

FROM DESEGREGATION TO RESEGREGATION: PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NORFOLK, VIRGINIA 1954–2002

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In the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Supreme Court declared separate public schools for African American and white students unconstitutional. This essay examines the history and evolution of school desegregation in Norfolk, Virginia from 1954 to 2002. "Massive resistance" by whites in Virginia to school desegregation began almost immediately following the 1954 decision. Meanwhile, African Americans, with the assistance of the NAACP, fought tirelessly and quietly to end school segregation. Real school desegregation was finally achieved in Norfolk through the implementation of an intra-district busing program in 1972. Yet, Norfolk would return to segregation, or experience resegregation, after the ending of the busing policy at the elementary school level in 1986 and at the middle school level in 2001.

The *Brown* decision did not solve the problem of segregation in the Norfolk public schools and failed to bring about equal educational opportunities for African Americans in the city. Indeed, progress towards that goal was marred by conflict. Moreover, since 1954 the context for school desegregation has changed, as have the policies and positions of those in charge of the Norfolk public schools. What has remained constant, according to Charles Bryant, former president of the Norfolk branch of the NAACP, is the demand for quality education for African American students.¹ Though segregation diminished and educational opportunities for African Americans improved in the 1970s, in the 1980s little significant progress was made, and the situation began to deteriorate.

MASSIVE RESISTANCE TO *BROWN*: 1954–1959

The court ruling in 1954 calling for the desegregation of the public schools was not received well in Virginia, a state, but also "a state of mind—a very special state of mind."² Virginians were adamant supporters of states' rights and fought hard to maintain racially discriminatory practices, including

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separate and unequal public schools. In 1954 Governor Thomas B. Stanley declared he would "use every legal means at my command to continue segregated schools in Virginia."³ However, it was not the governor who had the most political influence in the state of Virginia, but Senator Harry F. Byrd and his powerful Democratic machine. Byrd's belief that the *Brown* decision was "illegal" and "the most serious blow that has been struck against the rights of the states" reflected the sentiment of the majority of white Virginians.⁴ Massive resistance was necessary, it was thought, since the Supreme Court was not only wrong, but was also interfering with the rights of the people of Virginia. Massive resistance in Virginia began in 1954 and continued to the end of the decade.

In September 1954 Governor Stanley appointed a legislative commission to examine possible courses of action in response to the Supreme Court's decision. The group, known as the Gray Commission, was chaired by Senator Garland Gray, a Byrd loyalist. The Gray Plan, released in November 1955, sought to "preserve segregation, and yet to avoid conflict with the Court."⁵ The plan called for tuition grants from public funds to aid white students attending private schools to avoid integration, a new pupil assignment plan to minimize race mixing, and an amendment to the compulsory attendance law so that no child would be required to attend an integrated school. Equal educational opportunities for African American students were not addressed.

In a state-wide referendum held in January 1956, the plan was approved by a near two to one margin. White leaders interpreted the result as a clear sign of the public's support for the maintenance of segregation. President Dwight D. Eisenhower remained noticeably silent about the situation in Virginia, following the advice of his press secretary James C. Hagerty who suggested that, "no comment be made which would be interpreted as either approving or disapproving the vote of the people of Virginia. . . . Rather the President might well point out that he understands that pursuant to the vote, a state-wide plan will be formulated to deal with the issue of segregation in the schools."⁶ There was no mention of the unconstitutionality, much less the immorality, of the situation in Virginia.

State leaders continued to develop a program of massive resistance that would affect all school systems in Virginia, including Norfolk. The Virginia General Assembly invoked the doctrine of "interposition" in 1956 and held a twenty-seven day session in which a total of twenty-three laws were passed that dealt with school integration or were aimed at the NAACP. The General Assembly adopted legislation against school integration, including a policy to cut off funds from school districts that attempted to integrate, provide tuition grants for white students to attend private schools, and even close integrated schools. That same year over a hundred southern members of Congress signed the Southern Manifesto, pledging defiance of the *Brown* decision.⁷

Massive resistance was strengthened in 1957 with the election of a new governor, J. Lindsay Almond. Almond had "sworn to a no-surrender policy against integration, [and] he [could] fan dangerous emotions with the best of

demagogues, warning that the Supreme Court [would] soon 'make it lawful for a Negro to intermarry with a white person.'⁸ As journalist Virginius Dabney noted, nothing carried "greater weight with white Virginians and other white southerners than the prospect that the education of the races together . . . [would] lead to ultimate interracial amalgamation and make ours a nation of mulattoes."⁹ Almond and other leaders played to whites' fears and promoted white supremacy. Not only would school integration supposedly harm southern whites' education, but it would also subvert their social mores and increase the likelihood of interracial unions.

THE STRUGGLE FOR SCHOOL DESEGREGATION

Amid massive resistance, African American citizens were actively trying to begin the desegregation of Norfolk's public schools. According to Rodney J. Reed, "the cry for desegregation was fundamentally a cry for equality of educational opportunity."¹⁰ At the time of the *Brown* decision, African Americans attended public schools that were physically inferior to those attended by whites, had access to minimal financial resources, and provided the students only limited educational opportunities.¹¹ With the assistance of the NAACP, Leola Beckett and other African American parents sued the school board in 1956 for not allowing their children access to public schools for whites. In *Beckett v. School Board of the City of Norfolk*, the plaintiffs targeted the state's "pupil placement law" which allowed the state placement board to reject African Americans' applications to transfer to public schools for whites.¹² At the time about 25 percent of Norfolk's total population was African American.¹³ In February 1957 the federal district court declared that the Norfolk school board could no longer refuse to admit students to specific public schools based on race. The school board, however, still denied 151 African American applicants admission to all-white schools based on their "health and safety, their social adaptability, and their place of residence." There was no direct reference to "race" in these rejections, though it remained the fundamental issue.¹⁴

Federal Judge Walter E. Hoffman ordered the school board to review its findings, and in August 1958 the board members decided to admit seventeen African American students to the six junior and senior high schools for whites. School Board Chairman Paul T. Schweitzer declared the assignment of African American students to these schools was "contrary to what all of the members of the school board and the division of the superintendent of schools honestly and sincerely believe is in the best interests of the applying children, the children of the affected schools, and the public in general."¹⁵ Though they disagreed with the ruling, white officials in the city of Norfolk and the state of Virginia were forced to deal with the federal court orders. Massive resistance was being put to the test.

Rather than permitting desegregation, Governor Almond decided to shut down all six white junior and senior high schools in Norfolk. Five months went by with nearly 10,000 students out of school. Journalist Robert C. Smith observed that, "in no other city in the South had the entire secondary school system been shut down, and in none other had as many as one-fourth of the public school students been out of school."¹⁶ Within the city of Norfolk there was a division among elected officials over what should be done. While the city council, led by Mayor W. Fred Duckworth, was firmly against reopening the public schools, school board members and educators were opposed. Mayor Duckworth angrily responded, "It would be well for the school board to stay out of the politics on this issue."¹⁷ Yet, it was not likely that the school board members and teachers favored the reopening of the schools because they supported school integration. In October 1958 at a meeting of the Virginia Education Association in which teachers voted in favor of reopening the schools, one teacher explained, "There was a real unity among us all—but don't misunderstand. We weren't voting for integration; we were voting for public education."¹⁸

In November 1958 Norfolk's mayor and city council posed the issue in a citywide referendum. The ballot question asked whether the city council should request the governor to reopen the public schools on an integrated basis. However, the question also included the warning that if schools were to be reopened, families would have to pay a tuition fee since state funds would be lost if integration occurred. The results were 12,340 votes against petitioning the governor and 8,712 votes in favor. Not surprisingly, African Americans voted more in favor of the petition, while most whites voted against it. Despite the small voter turnout, a biased ballot question, and the large African American vote in favor of the measure, Governor Almond interpreted the results as a mandate to continue massive resistance.¹⁹

About 10,000 white students in Norfolk were without public schools since the white junior and senior high schools were closed, while the education of African American students in nearby schools continued.²⁰ White families struggled to find educational alternatives. Commonly referred to as "The Lost Class of '59," the students attended old private schools and newly established ones, temporary tutoring groups, and schools out of state. An estimated 3,000 students attended classes in churches and homes taught by Norfolk teachers. Approximately 250 students were part of the private school system called the Tidewater Educational Foundation, about 500 attended public schools in neighboring districts, and up to 940 enrolled in adult night classes in South Norfolk.²¹

According to one Norfolk teacher, "the sad part is that even if schools were to open tomorrow, we'll have lost a good many of our students. There are at least 3,000 gone, and we don't know where they are."²² Unlike the situation in Warren County and Charlottesville where 3,000 white students were closed out of their schools by Governor Almond to avoid integration, newly established private schools and emergency classes in homes and

churches were able to serve the majority of the displaced students. However, in Norfolk, Virginia's largest city, there was not an adequate substitute for public schools, and several thousand students received no formal education.²³

The Tidewater Educational Foundation, one alternative to the closed public schools, was a private school system designed by the segregationist group the Defenders of States' Rights and Individual Sovereignty. Formed in 1954 as part of the massive resistance movement, it played a key role in promoting white segregationist actions. One member declared in 1955, "I intend to resist with all the might . . . this effort to distort the minds, to pollute the education, and to defile and make putrid the pure Anglo-Saxon blood that courses through the innocent veins of our helpless children."²⁴ White supremacy was central to white Virginians' "state of mind," and there was little support for integration. Although the Ku Klux Klan and violence were not widespread in Virginia, the Defenders followed in the footsteps of the White Citizens Councils, which were organized to uphold segregation by focusing on litigation, political mobilization, and economic retaliation against African Americans rather than overt violence. The Defenders used threats, organized direct-mail campaigns to influence white public opinion, and established private schools.²⁵

THE "NORFOLK 17"

The seventeen African American students who led desegregation efforts were in a special tutoring school established by educator and activist Vivian C. Mason. According to Mason, the Norfolk 17 "understood completely that the whole [African American] community was behind them."²⁶ Other African American students continued to attend their schools, but the Norfolk 17 did not want to compromise their legal standing by attending. There was talk by Virginia's white leaders of shutting down African American schools in addition to white schools. Governor Almond expressed opposition to the idea, but in 1959 the Norfolk city council attempted such a plan. However, through a lawsuit brought by several parents, Judge Hoffman halted the council's plan of retaliation.²⁷

Meanwhile, the NAACP and African American leaders worked tirelessly, though quietly, to end massive resistance. R. D. Robertson, then president of the Norfolk NAACP, declared that, "We're not making any noise here—you won't see any 'statements' from the Norfolk NAACP chapter. We're just keeping quiet and going through the courts. . . . We're just going to wait till law and order prevail."²⁸ P. B. Young, Sr., founder and publisher of the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, the highly influential African American newspaper, explained that African Americans had a "sense of futility" about state politics; "The only thing the Negro in Virginia has faith in is the [federal] courts."²⁹

Indeed, the courts were busy dealing with the issue of massive resistance; by 1958 there were five school desegregation suits being pursued in the state of Virginia. The NAACP enjoyed great popularity among African Americans in Virginia, although legislation passed in 1956 to interrupt its activities decreased membership somewhat. According to journalist Benjamin Muse, "It is difficult to describe the intensity with which the NAACP was hated by white Virginians."³⁰ On 19 January 1959, the Virginia Court of Appeals in *James v. Almond* and the Federal District Court in *Harrison v. Day* handed down rulings that undermined massive resistance. *James v. Almond*, brought by the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools against Governor Almond on behalf of twenty-six displaced white students, did not involve African Americans. *Harrison v. Day*, however, was a test case brought by the NAACP to challenge massive resistance legislation. The NAACP was considered "the sole means by which blacks could gain admission to segregated schools. Blacks would apply for entry to white schools, be denied, and pursue remission in the courts. The NAACP provided the only legal expertise available to these black plaintiffs."³¹ The federal government provided African Americans no assistance in the school desegregation cases, although Virginia's laws clearly defied the *Brown* ruling. Thus the NAACP, at the local and state level, played a crucial role in ending school segregation in Norfolk and throughout Virginia.

On 2 February 1959, after five months, the six junior and senior high schools for whites were reopened, with the seventeen African American students in attendance. The courts had finally brought about school desegregation, and with it came the promise of equal educational opportunities for African Americans. Vivian Mason discussed the state of the Norfolk 17 on "integration Monday," "They were ready. I had told them they had lost their childhood when they agreed to file the suit for desegregation; that they had to be adults now."³² Plainclothes policemen guarded the students for several days until the security was deemed unnecessary. It had finally become clear that Virginia could not resist the federal government any longer. Governor Almond asked helplessly, "What can you do in the face of overwhelming power?"³³ Virginia had seemingly surrendered, but obstacles to educational equality for the vast majority of African American students remained.

THE ERA OF SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN NORFOLK, 1959–1986

A press release issued by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund on 22 March 1966 announced: "Norfolk closed its schools in the fall of 1958 in the face of a federal court desegregation order. The schools reopened in February 1959, with 17 Negroes enrolled in desegregated classes. Since then there has been token integration."³⁴ Indeed, what took place in the seven years since the case of the Norfolk 17 was "token integration." For example, in the 1965–66 school year in Norfolk, 90 percent of the black elementary school students were in schools that were over 90 percent African American;

the same percentages were found for whites in predominantly white schools.³⁵ Nationwide, it was clear that segregation in public education was still a pressing issue. Despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed legal segregation in public accommodations, the 1966 report on *Equality of Educational Opportunity* by sociologist James Coleman documented the continuing segregation of black and white students and the persistent higher academic achievement levels for white students. In 1968 the Kerner Commission, created by President Lyndon B. Johnson to report on the major causes of the urban rioting in the mid-1960s, offered the following warning: the U.S. was on its way to becoming "two nations, one white and one black, separate and unequal."³⁶

On 27 May 1968, the Supreme Court in *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, Virginia* outlined the criteria (later known as the *Green* factors) that a school district had to meet in order to achieve "unitary status"; these included the absence of racially identifiable student bodies, faculty or staff, or inequalities in transportation, extracurricular activities, and facilities.³⁷ Justice William Brennan wrote the unanimous Supreme Court decision and aimed his comments directly at southern school boards when he stated, "the burden of a school board today is to come forward with a plan that promises to realistically work, and promises realistically to work now."³⁸ Norfolk was forced to face the reality of its poor attempt at public school desegregation.

The NAACP and African American parents continued their challenge to segregation in the 1970 lawsuit *Brewer v. School Board for the City of Norfolk*. The Norfolk school board finally agreed to implement a desegregation plan, but African Americans challenged the school zones proposed in the plan since they would correspond with the already segregated neighborhoods. According to civil rights lawyers, the segregation of Norfolk's public schools was largely due to residential patterns. Since neighborhoods were racially homogeneous, schools remained mainly African American or white, with little mixing. As a result of the lawsuit, a second imperfect desegregation plan was established in Norfolk.³⁹

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund found that busing to achieve integration placed the burden unfairly on the students. "The lack of transportation in Norfolk, Va. is a real hardship to students who must pay \$63 a year to ride city buses to school because the district does not operate its own transportation system. Several hundred students from poor families in Norfolk are not in school this year because they do not have transportation."⁴⁰ The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit intervened on 7 March 1972, however, and ordered the Norfolk school board to provide free transportation as part of its desegregation plan. Without providing transportation to assigned schools, the court called the desegregation plan a "futile gesture" and a "cruel hoax."⁴¹

Free bus transportation became an option as the result of the Supreme Court ruling in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, Board of*

Education, also in 1972. In allowing busing as an appropriate school desegregation remedy, *Swann* proved to be one of the most important school segregation rulings after *Brown*. Federal district courts took over in Norfolk, ordering a revision of the earlier flawed school desegregation plan. Yet, there was an eerie reminder of times past when schools remained closed for the first week in September 1971. School officials claimed to need more time to implement the busing plan. Finally, free busing and mandatory assignments affected 24,200 white students and 24,600 African American students, near equal numbers. Desegregation was realized at last: only one of Norfolk's thirty-nine elementary schools was more than 70 percent African American in 1972.⁴²

The busing program prompted an outpouring of opposition from whites.⁴³ Many whites felt that their rights were being infringed upon for the benefit of African Americans, while in reality busing provided the first meaningful attempt at educational equality for African Americans and whites. Some claimed that whites' distress was due to economic disparities between African Americans and whites since African American students were generally from a lower socioeconomic background.⁴⁴ However, other studies showed that white racism was the main reason for resistance to busing. Sociologist Franklin D. Wilson noted that, "it appears that substantial numbers of whites seek to avoid attending schools with blacks regardless of the form or instrument of social contact."⁴⁵ In other words, busing was not the problem, white racism was.

African Americans easily recognized the responses; it was a continuation of the massive resistance that had never really ended in Norfolk, but had simply changed forms. For whites in Norfolk, before the enemy was school desegregation, now it was busing; both were problematic since they imposed change on white Virginians' traditional way of life. African Americans continued their faith in the courts to provide appropriate remedies for past and present educational inequalities. However, while the NAACP praised *Swann*, the revamped Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) under Roy Innis, a conservative black leader and supporter of President Richard Nixon, filed an *amicus curiae* brief opposing it. CORE emphasized improving African American schools, instead of busing to achieve desegregation. The brief stated CORE's "belief that a community school district structured along natural, geographic lines is the best possible way of destroying segregation and insuring equal education for children."⁴⁶ Indeed, this argument was and continued to be present among members of the Norfolk African American community, though the majority favored busing as a means to address inequalities and end segregation.

Editorials during the 1970s in the *Journal and Guide* reflected African Americans' concerns over continued white resistance. One writer declared, "Freedom of the choice to segregate people is anarchistic, archaic, and unsuited for a civilized society"; another wrote, "Busing, it seems, was all right to support racial segregation, but it is an anathema to promote

desegregation."⁴⁷ According to the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, in 1976 slightly over 50 percent of all school children were bused to school, while only less than 7 percent were bused for purposes of desegregation.⁴⁸ In 1972, Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary for the NAACP, pointed out,

The NAACP is *not* an advocate of busing for its own sake. We have always viewed busing as one of many possible tools to achieve our ultimate objective--*quality education for black children*. We are convinced that school desegregation is a prerequisite for quality education, but have never viewed busing as the only tool or even the most desirable one.⁴⁹

African Americans were still issuing the now familiar cry for equality of educational opportunity. For most African Americans the issues remained the same, and busing was merely a way to guarantee the right to a quality public education for black students. While President Nixon openly opposed busing, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1972 sided with Wilkins:

What Americans must keep in mind, in the furor over the busing debate, is that to restrict busing in most communities is simply to restrict desegregation. . . . What you really say when you say to these children "no busing" is "stay in your place and attend your inferior schools." This will, in reality, cost us another whole generation of badly educated minority children, denied their constitutional rights to equal educational opportunity.⁵⁰

Did school officials in Norfolk seek to continue segregation and deny African American children a quality education? In 1975 the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights warned that segregation was on the rise. That same year Norfolk was declared a "unitary school district," and federal court supervision ended. The significance of this decision would not be realized until several years later.

RESEGREGATION AND THE RETURN TO NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS, 1986–2002

By the late 1970s a new barrier to school desegregation plans in Norfolk was becoming apparent—white flight. From 1960 to 1980 the white population of Norfolk fell by 28 percent, and the African American population grew by 19 percent. Suburbs such as Virginia Beach and Chesapeake grew rapidly during this period, and the new residents were largely whites who had formerly lived in Norfolk. In 1980 the African American population was 35 percent of Norfolk's total population, while African American students made up 60 percent of the enrollment in the public schools.⁵¹ With these demographic changes in mind, the Norfolk school board announced in 1981 its intention to end busing at the elementary school level and to return to "neighborhood schools." The board hired sociologist David J. Armor to examine the school system, make recommendations, and testify as

an expert witness if needed. According to Armor, "It is by no means obvious to the average citizen that school integration, and especially the more intrusive practice of mandatory busing, has any benefits at all, much less benefits that justify the costs."⁵² Many would later argue that as an anti-busing advocate, Armor's conclusions reflected his biases.⁵³

In *Forced Justice*, Armor explained that the Norfolk school board's decision to return to neighborhood schools was based on the following rationales: 1) mandatory busing had not improved the academic achievement of African American students relative to white students; 2) a neighborhood school policy with voluntary options would end white flight and produce more long-term desegregation; and 3) neighborhood schools would improve the quality of education by increasing parental involvement in schools.⁵⁴ In 1983 the school board approved a plan to end busing for elementary school students by a 5–2 vote. African American school board member Dr. John Foster was opposed to ending busing and developed an alternative compromise plan, but it was rejected.

African American parents took action in the courts in 1983. With the assistance of the NAACP, Paul Riddick and twenty-one other African American plaintiffs filed suit in *Riddick v. The School Board of the City of Norfolk*, charging that the neighborhood school plan was racially motivated and violated their constitutional rights under the Fourteenth Amendment. District Court Judge John MacKenzie, however, ruled that the school board was not implementing a discriminatory plan. The plaintiffs appealed to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals and the court again sided with the school board. The courts accepted Armor's findings that Norfolk would continue to lose white residents due to busing and that this would cause the public school system to become overwhelmingly African American. They found that Norfolk had lost between 6,000–8,000 white students because of busing and, as a result, resegregation was occurring. Interestingly, the courts did not rely on the achievement data in their decisions, but rather focused solely on the issue of white flight.

In the fall of 1986 busing ended and Norfolk's elementary school students were assigned to their neighborhood schools. As the Court of Appeals decision outlined, under the plan adopted, twelve of Norfolk's thirty-six elementary schools became 70 percent or more African American, compared to four under the busing plan (ten became 95 percent or more African American). Six schools became 70 percent or more white.⁵⁵ In effect, Norfolk schools were resegregated. African American school board member Lucy Wilson declared, "It was turning back the clock. It was like being told you have to go to the back of the bus."⁵⁶ The phrase "turning back the clock" became closely associated with the return to neighborhood schools.

The fact that Norfolk had gained unitary status in 1975 was significant. Since the courts decided that Norfolk school officials had ended discrimination in the district, the plaintiffs would have to prove otherwise. Had Norfolk's public schools not been declared "unitary," then the school

board would have had to demonstrate that the neighborhood school plan did not undermine attempts to create a desegregated system. Instead, the court assumed that the plan was a nondiscriminatory effort to improve education, though it was clear to many observers that racial segregation would result.⁵⁷ The U.S. Department of Justice during the Reagan administration, led by William Bradford Reynolds, became involved when it intervened on behalf of the Norfolk school board to argue that busing should be ended. There was no support from the federal government for desegregation and many worried that the gains that had been made would be reversed. Furthermore, Norfolk was a city with a long history of segregation. A mere three years of federal court supervision, and fifteen of busing, did not seem sufficient to reverse school enrollment patterns.

When busing ended at the elementary level, a plan was implemented to give the newly all-African American schools additional resources. Even the two African American school board members who had dissented earlier endorsed this decision when the federal court's ruling practically guaranteed the neighborhood school plan. The "target" schools spent more funds per pupil than the district-wide average, and class sizes were reduced. An oversight committee was established to ensure the schools' success, but it disbanded after four years because the school board deemed it unnecessary. Rev. Anthony Paige, a member of the pro-busing group, the Norfolk Coalition for Quality Public Education, lamented, "I'm disappointed with black leadership. They are out of step with the community. They agreed to the 'compromise plan' which was in reality a political and economic deal. It was a business deal."⁵⁸

During the *Riddick* case many African Americans maintained their faith in the courts to support the efforts to obtain a quality, desegregated education for their children. Paul Riddick, now a city council member and then a parent of two children in the Norfolk public schools, stated his purpose for the lawsuit: "I wanted to prevent the school system from going back to segregated elementary schools."⁵⁹ Henry L. Marsh, former Mayor of Richmond and chief attorney for the twenty-two African American plaintiffs, explained, "I can't believe that America will return to segregation in 1986—I just don't believe that."⁶⁰ After the ruling from the Fourth Circuit of Appeals, Marsh declared, "We will continue with the litigation. We are in the process of preparing documents to take the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. In the U.S. Supreme Court we expect to win the case and to keep Norfolk's schools integrated. . . . We will continue the fight."⁶¹ In their appeal to the Supreme Court, the plaintiffs argued that Norfolk's unitary status should not allow the system to re-segregate: "There is no logic to the notion that a school system which becomes 'unitary' by eliminating segregation remains 'unitary' in perpetuity, even if it deliberately destroys the conditions that made it unitary."⁶² The Supreme Court, however, declined to hear the case, and so the decision remained.

Many members of the African American community reacted with a great deal of anger over the return to neighborhood schools.⁶³ *The Journal and*

Guide served as a source of information and a forum for dialogue among African American residents. One writer labeled the school board the "board of miseducation" for its denial of equal educational opportunities for African American students. Another writer declared, "The fact is: it is not about the bus, *it is about us*," referring to white racism and the extensive white flight from Norfolk.⁶⁴ Some white parents joined African American pro-busing groups, though it appeared that the majority of whites were in favor of ending busing. Both Paul Riddick and Nelson White, leader of an African American parent group, noted that the way busing lines were drawn, it was primarily low-income whites and African Americans who were bused long distances, whereas upper-class whites remained isolated in their own schools.⁶⁵ Still, according to white parent Diane Greene, "They're setting all of us back 50 years with this neighborhood plan."⁶⁶

Not all Norfolk African Americans opposed the return to neighborhood elementary schools; indeed, some were in favor of the move. One *Journal and Guide* writer suggested, "the Negro mis-leadership should be working with the board to work out a plan to insure that black children will be provided 'equal educational opportunity' rather than whether they sit next to a white, pink or polka-dot child."⁶⁷ In 1981 Norfolk residents Nelson and Earlean White began a group called the Parental Involvement Network (PIN). This grassroots organization of about sixty-five African American parents who favored neighborhood schools in Norfolk circulated petitions calling for an end to busing and was associated with the National Association for Neighborhood Schools (NANS). NANS recognized the importance of the decision in Norfolk to end busing and argued that "racial control of student assignment is now finally being correctly ruled as unconstitutional" and "school children must no longer be used for social experimentation. . . ."⁶⁸

Nelson White, head of PIN, said that he did not see the value in busing African American students across town since they often wound up in "hostile situations." The burden of desegregation seemed to be placed more on African American students than on whites, and he believed that the "integrated education" of African American students was not any better than the "segregated education" he received in Norfolk years before. "Kids who were bused weren't doing any better" academically than those not bused. More importantly, the students who were bused were "suffering in other ways—in terms of lower self-esteem and self-perception than those in neighborhood schools." However, the most important issue for PIN members was resources, and White believed that, "it will be a long time before kids in the lower-income black community come up to where they should be achieving."⁶⁹ White noted the influence of parents on their children's education in terms of their own level of education, income, and career. He also acknowledged the difficulty of being the only African American pro-neighborhood schools group, since the others were all-white and often had a "racist standpoint."⁷⁰

Yet, there was an abundance of evidence that undermined arguments about the positive aspects of neighborhood schools.⁷¹ Segregation and resegregation

were sources of educational inequality, and reflected larger societal problems such as employment discrimination, residential segregation, and income disparities between African Americans and whites. The appeal by the *Riddick* plaintiffs to the Supreme Court also pointed out that, "the importance of the plan to the next generation of black students in Norfolk is also evident. The new plan is particularly destructive in the way it concentrates school segregation among low-income blacks who reside in all-black public housing projects."⁷²

In 1999, more than 90 percent of the students at the ten all-African American elementary schools in Norfolk were enrolled in the federally subsidized free and reduced-price lunch program, a standard measure of poverty.⁷³ According to a report from the NAACP Education Department, "Resource inequalities often follow race and class divisions between districts, and often follow patterns of neighborhood segregation," and "*racially-isolated schools for all groups except whites are usually schools with high concentrations of poverty.*" African Americans, then, were exposed to higher concentrations of poverty in their schools, in contrast to whites. Concentrated poverty was related to educational inequalities and lower educational achievement.⁷⁴ Paul Riddick was always aware of these factors and their implications for Norfolk's students. He noted that the higher concentration of socioeconomic disadvantage in predominantly black schools meant a lack of opportunity for those students. African American children in segregated schools had limited access "to an entire other side of town . . ." and "nothing happened in Norfolk" to improve the education of African American students since the end of busing.⁷⁵

Many agreed with Riddick. In fact, David Armor's three major findings promoting a return to neighborhood schools were challenged. Researchers Leslie G. Carr and Donald J. Zeigler declared, "In practically all aspects, Armor's predictions about what would happen in Norfolk schools if busing for integration continued and what would happen if it ended were in error." Carr and Zeigler claimed that after 1982 white flight nearly stopped in grades K-12 and reversed in grades K-5. The actual rate of return of white students was about one-third of what Armor predicted, and parents' attitudes toward the public schools did not improve. Furthermore, factors besides busing influenced whether or not white parents used Norfolk schools.⁷⁶ In an ongoing debate between the researchers, Carr also questioned Armor's ways of measurement, arguing that he wrongly examined all grade levels instead of only grades K-5; both Armor's calculations of white flight and white return "fall far below his predicted levels."⁷⁷

Educational researcher Gary Orfield also criticized Armor and other neighborhood school advocates in Norfolk. Orfield, Susan Eaton, and Christina Meldrum found that in Norfolk, "none of the promises attached to the return to neighborhood schools came true."⁷⁸ Orfield claimed that Norfolk's population had begun to stabilize five years before the end of busing. Moreover, other reasons existed for white flight besides the

desegregation plan, including high crime, poverty, and tax rates in the city. White flight was a reality in urban areas nationwide; it was not confined to Norfolk. One Norfolk resident faulted the school board itself for initiating the white flight. "The school board has forgotten that closing the white junior and senior high schools started the disruptive pattern of whites fleeing the city to educate their children because of closed schools."⁷⁹ In terms of academic achievement, African American students achieved higher test scores at integrated schools than at the resegregated all-black schools. Finally, parental involvement decreased based on evidence that PTA membership dropped in target schools, and Orfield pointed out that neighborhood schools did not necessarily increase parental involvement.⁸⁰

White flight occurred nationwide, even in cities without mandatory busing. Norfolk schools' Public Information Officer George Raiss noted that African Americans in Norfolk were initially opposed to an end of busing for they "feared a return to separate but equal." However, the real issue was a return to separate and unequal schools in Norfolk. Raiss confirmed the existence of ten nearly all-African American elementary schools in 2002. Over time, he said, "the absence of busing has come to be more accepted in the black community." As an indicator of increased approval of neighborhood schools, Raiss cited the majority-minority transfer program established in Norfolk. In 1986, 4,000 African American students used the program, while in 2002 the number was under 1,000.⁸¹

As for Armor's three findings about Norfolk schools, Raiss acknowledged that none had been fully realized. In 2002, when asked about a stabilization of white flight and return of whites to the city, Raiss stated, "that hasn't happened." "That [white flight] happened in cities all over the country—busing or no busing. We were no different than virtually any other core city of the 1970s and 1980s. Whether it was from busing or not, I don't know." As for achievement gains in the resegregated schools, Raiss declared, "it depends." Parental involvement "continues to be a major goal" and "again it depends," on the individual school.⁸²

David Armor maintained his original stance against busing, and his research found voluntary programs to be just as effective as mandatory desegregation plans. Armor concluded, "More important, a school district is not responsible for overcoming racial imbalance due to strictly demographic and other external forces once a plan has been implemented. The critical consideration is whether the plan was effective in eliminating these conditions arising from the prior dual school system, such as designated one-race schools, unequal resources, imbalanced faculty, and so forth."⁸³

Armor acknowledged past inequalities, but not present ones. Finally, he asserted,

Racial balance has largely continued . . . with or without court orders. . . . There has been no rush to dismantle desegregation plans and return to neighborhood school policies.

The reason is that racial balance and racial diversity have become desired goals, especially within the educational establishment.⁸⁴

This statement, however, is false. Norfolk returned to neighborhood schools, and increased segregation—less racial balance and diversity—among students was a direct result. Court orders and supervision were necessary, as the African American community had long realized, for school systems to achieve and maintain racial balance. When court supervision ended, so did busing; and the neighborhood elementary schools remained segregated.

THE RETURN TO NEIGHBORHOOD MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN 2001

In September 2001, busing in Norfolk ended at the middle school level (grades six to eight). At that time, similar concerns resurfaced, and whereas African Americans were widely opposed to the end of busing, whites were generally in favor. In a repeat of the situation in 1986, the school board voted to approve the plan by a 5–2 vote. The board consisted of four white members and three African American members; two African American members voted against the plan, while one, Alveta Green, voted in favor of ending busing. Green faced a barrage of criticism from the African American community.⁸⁵ But Green firmly defended her position and cited her priority as closing the academic achievement gap. According to Green, "We need to be worried about busing over some encouraging words to our students. About busing over the idea that it's OK to make the honor roll. . . . And about busing over good teachers who want to teach black children." Green had been an educator and civil rights activist. As for the criticism of her vote, "I can take it," she declared, "I have my civil rights scars. Show me yours."⁸⁶

Other African American leaders were outraged. Council member Riddick called anti-busing advocates "racists" and called on Green to leave the school board because of her vote, which was "an affront to the African-American community."⁸⁷ Ulysses Turner, one of the African American school board members who opposed the plan, explained, "resources, including human resources, can make a difference."⁸⁸ Like the return to neighborhood elementary schools, the return to neighborhood middle schools led to high concentrations of poverty in schools that became predominantly African American. Turner and others also exposed problems with the school board itself, calling it not racially representative of the makeup of the student population, which was 70 percent African American. Moreover, school board members in Norfolk were appointed by the majority-white city council; it was one of the few remaining in Virginia whose members were appointed rather than elected. In fact, Mayor Paul D. Fraim (white) "was instrumental in ending busing at the middle school level."⁸⁹ If African Americans were nearly three-fourths of the school system, many reasoned that they should be represented as such on the board that served them.

As in the return to neighborhood elementary schools, extra resources were allocated to the middle schools that would have high concentrations of poor students. This eased some concerns among African Americans, but not all of them.⁹⁰ Raiss described a middle school improvement plan involving \$10 million per year allocated to targeted schools. When busing ended in 2001, "officials launched an 'equity plan' that added equipment and staff to schools that lost some diversity. The goal: to make sure children had what they need to learn regardless of where they lived and attended school." In 2001 the plan included three targeted middle schools.⁹¹ The focus now was resources, not race.

The Norfolk NAACP continued its opposition to a return to neighborhood schools, but its position would ultimately change. Initially, Charles Bryant, branch president, voiced his disagreement with the plan. "This would lock the students into a culturally isolated and segregated situation. So far as providing equity in materials and resources, it's all promises and long range planning. We have been down that road before with the elementary schools."⁹² The Norfolk NAACP, with the support of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), began a "Selective Buying" campaign, similar to an attempt in 1986 to use an economic boycott of white-owned businesses to push for a continuation of busing. According to Raiss, the Norfolk NAACP also threatened a lawsuit in 2001 over the end of middle school busing, but never brought one.⁹³

Instead, Bryant decided to go and observe certain middle school classes every week to ensure that African American students were receiving a quality education. Bryant explained how at first members of the Norfolk NAACP were opposed to the end of busing. They were most concerned about the quality of education that African American students would be receiving in neighborhood schools. However, Bryant found that schools "maintained the same standard as before" in that teachers and materials were the same and class size was even reduced. "The concern was not so much about busing," Bryant stated, "as providing equal resources." Overall, Bryant was "totally impressed" with the state of the neighborhood middle schools for, "I was thinking just the opposite would happen" in terms of decreased educational opportunities.⁹⁴ The NAACP did not challenge the return to neighborhood middle schools as it had with elementary schools.

While the city of Norfolk was approximately 44 percent African American in 2002, its schools were approximately 70 percent African American.⁹⁵ These numbers pointed to the trend of large percentages of white students in urban areas attending private rather than public schools. Like others, Bryant cited changes: there had been an increase in African Americans and a higher concentration of poverty in the city over time. Bryant reasoned in 2004, "You really can't force people to move . . . that's unfortunate but it's the way things go."⁹⁶ Indeed, the 1974 Supreme Court case *Milliken v. Bradley* virtually ruled out the possibility of integrating majority white suburbs with majority African American cities to create metropolitan school

systems. Thus a viable option for future desegregation was denied. Riddick observed, "there is no regional cooperation" between the city of Norfolk and its surrounding suburbs, and that suburban school officials demonstrated no interest in the creation of a metropolitan school system.⁹⁷ In Norfolk, resegregation appeared to be there to stay.

Yet, a call to end busing at the high school level in August 2002 was met with resistance. In 2004, according to Bryant, "everything is quiet [in Norfolk] . . . they tried to make an assault on the high schools, but the plan was thwarted."⁹⁸ Interestingly, it was three city council members and two state legislators who suggested the plan—no school board members. The strong influence of local politics on the school system remains. Riddick noted that there is "not a whole lot of interest in busing" now, despite disparities in educational opportunities between white and African American students.⁹⁹

In Superintendent John O. Simpson's all-staff speech on 29 August 2002, he declared, "For those of us in Norfolk Public Schools, the phrase 'on the bus' is a positive one. It symbolizes that we are all moving in the right direction on our journey to world-class status."¹⁰⁰ Simpson's choice of words was ironic during a time when busing for desegregation was on the decline in Norfolk, and segregation was increasing within the school system, within various schools, and within the greater metropolitan area. It was doubtful that this was the right direction to which Simpson referred. "On the bus" was not a positive phrase in Norfolk in the 1970s. Busing, and therefore substantial school desegregation, did not occur until federal court orders mandated outside supervision. Then with the achievement of unitary status, Norfolk's busing plan gradually ended, first at the elementary level, then at the middle school level, and perhaps next at the high school level.

Racial isolation in 2002 was greater in neighborhood schools than during the era of widespread busing. One African American resident of Norfolk feared that without busing, students would grow up in isolation and "when these isolated children become adults, they won't be able to co-exist in a multicultural world." He thought the adults' racism was behind the call to end busing.¹⁰¹ One white high school student declared, "What I like about busing from different neighborhoods is it does bring diversity within our schools."¹⁰² Whether these separate schools are equal in providing equal educational opportunities for African Americans remains to be seen. Indicators of African American achievement have shown different results, and Public Information Officer Raiss maintained that achievement levels vary from school to school. However, according to a number of researchers "most of the students in Norfolk's all-black schools remain in the educational basement."¹⁰³ Kenneth Clark, whose research was critical in the *Brown* decision, continues to wonder why more than forty years later, there is still "talk about 'separate but equal.' If they're going to be equal, why are they separate?"¹⁰⁴ The issue remains, and many are closely watching Norfolk, remembering the past, observing the present, and hoping for the best in the future. With regard to the success or failure of school desegregation in Norfolk, "The jury is still out."¹⁰⁵

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