

## Chapter One: The Problem

“Separate school children by wealth and the result is class misunderstanding and hatred. Separate by race and the result is war. Separate them by color and they grow up without learning the tremendous truth that it is impossible to judge the mind of a man by the color of his face. Is there any truth that America needs to learn more?”

W.E.B. DuBois  
Crisis  
November 1910

### Context

Section one of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution states that, All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of the citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. (United States Constitution, Art. XIV, §1)

Minority students for decades had their right usurped because they did not have the same access to materials, teachers, and facilities during the first half of the twentieth century (Myers & Loury, 1997). As a result, the equal protection clause was used as a springboard to desegregation litigation in an effort to secure more upward educational opportunities for these children (Stuart, 1993). According to Brown (1997), desegregation of schools, based on the Fourteenth Amendment, had an impact on both self-determination and a tolerance for racial and ethnic diversity.

The idea of self-determination, being able to make one's own choices, is essential. From the beginning, America has been a melting pot of culture, race, and religious affiliation; therefore, restricting African-Americans personal options is anathema to the concept of self-determination. "The emancipatory function of the knowing individual in America served as a means to attenuate the sense of ethnic and religious group identity" (Brown, 1997, p. 1034). Many of the conflicts that had occurred between these groups in Europe did not manifest themselves in America thus contributing to a reduction in their ethnic and racial identity (Brown, 1997).

During the Civil Rights period, the concept of self-determination was expanded to America's African-American citizens. While America had recognized African-Americans as individuals, they had not allowed them the opportunity to overthrow their subjugation and function as knowing individuals. The Civil Right Movement freed African-Americans "from the conceptual imprisonment attached to the color of their skin" (Brown, 1997, p.1036). Thus when the federal courts engaged in school desegregation, they were attempting to remedy the past vestiges of discrimination.

By exposing students to people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds it also allows them to be more informed about their own backgrounds. Awareness of their backgrounds is necessary to allow students to gain the ability to obtain self-reflective position from which they can accept or reject their received traditions. Thus mandatory desegregation can be viewed as enhancing the ability of learners to become self-determining. (Brown, 1997, p. 1037)

According to Brown (1997), tolerance is a "showing of understanding or leniency for the conduct or ideas conflicting with one's own" (p. 1038). In order for desegregation to

work, African-Americans had to be accepted by white society for being black. It was important to ensure

that public school students internalize the values of toleration for racial and ethnic differences is just as important as them internalizing the values for self-determination. Exposing children to those from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds assimilates them into a pluralistic culture and thereby prepares them for participation in our democratic society. The court correctly stated that all students benefit from racially and ethnically diverse schools. (Brown, 1997, p. 1039)

As early as 1952, at a White House Conference on Children and Youth, proponents of desegregation pointed out that minority children often suffered from psychological harm brought on by segregation. They had feelings of inferiority, possessed a defeatist attitude (Armor, 1995), and learned that opportunity is often “color” coded (Myers & Lowery, 1997). It was evident to the conferees that poor children, African-Americans in particular, paid the highest prices for the lack of educational opportunity. Their lower ambitions and their lower self-esteem victimized them and they appeared doomed to be permanent members of the underclass (Stuart, 1993).

Education is the most valuable possession that we provide our children. It enables them to go out into society armed with knowledge and with a sense of confidence. It affords them the opportunity to become an integral part of the polity. It is a prerequisite for success, for professional work, and for appreciation of cultural values (Hudgins, 1970).

Education also aids in the elimination of racial barriers (Pratt, 1992). There is merit in this educational interaction. According to Joondeph (1998), the policy of desegregation has been an unqualified success. The gap in standardized scores for African-American

children has decreased by half. At the same time, scores for white children has remained the same. Other educational benefits for black children included fewer teen pregnancies, less delinquent behavior, more high school graduates, and higher career aspirations.

To many Virginians, and others throughout the South, the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954) decision represented an intolerable expansion of federal powers. It, in fact, helped to remove the stigma of inferiority and degradation that African-Americans had lived with for many years and enabled them to receive an education comparable to that of white children (Alexander & Alexander, 1998).

Prior to 1963, Danville, Virginia, was a small quiet mill town. Dan River, Inc. and the tobacco industry were the main focus of the local economy and provided the main employment opportunities within the community. Downtown Danville was a thriving business entity. Located on the North Carolina line in the “black belt” region of Virginia, Danville also operated as a segregated society. The lunch counter at Woolworth’s had separate sections for blacks and whites. In the basement at Belk-Legget’s, there were water fountains that were marked “For Blacks Only” Or “For Whites Only.” The main branch of the public library on Main Street was off limits to the black citizens of the community. Danville operated a dual school system maintaining separate schools for African-American and white students (Student # 2, interview, October 25, 2001; Teacher # 2, interview, November 6, 2001).

The Supreme Court found in Brown v. the Board of Education (1954) that separate facilities for blacks and whites violated the Fourteenth Amendment and that school systems needed to desegregate. In their order, they failed to set a time frame for desegregation. In a subsequent case, Brown v. the Board of Education (1955), the Supreme Court expanded its

ruling to include a time provision. In spite of these rulings, Danville made little progress toward school desegregation.

However, in 1963, Danville was in the process of changing. The African-American community had grown tired of the segregated lunchrooms, the segregated libraries, and the segregated schools. The protests, marches, and sit-ins that had been part of the national and state news for years, had come to Danville. Martin Luther King made an appearance in Danville in an attempt to galvanize the black community in its pursuit for equality. Tensions were high between the black and white communities. African-Americans marched on Main Street and conducted a sit-in at City Hall as they sought equality in their everyday lives and in their education (Teacher # 2, interview, November 6, 2001).

In 1964-1965 school year Danville Public Schools began its conversion from a dual educational system to a unitary system as the first African-American students opted to attend George Washington High School rather than Langston High School that fall (Teacher # 1, interview, October 25, 2001). Freedom of choice was fully introduced to Danville Public Schools during the 1965-1966 school year, and color ceased to be the sole determinant of school assignment and total desegregation was planned for the fall of 1970 (Medley, 1972).

#### Purpose and Significance

Fifty years after the Brown (1954 and 1955) decisions, desegregation remains a timeless topic worthy of continued exploration. If the study of history and of the decisions made by its government and school leaders are important and “if one agrees with the premise that the present and the future are built upon our knowledge of the past” (Modlin, 1998, p.1), then there are several reasons for continued study of desegregation:

1. It allows us the opportunity to look at leaders and their decisions at a local, state, and national level.
2. It allows us the opportunity to assess the impact of their decisions.
3. It shows us where our schools have been and provides educational leaders with direction for the future.
4. As it relates to Danville, it provides us with another piece of the total picture of desegregation in Virginia.

The desegregation and massive resistance movements in Virginia's public schools have been chronicled in a number of books, studies, and dissertations. In August of 1971, Dallas Crowe submitted a dissertation to the University of Virginia in which he traced the desegregation of Charlottesville City Schools. In his work, he focused on the political systems in Charlottesville and their interaction during this time (Crowe, 1971). James Benfield, in 1976, submitted a dissertation to the faculty of Virginia Polytechnic and State University in which he examined the critical litigation and statutes that impacted desegregation in North Carolina. He examined these Federal and state cases and statutes related to their patterns and themes (Benfield, 1976). Frank Cool, in 1983, presented a case study to the faculty of Virginia Polytechnic and State University about the desegregation of schools in Norfolk. He focused on the impact of massive resistance on this community. He identified major players in the process and discussed their role in the development of policy (Cool, 1983).

Benjamin Muse, in Virginia's Massive Resistance (1961), wrote a historical perspective on massive resistance. His major focus was on the people and communities involved with this movement. Francis Wilhoit in which he sought to provide insight and

analysis into the origins and the politics of massive resistance wrote The Politics of Massive Resistance (1973). Published in 1998, by Andrew Lewis and Matthew Lassiter, The Moderates' Dilemma: Massive Resistance to School Desegregation in Virginia is a collection of observations about the trials of desegregating the public schools. All of the dissertations and studies examined by the author had parts that focused on national and state litigation in the federal courts. Refer to table 1 in the appendix for a synopsis of all studies and books that were referenced in this study.

Most of the research in desegregation has focused on the larger issues such as massive resistance throughout the state or the desegregation movement in a locality over a period of several years. The most notable exception is Lee Fowler (1997), in his dissertation submitted to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. His approach was to examine one high school, Indian River in Chesapeake, Virginia, and the efforts that the school community and local government made in 1971 to desegregate. For this researcher, Fowler was addressing the two missing components of desegregation studies:

1. What took place in the localities during the short time leading up to the desegregation of their schools?
2. What was the impact on individual schools and their students during desegregation?

The scope of the research needs to be narrower to identify the specific problems that localities endured in their attempts to desegregate public schools and to discover how, or if, they resolved them satisfactorily.

#### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to identify, to record, and to analyze the events that led to the desegregation of George Washington High School and Langston High School in 1970.

The proposed topic for this study is “A Case Study in the Desegregation of George Washington High School and Langston High School in Danville, Virginia, during the 1970-1971 School Year.” This case study would be conducted through the eyes of the students, the community, the teachers, and the administrators who were directly involved in this transition. It is the hope of the researcher that the results of the case study would provide a better understanding of the process that was used in planning the integration of the schools, of the issues that were considered, of the overall effectiveness of the process, and of the people who made the process work.

### Research Questions

Based on the author’s research and preliminary discussions, the following research questions were developed. There are four research questions:

1. What were the main factors that prompted the desegregation of Langston High School (LHS) and George Washington High School (GW) in Danville in 1970?
2. Who were the key players in the desegregation of Danville City Schools: (a) in the community? (b) in the school system?
3. What was done to prepare for the desegregation of LHS and GW? (a) with the students? (b) with the faculty and staff? (c) with the community?
4. What was the attitude of the students, the staff, and the community about desegregation?

### Theoretical Model

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) described an ecological environment that he compared to a “set of Russian dolls” (p. 3). This “nested environment” consisted of four parts: the micro-system, the meso-system, the exo-system, and the macro-system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).



This model will be used to discuss the various components in the desegregation of George Washington High School and Langston High School in Danville, Virginia.

The micro-system is the innermost circle of the nested environment. It contains the setting “where people can readily engage in face-to-face interaction” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). For the purposes of this study, it would consist of the students from the two high schools.

The second part of the nested environment is the meso-system. The meso-system, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979) is comprised of the interrelations “among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates” (p. 25). In this study the meso-system would be the school administrators and the teachers at George Washington High School and Langston High School.

The third component according to Bronfenbrenner (1979) is the exo-system. The exo-system refers to “one or more settings that do not directly involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (p. 25). The exo-system includes the central office school administration, the school board, and the city council.

The fourth part of the nested environment is the macro-system. The macro-system, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), is a far-reaching layer that contains information and ideology that serves as the basis for understanding the actions and reactions of the lower layers. The macro-system would consist of the laws, the policies, and the court decisions that impacted the desegregation of George Washington High School and Langston High School. Refer to figure 1 on the next page for visual presentation of Bronfenbrenner’s nested environment.

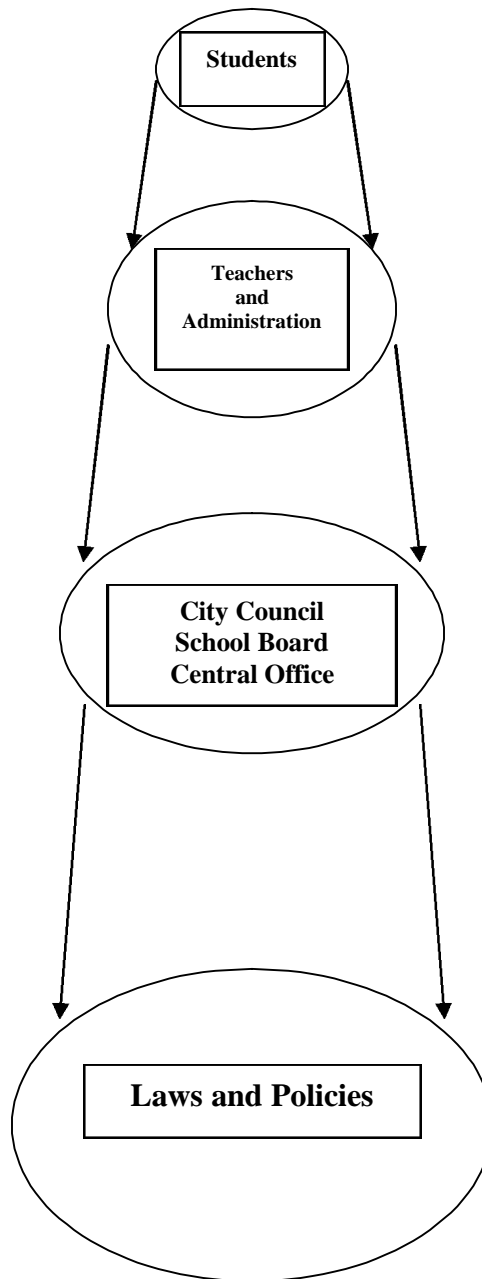


Figure 1: Theoretical Model: Bronfenbrenner's "Nested Environment"

## Terms and Definitions

This section of the dissertation will introduce a number of terms that will be used throughout this paper. Defining these terms help provide the reader with some of the historical background and context necessary to understand desegregation as well as establish consistent interpretation of their intended use.

Segregation: Segregation is a term used to identify people that have been separated from others because of their race, a custom, a rule of law, or any other factor. There were two types of segregation: de jure and de facto segregation (Savage, 1959).

De jure segregation: De jure segregation violates the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution. It refers to any action or policy that is perpetrated by public officials that has a significant segregative effect. An example of de jure segregation was the Jim Crow laws of the South enacted in the 1800s (Armor, 1995). When discriminatory intent on the part of public officials is discovered, there is an affirmative duty to correct it immediately (Alexander & Alexander, 1998).

De facto segregation: De facto segregation is not officially prescribed by law and occurs as a matter of custom, i.e. housing patterns, and does not violate the Constitution (Savage, 1959).

Jim Crow Laws: Jim Crow laws were an example of de jure segregation. According to Bardolph (1970), the first Jim Crow law was passed in Tennessee on March 23, 1875, and it gave any owner, or his employee, a great deal of latitude in excluding “any person, whom he shall for any reason ...choose not to entertain, carry, or admit, to his house, hotel, or carriage, or means of transportation or place of amusement” (p. 82). Jim Crow laws were instituted throughout the South and their sole intent was to perpetuate discrimination against African-Americans (Bardolph, 1970).

Desegregation and Integration: Desegregation and integration are used interchangeably.

However, they do have subtle differences. Desegregation takes place when there is an intentional act on the part of someone to physically integrate a school by assigning students to it without regard to race (Armor, 1995). Integration, however, takes desegregation one-step further. It implies not only physical proximity, but also a melding of ideas, ideals, and goals (Savage, 1959).

Equal Protection Clause: The equal protection clause of the Constitution, in the Fourteenth Amendment, provides that no law, whether intentional or arbitrary, shall discriminate against any citizen of the United States through statute or improper execution (Alexander & Alexander, 1998).

Pupil Placement Board: As a component of the Pupil Placement Act, the pupil placement board was created in 1956 by the Virginia General Assembly and served as the first line of defense against the desegregation of public schools. This three-member panel was given the responsibility for student placement and transfers within the Commonwealth (Pratt, 1992). They were authorized to assign students to schools based on a variety of reasons. In reality, the pupil placement board used residential housing patterns and lower academic achievement to disqualify blacks from enrolling in white schools (Pratt, 1992), therefore, perpetuating segregation.

Freedom of Choice Plan: The freedom of choice plan was instituted in 1958 by the General Assembly (Kilpatrick, 1962). This allowed parents to choose the school their child would attend as long as the curriculum was suitable and there was space. It also included a provision for the placement of personnel on a nondiscriminatory basis (Pratt, 1992).

Civil Rights Act of 1964: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 represented the first major law addressing racial segregation that was passed by Congress. Title VI stated that no one could be discriminated against nor denied the opportunity to participate in any program receiving federal funds. The secretary of HEW could deny funds to any district that violated Title VI after an appropriate complaint, investigation, and hearing (Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI, § 602). Title IV of the Civil Rights Act also authorized the secretary to assist in the preparation and implementation of school desegregation plans (Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IV, § 602).

Dual and Unitary Educational Systems: School systems that operated under a dual educational system, separate black and white schools, were obligated to convert to a unitary system and all racial discrimination was to be eliminated (Armor, 1995). If placed under the supervision of the courts for operating a dual system, a school system had to develop a plan for converting from a dual system to a unitary system and had to have approval to enact any policy changes, for example, opening or closing schools and changing attendance zones, that would affect their desegregation plans. To be freed from court supervision, a school system had to demonstrate that it had eliminated all vestiges of unconstitutional segregation, as much as practicable (Armor, 1995).

Harm-Benefit Theory: David Armor (1995), in his book Forced Justice: School Desegregation and the Law, discussed the harm-benefit thesis alluded to by the Supreme Court in its Brown decision in 1954. There are three components to this thesis: the social science theory, the vicious cycle theory, and the contact theory.

Interposition: When confronted with the idea of desegregation of Virginia's public schools, interposition became a dynamic component of Virginia political theory. This philosophy,

according to Lassiter and Lewis (1998), enabled a state to exercise “its sovereignty in . . . grave and extraordinary cases when the Federal government oversteps its constituted authority” (p.51). Interposition was a cynical attempt by segregationists to defend white supremacy (Lassiter & Lewis, 1998).

Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties: The Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties originated in Prince Edward County. Led by Barrye Wall and Robert Crawford, the Defenders opposed integration or desegregation in any form (Dabney, 1971).

Southern Manifesto: The Southern Manifesto was a declaration on March 12, 1956, by the representatives of Southern states that expressed their defiance for the ruling of the Supreme Court on desegregation (Muse, 1961).

Gray Plan: A commission headed by Garland Gray, state senator, proposed the Gray Plan. It consisted of three essential components: the creation of tuition grants, the formation of a pupil placement board, and the abandonment of compulsory attendance (Gates, 1964).

Minority to Majority Transfer: Minority to majority transfer occurs when a student attends a school where his/her race is in the minority and wants to transfer to a school where their race is in the majority (Benfield, 1976).

Black Belt: The Black Belt refers to rural Southside Virginia and it is distinguished by the heaviest concentrations of African-Americans (Bartley, 1969).