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ABSTRACT

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka that segregated schools were unconstitutional. In 1984, on the thirtieth anniversary of the Brown decision, psychologist Kenneth Clark spoke in West Virginia. Clark's doll studies had greatly influenced the Brown decision as he attempted to show how segregation created a badge of inferiority and led to psychological damage among African American children. West Virginia's reaction to the Brown decision was not without problems, but suggested a commitment to offer its African American citizens equality of educational opportunity as protected by the Fourteenth Amendment.

ARTICLE

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that segregated schools were unconstitutional. Chief Justice Earl Warren read the decision of the Court: "We come to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public school solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other tangible factors may be equal, deprive children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does. We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of separate but equal has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."¹ This ruling overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* in which the court in 1896 had declared that separate facilities did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment.

The *Plessy* case did not involve education directly, but was a transportation case based on an 1890 Louisiana law that mandated separate railway cars for blacks and whites. Homer Plessy, who was one-eighth black, refused to vacate the white car and was imprisoned in a New Orleans parish jail. Plessy challenged that he had been denied his constitutional rights guaranteed by the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. The Supreme Court argued that in no way was Plessy being forced into a state of involuntary servitude by riding in a separate car. The court further stated that the Fourteenth Amendment, which protected "life, liberty, and property without due process of law," was not being abridged. Even though Louisiana law mandated separate cars, the court found the railroad cars essentially no different. The constitutionality of separate but equal held until overturned by the *Brown* decision in 1954.²

The challenge to *Plessy* began years before the *Brown* decision in 1954 and was initiated through the work of Charles Hamilton Houston, a World War I veteran and graduate of Harvard Law School. The discrimination Houston faced as a black officer during the war, and the racism of American society upon his return, led him to attend Howard Law School, where he eventually became Dean. With the goal of overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Houston began to train civil rights lawyers at Howard. Future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall was his best student.

Marshall headed the NAACP defense team that began the challenge, demonstrating that the separate but equal doctrine of *Plessy* did not hold for many law schools in the country. However, Marshall and his colleagues believed that simply showing schools were separate and unequal was not enough to overturn *Plessy*. They must prove that the segregation produced a badge of inferiority. The separation alone implied inferiority. Marshall and the defense team believed the psychological studies of Kenneth Clark could be applicable to their argument. Clark's research explored how the impact of separation affected the self-image and potential for learning in African American children. Clark used dolls to show how children learn about race and identify themselves. The African American children in his study were shown four dolls from the same mold and dressed alike. Two dolls were boys, one black and one white, with the same configuration for the girl dolls. To determine racial preference Clark asked each African American child to give him the following: the doll you like to play with or the one you like best, the nice doll, the doll that looks bad, and the doll that is a nice color. Clark's findings revealed that the African American children demonstrated a strong preference for the white dolls and a rejection of the black dolls. Clark and the NAACP defense team believed the research proved that black children learned early that American society preferred whiteness, implying that black meant inferior. Marshall convinced the Supreme Court during the Brown case that separation increased these deep psychological feelings of inferiority.³ The court agreed.

Following the 1954 *Brown* ruling, West Virginia Governor William C. Marland pledged to obey the Supreme Court edict and foresaw no serious difficulty in integrating West Virginia schools. State Superintendent of Schools W. W. Trent agreed, considering the adjustment as largely administrative. In a letter to county superintendents Trent wrote, "As segregation is unconstitutional boards should, in my opinion, begin immediately to reorganize and readjust their schools to comply with the Supreme Court decision.... Neither force nor legal action should be necessary to effect compliance with the decision of the Supreme Court."4 State Negro School Supervisor J. W. Robinson expressed agreement with the ruling. "I feel that Negro pupils in general will benefit with a better education. I don't expect any trouble. The ruling will open the door to many qualified Negro teachers now looking for jobs and should alleviate the teacher shortage problem in West Virginia." The Reverend Daniel Kirwin, superintendent of Catholic schools in the Wheeling Diocese, stated that the court's decision was "another step toward achievement of real democracy in the United States. Although the decision will give in to many problems, particularly in the Deep South. I do not see how a Christian nation could adopt any other policy. I am glad the question has been settled."5 While school segregation had been attacked and the Fourteenth Amendment brought to life, the question of how to proceed was far from clear. The Brown decision was not accompanied by a plan or recommendation for implementation, leading many states to delay integration. Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Maryland, the District of Columbia, and West Virginia stated that they would readily comply with the court's decision. However, Georgia Governor Talmadge, the most outspoken of the seventeen Jim Crow governors, challenged the constitutionality of the decision and vowed to maintain segregated schools. South Carolina leaders, led by Governor James F. Byrnes, discussed the possibility of abandoning their public school system to avoid integration. The Jackson Mississippi Daily News claimed the Supreme Court would be held responsible for the blood that would soon stain southern soil.⁶ Approximately a month after the court decision, the Southern Education Reporting Service announced the creation of Southern School News, a newspaper whose purpose was to report on the progress of desegregation. C. A. McKnight of the Charlotte Observer served as executive director, with the George Peabody College of Teachers acting as fiscal agent and source of publication.7 While some feared the Southern School News was a tool to laud integration, others saw it as a mouthpiece of the Dixiecrats. The paper's editors believed they simply reported the facts.



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Protests Against Racial Integration at Matoaka High School, Mercer County, West Virginia *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, September 17, 1956



Protests Against Racial Integration at Matoaka High School in Mercer County, West Virginia and Hemphill-Capel Junior High School in McDowell County, West Virginia Bluefield Daily Telegraph, October 1, 1957

The response to the federal court's ruling was generally positive in West Virginia although there were concerns and delays in some counties. In 1954 West Virginia's public schools were organized into fifty-five counties with elected school boards. The West Virginia Board of Education, appointed by the governor, determined educational policy for the state. Governor Marland and State School Superintendent Trent sought to abide by the Supreme Court's decision. Trent stressed that "integration must be worked out on the county level, with each school system adopting desegregation techniques to cope with local problems."⁸ This policy allowed some counties in the state to take a wait-and-see attitude while others moved quickly to integrate schools. Those counties closer to the Virginia border, the eastern panhandle, and the southern region of the state were slower in accepting the court's ruling. For example, Greenbrier County, on the southwest Virginia border, took an approach that delayed integration. On September 16, 1954, at the beginning of the school year, the Greenbrier Independent announced that segregation was to continue. The Greenbrier Board of Education had met and decided to return to segregated schools after a week's trial at integration. This decision was reached after three hundred white students from White Sulphur Springs High School protested integration by refusing to attend school. The board session lasted more than twelve hours with angry parents standing just outside the meeting room. Rumors abounded that two white football players were being replaced by African Americans. Another story reported that an African American male had passed a note during school to a white girl. The school board of Greenbrier County ordered African American students to return to the schools they had attended during the 1953-1954 school year.9

Boone County experienced difficulty when eleven students complained about the integration of Madison's Scott High School. Although Principal E. C. Brown supported integration along with the student council, a small number of anti-integration demonstrators forced the issue and picketed. A local minister also stirred up the crowd gathered at the county board of education meeting on September 9, 1954. There was some concern that the reporting of the Greenbrier incident by the media had incited reaction in other parts of the state. In response to this concern the *Charleston Gazette*, published in the state capital, refused to publish photographs of the demonstrators who had asked to be identified. Tom Nutter, president of the West Virginia Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People challenged Governor Marland to step in and quiet the tension in the southern counties.¹⁰ Some parents in Barbour County protested and called for a gradual approach. Taylor County suggested a freedom-of-choice plan while Mercer, Berkeley, and Mineral wanted to wait until the Supreme

Court devised a plan for implementation. A small protest took place in Marion County when a group of mothers picketed the Annabelle School near Fairmont. The protest was curtailed when a local judge threatened to issue an injunction.

Monongalia County, home of West Virginia University, responded to the decision favorably with the school board emphasizing that African American pupils would be admitted to schools in their residential areas.¹¹ Other forms of integration included the merger on October 15, 1954, of the West Virginia Association of Teachers (white) and the West Virginia State Teachers Association (African American). A proposal for a merger had been discussed in 1950, but tabled at the time for further study. A joint committee of the WVEA and the WVSTA recommended a "closer working relationship," stating "that working together will help to break down barriers that seem to exist and that in the near future the members of both associations will feel that one educational organization within the state will prove more effective than the present dual association."12 The official vote to merge took place on October 15, 1954; however, the merger was not without controversy. Prior to the merger, the WVSTA proposed to send a \$1,500 contribution to the NAACP which angered some members of the WVEA. The WVEA refused to consider the merger until the controversy was resolved. The WVSTA relented on the contribution to the NAACP and the merger moved forward to form the united West Virginia Education Association of the National Education Association.¹³ West Virginia Boys State also changed its policy to include all representatives from the fifty-five counties regardless of race, creed, or color.14

Yet, one year following the *Brown* decision, the state still remained divided on its approach to desegregation. Twelve counties were fully integrated while others continued a wait-and-see attitude. An assistant superintendent from McDowell County stated that there had been no interest in his county on the integration issue. The Superintendent of Logan County, Paul Winfield, claimed that African Americans "seem satisfied with their schools and the existing system. The matter hasn't been pushed in the county," Winfield remarked, "but it could be a knotty problem."¹⁵ While West Virginia gradually moved toward integration, most of the South remained entrenched. South Carolina papers reported no court order forcing them to integrate schools. The Alabama press echoed this response while the *St. Louis Dispatch* and *Charlotte News* argued that the intent of the *Brown* decision should be supported.¹⁶ The state of Louisiana received a grant of \$100,000 from a state agency, the Board of Liquidation of the State Debt, to fight integration in the courts. The NAACP in Louisiana protested that state money was being used to fight a decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, clearly a challenge to the Fourteenth Amendment.¹⁷ The Supreme Court had reaffirmed its earlier decision through *Brown II*, which called for desegregation with all deliberate speed, but pushed implementation to the lower federal courts. This put extreme pressure on many federal judges who lived and worked in these segregated communities.¹⁸

Superintendent Trent reported in February 1955 that "twentynine counties have integrated in full or in part, 3 of which have integrated in transportation only; 16 counties postponed action; and 10 counties have no Negro pupils for elementary or high schools."19 When school opened in West Virginia in September 1955, there was positive evidence of the state's move to integrate; however, Willard Brown, a Charleston attorney for the NAACP, pressed for legal action in counties not seeking to comply with the court order. These counties included Greenbrier, Logan, Mercer, McDowell, Mingo, and Fayette. State Superintendent Trent advised the holdout counties to begin working to integrate their schools.²⁰ All was far from well when four African American students were turned away from four Raleigh County schools, and Greenbrier County became the first county in the state to face legal action. The suit was brought to the U.S. District Court in Charleston on behalf of six African American children and their parents. "In the bill of complaint," the Southern School News reported, "it was alleged that Greenbrier County Negroes were denied their constitutional rights by being forced to attend separate schools."21 On October 12, 1955, Federal Judge Ben Moore "spelled out a plan for ending alleged discrimination against Greenbrier County's 400-odd Negro Children." West Virginia

NAACP attorney Willard Brown described Judge Moore as a liberal jurist who had "repeatedly stated that it is not the problem of the court to determine how the Board of Education is to proceed with integration, but that it is the duty of the board to proceed."²² In an attempt to avoid a similar court battle, Mercer, Summers, and Raleigh Counties agreed to desegregate. The West Virginia State Department of Education announced on September 27, 1955, that ten counties had not moved to integrate. These included Berkeley, Grant, Hampshire, Hardy, Jefferson, Raleigh, Greenbrier, McDowell, Summers, and Mercer. Due to the delay the NAACP was planning to legally challenge McDowell, Logan, Mingo, Hardy, Jefferson, and Berkeley in the eastern panhandle.²³

Integration began in Greenbrier and Raleigh Counties in February 1956 when thirty African Americans out of 381 were admitted to county schools. Raleigh County admitted fourteen out of 3,011 total African American students. The NAACP charged the Raleigh school board with "purposely delaying compliance."24 Later that spring the NAACP filed a suit against Logan County arguing that, at the present pace, it would take the county twelve years to fully integrate its schools. The NAACP suit asked for an injunction against the county board of education and Superintendent of Schools Paul C. Winter. The suit was brought on behalf of the parents of five children by a local parents' and citizens' organization. In a controversial move, Dr. H. T. Elliott, president of the Logan County chapter of the NAACP, refused to support the NAACP's legal action. Elliott stated, "We feel the board is acting reasonably toward ending segregation and not arrogantly, as we understand some school boards have acted."²⁵ T. G. Nutter, president of the West Virginia State Conference of the NAACP, believed that Elliott was dragging his feet and that the local NAACP branch in Logan was controlled by teachers who refused to support the suit, probably fearing for their jobs. Nutter suggested Elliott be suspended from his NAACP post. Willard Brown advocated a "complete investigation" of Dr. Elliott's stand as president of the Logan branch. Brown stated, "We have come too far along the way here in West Virginia to allow anybody, including yours truly, to prevent us from proceeding to reach our

goal of first-class citizenship."26 Judge Harry Watkins soon ruled that "discrimination on the ground of race or color in the schools of Logan County must end at the earliest practical date."27 By the summer of 1956 the last African American school in Ohio County had been closed, and an NAACP suit challenging McDowell County had been brought to solution. A report from the local NAACP chapter in McDowell County suggested several problems that were slowing down school integration. While the report mentioned the influence of delays in Virginia and Arkansas, the primary issues surrounded parental refusal to send their children to white schools and "the influence of Negro teachers and Negro parents and pupils to maintain the old standard of separate schools." At the time no African American teacher had been transferred to a white or integrated school in the county.28 Delays in Cabell County resulted in a suit by the NAACP in July 1956 with NAACP state president T. G. Nutter claiming, "Cabell County is making no real effort to desegregate its schools."29



Bluefield Daily Telegraph, October 2, 1957

During the national Republican and Democratic conventions of that year, the West Virginia delegation supported a civil rights platform. When school opened in September 1956, only three out of fifty-five counties were still fully segregated. On September 16, 1956, while speaking in Missouri, Thurgood Marshall applauded the West Virginia branch of the NAACP for "bringing integration to the point where there are only three counties to go," and believed that West Virginia had made more progress than any other state.³⁰

On September 15, 1956, T. G. Nutter reported on the progress of the NAACP to integrate West Virginia schools. Nutter reported that Greenbrier, Raleigh, Mercer, McDowell, Logan, Cabell, and Ohio County had integrated or moved toward integration. The three counties that had not moved to desegregate were Berkeley, Jefferson, and Hampshire. A few days later a headline in the *Charleston Gazette* read, "Dixie Can Look to West Virginia for Lesson on Integration." The editorial stated, "West Virginia was the first of the southern and border states to comply with the Supreme Court's integration order of 1954, and to show that integration is a socially and politically acceptable fact of educational life in an area where strong segregationist sympathies have existed since the Civil War."³¹

African American teacher placement was becoming a nationwide concern as states closed black schools and integrated white schools in the fall of 1956.32 Teacher placement was a real and sensitive issue for African American teachers in West Virginia as well. In Logan County, Carrie Minnefield, a teacher and member of the Logan branch of the NAACP, wrote to Roy Wilkins and Thurgood Marshall expressing her concern about the criticism of the Logan branch. She reported that fifteen white teachers had lost their jobs and gualified African American teachers were seeking employment elsewhere due to the closure of their all-black schools.33 The Southern School News reported that 304 teachers had been displaced in Oklahoma, fifty-eight in West Virginia, twenty in Mississippi, twenty in Missouri, and twenty in Texas. Most of the teachers found other assignments, but not always to their satisfaction. The number of lost jobs approached 38,000 in the seventeen Jim Crow states from 1954 to 1965. Some suggest this began the steady decline in the number of African American teachers which exists to this day. At the time of the Brown decision, 85 percent of African American teachers taught in the South.³⁴ In West Virginia, twelve principals of former African American schools lost their administrative positions and

had to accept teacher positions with lower pay.³⁵ There was a court challenge from one African American teacher, Harry Davis, a former principal of Charleston's Garnet High School because he had been assigned an assistant principal's position at Charleston's Technical High School.³⁶ Due to racism, coupled with economic forces, many African Americans in West Virginia were struggling to find employment and still experiencing prejudice in the workplace. Many migrated north to Chicago, Cleveland, Youngstown, and Detroit. West Virginia NAACP counsel Willard Brown expressed their frustration: "We ask that only qualified Negroes be hired, but we still can't break down the resistance against our people."³⁷

In November 1956 West Virginians elected Republican Cecil Underwood as governor of West Virginia, an office held by Democrats since 1932. State Superintendent of Schools W. W. Trent also lost his bid for re-election as teachers blamed him for low salaries and low educational standards, but not for his prointegration stand. However, U.S. Congressman Robert Byrd won re-election even though he aligned with the southern Democrats still fighting integration.³⁸ The seventeen Jim Crow states varied greatly in their response to Brown. In October 1954, Oklahoma public schools remained segregated, but some race barriers were addressed in higher education and parochial schools. The state attorney general of Louisiana declared that his state was not part of the federal decision, so Louisiana schools remained segregated. Florida and Kentucky took a wait-and-see posture while Texas declared the decision an "unwarranted invasion of states rights." South Carolina kept its schools segregated and, along with Mississippi and Alabama, discussed the possibility of abolishing the public schools to avoid integration.³⁹ Enrollments of African Americans in integrated schools showed great variation in the seventeen Jim Crow states in the spring of 1956. Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, and Virginia had no racially mixed districts, meaning schools were still overwhelmingly segregated. At the same time nearly 90 percent of West Virginia's districts were mixed, while 5 percent of Oklahoma's 1,746 school districts and 4 percent of Texas's 1,802 were mixed.

By the end of the 1956-1957 school year, twenty of fifty-five counties in West Virginia were considered desegregated, and twenty-one partially, with Berkeley, Hampshire, and Jefferson still segregated. Eleven counties reported having no African American students. An anti-integration demonstration was held in Mercer County at the beginning of the 1956-1957 school year; however, the local school board refused to yield its desire to integrate. The segregationists were foiled and the demonstrations eventually ceased. The following year the attempted integration of nine African American students at Little Rock High School in Arkansas captured the national headlines. McDowell County experienced a protest at Welch High School when four hundred white students boycotted classes because eight African Americans attempted to enroll. Some protestors carried signs reading "We Support Little Rock." While Principal E. W. Richardson pleaded with the protestors, they refused to listen and marched through the business section of the city. Local and state police were on hand to quell the possibility of violence. Another demonstration took place in Mercer County, but by mid-October schools in both Mercer and McDowell were operating without incident.

Most West Virginia leaders continued to support school integration. Republican Governor Cecil Underwood, who supported Eisenhower's use of federal troops in Little Rock, accused Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus of using the southern governors' conference for political gain.⁴⁰ Underwood cast the only dissenting vote among southern governors at the conference, a vote that condemned President Eisenhower's action. His stance won him an honorary membership in the NAACP.⁴¹ The 1957-1958 school year was the first school opening since 1954 without a pending lawsuit, and the state noted that by integrating its schools, it had saved nearly \$250,000 out of a school budget of one million.⁴² Although a bit premature, West Virginia claimed to be the first of the southern and border states to end segregation. By the fall of 1958 forty-seven of fifty-five counties in the state were considered to be integrated.⁴³

A 1958 report from the state NAACP suggested that African American teachers in West Virginia were satisfied with their present positions. Mrs. John Norman, a teacher at Stonewall Jackson High School wrote, "I like the high standards of conduct and of scholarship to which the school adheres. . . . The philosophy at Stonewall Jackson is to develop young people to their optimum, spiritually, physically and mentally." E. B. Saunders, former principal of Kelly Miller High School in Clarksburg, was made principal of a predominately white school with an all-white faculty. He reported, "I was respected in every sense of the word by the faculty, pupils, parents and patrons of the school. . . . The same respect has been given to other teachers sent from Kelly Miller to other schools."⁴⁴ The West Virginia NAACP was determined to point out the positive achievements in school integration.

The 1958-1959 school year was interrupted by a school bombing at Osage, West Virginia, just outside of Morgantown in Monongalia County. There was never conclusive evidence that the bombing was racially motivated, and the county had led the state in integrating its schools. Copycat bomb threats took place in Oak Hill, Point Pleasant, Charleston, and Beckley. The West Virginia legislature acted quickly by making bomb threats a felony and requiring schools to make up lost instructional days. The legislature's response seemed to stop the threats.⁴⁵ On April 29, 1959, Thurgood Marshall issued a press release challenging the states of South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama, which were still committed to segregated schools and considering closing all public schools. Marshall stated, "We will continue to stand firm for the basic constitutional rights already adjudicated and insist on desegregation with all deliberate speed."⁴⁶

While the public schools moved to integrate, West Virginia higher education also responded by increasing equality of opportunity for African American students.⁴⁷ Dr. Ervin Stewart, the president of West Virginia University, wrote to the state attorney general four days after the *Brown* decision asking if the university "should admit in-state and out-of-state Black students to the undergraduate programs of the university."⁴⁸ West Virginia Attorney General John G. Fox ruled that the federal mandate should be applied to higher education. Shortly following his ruling the governing board of higher education in West Virginia adopted a policy of nonsegregation, desiring to admit any qualified student to any state college or university. One unfortunate consequence of the *Brown* decision, however, was the closure of Storer College in Harpers Ferry. Founded in 1867 by abolitionist John Storer, the college's original mission was to prepare African American teachers and to teach literacy. Although Storer alumni attempted to save the school through fund-raisers, when declining enrollment led to increasing debt, the state decided to close the institution and remove \$20,000 of state funding from the school. Storer was closed shortly after the discontinuance of state aid.⁴⁹ The state also claimed to save \$40,000 by merging the Colored School for the Deaf and Blind with its white counterpart. The white school had been in operation for forty years.⁵⁰

The election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 ushered in an age of attention to civil and human rights. This led to the formation of human rights commissions in many states including West Virginia. In 1961 the West Virginia Commission established thirty-five local community relations commissions to share information and discover issues related to equality and racism. The commission reported that in January 1964 there were still eighty-eight public schools that were all African American in West Virginia, and the commission urged the state board of education to eliminate these schools within the next five years. McDowell County still had twenty-three all-black elementary schools. The McDowell county chapter of the NAACP claimed that prejudice, apathy on the part of the board of education, reluctance by African American students to meet the challenges of a new environment, and desire by African American parents and teachers to maintain separate schools all contributed to the delay. The NAACP argued that the county's five-year plan was too slow and at the national level began a campaign opposing federal funds to counties that retained segregated schools.⁵¹ The NAACP also challenged segregation in the North where zoning laws fostered de facto segregated communities and schools. In an attempt to increase African American political activism Gloster Current, director of national NAACP branches, called for the "election of more Negroes

to local school boards in order that the deliberation of these bodies, which are conducted out of earshot of most citizens, will have the advantage of minority group representation."⁵²

On February 10, 1962, the NAACP filed suit against the Raleigh County Board of Education for failure to desegregate their schools. African American children traveled long distances on segregated buses to attend segregated schools even when white schools were closer to where they lived. The school board was charged "with having attempted to zone and gerrymander the entire school area of Raleigh County." The suit further charged the board with intimidating African American principals and discouraging students from attending schools closer to their homes. Attorney for the NAACP Willard Brown pointed out the resulting inequities. "There is a lack of adequate personnel, subject matter taught, and physical equipment in all of the schools that are predominately Negro as compared to all of the schools that are predominately white."⁵³ The suit argued that Raleigh County had violated an earlier court order of January 10, 1956, to desegregate.

The NAACP in Mercer County was concerned that the county was participating only in token integration. According to the president of the local branch of the NAACP in Mercer County, C. Anderson Davis, the county superintendent refused to allow African American children to go to school beyond their districts, resulting in segregated schools.⁵⁴ The declining number of African Americans in public school administration in West Virginia was also disturbing. In 1954 there were nine assistant superintendents in West Virginia, but in 1964 there were none. The percentage of African American teachers also dropped. Some African American pupils were feeling alienated, and little was being done to help disadvantaged children. Textbooks ignored African American history and culture.⁵⁵

To make matters worse, the Ku Klux Klan was organizing in Greenbrier County. Always a trouble spot, Greenbrier County experienced a protest when one hundred white students from the high school in White Sulphur Springs called for an all-white high school. The demonstration caught many African Americans in the community by surprise. C. Anderson Davis visited the school where apparently white students complained that African Americans were receiving most of the athletic awards in football and basketball, and an African American girl had been selected as a majorette in the band. Davis found that school officials and the superintendent were adamantly opposed to the demonstration and that the students who participated would be considered absent and their parents potentially fined. Davis believed it best to say little about the disturbances and to let the school officials handle the problem.⁵⁶ A white minister from White Sulphur Springs expressed the sentiment of the protestors stating, "During the past 100 years Negroes have been kept in the lower income brackets. We have had to live in substandard housing . . . Why are we giving them [Negro children] an education if we can't integrate them into the commercial life of the community? They don't need an education to dig a ditch."⁵⁷

While schools were becoming more integrated, hiring practices and equal opportunity in society were still being undermined by racism. The Brown decision not only influenced public schools and higher education in the state, but also housing, employment, voting, and public accommodations. Jim Crow laws segregated schools, but also affected association patterns of African Americans and whites. African Americans were concerned about discrimination in hiring practices, housing, and public accommodations. Groups such as the Charleston United Church Women and the West Virginia Human Rights Commission fought to open doors previously closed to African Americans. One of the first demonstrations against segregated seating practices in the country took place in March 1960 when a group of Bluefield State College students, sponsored by the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), picketed two theaters in Bluefield. They also attacked segregated lunch counters at Kresge and Woolworth stores with limited success. Many hospitals, restaurants, hotels, and pools still refused to admit African Americans. By 1965 the West Virginia Human Rights Commission could report that such "blatant racial discrimination" was over.58

In February 1965, the *Southern School News* reported on issues of compliance as mandated in Section VI of the Civil Rights Act (CRA) of 1964. Federal assistance was not to go to any new projects

"unless an assurance of compliance, court order, or desegregation plan had been submitted to the Office of Education."59 Unlike other southern states, West Virginia had moved to integrate schools and public facilities prior to the signing. The CRA forced the Jim Crow South to move toward integration, denving federal funds to those who continued to discriminate through segregated schools. Schools in West Virginia were considered fully desegregated by 1964, but that ten-year struggle was influenced by a combination of economic, social, and political forces. In 1954 the West Virginia economy had been hurt by a 20 percent drop in coal production. The Democratic legislature was seeking to reduce a seven-million-dollar deficit and could only do so by eliminating segregated public schools and colleges.⁶⁰ A state deficit pushed policy makers to seek means to conserve funds, and one solution was to eliminate the costly separate school systems and their transportation costs. Both white and African American teachers were expecting a salary increase at the time, so money was needed to fund the raises.⁶¹ According to Governor Marland, the state needed to find six million dollars if it was to continue a segregated school system. It simply did not have the money.

The closure of African American schools happened virtually overnight in most counties. Due to the small African American population in West Virginia, blacks would never have outnumbered whites in any school district. This was not true in other parts of the South. Even though politically dominated by the Democrats, and a strong union state, West Virginia could count on both Democrats and Republicans to support school integration. The strong support for the *Brown* decision by Governor Marland, State Superintendent Trent, and Governor Underwood also helped set the stage for early implementation.⁶²

The struggle for equality of opportunity for African Americans in West Virginia was not without a downside. The closure of local African American schools resulted in a loss of community identity in many black communities. Nelson Bickley believes the "loss of the black schools left a great void in the communities. The schools had been an organizing factor, bringing people together in a centralized

space, crossing religious affiliations, family boundaries, lodge and club loyalties. The teachers were valued and respected in the community and were often turned to for advice and leadership by the adult population of their areas." Bickley describes African American teachers in West Virginia as the "bedrock" of their communities and of the small black middle class.63 One African American teacher responded, "Black parents did not know how to react to the changed school situation. Black teachers had been able to motivate black students and insist that they learn. Black parents supported the black teachers' efforts to teach and discipline the students."64 Many African Americans preferred to keep their children in segregated schools due to this concern. Roberta Freeman, who attended the African American Lincoln School in Flemington recalled, "Even after it closed, it never lost its identity in the community-people used to call it the little colored school . . . We got a good education because our families and teachers cared so much about us. But some of my best friends are white-I was born here with them and they mean the world to me. We had a good upbringing from day one-togetherness was an important part of life."⁶⁵ George Blue, who attended a segregated school in Monongalia County, realized there was a difference in equity between black and white schools before Brown. He recalled, "We did not even get all the subjects they got. But I can say we were given a whole lot of individual attention." On integration Blue stated, "I feel that the integrated system of education is the best thing that ever happened to West Virginia . . . but the main advantage is for the young people to get an education. That is basically what we want."66 Black schools involved the parents, "served as neighborhood centers, and were objects of pride for the black community. Their loss was a historical tragedy."67

Some African American teachers lost their jobs and others were placed in predominately white schools. Fifty-two were displaced during the 1955-1956 school year. In Monongalia County, considered the first county to fully integrate, historian Connie Rice reports, "The number of black teachers in the county declined rapidly after 1954. A few teachers retired and several did not qualify for certification following integration."⁶⁸ In Kanawha County during the same year, twelve former principals of African American schools were assigned teaching positions at lower pay. The *Southern School News* reported that, throughout the South, "Negro Principals and administrators were, in the majority of cases, treated unjustly."⁶⁹ African American administrators were typically demoted when assigned to white schools, and shortly after *Brown* none were appointed as full superintendents. Members of the former West Virginia State Teachers Association were often overlooked for leadership positions in the merged teacher organization, the West Virginia Education Association. Local historian Ancella Bickley writes, "In the 18 years that elapsed between the time of the 1954 merger and 1972, only one black person, Dr. Harrison Ferrell, dean of West Virginia State College, served on the West Virginia Education Association Executive Committee."⁷⁰

While much is still to be learned about the West Virginia experience, segregation is still an issue for the South and the nation. Influenced by Brown and the CRA of 1964, the South "witnessed the greatest increase in racial integration" and in the late 1980s could boast the highest level of school integration in the nation. According to the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, the "South remains the only region of the country where whites typically attend schools with significant numbers of blacks."71 Unfortunately, the nation is experiencing segregation once again through increasing discrepancies in wealth coupled with race and ethnicity. In 1999, a third of Latino students attended segregated schools and 70 percent of African American students attended predominately minority schools. At present the United States faces greater ethnic and racial polarization, perhaps coupled with increased educational inequity. The integration of American schools and the challenge to Jim Crow was both a legal and moral response. Segregation implied inferiority by its nature, a type of artificial barrier that created a caste system in the United States.⁷² Brown challenged this type of caste and racism as defined by law (de jure), but had less effect on challenging the socioeconomic inequalities between blacks and whites at the time.73 Brown had little influence on the de facto segregation characteristic of many northern communities.

Of the seventeen Jim Crow states, West Virginia led the way in integrating its schools, but not without difficulty. The success can be attributed to early support for the Supreme Court's decision at the state level, led by Governor Marland and Superintendent Trent. Local communities generally supported the decision with local branches of the NAACP dialoguing about integration with county school boards. Not all boards responded with sincerity, and this often led to lawsuits initiated by the NAACP. By the time the CRA of 1964 became law, the majority of West Virginia schools were integrated or moving to integrate as economic pressure in funding two separate systems pushed the state in that direction. Of the seventeen Jim Crow states, West Virginia in 1958 had the lowest percentage of black enrollment because of its small black population. Forty-seven out of fifty-five school districts in West Virginia were considered fully integrated. In comparison to West Virginia, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia had no blacks in integrated schools in 1958.74

In 1984, on the thirtieth anniversary of the *Brown* decision, psychologist Kenneth Clark spoke in West Virginia. Clark's doll studies had greatly influenced the *Brown* decision as he attempted to show how segregation created a badge of inferiority and led to psychological damage among African American children. Clark stated during his address that "the purpose of education is to free the human mind of ignorance, superstition, irrational fears and hatreds, tribalism, parochialisms, and the hostilities which interfere with the ability of humans to interact constructively with their fellow human beings."⁷⁵ West Virginia's reaction to the *Brown* decision was not without problems, but suggested a commitment to offer its African American citizens equality of educational opportunity as protected by the Fourteenth Amendment.

NOTES

This article was previously published in *West Virginia History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2008.

- Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). 1. Among the seventeen states including West Virginia were Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Delaware, Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, Maryland, and the District of Columbia, Kansas, New Mexico, Wyoming, and Arizona also had segregated schools to some degree. Segregation implies a separation or grouping, in this case by race. In these seventeen states segregation was de jure, "by law." Desegregation is the legal process of ending segregation, stimulated by the Brown v. Board decision. Integration implies the actual process of desegregation, although integration may be more social in context than legal. The terms desegregation and integration are often used interchangeably, although this can lead to confusion. See Morris J. MacGregor Jr., Integration of the Armed Forces 1940-1965 (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1985); and Oscar Handlin, "The Goals of Integration," Daedalus 95 (Winter 1966): 270.
- 2. Homer A. Plessy v. John H. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).
- 3. Kenneth Clark, *Prejudice and Your Child* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).
- 4. Southern School News, Sept. 3, 1954, 14. Trent reiterates his view in "Department Notes," *West Virginia School Journal* 83 (Sept. 1954), 22.
- 5. Wheeling Intelligencer, May 19, 1954, 5. In 1954 there were 420,000 white and 26,000 African American students attending school in WV; W. E. Chilton III, "Desegregation/Integration and the Media: Fallout from the Brown decision in West Virginia," *Proceedings of the Brown v. Board of Education Symposium* (Institute: West Virginia State College, 1984), 40-47.
- 6. Southern School News, May 17, 1954, 1.
- 7. Ibid., Sept. 3, 1954, 1.
- 8. Ibid.,14.
- 9. *Greenbrier* (County, WV) *Independent*, Sept. 16, 1954, 1. At the time African Americans represented 4.7 percent of the total school population with twenty-three students enrolled at White Sulphur Springs High School and fourteen at Rupert High School; *Southern School News*, Oct. 1, 1954, 14.
- 10. Southern School News, Nov. 4, 1954, 15.
- 11. Ibid., May 4, 1955, 4. By May 1955, Monongalia County Superintendent Rex Smith claimed complete integration of pupils and teachers.
- 12. Charles A. Lord, *Years of Decision: A History of an Organization* (Charleston: West Virginia Education Association, 1965). This work is a history of the West Virginia Education Association.
- 13. Ancella Bickley, *History of the West Virginia State Teachers' Association* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1979), 96-99.
- 14. Southern School News, Nov. 4, 1954, 15; See also ibid., July 6, 1955, 8.
- 15. Ibid., May 4, 1955, 4.
- 16. Ibid., June 8, 1955, 9.

- 17. Ibid., Aug. 1955, 5. *Southern School News* was publishing monthly at this time.
- 18. Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 746. For a discussion of this predicament for local judges, see Cynthia Stokes Brown, ed., Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement: Ready from Within (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990). Septima Clark attended civil rights workshops at the Highlander Folk School with Rosa Parks. Brown II (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 349 U.S. 294 [1955]) was issued fourteen months after the initial Brown ruling and focused on the implementation of the decision.
- W. W. Trent, "Department Notes," West Virginia School Journal 83 (Feb. 1955), 22.
- 20. Southern School News, Sept. 1954, 2.
- 21. Ibid., Oct. 1955, 11.
- 22. Ibid., Nov.1955, 5; Willard Brown to Roy Wilkins, Jan. 10, 1956, NAACP Administration, General Office File, 1956-1965, Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as NAACP Papers); Desegregation of Schools, West Virginia, Group III, Box 1-107, Campaign for Educational Equality, Microfilm Reel 10 (University of Virginia, Charlottesville).
- 23. Southern School News, Oct. 1955, 11. Nine counties at the time had no African American students to report; Southern School News, Nov. 1956, 10.
- 24. Ibid., Feb. 1956, 15.
- 25. Charleston Gazette, Mar.11, 1956, 8.
- 26. T. G. Nutter to Gloster B. Current, Mar. 20, 1956, NAACP Papers. For discussion of Elliott's lack of performance, see T. G. Nutter to Gloster B. Current, July 2, 1956, ibid. Elliott was superintendent of the State Tuberculosis Sanatorium for Negroes, and his wife taught school in Logan County. See also Willard Brown to Roy Wilkins, Mar. 12, 1956, and T. G. Nutter to Dr. H. T. Elliott, Apr. 13, 1956, ibid.
- 27. Southern School News, May 1956, 16.
- 28. McDowell County Board of the NAACP, Report of the McDowell County Chapter of NAACP, West Virginia State Division, n.d., NAACP Papers.
- 29. Southern School News, June 1956, 11, and July 1956, 2.
- 30. Ibid., Sept. 1956, 10, and Oct. 1956, 5. Marshall seemed to appreciate West Virginia's efforts to desegregate (Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 747). Marshall made this statement two days following Brown II on June 2, 1955. See also Gloster B. Current to T. G. Nutter, Nov. 27, 1956, and Memo of Roy Wilkins to Gloster B. Current, Sept. 5, 1956, on the subject of school integration in Kentucky and West Virginia, NAACP Papers.
- 31. T. G. Nutter to Officer and Delegates to the 12th Annual Session of the West Virginia State Conference of the NAACP, Sept.15, 1956, and "Editorial of the Week," Sept. 22, 1956, NAACP Papers.

- 32. Jonas O. Rosenthal, "Negro Teachers' Attitudes toward Desegregation," Journal of Negro Education 26 (Winter 1957): 63-71.
- 33. Carrie Minnefield to Roy Wilkins and Thurgood Marshall, Oct. 16, 1956, NAACP Papers. T. G. Nutter challenged Minnefield in Nutter to Wilkins, Nov. 13, 1956, ibid., referring to her as having a "very disturbed mind."
- 34. See Edgar Epps, "Race and School Desegregation: Contemporary Legal and Educational Issues," Urban Education Journal 1 (Spring 2002), http:// www.urbanedjournal.org/articles/article0003.pdf See also Mildred Hudson and Barbara Holmes, "Missing Teachers, Impaired Communities: The Unanticipated Consequences of Brown v. Board of Education on the African American Teaching Force at the Pre-collegiate Level," *Journal of Negro Education* 63 (1994): 388-93.
- 35. Lawrence V. Jordan, "Educational Integration in West Virginia: One Year Afterward," *Journal of Negro Education* 24 (Summer 1955): 371-81. In 1955 Jordan argued that 6 principals and 7 teachers had lost jobs while no white teachers had lost theirs (see table on 379).
- 36. Southern School News, Nov. 1956, 2.
- 37. Ibid., May 1957, 10.
- 38. Byrd did not support Brown, nor did he support the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that finally forced southern schools to integrate. He does not discuss the reasoning behind his decision in his autobiography, *Robert C. Byrd: Child of the Appalachian Coalfields* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2005), 149, 170.
- 39. Southern School News, Oct. 1, 1954, 1.
- 40. Ibid., Nov. 1957, 8.
- 41. Ibid., Apr. 1958, 3.
- 42. Ibid., June 1957, 3.
- 43. Ibid., June 1958, 7, and Oct. 1958, 2.
- 44. Report to the Officers and Delegates to the 14th Annual Session of the West Virginia State Conference of the NAACP, Sept. 13, 1958, NAACP Papers. The report does not include information on the opinion of teachers displaced by the *Brown* decision. For the national perspective on teacher displacement, see J. Detweiler, "The Negro Teacher and the Fourteenth Amendment," *Journal of Negro Education* 36 (1967): 403-9.
- 45. *Southern School News*, Dec. 1958, 4. No evidence was found to link the bombing with the integration of schools.
- 46. Statement of Thurgood Marshall to United Press International, Apr. 29, 1959, NAACP Papers.
- 47. For the higher education response to Brown, see William P. Jackameit, "A Short History of Negro Public Higher Education in West Virginia, 1890-1965," *West Virginia History* 37 (July 1976): 309-24.
- 48. Gordon Gee, "The Impact of the Brown Decision on Higher Education," Proceedings of the Brown v. Board of Education Symposium, 81.

- 49. See Lawrence V. Jordan, "Desegregation of Higher Education in West Virginia," *Journal of Negro Education* 27 (Summer 1958): 332-41.
- 50. Southern School News, July 6, 1955, 8, and June 8, 1955, 12.
- 51. Ibid, Apr. 1964, 11; Press Release, "NAACP Opposed to Federal Funds to States Which Keep Segregated Schools," Mar. 10, 1961, NAACP Papers.
- 52. Press Release, "Relax School Districts, NAACP Officials Urge," Sept. 15, 1961, NAACP Papers.
- 53. William G. Taylor v. County Board of Education of the County of Raleigh. Suit filed in the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of West Virginia, Civil Action No. 159, NAACP Papers.
- 54. C. Anderson Davis to Robert L. Carter, Oct. 3, 1963, ibid.
- 55. Southern School News, Apr. 1964, 11.
- 56. C. Anderson Davis to Gloster B. Current, Mar. 25, 1964, NAACP Papers.
- 57. Southern School News, June 1964, 9.
- For information on the commission, see Douglas Smith, "In Quest of Equality: The West Virginia Experience," West Virginia History 37 (Apr. 1976): 211-20.
- 59. Southern School News, Feb.1965, 8. In Feb. 1965 the Southern School News became the Southern Education Report.) Unlike the SSN, the SER came to rely on a full-time staff of reporters while its predecessor had relied on part-time correspondents from the individual states. Like the SSN, the SER continued to publish annual statistical summaries on racial enrollment in the public schools and colleges (June 1965, 8).
- 60. Southern School News, Dec. 1, 1954, 19. See also W. W. Trent, Forty-first Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Free Schools (Charleston, WV), July 1, 1952 to June 30, 1954, 22.Trent notes that the population declined due to the closing of mines.
- 61. Southern School News, Dec. 1954, 9.
- 62. See the Geospatial and Statistical Datacenter, University of Virginia, http:// fisher.library.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus. In West Virginia the white population declined by 145, 131, and the African American declined by 25, 485.
- 63. Nelson Bickley, "Brown v. Board of Education in West Virginia," *West Virginia Law Review* 107 (Spring 2005): 1-10. This manuscript is from a speech given on Feb. 21, 2005, at the WVU College of Law (see http://web. lexis-nexis.com/universe).
- 64. Ibid., 7.
- 65. Morgantown (WV) Dominion Post, Jan. 28, 2001.
- 66. Jean Clark, et al., *Monongalia Blacks Speak of Today and Yesterday: Black Men Part I* (Morgantown, WV: Monongalia County Schools, 1977), 3, 4. This work contains brief oral histories of black males in the county from a project

sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) in the late 1970s.

- 67. Adam Fairclough, *Black Teachers in the Segregated South: A Class of Their Own* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 13.
- Connie Rice, Our Monongalia: A History of African Americans in Monongalia County, West Virginia (Terra Alta, WV: Headline Press, 1999), 161. Using census data, Rice reports (194) that the actual African American population in Monongalia County declined from 1,682 in 1950 to 1,133 in 1960.
- 69. Southern School News, Nov. 1956, 2.
- 70. Bickley, *History of the West Virginia State Teachers' Association*, 103. The loss of teacher positions and the lack of representation on merged teacher associations was characteristic of integration nationally, according to Fairclough, *Black Teachers in the Segregated South*, 13.
- 71. "Schools More Separate: Consequences of a Decade of Resegregation," Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, http://www.civilrightsproject. harvard.edu. For a sociological view of the impact of Brown from the national perspective, see James S. Coleman, "Education in the Post-Brown Era," *Proceedings of the Brown v. Board of Education Symposium*, 115-29. Coleman is known for his study entitled Equality of Educational Opportunity (Washington, DC: 1966).
- 72. See Memo from American Friends Service Committee and NAACP Defense and Educational Fund to John W. Gardner, secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Nov. 15, 1965, NAACP Papers.
- 73. Robert Cottrol, Raymond Diamond, and Leland Ware, "NAACP and Jim Crow: The Legal Strategy That Brought Down Separate but Equal by Toppling School Segregation," *American Education* (American Federation of Teachers) (Summer 2004): 9-33. Nelson Bickley states ("Brown v. Board of Education in West Virginia," 7) that the last all-black schools "to hold classes were Park Central High School and Genoa Junior High School in Bluefield, both of which remained open until 1969. Piney Oaks Elementary in Raleigh County was the last all-black school in the state to close in 1971."
- 74. Southern School News, Oct. 1958, 2.
- 75. Kenneth Clark, "Educational Trends and U.S. Commitments since the Brown Decision," *Proceedings of the Brown v. Board of Education Symposium*, 71.