some graduates say that they never thought about transferring into the integrated schools.

³⁷Cora Pack, interview by author, Christiansburg, Virginia, 16 March 1995.

³⁸Montgomery News Messenger, 2 September 1965; Blacksburg High School Year Book, 1966.

³⁹Smith and DeHart, 64.

Jessie Sherman, now Jessie Eaves, attended C.I. from 1960 until 1965 and never considered transferring. Ms. Eaves remembers passing white high schools on the way to C.I. every day. She had to catch the bus at Wakeforest at 7 a.m. to go to school and then returned home at 5:30 p.m. Still, she never considered transferring to Blacksburg High School. "I enjoyed C.I.," she says now.⁴⁰

There were a number of things Ms. Eaves liked about C.I. that were not available at Blacksburg High. She liked C.I.'s large campus because it "was like a junior college." She says that the bell would ring and you would walk across the campus to your class. Ms. Eaves participated in numerous extra-curricular activities. She sang in the choir and belonged to the Future Business Leaders of America, the yearbook staff, and the forensics team. She also was a cheerleader for four of her five years at C.I.⁴¹

Jessie Eaves liked the ability to get to know students from Floyd, Radford, and Pulaski who attended C.I. She recalls that each student belonged to a study group and many in her group were from other areas outside of the county. They would take turns meeting at each other's houses. If

⁴⁰Jessie Eaves, telephone interview by author, 26 April 1996.

⁴¹Ibid.

she had transferred to Blacksburg high, she would have lost this contact with her peers.⁴²

After desegregation began in other Montgomery County schools there were some black students who were treated unfairly and excluded. Cora Pack remembers that in 1964 her son began first grade at a desegregated elementary school in Christiansburg. He had played with the white children in his neighborhood, but when he began school, this came to a halt. Mrs. Pack claims her son was not treated fairly in school. For example, when the teacher had the boys in the class build airplanes, she would not let Mrs. Pack's son help. He was the only black student in the class, and the teacher just "forgot about him."⁴³

Mrs. Pack's daughter, Ann, had a similar experience. In 1965 Ann transferred from C.I. and was one of the first to integrate Christiansburg High School. Mrs. Pack found that the teachers at the integrated school were not interested in black students at the time. When Ann began failing geometry, Mrs. Pack went to a PTA meeting to speak with her teacher. The teacher told Mrs. Pack that Ann was

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Cora Pack, interview by author, Christiansburg, Virginia, 16 March 1995.

doing well, but she continued to get "F's" on her report card.⁴⁴

In 1964 the parents of a white child attending the desegregated Margaret Beeks Elementary in Blacksburg requested a transfer for their daughter to attend Christiansburg Elementary. A psychologist sent a letter to the Montgomery County School Board explaining that the child needed to transfer "because of a phobia she has against colored children in her classes." Because of the psychologist's recommendation, the Board granted the request.⁴⁵

Throughout 1964 the School Board continued to receive applications for Pupil Placement transfers. If the applicants did not specify why they wanted to transfer, the application was sent back until this was made clear. The applications were then sent to the Pupil Placement Board in Richmond.⁴⁶

Bi-racial cooperation facilitated desegregation. The Blacksburg Town Council established a bi-racial committee in the Spring of 1963. Mayor John M. Barringer appointed "a group of citizens representing various civic organizations"

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Montgomery County School Board Minutes, 9 January 1964.

⁴⁶Montgomery School Board Minutes, 1959-1964.

including Rev. Archie Richmond and Mrs. Ellison Smyth.⁴⁷

The committee's other appointees included representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and the mayor himself.⁴⁸

The president of the Blacksburg Jaycees wrote to the mayor and asked the purpose and function of the committee. In response, Rev. Richmond wrote "problems long ignored."⁴⁹ It is uncertain what the committee did, but Blacksburg's development of such an organization during the time shows that they were more progressive than other many sections of the South, state, and even county.

Enforcement of Brown: Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act

In 1964 President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. Historians have argued that this act encouraged large-scale desegregation because it gave the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) the power to investigate desegregation in localities.⁵⁰ Title VI of the

⁴⁷Montgomery News Messenger, 13 June 1963.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Pratt, 426.

act required the withdrawal of federal funds if school desegregation did not take place. The act removed the burden of desegregation from black Southerners and placed the responsibility to integrate on local school boards.⁵¹

In the summer of 1965 Montgomery County submitted a desegregation plan to HEW in which "all children would be given a choice of attending either the nearest formerly all-white or colored school."⁵² The only change HEW wanted was the choice to be expanded to "any school in the county." Evans L. King, Superintendent of Montgomery County School, opposed this plan because of its "infeasability" due to transportation problems and the ability of students to switch schools for any reason they wished.⁵³

C.I.'s status as a regional high school became a problem while officials were planning desegregation. When Montgomery County's school officials explained to HEW officials that Christiansburg High School was overcrowded and that three classes had to be moved to the elementary school the year before, one of the HEW consultants suggested sending white students to C.I. King explained that this was not possible because the "Montgomery County school board

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Montgomery News Messenger, 19 July 1965.

⁵³Ibid.

owned only one third of the school and under the will which setup the institution for the education of Negro youth in the area, white students couldn't be assigned there without court action." HEW officials did not understand Montgomery County's situation because they had never encountered a regional school before.⁵⁴

By September 1965 both Montgomery County and HEW officials agreed upon a desegregation plan which called for the closing of three black schools. Two were elementary schools, Elliston Graded and Wakeforest. Both were to be closed in the 1965-66 school year. C.I. was the third black school to be closed, but it would remain open until after the 1965-66 school year. Students were allowed to stay at C.I. if they chose to do so for that last year.⁵⁵

Although HEW used Title VI to influence Montgomery County's desegregation plan, it is clear that HEW did not have the funding, strict standards, or the knowledge to enforce southern desegregation. In 1966, 1967, and 1968 HEW published guidelines that described what localities had to do in order to comply with Title VI. The 1965 guidelines accepted Freedom of Choice plans even though "there was no way for federal officials in Washington to know why black

⁵⁴Ibid., 5 August 1965.

⁵⁵Montgomery News Messenger, 9 September 1965.

children were not using the option open to them."⁵⁶ The 1966 guidelines continued to accept Freedom of Choice plans. According to Harold Howe II, the U.S. Commissioner of Education in 1966, there were

two basic requirements: first, that any desegregation plan, of whatever type, must work; and second, that in the case of freedom-of-choice plans, the choice must indeed be free. In the guideline requirements covering free choice plans, certain percentages are cited for the transfer of students, the purpose being to give schools a suggested standard for meeting their legal responsibilities to desegregate.⁵⁷

The percentage that Howe referred to was a mere 15 percent!⁵⁸ Therefore, Montgomery County could have obtained funding by transferring only 15 percent of its black students into white schools.

HEW did not enforce the Title VI cutoff for localities that did not desegregate. Numerous school districts signed compliance forms, but were not in compliance. Many

⁵⁶Beryl A. Radin, Implementation, Change, and the Federal Bureaucracy: School Desegregation Policy in H.E.W., 1964-1968 (New York: Teachers College Press, 1977), 108.

⁵⁷U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, The Human Frontier: Remarks on equality in education (sic), by Harold Howe II, United States Commissioner of Education (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1966), 26.

⁵⁸Radin, 110.

continued to operate a dual system.⁵⁹ The federal fund cut-off was simply not an effective sanction: "of the 600 administrative proceedings undertaken against school districts between 1964 and 1970, funds were terminated in 200; in all but four of these districts, federal aid was subsequently restored, often without a change in local procedure."⁶⁰

Desegregation in Montgomery County was unusual and is an exception to J. Harvie Wilkinson's five stages of southern desegregation. According to Wilkinson, the stages were: 1) absolute defiance from 1955 until 1959; 2) token compliance from 1959 until 1964; 3) modest integration from 1964 until 1968 due to HEW's enforcement of Title VI; 4) massive integration beginning in 1968 due to Green v. County School Board⁶¹; and 5) resegregation in some southern communities after 1968.⁶²

⁵⁹Ibid., 108.

⁶⁰Ibid., 14.

⁶¹In Green, the Supreme Court ruled that there was a positive obligation to integrate as opposed to an obligation to not segregate. According to Wilkinson, it was "the distinction between Thou Shalt Integrate and Thou Shalt Not Segregate," where Green was the former and Brown was the latter. Wilkinson, 82.

⁶²Wilkinson admits that there are exceptions to these stages. Wilkinson, From Brown to Bakke, 78.

Montgomery County was already in absolute compliance in 1966 when most southern localities were modestly integrating. Given the ineffectiveness of Title VI, why did the county fully desegregate in 1966? There is not one definitive reason, but rather a combination of events and circumstances motivated the School Board and the community. According to Gary Orfield, a number of localities in Virginia were preparing to use "free choice mechanisms" in the summer of 1965, but some were not in compliance with HEW for such reasons as "the length of the choice period or the adequacy of the notice sent to Negro parents." In the middle of August Hew informed these localities that unless they reopened the transfer period, they would be rejected. Orfield contends "some school systems in moderate parts of the state were willing to promise abandonment of freedom of choice in a future year in exchange for Federal approval during the coming school year." More than 10 districts in Virginia made this arrangement with HEW.⁶³

HEW certainly had some Montgomery County officials frightened that they would lose badly needed federal funding. In September 1965, the Montgomery News Messenger explained, "the county has been faced with the possible loss of \$200,000 in federal funds in addition to other direct

⁶³Orfield, 226-227.

aid."⁶⁴ Federal funding was an important part of Montgomery County's budget. Like many school districts, Montgomery County had obtained federal funding under the WPA during the Depression.⁶⁵ In 1953 the county applied for federal funds under Public Law 874. This act was passed "to provide financial assistance for local educational agencies in areas affected by Federal activities."⁶⁶ By 1963 Montgomery County was receiving \$110,000 under P.L. 874 because the Radford Arsenal, a federal installation, was located in the county. The county also received \$36,000 in federal funds for school lunch programs in the same year.⁶⁷ School officials believed that if the county did not desegregate, it would lose this funding.⁶⁸

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) allocated a tremendous amount of federal funding to localities. The ESEA was HEW's carrot because it made available \$959 million in federal funds to localities in order to ease the effects of years of segregation.⁶⁹

⁶⁴Montgomery News Messenger, 9 September 1965.

⁶⁵Montgomery School Board Minutes, 1936.

⁶⁶Public Law 874, U.S. Code, Vol. 20 secs. 236-244.

⁶⁷Montgomery News Messenger, 8 May 1963.

⁶⁸Ibid., 9 September 1965.

⁶⁹Radin, 108-109; U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 36.

Furthermore, black students were already transferring out of the segregated schools in Montgomery County and integrating the white schools. The number of black students in black schools was shrinking. Because desegregation began in Floyd County in January 1960 and in Pulaski County in the Fall of 1960, C.I.'s enrollment began to drop.⁷⁰ In April 1960, even before desegregation began in Montgomery County, the School Board discussed "the problem of cost for the operation of Christiansburg Institute with the prospects of decreased enrollment."⁷¹ In June, "several requests from the colored patrons of the county were presented" to the School Board. Although they were not to deny reasonable requests, the School Board advised these patrons that it could not "consider construction of any additions to buildings at the present time."⁷² In July 1963, Blacksburg Graded School was closed because enrollment dropped to 6 students after 20 students had been approved to attend Margaret Beeks Elementary under Pupil Placement.⁷³

⁷⁰Bee, "It was a Quiet Day in Floyd;" Pulaski County School Board Minutes, 1960.

⁷¹Montgomery School Board Minutes, 7 April 1960.

⁷²Ibid., 28 June 1960.

⁷³Ibid., 5 July, 1963.

**School Age Population by Race in
Montgomery County for 1950 and 1960**

	White			Non-white ⁷⁴		
	1950	1960	Change	1950	1960	Change
under 5	2,954	3,177	+ 7 %	187	110	- 41 %
5-19	7,727	9,141	+ 18 %	414	445	+ 7 %
14-19	3,309	4,054	+ 22 %	146	156	+ 6 %

Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1950-1960

With the baby boom providing a national increase in population, new school facilities were needed -- as long as they were not former black schools. Although Blacksburg utilized a former black elementary school for an integrated school, this was an exception.⁷⁵ As can be seen in the above table, the number of white students over five years old in Montgomery grew at two to three times the rate of the number of black students over five between 1950 and 1960. The number of black children under the age of five was shrinking dramatically, 41 percent, while the whites in that age group grew at a steady rate.

⁷⁴The census in 1950 and 1960 does not stipulate what race the non-whites are, yet it can be assumed that most of the non-whites were black residents.

⁷⁵Blacksburg used the formerly black school on Harding Avenue as an integrated elementary school after building additions to the school. Jacqueline Eaves, interview by author, 11 March 1996.

Another reason Montgomery County fully desegregated was because integration had advantages over Freedom of Choice plans. Freedom of Choice was not only costly, but also inconvenient. According to Gary Orfield, "Unpredictable sudden changes in enrollment at various schools could wreck months of work in developing detailed plans for teacher assignments, class assignments, and even transportation." Attempts to maintain segregation piece-meal was divisive to community race relations as well.⁷⁶

Furthermore, Orfield describes one federal official who felt that some school superintendents wanted to be pressured into full desegregation and would use "the Office of Education as a scapegoat for resolving an emotional issue and creating a united and efficient school system in place of duplicate facilities."⁷⁷ In doing so, localities saved money on electricity, janitorial services, salaries, and capital improvements formerly needed to keep black schools open.

An additional reason Montgomery County may have desegregated in 1966 was that because of the small number of black residents integration did not threaten white residents. When two coal mines closed in the county in

⁷⁶Orfield, 227.

⁷⁷Ibid.

1955, many blacks left the area to seek employment elsewhere.⁷⁸ As can be seen in the table below, from 1950 through 1970 the white population of Montgomery rose 61 percent, while the black population slipped 10 percent. Therefore, the black population was actually decreasing rapidly in proportion to the white population. This situation differed dramatically from Prince Edward County where the white residents gave up their public schools to avoid desegregation.

Population of Montgomery County by Race, 1940-1980

	White	Black	Other	Total
1940 ⁷⁹	-----	-----	-----	21,206
1950	28,192	1,569	19	29,780
1960	31,394	1,422	107	32,923
1970	45,519	1,416	222	47,157
1980	60,179	1,788	999	63,516

source: U.S. Census of Population: 1940-1980.

⁷⁸Jessie Eaves, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 27 April 1996.

⁷⁹The Census gives only aggregate numbers for 1940.

Perhaps one of the most important reasons Montgomery County desegregated completely in 1966 was due to bi-racial cooperation in leadership and organization. Through the efforts of Reverends Smyth and Richmond, many in the white community took a moral stand. Because of their work and that of others in the Human Relations Council, race relations were improving. The organization helped the community prepare for integration. As Phillip Price has suggested, the influx of educated Northern whites into Blacksburg no doubt aided this transition.

C.I. contributed much to favorable race relations. In a history of Montgomery County written in 1957, the author contends that "there was splendid race co-operation fostered and engendered by the Industrial Institute located at Christiansburg" and "there has always been in this school a marked absence of ostentation, but at the same time an insistence upon thoroughness of training in both academic and industrial subjects. There is probably no part of the United States where the two races get along better than in Montgomery County."⁸⁰ While segregation, paternalism, and racism existed, it is apparent that Montgomery County was indeed unusual.

⁸⁰Crush, 132.

The Closing of Christiansburg Institute

Some black residents were not enthusiastic about desegregation. By 1964, residents knew that the black schools would soon close due to the decline in enrollments.⁸¹ As black residents began to transfer their elementary children to white schools, they met with resistance from the principal of Friends Elementary School. The principal, Mr. Day, told a PTA meeting that "if parents here don't think this school is good enough for kids, they should walk softly and carry a big stick."⁸² In other words, blacks should support their black schools, at least until the schools closed after full integration.

Robert Dobson, a former teacher at C.I., recalls "most of the blacks that I had an opportunity to speak with back at the time were bitterly against the closing of the school. Most of them voiced that the education that the black students were receiving already was heads and shoulders over or better than the education that the white students were receiving. I think they were basing that view mainly on the fact that all the teachers [at C.I.] were specialists in their areas and coupled with the fact that discipline did

⁸¹Cora Pack, interview by author, Christiansburg, Virginia, 16 March 1995.

⁸²Ibid.

not appear to be much of a problem, [and] more time was spent on task than [in] the white setting."⁸³

Dobson remembers that many blacks felt that it was a waste of the taxpayers' money to close C.I. The buildings were physically sound and the students received experience in trades such as barbering, cosmetology, auto-mechanics, brick-laying, and carpentry. Classes in these trades were not offered in integrated schools in 1965-1966.⁸⁴

Many former graduates of C.I. contend that if given the choice, they would have chosen to attend the segregated school rather than attend an integrated one. One graduate, Cora Pack, claims that she transferred her children to white schools simply because she felt that they would get better jobs if they attended an integrated school.⁸⁵ Despite the loss of black schooling, many blacks felt that "it was time" to integrate and break the barriers of Jim Crow.⁸⁶

In the Spring of 1966 Christiansburg Institute held its graduation ceremonies for the 22 students in its senior class. Total school enrollment had dropped to 120 students

⁸³Robert Dobson, interview by author, Christiansburg, Virginia, 5 March 1996.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Cora Pack, interview by author, Christiansburg, Virginia, 16 March 1995.

⁸⁶Jacqueline Eaves, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 16 February 1996.

by January 1966. This was a 35.3 percent decline in enrollment since 1957. The school was to close after the class of 1966 graduated.⁸⁷

The fate of the school was in the hands of the county. Montgomery County owned C.I., and blacks were relatively helpless in deciding C.I.'s future. The sale of C.I. was quite controversial due to the stipulation made by the Friends' Freedmen's Association when it deeded the school to Montgomery, Pulaski, and Radford in 1947. The Association had stipulated that C.I. must be used for black education. Despite the concerns of black citizens, C.I. was sold. In 1967 Montgomery County sold most of the property for \$330,000.⁸⁸ Integration was now the future and apparently black schools belonged in the past.

Montgomery was unique because of its unusual circumstances. Race relations were relatively good in comparison to other sections of the state, integration did not threaten white residents due to the county's low percentage of black residents, and residents developed bi-racial cooperation. Finally, because of C.I.'s excellence, black students were not anxious to escape segregated education. Although black residents were active in pushing

⁸⁷Smith and DeHart, 64.

⁸⁸Ibid., 62-66; Swain, 251.

integration, they had numerous reasons to want their children to remain at C.I.

Montgomery County fits in a desegregation spectrum which ranges from Prince Edward, Virginia to Hyde County, North Carolina. Both counties have a much higher percentage of blacks than Montgomery.⁸⁹ John Egerton describes how whites in Prince Edward would do anything, including sacrifice their public schools, to avoid any integration. David Cecelski details how blacks in Hyde County protested over the closing of the black school.⁹⁰ Cecelski explains, "In Prince Edward County, Virginia, white leaders had chosen to close all public schools rather than send white children with black children" and "Hyde County blacks had chosen not to attend public schools rather than accept desegregation on racist terms."⁹¹ Neither such incident occurred in Montgomery. The white schools remained open and the black high school, and most of the black elementary schools, closed.

⁸⁹Cecelski is a bit vague on this point, but remarks that blacks made up half of the "mainland population." Cecelski, 21. Prince Edward's percentage of black population was 44.6 in 1950. Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945-1966, 116.

⁹⁰John Egerton, Shades of Grey: Dispatches from the Modern South (Baton rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1991); David S. Cecelski, 113.

⁹¹Ibid.

White Montgomery County residents controlled desegregation in the county. Although whites were not committed to resistance and the county integrated its schools relatively quickly, whites denied blacks participation in making desegregation decisions. If blacks in Montgomery County had held more control, as they did in Hyde County, they surely would not have closed C.I.

Chapter Five

The Death of Jim Crow

Throughout the early 1960s, blacks took action to bring segregation to an end. They fought not only for integrated schools, but also for an integrated community. Because southern states, including Virginia, passed anti-NAACP laws in the 1950s, blacks developed other civil rights organizations to fill the vacuum left by the NAACP. Unlike later organizations, the NAACP was an ineffective tool in mass demonstrations.¹

Two organizations became important to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s -- the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). These organizations were comprised of mainly young blacks, along with a number of northern whites. The goals and tactics of both SNCC and CORE differed with those of the NAACP. While the organizations changed over the course of the 1960s, initially racial integration was their top priority. Both utilized non-violent protest to change the South's segregated society. CORE initiated the Freedom Rides in the early 1960s, challenging the South's segregated accommodations. SNCC began the sit-in movement

¹Morris, 35-38.

in 1960. Members, mostly southern black college students, would "sit in" white restaurants and other facilities until they were served.²

Like many youth across the South during the 1960s, the black youth in Montgomery County and at Virginia Tech began to take matters into their own hands. Although SNCC and CORE were not active in the community, blacks formed other organizations which had similar goals and tactics. Activism on the part of individuals also influenced desegregation in the community and at Virginia Tech.

²There are many sources on both SNCC and CORE. See Anne Moody's book Coming of Age in Mississippi for an autobiographical account; Aldon Morris discusses the differences in tactics and goals in The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement; Allen J. Matusow discusses these organizations in the context of 1960s liberalism in The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s (New York: Harper & Row, 1984); for an account of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the parent organization to SNCC, see David J. Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York: Vintage Books, 1988); and for a general overview of the movement in the 1960s, see John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr.'s From Slavery to Freedom, 492-531.

Breaking the Color Barrier at Virginia Tech and Radford College

James L. Whitehurst came to Virginia Tech in 1959, and in 1963 he was the fourth black graduate from the school. Whitehurst wanted to major in electrical engineering and felt that Tech was the best school for him to attend because it "'had better laboratories, better professors and better equipment'" than black schools.³

Despite the benefits of a Virginia Tech education, Whitehurst faced both segregation and racism at the school. Like Matthew Winston, he had to live off campus with black families, and he could not eat on campus. Although a high school football star, he was not allowed to play on Tech's team. The coach told him that if he joined the team, they would have to leave him at home when they played against teams in Alabama. Whitehurst was given a uniform, however, and continued to go to practices, watching the players from the sidelines. After weeks of persistence, he gave up his ambition to play on Tech's team, but continued to push other segregation barriers at the school.⁴

³Michael Ollove, "Fighter Broke Racial Barriers at Virginia Tech," Roanoke Time, 13 May 1979.

⁴Ibid.

During his time at Tech, Whitehurst successfully challenged other Jim Crow policies. After his sophomore year, Whitehurst demanded living accommodations on campus. The administration finally gave in, but put Whitehurst in Lane Hall by himself. The residence hall could accommodate 124 students, yet he stayed alone.⁵

In his junior year Whitehurst challenged segregated social activities by making it known that he was going to attend the annual ring dance. President Newman called Whitehurst into his office, as he done with Matthew Winston four years earlier, and strongly urged him not to attend. Like Winston, Whitehurst did not say whether he would attend the dance. Unlike Winston, however, he planned to attend and threatened the university with a court injunction to stop the dance if he were not allowed to attend.⁶ Whitehurst did attend, making Tech's 1962 ring dance the school's first integrated social event.⁷ Jim Crow segregation continued to weaken at Tech. In his senior year, Whitehurst was "allowed to move into a residence hall with whites and to eat with everyone else."⁸

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

According to Whitehurst, white students were supportive of him and his attempts to break the color line at Tech. When he faced opposition from the administration concerning the ring dance, a number of white students offered to circulate petitions for him to attend. When Whitehurst and his date arrived at the dance, they were applauded by the other students.⁹

In 1966 Tech began sending recruiters to eastern Virginia in order to entice blacks to attend the university. That year twenty blacks were admitted to Tech. This included six women, the first black female students at the school. There were only two blacks at Virginia Tech when the twenty arrived.¹⁰

There are two primary reasons that Virginia Tech recruited and admitted twenty-two blacks in 1966. First, the Byrd Machine's influence after massive resistance weakened considerably, and Walter Newman was no longer president of Tech, having left the post in 1962. Virginia Tech's new president, Thomas Hahn, had great visions for the school.¹¹ Hahn needed funding to carry out an extensive building program that included the construction of

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Elaine Carter, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 12 March 1996.

¹¹Kinnear, 416-420.

dormitories, student centers, and Lane Stadium. Hahn was seeking to transform Tech into a "multipurpose land-grant university with a high quality program."¹²

The second reason that Tech actively integrated in 1966 was because federal funding became contingent on desegregation: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act applied to all federally assisted programs, including higher education. Even before the Civil Rights Act was passed, Virginia Tech was dependent on federal funding. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 "provided an original authorization of approximately \$1 billion for basic science, mathematics, and foreign language programs in the form of student loans, equipment acquisition, and teacher training institutes." In 1963, Congress authorized over \$1 billion in grants for classroom construction in colleges.¹³ In that year the school received \$3,453,478 in federal funding.¹⁴

The availability of federal funds continued to increase and Tech wanted its share to carry out its building program. Congress appropriated additional funds for higher education

¹²Ibid., 447.

¹³Eugene Eidenberg and Roy D. Morey, An Act of Congress; The Legislative Process and the Making of Education Policy (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1969), 16.

¹⁴Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University: Report of the President, vol. 58, no. 7, July 1965. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University: Report of the President, vol. 62, no. 10, October 1969.

when it passed the 1965 Higher Education Act. The act "authorized a three-year, \$2.5 billion program which included funds for undergraduates and graduate student scholarships, libraries and library training, ... community development projects, and construction grants."¹⁵ By 1969 Tech's federal funding increased to \$7,076,949.¹⁶

The year before Virginia Tech admitted 20 black students, nearby Radford College admitted six.¹⁷ Alexis Johnson and Jessie Eaves were among the black students who attended the all-girl college in 1965. Ms. Johnson, also a 1965 graduate from C.I., says she never experienced any racism from the students, administration, or the professors. The only negative experiences she had involved people who were not students, mostly white males visiting the college.¹⁸

Jessie Eaves does recall problems in her English class at Radford. The professor would call on her every day, while not calling on other students. She never could figure

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Jessie Eaves believes that there was one black student before 1965. Jessie Eaves, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 26 April 1996.

¹⁸Alexis Johnson, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 17 April 1996; Jessie Eaves, telephone interview by author, 27 April 1996.

out what the problem was, but she says that she did "terrible" in the course. After graduating fourth in her class at C.I., she found it difficult to accept not doing well at Radford.¹⁹

White Radford students did not display racist attitudes, but some of their parents did. Both Ms. Johnson and Ms. Eaves remember that one black student, Laverne, lived on campus and roomed with a white student. When the white student's parents visited, they were shocked that their daughter's roommate was a black student. The parents made their daughter change rooms.²⁰

Although Alexis Johnson remained at Radford for only one year, she feels that her experience was beneficial. Before then, she did not think very highly of white people. At Radford she learned that not all white people were racists.²¹ Integration brought greater understanding from both whites and blacks.

Jessie Eaves also left Radford after one year. She also feels that her experience was beneficial. Although she found it difficult to commute to school as they did, she

¹⁹Jessie Eaves, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 27 April 1996.

²⁰Ibid.; Alexis Johnson, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 17 April 1996.

²¹Ibid.

believes that her time at Radford was a good learning experience.²²

Farewell to Jim Crow in Montgomery County

In the early 1960s young Montgomery County blacks organized to challenge segregation in their community. Jacqueline Eaves and other students formed Students for Human Rights.²³ The group was an off-shoot of the local NAACP Chapter and was comprised of children of black leaders in the community as well as local college students.²⁴

According to Eaves, the organization approached the local NAACP and informed them that they wanted to begin sit-ins to force the desegregation of facilities in the area. The NAACP wanted the students to "slow down," but the students refused. The Students for Human Rights sent a

²²Jessie Eaves, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 27 April 1996.

²³Jessie and Jacqueline Eaves are not directly related. Eaves is their married name, and Jessie says that their husbands may be distantly related.

²⁴Jacqueline Eaves, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 16 February 1996.

letter to the Town Council in Blacksburg informing them of what they intended to do.²⁵

Between 1962 and 1963 the students participated in sit-ins in local restaurants. According to Eaves, they went to one restaurant in Blacksburg where the owner had commented that "he would not let a nigger work in his kitchen." The students sat down and ordered a meal. When the meal came, they took one bite of the food and left. Eaves laughs and says that she and the others "knew that they spit in our food." The students never went back, but they proved their point.²⁶

Eaves says that the group went to the Lyric Theater as well, where they encountered little resistance. For the first time, Eaves sat up front, but "couldn't figure out what the fuss was about." She contends the seating was much better in the balcony! So much for the logic of segregation.²⁷

Eaves recalls another less successful sit-in at the Hokie House in Blacksburg. She was not there, but knew people who were involved. Since Blacksburg was such a small town, everyone knew everyone else and during the Hokie House

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

incident, the owner threatened to call the students' parents. The owner apparently called the kids by name and threatened to pour clorox on them and the sit-in ended.²⁸

Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination in public accommodations, only the continued persistence of black residents made Jim Crow end. During her senior year at C.I., Alexis Johnson joined the Council on Human Relations. Similar to the Students for Human Rights, the Council held sit-ins at local restaurants. Like Phillip Price, Ms. Johnson watched the news and saw the violence in other sections of the South. She was apprehensive that during the sit-ins whites would put mustard and ketchup in her hair as they had done in other areas. She had been taught passive resistance, but feared she could not maintain her passivity if whites were to do this to her. Luckily, such incidents never happened and the group successfully integrated a number of restaurants, including Hardee's Restaurant and Pete's Drive-in.²⁹

Jessie Eaves recalls that blacks did not have a problem integrating their community. She feels this was because everyone, whites and blacks, grew up together. Ms. Eaves

²⁸Ibid., George "Snake" Page, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 16 January 1996.

²⁹Alexis Johnson, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 17 April 1996.

also contends that integration went smoothly in Blacksburg because the community was "so friendly." She says, "You didn't have the violence that you had in a lot of other places." After the first sit-ins, integration gradually occurred without incident.³⁰

Black Educators in the Integrated Schools

Black students were not the only ones integrating schools. Although black teachers and principals in many communities across the South found themselves without jobs after desegregation, this was not the case in Montgomery.³¹ The School Board found positions for the black educators after schools were integrated in 1966. The teachers went to Shawsville, Blacksburg, Radford, Dublin, and Christiansburg.³²

³⁰Jessie Eaves, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 27 April 1996.

³¹Historians and educators have discussed and documented how many black teachers and principals lost their jobs during desegregation. See Richardson, The Development of Negro Education in Virginia, 1831-1970, 112-122. According to Cecelski, between 1968 and 1971, at least 1,000 black teachers were fired and 5,000 white teachers were hired. Cecelski, 8-9.

³²Robert Dobson, interview by author, Christiansburg, Virginia, 5 March 1996.

According to Raynard Hale, former Superintendent of Schools for Montgomery County 1967-1974, the teachers at C.I. were "outstanding" and some shortly became heads of their departments in the integrated school system. Hale feels that integration went very smoothly due to the leadership of the principal of C.I., John F. Banks, and to the "quality of the faculty."³³

In 1966 Robert Dobson was one of two black teachers transferred from C.I. to Christiansburg High. He had taught business at C.I. and had helped coach football and basketball. Dobson had also formed a Judo Team because of his experience in martial arts while in the military.³⁴

Dobson recalls that during 1965 Montgomery used Freedom of Choice, but in 1966 there was no choice - integration had to take place. When he went to Christiansburg High, he continued to teach business, and because "Christiansburg High had even more [extra-curricular] offerings than C.I.," he was the 8th grade basketball and football coach. In addition, Mr. Dobson was the yearbook sponsor and worked

³³Raynard T. Hale, interview by Frank T. Hammons, 13 March 1990, "Oral History of the Public School Principalship," Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

³⁴Robert Dobson, interview by author, Christiansburg, Virginia, 5 March 1996.

with the sandlot program in basketball, football, and baseball.³⁵

While black students were being denied the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities in other localities after integration, Dobson contends "because of schools becoming totally integrated it had to be in every respect. The blacks were not denied the opportunity to play sports or to join clubs." Social activities such as proms continued to be sponsored.³⁶

Dobson recalls that the culture of white and black students did differ and this came to light during integration. He remembers that the white students had "better quality of dress," but the black students had more "pride of dress." The black students were neater and took care of what they had because it was limited. This was due to the emphasis that C.I. had put on appearance and self-

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid. It seems that there is a strong correlation between full integration and full participation in extra-curricular activities. Some cities and counties, such as Norfolk and Prince Edward, were not fully integrated in the 1960s. Norfolk integrated in 1973 under court order, and Prince Edward remained relatively segregated well into the 1980s. Cool, "A Study of the Norfolk Desegregation Process," 68-98. Early desegregation in nearby Floyd County was similar to Montgomery County in that blacks were then denied participation in extra-curricular activities. Bee, "It was a Quiet Day in Floyd."

discipline, which carried over into the desegregated school system.³⁷

Regarding the desegregation process itself, Dobson says, "I found the transition to be quite smooth. I didn't encounter any problems as strange as that may sound." Having come from an integrated area in Pennsylvania, Dobson remembers that "it was not a shocking experience at all." Dobson also had been in an integrated military. Both experiences aided Mr. Dobson in his transition to an integrated school system.³⁸

Dobson recalls that he got along quite well with the white teachers because he knew them through the community. He had known them through sporting events, community activities, and simply meeting in the grocery store. He feels that since there were just two black teachers initially at Christiansburg High, it was very easy for them to blend into the school: "There were no problems whatsoever."³⁹

Dobson continued teaching at Christiansburg High from 1966 to 1973. In 1973 Montgomery County opened a new high school in Christiansburg and changed the old school to a

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

middle school. That year Dobson was offered the choice between going to the high school as a teacher or staying at the middle school as an administrator. He chose to stay at the middle school. In 1973 he was a guidance counselor and the next year became an assistant principal, a position he held until he retired in 1991.⁴⁰

Rosa Holmes, a black elementary teacher, also recalls that the desegregation process went smoothly. Mrs. Holmes had taught at Friends Elementary in Christiansburg, and after desegregation she was transferred to Margaret Beeks Elementary in Blacksburg. She was initially afraid that she would not get along with the children, yet Mrs. Holmes found that she got along as well, if not better, with the white children as the black children. Similarly, she got along well with the white teachers in the integrated schools.⁴¹

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Rosa Holmes, "Black Appalachian Oral History Project," interview by Michael Cooke, 13 March 1991, Tape Recording, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

Post-Jim Crow:

The Effects of Desegregation on Montgomery County Schools

Overall, integration was a progressive and positive step for Montgomery County residents, but it did not come without sacrifice. Blacks actively organized to integrate their community, yet they were really the ones who lost the most -- their black schooling. Indirectly, the closing of C.I. caused the extended black community in the area to fragment. After integration, blacks went to school in their own counties and towns. Black students from Blacksburg would not no longer go to school with blacks from Christiansburg, Elliston, Radford, or Pulaski.⁴²

Raymond Wolters claims "the story of desegregation was not as simple as Kluger's morality tale."⁴³ He argues, "By the 1980s there was a growing recognition that the public schools had suffered from many of the changes associated with desegregation." He says that "contrary to the expectations of those who favored desegregation, the quality of public education available to blacks is generally no

⁴²Jessie Eaves, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 27 April 1996; Elaine Carter, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 12 March 1996.

⁴³Raymond Wolters, The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 281-284.

better than it was in 1954."⁴⁴ Disagreeing with Wolters, Rosemary C. Salomone writes, "research evidence suggests that racially integrated education not only improves achievement among black students, but better prepares them to function effectively in the larger society."⁴⁵

Wolters is extremely condescending and unsympathetic to black Americans. He contends that the school districts most affected by desegregation have changed "black family life," and the rate of illegitimate births among blacks has increased due to desegregation.⁴⁶ Wolters's evidence is suspect and his logic is certainly faulty. Attitudes such as Wolters's inhibit proper assessment of the desegregation process.

Schools in Montgomery County did benefit from integration, however. The increase in governmental spending during the 1960s, even with the desegregation strings attached, directly affected Montgomery County schools. By 1967 Montgomery was receiving \$198,000 in federal funding

⁴⁴Ibid., 281, 284.

⁴⁵Rosemary C. Salomone, Equal Education Under the Law: Legal Rights and Federal Policy in the Post-Brown Era (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 77. Also, for governmental documentation on desegregation, see U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Twenty Years After Brown: A Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights (Washington, D.C., 1977).

⁴⁶Ibid., 70.

for education. Under Public Law 874, Montgomery County received \$135,062 in 1967. The School Board obtained other federal funds under the Forest Reserve Fund (due to the location of the Jefferson National Forest in the county), the National Defense Education Act of 1958, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.⁴⁷

Many of these funds were appropriated in order to help disadvantaged children obtain equal education. Montgomery County used these funds to provide instructional programs to improve students' communicative skills. The county used funding under Title II of the Elementary and Secondary School Act to purchase 13,000 books and to offer summer school in 1968. The students selected for summer school were the ones with "the greatest educational need."⁴⁸

In the twelve years after Brown, Montgomery County moved to a fully desegregated school system. Two-room schools were no longer in existence. The smallest school was a four-room elementary. Because a dual school system was no longer used and because of the increase in federal funding to education, the county changed from a rural school system to one with modern facilities, instruction, and

⁴⁷Montgomery News Messenger, 30 May 1968.

⁴⁸Ibid.

curriculum.⁴⁹ Integration paved the way for federal funding; both combined to improve the quality of education for whites and blacks in Montgomery County.

Despite these losses, integration was successful and, Montgomery County residents were able to avoid resegregation. Robert Pratt describes this phenomena in Richmond. Because wealthier whites and blacks fled the inner city during the 1970s, resegregation has occurred. Pratt concludes: "It is perhaps cruelly ironic that steps designed to bring the races closer together succeeded in only driving them further apart."⁵⁰ Resegregation did not occur in Montgomery County probably because of its rural locale -- there was no suburb for wealthy whites and blacks to flee.

After desegregation, clearly one negative outcome for blacks in Montgomery County was the loss of their black school. Unfortunately C.I. was closed and sold, confirming Cecelski's convictions that blacks suffered losses during desegregation.⁵¹ Blacks verbally protested, but in the end it seemed integration was worth the price of losing C.I.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Pratt, 448.

⁵¹Cecelski, 8-30.

Amanda DeHart and James Wesley Smith write "Blacks in Montgomery County and Southwest Virginia, thus paid a dear price for integration. They lost an institution vital to their heritage and African-Americans in general ... Accordingly, the institution now lives only as a dream in the hearts and minds of individuals once associated with the school and in the annals of recorded history."⁵²

⁵²Smith, 66.

Conclusion

During the years of Jim Crow, Montgomery County black residents faced many of the same limitations in their lives that other southern blacks faced. There were limited opportunities for education and employment. As Elaine Carter puts it, accommodation to whites was necessary for survival. Schooling often was unequal, especially on the elementary level.

Montgomery County was unique, however, because of C.I. and relatively peaceful race relations. The low percentage of black residents made integration easier. Whites were not fearful of desegregation because they knew that it would not affect them as it might in other localities as Prince Edward. Through the efforts of Archie Richmond, Ellison Smyth, and others willing to push the social limits of segregation, integration came as a bi-racial product. Virginia Tech eventually was influential in bringing integration, not so much due to its own desegregation, but mainly because the University was growing. Because of this growth, well-educated, younger whites were moving into the area.

In retrospect, it is clear that desegregation gave Montgomery County residents the freedom to abandon the dual school system, which saved the county money so that it could

Conclusion

concentrate on developing quality education in integrated institutions. Increased federal funding helped the county shed its rural school house image and become a modern system. Montgomery County blacks followed the patterns of activism prevalent across the South. Blacks organized and went to the school board to obtain the equipment, money, and eventually buildings they needed in their schools. They fought for the equalization of facilities. After Brown, they left their black schooling and went into the white schools, sometimes with only one other black student with them. These students were minorities by race and number.

Blacks gave up an important institution in order to achieve integration. C.I. stressed self-awareness and confidence, even within the segregated society. Furthermore, C.I., along with the black churches, provided an important institution that fostered black activism.

Desegregation affected the cultural identities of blacks insofar that their community was fragmented. No longer were the families in Elliston tied to the families in Christiansburg, and so on. With this fragmentation, one would assume that the activism among black residents has weakened. C.I. had given them the teachers, role models, knowledge, and confidence to push through the barriers of Jim Crow. They did this, but then were left without the security of this important institution.

Conclusion

Yet the Christiansburg Institute Alumni Association, founded in 1976, keeps the older members of the community together, whether it's to attend reunions or simply by sending out its newsletters. Through their efforts, they are working towards the cultural center which may help bring a fragmented community back together.

The history of Montgomery County's black education is important and significant because it demonstrates that blacks in Southwestern Virginia were active in both equalization and integration. Despite their small numbers, they were able to organize for change. C.I. provided a springboard for this organization. It is clear that especially in areas with a low percentage of blacks, the black school experience was important in bringing the larger community together.

Unlike other areas of the South, Montgomery County blacks were not denied participation in the school culture after full desegregation. Due to bi-racial cooperation, a small black population, and excellent black teachers, integration was complete in 1966. As Robert Dobson recalls, integration had to take place in every way.

Black activism in southwestern Virginia has generally been over-looked by historians. The omission of their struggles against Jim Crow should be rectified. Activism did not simply occur in urban areas or in areas with high

percentages of blacks. Activism was imperative wherever Jim Crow took up residence, including Montgomery County.

Epilogue:

Thirty Years After Desegregation

The world has changed since the days of segregation. Racism still exists, but black Americans have freed themselves from Jim Crow. Even so, there is much to be done concerning race relations in Montgomery County, Virginia, and the nation.

Thirty years have gone by since the last class graduated from C.I. in 1966. The C.I. Alumni Association is strong within the community, and they keep in touch with members throughout the United States as far away as California.

Graduates look back on their alma mater with fond remembrances. Jacqueline Eaves graduated in the class of 1964 and is chair of many of the alumni association's committees. She feels that black education today is well-rounded, but that "they [blacks] are missing part of their culture." She remembers when she was growing up, there "was no such thing as 'I can't.'" Eaves says that at C.I. you learned to present yourself in front of groups and to have confidence. The school was an "extended family situation then in the black community." She believes that there is

not enough time for that in schools today. There's not enough individual attention.¹

Jacqueline Eaves contends that expectations have changed as well. "In growing up, in order to exist in the world as is now, you have to stand out. If you're a black American, you'll have to stand out a little more. You may not always be the best, but you try to be the best."²

Jessie Eaves also comments on the loss of C.I.: "Maybe I'm wrong saying this, but I think the black students did better." It seems to Ms. Eaves that blacks accomplished more in life when they graduated from C.I.³

Like Jessie Eaves, Elaine Carter sees changes in the black community since C.I. closed. C.I. had brought blacks together from different areas of the county. Students were able to get to know other blacks from Elliston, Christiansburg, Blacksburg, and even from other counties such as Pulaski and Floyd. That has changed since the closing of C.I. Blacks attend school in their own

¹Jacqueline Eaves, interview by author, Blacksburg Virginia, 16 February 1996.

²Ibid.

³Jessie Eaves, telephone interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 27 April 1996. Jessie and Jacqueline both have the married name Eaves and are not directly related.

communities, and the once large black community has fragmented.⁴

Carter, Eaves, and others in the alumni association are trying to make C.I. more than just a dream in the 1990s: they are working to form a cultural center at C.I. They envision the center as a learning environment for the community as a whole. "It could be a resource for learning about each other," says Eaves. She sees the cultural center as a legacy for C.I. Tech Professors and administrators are helping with the project as well.⁵

While the center is still in the planning stages, it is certain that again C.I. will provide an important function in the community. During segregation, C.I. was an outstanding educational institution for blacks. Thirty years after desegregation, the institution will be used once again to foster education, this time for all the people in Montgomery County.

Virginia Tech's first black graduates have fond feelings for their alma mater as well. After graduating from Tech, Matthew Winston worked at NASA for 36 years until his retirement in 1995. His son, Matthew Winston, Jr., not

⁴Elaine Carter, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 12 March 1996.

⁵Jacqueline Eaves, interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 16 February 1996.

only graduated from Tech in 1990, but now works for the university in public relations.⁶ Charlie Yates has returned to Tech, but now he teaches as a professor of engineering.

After his graduation, James Whitehurst worked as an engineer for DuPont and then became an Air Force fighter pilot. While he was in the Air Force, he became Virginia Tech's first black member of the board of visitors. In the early 1970s, Whitehurst went to law school at the University of Virginia and in 1979 became Doug Wilder's law partner.⁷

⁶Matthew Winston, Sr., interview by author, Blacksburg, Virginia, 20 April 1996.

⁷Ollove, "Fighter Broke Racial Barriers at Virginia Tech."

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