

The Tragedy of Public Schools: Prince Edward County, Virginia

A Report for the Virginia Advisory
Committee to the United States Commission
on Civil Rights

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Prince Edward County, Virginia closed its public schools at the end of the Spring term of 1959 in order to avoid a court order to desegregate them. At the time of this writing over four years later, there is still no public education for the white and Negro children of the County, a situation unique in the United States. While white children have had private schools during this period, Negro children had no regular schools open to them until the establishment this fall of a free school, supported by foundation and other gifts. For four years then, more than one half of the children of Prince Edward County did not have an opportunity for formal education in the county. They have been denied what many consider to be one of the most fundamental rights of American children -- the right to a tax-supported education. This tragedy has taken place in a nation which constantly affirms its belief that education is essential to the development and maintenance of a democracy. It has occurred in a society founded on the belief in the worth of every individual and in the necessity of an education for the full realization of that worth. It has happened at a time when schooling is becoming more and more essential as improved technology demands more highly educated and skilled workers and eliminates jobs for the uneducated and the unskilled. It has taken place in a county that openly seeks new industry while denying most of its own children the chance for the schooling essential to the development of skills needed by any new industry that might come. It has happened in spite of the fact that white leaders who ordered the school closing have insisted that they want Negro children in the county to have an education. Yet, it has happened. The "unthinkable", has happened, here in Virginia and in America.

This report seeks to find out why this tragic waste of the county's resources was allowed to take place when apparently no one wanted it to. The report will begin with a brief sketch of Prince Edward County to present the setting. Next it will trace the chronology of events surrounding the closing of the schools, including a citing of the many of the court decisions involved. Then will come a description of the education without public schools and the reactions of whites and Negroes in the county to school closing. An interpretation of why it all has happened will conclude the report.

It is hoped that the report can aid citizens of Virginia to understand more clearly what took place in Prince Edward County and why. And it is devoutly desired that this analysis of Prince Edward County school closing can help any other school system, in Virginia or elsewhere, avoid a similar fate.

The data for this report were gathered by Edward H. Peeples, Jr., currently an instructor in sociology at the Medical College of Virginia. A native of Richmond, Virginia, Mr. Peeples made observations in the county over a period of three years. During that time he conducted interviews with more than 100 persons in the county, studied all available public records and census data, and read histories, newspapers, and other materials written about the county. His first extensive contact came in the spring of 1961 with his establishment of the Richmond Committee of Volunteers to Prince Edward, which conducted week-end educational and recreational activities in the county for four months. Periodic visits continued throughout 1961 and 1962 during which time he set up a study for his master's thesis for the University of Pennsylvania. Field work for this thesis took place during December of 1962 and January of 1963. His thesis entitled "A Perspective of the Prince Edward County School Issue," was accepted by the faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Pennsylvania and led to his award of the Master of Arts degree. In the late spring of 1963 the Virginia Advisory Committee [to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights] invited Mr. Peeples to help with its report on Prince Edward County, and he returned to the county for the months of May and June of 1963 to conduct additional research. This field work was directed by the author, Professor J. Kenneth Morland, Chairman of the Department Sociology and Anthropology of Randolph-Macon Women's College, Lynchburg, Virginia, who put the report into its final form, incorporating additional data from a Michigan State University study of the county during the summer of 1963, a study in which the author participated.

Chapter 2. The Setting

To understand what occurred in Prince Edward County, it is helpful to know something of the nature of the county itself. In such a report as this, a description of pertinent characteristics must be brief, but it is hoped that it will be sufficient to set the scene. The description must also be selective, with an emphasis on racial differences in population, economics, education, and social standing, since the central issue in the report concerns racial discrimination.

Location and Early Settlement

Prince Edward County is situated in the south-central part of the state in an area known as "Southside Virginia". This area is a part of the "Black Belt", an extension of land across the south, from the Chesapeake Bay down through the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, to east Texas. Counties in this belt of land share many of the same economic and social characteristics. They are predominantly rural, have a Negro population of at least one-third of the total (and in some instances a majority), and possess stringent mores and laws requiring racial segregation.

The county comprises 357 square miles of low, rolling hills. It is approximately thirty miles at its widest east to west points and about twenty miles in its longest distance from north to south. The only incorporated town in the county is Farmville, the county seat, with a population of 4,293 in 1960. Farmville is an economic center, not only for Prince Edward, but also for a number of counties in the area. Cities nearest the county are Richmond, about 60 miles by highway to the east, and Lynchburg, some thirty miles to the west. The county has railway and bus service and is crossed by three U.S. highways. Farmville has a small airport but no regularly scheduled commercial flights. Such flights are available in Richmond and Lynchburg.

The first settlement of what is today Prince Edward County occurred around 1700 when settlers came from Tidewater, Virginia. These settlers brought with them the institution of slavery which was an intrinsic part of the social and economic system of colonial eastern Virginia. Some decades later, Scotch-Irish families moved south from Pennsylvania and located in the county. Most of the residents of Prince Edward County today are descendants of those two waves of migration. The county itself was formed in 1753 from parts of Amelia County, and it was named for Prince Edward, the son of Frederick, Prince of Wales and younger brother of George III.

Population

According to the 1960 census, Prince Edward County had a population of 14,121, of whom 39.9 percent were non-white. Since "non-white, for all practical purposes means "Negro" in Prince Edward County,¹ we shall use these terms interchangeably. From 1950 to 1960 the population declined 8.3 percent, with a decrease of 1,277, of whom 1,236 were non-white. The proportion of non-whites in the total population of the county fell from 44.6 percent in 1950 to 39.9 percent in 1960. A greater decline took place in rural rather than in urban population, for the rural portion of the county decreased 10.8 percent and the urban portion lost 1.9 percent during the 1950-1960 period.

¹ The 1960 census lists 4 of 5,624 non-whites as being of "foreign or mixed parentage."

During this ten-year period of 1950 to 1960, the population of the entire state increased by 19.5 percent, which is nearly the same as the percentage increase for the United States as a whole. Thus Prince Edward declined in numbers while the state and nation were increasing. However, six of the seven counties surrounding Prince Edward also lost population from 1950-1960, the average loss being 5.6 percent. Three of the counties sustained greater losses than Prince Edward. Such losses reflect the general decline in population in the predominantly rural sections of the area during the past decade.

Economy

Because most of its people live in rural areas, Prince Edward County might be thought of as predominantly agricultural in economy. Actually less than one-fifth of its working force had agricultural occupations in 1960. However, farm products are important in Prince Edward' economy, having brought in three and three-quarters million dollars in 1959, an increase of almost one million over the value of farm products sold in 1954.² Among the variety of crops grown are tobacco and lumber (the two most important cash crops), corn, wheat, and alfalfa. Poultry, dairy, beef cattle, and hogs are raised commercially, and peaches and apples are grown by several commercial orchards in the county.

The largest industrial plant in the county is a shoe factory employing 350 persons. Other industries include wood-working and construction companies, a barrel factory, a plant that reproduces antiques, a garment factory, two tobacco-handling plants, and one stone-mining operation. The value added by manufacturing in 1959 was slightly over two million dollars.³ Almost all of the businesses and industries in the county are centered in Farmville. No new manufacturing plants were established in the county during the period of 1950-1962.⁴

Data on the distribution of occupations in the county in 1960 show a sharp difference in the types of jobs held by whites and by Negroes. Proportionately, Negroes were under-represented in the professional, managerial, clerical, and sales positions, and were over-represented in laboring and household jobs. The percentage of Negroes in the professions was one-fourth that of whites, and it was one-tenth that of whites in managerial, sales, and clerical categories.⁵ In contrast, there were proportionately four times as many Negro as white laborers and twenty-five times as many Negroes as whites in private household work. Put in another way, 6.2 percent of the Negroes who were employed held "white-collar" jobs, while 45.5 percent of the whites employed held "white-collar" jobs.⁶

² These figures are from U.S. Bureau of the Census, COUNTY AND CITY DATA BOOK: 1962 (p.400) and 1957 (p.321) issues (U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C.).

³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, County and City Data Book: 1962, p. 321

⁴ John L. Knapp, "New Plants in Virginia," The Virginia Economic Review, Vol. 15 (September, 1963), p. 6.

⁵ See Table 1 in the Appendix.

⁶ "White-collar" jobs include the professions, technicians, managers, clerical and sales positions. See Table 2 in the Appendix.

The percentage of the civilian labor force unemployed in the county in 1960 was 2.7 percent, a figure that is lower than that for the nation as a whole. However, the 5.5 percent of Negroes reported to be unemployed was exactly five times as great as the 1.1 percent of whites reported as unemployed.

As might be expected, the difference in occupational position by race are reflected in differences in median income. In 1959 the median income for all Prince Edward County families was \$3,043, while for Negro families it was only \$1,848, or 60.7 percent of the median. Viewed in another way, of the 3,235 families in the county, 1,600, or 49.5 percent made less than \$3,000. But of the 2,031 white families, 31.9 percent made less than \$3,000, while of the 1,204 Negro families, 953 or 79.2 percent made less than \$3,000.⁷

These figures are significant in trying to answer the question of whether or not the Negroes of Prince Edward were able financially to support a private school for their children in 1959. (We shall find that support of the private school for whites by whites making much more money than Negroes has not been easy.) That it would be feasible for Negroes to establish private schools and pay tuition costs, even with the help of whites in the county, is open to grave doubt. We shall return to this question later.

Educational Achievement of Adults

The median number of years of schooling of those in the county 25 years and over in 1960 was almost two full grades below the median for the state as a whole. For Prince Edward it was 8.1 years compared to 9.9 years for the entire state of Virginia. The median for the whites of Prince Edward County was above the 8.1 years, but the median of 6.0 years for the Negroes was slightly more than two years below the county median. When the two races are compared by grade categories completed, we find that the proportion of Negroes with no grades completed was three times that of whites who had completed no grades.⁸ Eight out of ten Negroes had not gone beyond elementary school in contrast to four out of ten whites who had not. On the other hand, the percentage of whites who had completed college in 1960 was more than five times as great as the percentage of Negroes who had graduated from college.

The presence of two all-white colleges in the county helps to account for the comparatively high percentage of white college graduates, a figure higher than the state as a whole. One of these colleges, Longwood, is a state college for women and is located in Farmville. The other is Hampden-Sydney, a church-related men's college located a few miles from Farmville.

Race differences in the amount of schooling received, however, is only a part of the full picture. Schools for whites and Negroes have differed greatly in quality over the years. Records of the secretary of the county school board show that in 1951, the time of a strike by Negro students that lead to litigation and court orders for desegregation, there were fifteen Negro schools in the county for an estimated Negro student population of 2,000. All but one of these schools were of wood

⁷ See Table 3 in the Appendix.

⁸ See Table 4 in the Appendix.

construction, were heated by wood, coal, or kerosene stoves, and were served by outdoor privies. The total value of these properties was \$330,000. In this same year, the seven schools for an estimated 1,400 white students were of brick construction, heated by steam or hot water, and served with indoor toilets. The total property value of these schools was \$1,200,000. In 1951, the per capita property value of schools for whites was an estimated \$817 while for Negroes it was \$194. In addition, there was an estimated 46 white children per acre of school property in contrast to 71 Negro children per acre of school property.

In the face of a probable court order to equalize facilities to remedy this obvious violation of the "separate but equal" basis for racially segregated schools, the county undertook the building of a new high school for Negroes. This modern brick structure was completed during the year 1953 at a cost of \$948,162, and was named for Robert R. Moton, a famous native of Prince Edward County who succeeded Booker T. Washington as president of Tuskegee Institute. Moton High School served as the high school for county Negroes until it was closed, along with all other public schools, in 1959. In the fall of 1963, it was reopened to house the high school division of the Prince Edward Free School Association.

Race Relations in Prince Edward County

Any picture of the setting in which the closing of public schools took place would be incomplete without reminding the reader of the relations that have traditionally existed between the races in the county. These relations have followed the caste-like arrangement characteristic of the rest of the "Black Belt", and indeed, of the entire Old South. The system is familiar to most Americans. The white race is dominant; the Negro race is subordinate. Each has a "place" and is supposed to keep it. The cornerstone in the maintenance of the "place" of each is legally enforced racial segregation. Physical separation is required in housing, churches, schools, and in all social gatherings in order to prevent any semblance of racial equality. But segregation has never meant strict physical separation of the races under all circumstances, for the system does allow close and intimate relationships. Negro women may nurse and take care of white children; they may cook, clean, and become virtually important and warmly regarded in white households. Negro men may work closely with whites in construction and other jobs; they may do yard work or household jobs on the most friendly terms with the white owners. But in all of these relationships, no matter how close or congenial, the Negro must demonstrate his subordination to the white. He must stay in his "place". As long as Negroes adhere to the system, the attitudes of most of the whites is one of benevolent paternalism. White supremacists hold firm that this way of ordering relations between the races is "best" for all concerned. They believe, further, that Negroes are really happy with this way of life and do not want to see it changed. Communication between the races is considered "good" as long as whites make the decisions and explain what is to be done while Negroes follow directions with proper deference.

The rationalizing support for this caste-like system is belief in the innate racial superiority of whites and the innate inferiority of Negroes. The doctrine of racial inferiority helps to reconcile the caste-like system with a democracy that stresses belief in the equality of opportunity for every individual and with a religious faith that teaches the worth of every person, regardless of race and social standing.

For Negroes, enforced racial segregation and the ideology which supports it have lead to inferior

schools and schooling, inferior jobs and income, inferior housing, and little, if any, direct voice in local political affairs. But these very differences in schooling, jobs, housing and the like are pointed to by white supremacists as evidences of innate inferiority of Negroes, and the differences are used to justify the very system which has assured the differences in the first place. Thus the system reinforces and perpetuates itself.

It is against this system of forced racial segregation and its consequences of unequal treatment that American Negroes have been protesting so strongly. This protest found expression in Prince Edward County when Negroes objected to their inferior schools, and the results of this protest form the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter III. Chronology of Events Surrounding School Closing

It has been in the rural counties of the South that white supremacy has been strongest and the changes in the racial caste system have occurred least. Organized protest by Negroes in rural sections is more difficult because united drives against forced racial segregation cannot be readily arranged among scattered people and withdrawal of Negro patronage is less effective in the disruption of business and industry arising from demonstrations. Therefore the open Negro protest in rural Prince Edward County came as a surprise, particularly since it happened before direct action against racial segregation had gained momentum throughout the nation. But at the same time, the protest by Prince Edward Negroes was met by adamant resistance, for it took place where forced racial segregation was considered by dominant white leaders to be absolutely essential in the ordering of race relations.

The protest and the firm resistance it encountered are expressions of a struggle that has involved not only the county, but also the state and the nation as well. The sequence of events that have occurred is complex and not easily untangled. Much of the battle has been fought in the courts, where the rulings have been numerous and intricate. The issues have been in state and federal courts for twelve years and are concerned with highly important constitutional questions. Among the salient issues have been: Who is responsible for public education, the locality or state? Does the Virginia Constitution require the state to maintain public schools even if a locality will not provide funds for them? If a state provides funds for some localities and not for others, are those in the localities not receiving state funds being deprived of their constitutional rights? Can state and local tuition grants be used in private schools which practice racial exclusion? These are knotty problems, not readily or easily solved. The following sketch of happenings can touch only the highlights, but can hopefully help to answer the frequently raised question, "Why is the struggle against legally required segregation taking so long?" The events are grouped according to the school year in which they took place.

1950-1951

Dissatisfaction with the obviously poorer facilities for Negro school children described in the last chapter, led in October of 1950, to an attempt by county Negro adults to secure improved school conditions. But those whites in leadership positions did little or nothing to meet the request.

When it became apparent that this method of appeal would accomplish nothing significant, Negro school pupils themselves decided to do something. On the morning of April 29, 1951, 456 Negro

students walked out of their high school in protest against educational conditions in the county's Negro schools. The strike was organized and carried out by the students themselves, evidently without the knowledge of their parents and teachers. However, two days after the strike, the parent-teachers association of the Negro high school met and endorsed the action of the students.

On the day of the strike a student leader telephoned NAACP attorneys in Richmond and asked for help. The attorneys, already busy with many requests for suits against racial discrimination, told the student to send them a letter explaining the situation. That letter arrived the next day, and the attorneys agreed to meet with the students, provided their parents were involved in the talks. A series of meetings with Negro youngsters and their parents demonstrated to the Richmond lawyers the great inequality in the schools and the intense desire for equal treatment by county Negroes, so they agreed to take the case.

The attorneys submitted to the county school board and the superintendent of schools a petition requesting a policy of non-discrimination in the public schools. This petition was promptly rejected. Then on May 23, 1951, the Negro attorneys filed a petition with the United States District Court of Eastern Virginia, naming the county school board and the superintendent as defendants. Attorney General J. Lindsay Almond filed a notice of intervention in the case and put the weight of the state of Virginia behind the defendants.

1951-1952

The approach that the NAACP developed in the Prince Edward County case, along with several other comparable school cases, represented a departure from an attempt to secure only equal facilities for Negro Children. Negro leaders had become convinced that court battles against the inequality of buildings and other facilities did not touch the heart of the matter of discrimination. They began to attack segregation laws themselves, with the claim that legally forced racial segregation in public schools resulted in inherently inferior education, regardless of other factors. On May 7, 1952, the United States District Court sustained the statutes requiring racial segregation but it ordered equalization of facilities. Counsel for the plaintiffs appealed this decision all the way to the United States Supreme Court. This court began hearings in December, 1952, on the Prince Edward case as well as the four other now famous appeals from Kansas (*Brown vs Board of Education*), Delaware, South Carolina, and the District of Columbia.

1952-1953

As has already been mentioned, county school officials began constructing a new Negro high school in 1953 as a means of trying to bolster the separate but equal doctrine. But this effort came late, for the battle had now turned to the constitutionality of legally forced racial segregation itself, rather than being restricted to the equality of school facilities.

1953-1954

On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court delivered its unanimous decision declaring that laws requiring racial segregation in public schools were unconstitutional. The Court, however,

requested further hearings on the manner in which relief from these unconstitutional laws might be granted. The Virginia State Board of Education promptly advised all school boards to maintain the customary separation of races during the 1954-1955 school term.

Within two months of the 1954 decision, the county's governing body, the board of supervisors, passed a resolution (see Peeples) asserting the following: the opposition to desegregation; their view that desegregation was impossible in Virginia; their intention of resisting the Supreme Court order with everything at their command; and their insistence that the state take immediate steps to preserve segregation. The supervisors ordered that copies of this resolution be sent to all Virginia state officials. In the summer of 1954, the governor appointed a 32-member legislative committee, which came to be known as the Gray Commission, to study means of maintaining separate schools. Thus, both state and Prince Edward white County officials were approaching the issue with the same purpose -- the maintenance of racial segregation in public schools.

1954-1955

In April, 1955 during a hearing on the 1955-1956 school budget for Prince Edward County before the board of supervisors, a delegation of whites insisted that they would not support tax levies which financed an "integrated system of public schools." This was the first public indication that some whites in the county would not support the school system if it were desegregated. However, the supervisors made no decision on the budget at that meeting, pending the outcome of the United States Supreme Court decree on the implementation of its 1954 decision.

That decree came on May 31, 1955. The court stated that the defendants must make "a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance with our May 17, 1954 ruling. Once such a start has been made, the courts may find that additional time is necessary to carry out the ruling in an effective manner. The burden rests upon the defendants to establish that such time is necessary in the public interest and is consistent with good faith compliance at the earliest practicable date." ⁹

Shortly after hearing the May 31 order, the board of supervisors met and accepted a budget which included only the state legal minimum for school maintenance and debt amortization. The chairman of the board concluded the meeting by declaring his own personal belief in the United States Supreme Court decision of 1896 of Plessey vs Ferguson upholding the "separate but equal" doctrine, in states rights, in the workability of separate schools, in the fact that Prince Edward County Negroes had been provided with a high school second to none in the county and in the propriety of a continued effort to resist the order of the Supreme Court. When Attorney General Almond ruled that localities in Virginia would be permitted under state law to appropriate funds sufficient only to operate schools for thirty days at a time, the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors adopted this plan for the 1955-1956 session, a plan which came to be known throughout the state as "heretofore" operation of public schools.

In July, 1955, the United States Supreme Court remanded the Prince Edward case to a special three-judge federal court which ruled that the county should begin "adjustments and rearrangement"

⁹ Race Relations Law Reporter, Vol. 1 (1956), p.12.

required for desegregation. It did not, however, state a specific date on which actual desegregation should occur. The attorneys for the plaintiffs responded by filing a motion for an order that the county be desegregated by September 1, 1956.

In the meantime, white leaders of the county, working through the parent-teachers associations of the white schools, called a meeting on the school issue. The chief purpose of the meeting was to seek a plan to underwrite salaries of the county's white teachers in event schools ceased operation, in order to help make sure that whites would have some kind of instruction for their children. This meeting resulted in the formation of the Prince Edward School Corporation, the forerunner of the present Prince Edward School Foundation, which is now in charge of the private schools for whites. No consideration of the educational needs of the Negro children of the county was given by the whites at that time.

1955-1956

In November of 1955 Governor Stanley called a special session of the Virginia General Assembly to act on the Gray Commission proposals. One of these proposals, asking for the providing of public funds for private schools, was forbidden by Section 141 of the Virginia Constitution. A statewide referendum was called in order to amend this part of the constitution. On January 9, 1956 Virginia voters approved, two to one, a constitutional convention to change the constitution to make tuition grants for private school attendance possible. The Prince Edward County vote was 2,835 for, and 350 against. The constitutional convention amended Section 141 in March of 1956.

On February 1, 1956 the General Assembly adopted a resolution "Interposing the sovereignty of Virginia against encroachment upon the reserved powers of this state." This vote was carried thirty-six to two in the Senate and ninety to five in the House of Delegates. Such a step initiated "Massive Resistance," a policy aimed at maintaining racial segregation in public school, even at the cost of closing the schools. This policy was implemented in August and September of 1956 when in a special session the legislature adopted laws requiring school closure and the termination of state funds to any locality where integration occurred.

In the meanwhile, whites in Prince Edward presented at a meeting of the board of supervisors on May 3, 1956, a petition of intent signed by 4,184 persons. The petition stated: "We, the undersigned citizens of Prince Edward County, Virginia, hereby affirm our conviction that the separation of the races in the public schools of this county is absolutely necessary and to affirm that we prefer to abandon public schools and educate our children in some other way if that be necessary to preserve separation of the races in this county. We pledge our support to the Board of Supervisors of Prince Edward County and their firm maintenance of this policy." Later, on May 31, the Board of Supervisors again approved "heretofore" operation of public schools for the 1956-1957 school year.

1956-1957

In the summer of 1956, the three-judge federal district court, to which the United States Supreme Court had remanded the Prince Edward case, decided that it should dissolve itself and turn the case

over to the supervision of a single-judge court presided over by Judge Sterling Hutcheson.¹⁰ On January 23, 1957, Judge Hutcheson denied a motion by the defendants to dismiss the case, and counsel for the defendants appealed this decision to the United States Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. Judge Hutcheson also ruled that the defendants did not have to fix a set time for the desegregation of county schools. He held that present conditions in the county, including opinion unfavorable to desegregation and the possibility that schools would be closed, required a deferring of setting a specific date for desegregation.¹¹ Lawyers for the plaintiffs appealed this part of the decision to the Fourth Circuit Court. Hutcheson's refusal to set a date for desegregation allowed the county to adopt again "heretofore" school operation for the 1957-1956 session.

1957-1958

In a decision on November 11, 1957, the United States Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed Judge Hutcheson's ruling that conditions in Prince Edward County required a delay in setting a time for compliance.¹² The Circuit Court said, in part "... we think that the District Judge was in error in not fixing a time for for compliance ..." The Court went on to say, "The fact that the schools might be closed if the order were enforced is no reason for not enforcing it. A person may not be denied enforcement of rights to which he is entitled under the Constitution of the United States because of action taken or threatened in defiance of such rights." Finally, the Circuit Court directed the District Court to enter an order requiring the defendants "to make a prompt and reasonable start toward complying with the court's order enjoining discrimination on the ground of race or color in admitting children to the schools under their supervision." However, a stay on the reversal was granted to the defendants, pending an appeal to the United States Supreme Court. In March of 1958 the Supreme Court refused to review the decision, and the case was sent back to the District Court presided over by Judge Hutcheson.

In the meantime the state continued to throw its weight behind the effort of the county to avoid complying with court decrees to desegregate the public schools. The Virginia General Assembly had passed "anti-NAACP laws" in 1956, requiring that the NAACP and similar organizations supply the State Corporation Commission with membership and contributor lists, that organizations advocating racial integration or segregation register, and that solicitation for court suits in an action in which the solicitor was not a party cease. The State House Committee on Law and Racial Activities had conducted an investigation in Prince Edward County in May of 1957, questioning thirty-six subpoenaed witnesses. Following this the Virginia Joint House-Senate Committee of Offenses Against the Administration of Justice charged the NAACP in November, 1957, with gross and illegal promotion and support of five Virginia desegregation cases. Such action sought to discredit Negroes who had participated in suits against school boards, including those who had participated in such suits in Prince Edward County. At the same time it served to enhance the stand of white leaders who had

¹⁰ Race Relations Law Reporter, Vol. 1 (1956), p.1055.

¹¹ Race Relations Law Reporter, Vol. 2 (1957), pp. 341-348.

¹² Race Relations Law Reporter, Vol. 2 (1957), pp.1119-1121.

resisted efforts toward compliance with the ruling of the United States Supreme Courts, including the white leaders of Prince Edward County. It was not until January, 1963, that the United States Supreme Court declared the “anti-NAACP laws” unconstitutional.

1958-1959

In following the directive of the United States Fourth Circuit Court to fix a time limit for Prince Edward County to comply with the Supreme Court ruling against racial segregation in public Schools Judge Hutcheson handed down a decision on August 4, 1958, giving the defendants a seven year delay for compliance.¹³ He arrived at this time interval by setting ten years after the 1955 order of the Supreme Court implementing the Brown decision as the deadline. He instructed the defendants to report on their initial plans for moving toward desegregation before January 1, 1959, and he reserved for the District Court the right to accelerate or extend the date of compliance. Attorneys for the plaintiffs appealed Judge Hutcheson's decision to the United States Circuit Court of Appeals.

In the fall of 1958 two suits testing the constitutionality of Virginia's massive resistance statutes were instituted, one in the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals and the other in a three-judge United States District Court in Norfolk. On January 19, 1959, both of these courts ruled against the massive resistance laws.¹⁴ After a final speech against desegregation, in which he said, "We have just begun to fight", Governor Almond called for the end of massive resistance by requesting legislation that would permit localities to desegregate if they wished. The result was that Negro children entered formerly all-white schools in Norfolk and Arlington on February 2, 1959. Thus, Virginia's requirement of racial segregation in all of its public schools came to an end, along with the four years of opposition to federal authority through massive resistance.¹⁵

The demise of Virginia's massive resistance laws left Prince Edward County without state statutes to prevent school desegregation. The full effect of the 1954 United States Supreme Court ruling was finally brought to bear directly on county officials on May 5, 1959, when the United States Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed Judge Hutcheson's seven-year-delay ruling.¹⁶ The Circuit Court directed the District Court to enter a decree requiring the defendants “to receive and consider the applications of such persons for admission to the white high school of the County on a non-racial basis without regard to race or color; and to take immediate steps in this regard to the end that the applications to be considered as to permit the entrance of qualified persons into the white school in the school term beginning September 1959...” The Circuit Court recognized the difficulties involved in desegregation, but it added that although other communities in the state had taken steps toward compliance, the school authorities in Prince Edward had taken no effective steps at all since the

¹³ Race Relations Law Reporter, Vol. 3 (1958), pp.964-971

¹⁴ Race Relations Law Reporter, Vol. 4 (1959), pp. 45-54; 65-78.

¹⁵ 7. Benjamin Muse's Virginia's Massive Resistance (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961) gives a full, clear account of these events.

¹⁶ Race Relations Law Reporter, Vol. 4 (1959), pp. 297-302.

second Brown decision in 1955. Furthermore, the Court said, county officials were not considering action for compliance in the future. It concluded that under such circumstances, it had no alternative but to order that steps be taken “to give effect to the mandate of the Supreme Court of the United States.”

In spite of the fact that actual orders of the Circuit Court were not issued until a year later and although no Negro child had ever applied to any white school in Prince Edward County, this decision by the Fourth Circuit Court served as the signal for the abandonment of public education in the county. Shortly after the Circuit Court gave its order, the president of the Prince Edward School foundation announced that full-scale preparation for the operation of private schools for white children would start immediately in order for the schools to be ready to open in September of 1959. A drive was begun to raise \$200,000 for the private school operation. At the same time, the county school board appealed the decision of the Fourth Circuit Court to the United States Supreme Court, which again refused to hear the case.

The fatal decision resulting in the closing of public schools in the county came when the board of supervisors met the following month (June of 1959) and rejected a school board budget designed for operating public schools during the 1959-1960 school session. Instead the supervisors approved a budget sufficient only to maintain closed school facilities and to pay school indebtedness. Public schools themselves could not operate and had to be closed.

1959-1960

When the fall of 1959 arrived, the doors of all public schools in the county remained closed, and “No Trespassing” signs were to be found on school property. On September 10, the Prince Edward School Foundation, before a national radio and television audience, conducted a formal ceremony for the opening of the all-white private schools. Classes began on September 14 with an enrollment of 1,475 children, compared to 1,562 enrolled in the public schools the previous year.

The more than 1,700 Negro children in the county were left entirely without schools. Fifty of these children were sent to the high school division of Kittrell College, a Negro Methodist institution in North Carolina, and some went to stay with relatives living out of the county in order to attend schools there. The Prince Edward County Christian Association was formed by Negro leaders in order to give the children without schools some training in the fundamentals of reading and writing and to provide organized recreation. Greater detail on these and related efforts will be given in the next chapter.

Encountering much criticism for failing to provide school facilities for Negro children, white leaders in December, 1959, chartered a corporation called “Southside Schools, Incorporated” and sent out letters inviting Negro parents to enroll their children in this all-Negro, private school system for an annual tuition fee of \$240. Although the Prince Edward Foundation had decided to forego state tuition grants for its schools in fear of weakening its legal positions, Southside Schools, Incorporated, took the risk in fixing this tuition fee at the level which might be available from public funds. However, only one application was returned by Negro parents, and Southside Schools soon abandoned its plans for opening schools for Negroes by February of 1960. White leaders in the county have made much of

this refusal of Negroes to accept the offer for private schools. Suffice it to say at this point that Negro leaders feared that their legal position would be jeopardized by accepting such funds for private schools. Besides, the governing board of Southside Schools was composed entirely of whites, with nine of the seventeen members also on the board of the all-white Prime Edward Foundation. Negroes were evidently not even consulted in the setting up of the corporation, and, consequently had little confidence in the offer. Finally, to have accepted segregated private schools would have been a denial by the Negro leaders of their own position that schools founded on compulsory racial segregation were not in accord with democracy or the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling. Later in the summer of 1960 some Negro leaders met with directors of Southside Schools, Incorporated, to discuss another offer of aid from the organization, but nothing came of the meeting.

In April of 1960, five of the six county school board members resigned, leaving a fourteen page statement asserting the importance of public education and the doubt whether private schooling could be depended upon to meet consistently the county's future educational needs.¹⁷

By the time of the opening of the school term in the fall of 1960 the white leaders in the county had decided to go ahead and use the state scholarship grants, following a revision of the law providing these grants. Scholarship grants of \$125 per pupil were accepted from the state, and additional payments of \$100 for each pupil were made available from county funds. A transportation grant of \$35 was given to those children residing more than a half a mile from their schools. Finally, under a new state provision, donations to the private schools were credited on real estate and personal property taxes, up to 25 percent of the amount required of the taxpayer.¹⁸

In September of 1960 the NAACP filed a motion with the United States District Court requesting that the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors, the State Board of Education, and the State Superintendent of Education be added as defendants for their failure to comply with the section of Virginia's constitution which required that the state operate an efficient public school system. And in January of 1961 the NAACP attorneys added another request to the effect that the state scholarship grants and tax write-offs be declared invalid. On August 23, 1961, Judge Oren Lewis, who had succeeded Judge Hutcheson in the District Court, ruled on both of these requests, He declared that a decision on the question of whether or not the state had to keep public schools open in order to comply with the Virginia constitution required an interpretation by the Virginia courts, and he deferred a ruling until those courts could act. But Judge Lewis declared that the provision of student grants from public funds and tax credits for contributors to local private schools were unlawful. He enjoined the school superintendent from approving applications for state scholarship grants so long as public schools were closed and thus prevented a freedom of choices between private and public schools. Finally he ordered the board of supervisors and the superintendent of schools to prepare plans for the desegregation of elementary schools when and if they were reopened.¹⁹

¹⁷ Mary Ellen Goodman, "Sanctuaries for Tradition: Virginia's New Private Schools," Special Report (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1961), pp. 25-26; Southern School News, Vol. 7, No. 1 (June, 1960), p. 12.

¹⁸ Muse, op. cit., 1961: p 153.

¹⁹ Race Relations Law Reporter, Vol. 6 (1961), pp. 749-755.

1961-1962

In September of 1961 Negro plaintiffs filed a new petition in the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals asking for a writ of mandamus to compel the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors to appropriate sufficient funds for the operation of public schools in the county for the 1961-1962 school year. The Virginia Supreme Court ruled on March 5, 1962 that the state constitution did not require that county authorities appropriate money for free public schools. The ruling explained that it was the legislative department of the state that was vested by the state constitution with duty, power, and authority to establish and maintain free public schools throughout the state, It added that the judicial branch could not invade the functions at the legislative branch of the state government.²⁰

After this ruling on the state constitution the United States District Court then proceeded to rule on the action closing the public schools as it related to the United States Constitution. On July 25, 1962, the District Court held that such closing did violate the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution by depriving plaintiffs of equal protection of the laws. The ruling stated, in part: "This Court holds that the public schools of Prince Edward County may not be closed to avoid the effect of the law of the land as interpreted by the Supreme Court, while the Commonwealth of Virginia permits other public schools to remain open at the expense of the taxpayers."²¹

The defendants were ordered to submit a plan for school desegregation by September 7, 1962. The Court said that it would consider further orders if schools were not open by then.

1962-1963

In response to the United States District Court order to submit a plan for desegregating county schools, the school board filed a report stating that it would administer the schools according to the State Pupil Placement law. The school board pointed out that under this law it had no power to place pupils, because this was the authority of the State Pupil Placement Board. On October 10, 1962, the District Court declared that this report did not comply with the orders and that if the school board intended to rely upon the assignment of pupils by the pupil placement plan, the school board should set forth its plans for procedure and submit them to the Court. The District Court further decreed that the county public schools could not be closed to avoid court orders while the state continued to keep other public schools open. However, no order was entered requiring compliance with the decree, pending a review by higher federal courts.²²

The case went before the United States Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals on January 9, 1963. Joining the attorneys arguing for the reopening of public schools was a representative of the United States Department of Justice as a "friend of the court," thus constituting for the first time in the history of the Prince Edward County case the direct entry of the Department of Justice into the case. The Fourth

²⁰ Race Relations Law Reporter, Vol. 7 (1962), pp. 59-64.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 404-499.

²² Ibid., pp.1080-1083.

Circuit Court handed down its decision on August 12, 1963, overruling the order of the District Court that had called for the reopening of public schools.²³ Judges Haynsworth and Boreman, constituting a 2-to-1 majority in the ruling, held that the Fourteenth Amendment prohibited racial discrimination in public schools that were operated, but that in the closing of all schools, both races were treated equally. The two judges also hold that the District Court should not have acted until Virginia constitutional issues had been decided by the state courts. Judge Bell, in dissenting from the majority opinion in the Circuit Court, stated that since the public school system is a state operation, the closing of the school in any one locality of the state constitutes discrimination while other schools are operating. He said that the schools were closed by the defendants solely to block the desegregation orders of the federal courts. Judge Boll wrote, "It is tragic that since 1959 the children of Prince Edward County have gone without formal education. Here is a truly shocking example of the law's delays. In the scales of justice the doctrine of abstention (by federal courts until state courts act) should not weigh heavily against the rights of these children." ²⁴

Earlier in the year the Prince Edward County School Board had brought an action in a state circuit court in order to obtain a declaratory judgment that it had no duty under state or federal provisions to maintain public schools while public schools were being operated elsewhere in the state. Named as defendants were the state education officials and the Negro school children who had asked for the reopening of public schools. In a lengthy decision handed down on March 21, 1963, Judge John Wingo Knowles ruled that the county school board had performed all of the duties required of it by state law by submitting proposed budgets to the board of supervisors. He also stated that while state education officials had supervisory and administrative authority over the state educational system, they did not have the power to establish or operate schools in any county. Finally, Judge Knowles held that state scholarship grants could be made for private, non-sectarian schooling whether public schools were open or not. Emphasized as a basis for his decision was the contention that the United States Constitution did not require states to provide public education and that Virginia state laws embodied a local option approach that did not require uniformity throughout the state.²⁵ This decision was appealed to the Virginia Supreme Court.

In the Democratic primary election of July 9, 1963, one of the candidates for the board of supervisors was E. M. Pairet, a Farmville businessman, who advocated the reopening of public schools. He argued that school closing hurt the county's economy by keeping industry out and by preventing the use of state scholarship grants by families whose children attended the white private schools. His two opponents in the election ran on the basis of keeping the schools closed until the court cases were settled. Pairet came in second, receiving slightly more than one-half as many votes as the winner of the election.

On July 25, 1963, in Farmville, about sixty Negro youths demonstrated against closed public schools by walking along the streets with signs asking that they have public schools. The next day there were

²³ Southern School News, Vol. 10, No.3, (September, 1963), pp.18-19.

²⁴ Quoted in ibid., p.19.

²⁵ Race Relations Law Reporter, Vol 8 (1963), pp. 94-111.

attempted sit-ins at several lunch counters, and the day after that ten Negroes, five juveniles and five adults were arrested and charged with blocking sidewalks, loitering and refusing to move on. The following Sunday twenty-three Negroes were arrested on the steps of the Farmville Baptist Church, being charged with disturbing a public worship service. They had sung and prayed on the steps outside the church after being refused admission.²⁶

The Governor of Virginia, Albert S. Harrison, Jr., announced on August 14, 1963, that the Prince Edward Free School Association had been organized "to establish, maintain and operate a system of schools for the education of the children of Prince Edward County, Virginia, without regard to race, creed, or color."²⁷ The Association resulted from conferences among federal, state, and local representatives, both Negro and white, and was financed by contributions from individuals and from foundations. It had been set up on a temporary one-year basis. Its bi-racial governing board was headed by Colgate W. Darden, Jr., a former governor of Virginia and a past president of the University of Virginia. The rest of the board was composed of four college presidents and the retired dean of the University of Virginia Law School. Thus, for the first time in four years Negro children had an opportunity for formal schooling in the county.

1963-1964

The schools operated by the Prince Edward Free School Association opened on September 16th, 1963 and by the end of the month more than 1,500 children were enrolled, including four white children. They met in school buildings rented from the county school board. The superintendent of the schools, Neil V. Sullivan, on leave from the East Williston, Long Island, New York school system, was chosen to head a faculty made up of Negro and white teachers.

When the United States Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the ruling of District Court Judge Lewis in August of 1963, a question was raised as to whether the county would then be eligible to receive state scholarship grants again. Judge Lewis had said that such grants should not be made available.

This question was settled temporarily on September 30, 1963, when Associate Justice William Brennan of the United States Supreme Court granted a stay requested by Negro plaintiffs on the ruling by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. The effect of this was to reinstate the ban on tuition grants in the county.

Attorneys for the Prince Edward County Negro plaintiffs filed a petition with the United States Supreme Court on October 20, 1963, seeking its review of all the issues in the school case. The petition contended that only the federal courts could solve the issue because federal rather than state matters were involved. The petition was aimed at overturning the Fourth Circuit Court decision that federal courts must wait for state courts to interpret provisions of the Virginia constitution dealing with public schools. It also attacked the validity of the state scholarship grants as "vehicles to defeat

²⁶ Southern School News, Vol. 10, No. 2 (August, 1963), p.14.

²⁷ Southern School News, Vol. 10, No. 3 (September, 1963), p.18.

and frustrate the rights of the petitioners to free public education unburdened by discrimination based on race.”²⁸

On December 2, 1963, the Virginia Supreme Court handed down its decision on the legality of school closing in Prince Edward County. It ruled that the Virginia State Constitution did not require the state to operate public schools in the county. The court declared that Section 129 of the Virginia Constitution, which said that the General Assembly must “establish and maintain an efficient system of public free schools throughout the state,” did not obligate the state to force the county to open its schools. The key word on which the decision was based was “system.” The court majority held that as long as the state had established and maintained a system of schools, it did not have to operate any particular school or schools. Chief Justice Eddleston dissented, saying: “I am firm in the view that the General Assembly is under the constitutional duty to relieve the closing. . . a situation which has brought to this state the shameful distinction of having within its borders the only school district in this nation where public free schools are not provided for its children.”²⁹ The majority of the court, however, stated: “Our task here is to construe a constitution, not to provide a remedy for a “shameful” situation. . . however regrettable the situation may be.”

On January 6, 1964, the United States Supreme Court announced that it would hear the Prince Edward County school segregation case and it set March 30, 1964 as the date for the hearing. This meant that the Supreme Court would not wait for final action by the United States Fourth Circuit Court of Appeal, which, as we noted earlier, had postponed a decision until the Virginia courts could rule on state matters involved. The Supreme Court said that it was taking this action without waiting for another ruling by the Circuit Court "in view of the long delay in the case... and the importance of the questions presented.”³⁰ Among the questions on which the court is expected to rule are: Is the closing of public schools in Prince Edward County Prince Edward County while they are maintained elsewhere in Virginia a violation of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment? Can a locality constitutionally close its public schools to avoid desegregation and then grant money from county and state funds to children attending a private school which practices racial segregation? The court indicated that it may rule on the case before its current term ends in June. Such a ruling would presumably bring to an end the more than twelve years of litigation.

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This brief sketch of the major happenings in the Prince Edward school-closing issue has sought to show the complexities of the problems involved, particularly the legal complexities. “Civil Action Number 1333, “ as the Prince Edward case is referred to in the United States District Court in Richmond, had already involved more than twenty major decisions, and the final decisions were yet to be made, although the time appears to be near to make such a decision.

²⁸ Southern School News, Vol.10, No. 5 (November, 1963), p.7.

²⁹ Southern School News, Vol.10, No. 6 (December, 1963), p.5.

³⁰ Quoted in The Washington Post, January 7, 1964, p. A-2.

During the more than four years of closed schools and the tangled legal battle over reopening them, provisions had been made in the county to compensate for the lack of schools. Brief mention was made of these provisions in the listing of events in the chronology. In the next chapter, we shall now look at them in greater detail.

Chapter IV. Education without Public Schools

In the description of Prince Edward County earlier, it was pointed out how the traditional system of race relations, maintained primarily by forced racial segregation, has placed Negroes in the county in a lower status position, with very little political or economic power. Whites completely dominate local governmental bodies, public school administration, the press and major business interests. Needless to say, there has been a vast imbalance of power at the county level between the whites who want to maintain strict segregation and the Negroes who are seeking to change the system. White segregationists have been able to mobilize the forces of the local government, the local newspaper, and most of the economic resources of the county in moving resolutely and effectively toward their goal of keeping public schools from being integrated, even when this meant abandoning public education entirely. Being almost without power in the county, Negro leaders have had to turn to state and federal courts, with the help of NAACP lawyers from Richmond, in trying to achieve the elimination of the stigma and inequalities they have experienced from the segregated school system. In such a setting of imbalance in availability of local resources, the opportunities for schooling in the county have been greatly different for white and Negro children, particularly after white segregationist leaders brought about the closing of the public schools. Whites were able to continue their segregated education without interruption in private schools backed by most of the resources of the county and with help from the state. Negroes, on the other hand, were left without schools and had to resort to various stop-gap measures with meager resources in the county, as they challenged the entrenched power of segregationist leaders in their fight for the right to a desegregated education.

Private Schools for Whites

When Virginia's massive resistance statutes failed and the federal courts ordered the desegregation of Prince Edward County's public schools in 1959, white segregationist leaders were ready to move ahead with private schools for white children. Although the first concrete steps had been taken in 1955 with the establishment of the Prince Edward Educational Corporation, several whites interviewed in the county suggested that private schools for white children had long been a dream of white segregationist leaders. In any event, during the summer of 1959, organization of the private school system for whites was completed and arrangements were made to open in time for the beginning of the 1959-1960 school session. Such organization and opening were aided, of course, by the move of the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors to bring about the closing of all county public schools. White parents had little choice but to send their children to the private schools if most of them were to have an education at all. Support for the private schools were therefore assured.

Administration and Staff

The leaders of the Prince Edward Educational Corporation secured a new charter from the State

Corporation Commission, having changed the name of the organization to the Prince Edward School Foundation. They chose a lumber business man as president of the Foundation, a building contractor as vice-president, and a retired oil company executive as school administrator. A board of directors of twenty-eight men and five women was formed to guide the Foundation.

Teachers were recruited primarily from among the whites who were on the faculties of the Prince Edward public school at the time of the closing. Among the 67 teachers employed by the Foundation in 1959, 9 had M.A. degrees, 46 others had graduated from college and the remaining 12 had at least two years of college work.³¹ The average teaching experience of these 67 teachers was 18.5 years. By the time of the 1963-1964 session, the number of teachers had decreased to 61, presumably because of decrease of about 200 in student enrollment from the approximately 1,450 in the schools in 1959-1960. Foundation teachers have been paid salaries comparable to those paid in public schools in the state.

Buildings, Equipment, Transportation

The Prince Edward School Foundation opened with seven units, an upper school in Farmville called the Prince Edward Academy, and six lower schools in each of the magisterial districts in the county. These schools were initially housed in fifteen buildings with classroom space in five churches (Baptist, Christian, Episcopal, Methodist, and Presbyterian), the women's club, a Moose organization, and three privately owned buildings. Auditorium space for the upper school was rented from a movie theater in Farmville. Locations of the schools have been changed from time to time in order to consolidate classes and to improve initial, makeshift arrangements.

For the 1961-1962 school session, a new Prince Edward Academy was opened in Farmville for the upper school students. The building was constructed for \$256,000 although it and its equipment are valued at \$400,000, ³² since some materials were contributed by supporters of the Foundation. Another new unit housing six additional classrooms and costing about \$55,000 was reported nearing completion in the late fall of 1963. These new classrooms will be used by pupils in the sixth and seventh grades presently attending classes in the Farmville Presbyterian Church education building. An auditorium and a gymnasium are planned as the next building when money becomes available.

The Foundation has steered clear of using buildings and equipment of the closed public schools. At one point, the Foundation was interested in buying the closed white high school building in Farmville from the county school board. However the board voted against such a sale, and the Foundation did not press the matter. School transportation was arranged for by a private organization which operated buses purchased as surplus from other counties. Books for the library were donated and typewriters for the business education classes were rented, although books and typewriters sat idle in the

³¹ These figures are from a report by the president of the Prince Edward School Foundation, B. Blanton Hansbury, to the United States Commission on Civil Rights in February of 1961 and published in the volumes, Third Annual Conference on Problems of Schools in Transition from the Educator's View Point, Williamsburg Va., 1961, p. 101. The entire recording of the hearing on Prince Edward County is strongly recommended to the reader.

³² Lynchburg News, November, 3, 1963, p. C-2.

Farmville High School.³³

Financial Support

During the first year of operation the Prince Edward School Foundation was financed entirely by contributions. No tuition charges were made, and, as we have seen, state and local tuition grants (technically called “state and local scholarships”) were not utilized for fear this would jeopardize the legal position of the white segregationists. Since the county’s levy for schools had been repealed, it was expected that white taxpayers, especially those with children in the system, would help to support the Foundation. During the 1959-60 school session, the sum of approximately \$300,000 was raised from contributions for the operation of the Foundation schools.³⁴ The United States Internal Revenue Service declared that all donations to the Foundation were deductible for income tax purposes.

When the Virginia General Assembly revised its earlier state scholarship law, divorcing it from an reference to race,³⁵ the white leadership of the county decided to apply for and to use grants for the 1960-61 school session. The Foundation set tuition charges of \$240 for the lower schools and \$265 for the upper school. State and local tuition grants covered most of the tuition charge. Altogether, some \$346,000 were given in state and local tuition grants, transportation grants, and tax credits.³⁶ The grants, both state and local, were paid directly to the pupils’ parents, who then turned them over to the Foundation. In the meantime, a capital fund campaign brought in enough money to start construction on a new building for the Prince Edward Academy, which was completed in time for the 1961-62 session.

The 1960-61 year, however, has proved to be the only one in which the state and local grants have been received. As reported earlier, in a ruling in the United States District Court on August 25, 1961, Judge Oren Lewis declared that both local and state tuition grants and tax credits were illegal as long as public schools were closed. Judge Lewis pointed out that the state grant law assumed a “freedom of choice” between public and private schooling, and he concluded: “This rule is plain and unequivocal. State scholarships are not available to persons residing in counties that have abandoned public schools”³⁷ Although the question of the eligibility of county residents to receive grants from public funds was opened again by a ruling of the United States Court of Appeals in August of 1963, Justice Brennan of the United States Supreme Court ordered a stay on the ruling, thereby reinstating the

³³ Benjamin Muse, Virginia’s Massive Resistance, p. 151.

³⁴ Richmond Times-Dispatch, August 25, 1961, p. 1.

³⁵ The wording of the last revision of this law is found in Race Relations Law Reporter, Vol. 5, (1960), pp.521-523.

³⁶ Richmond Times-Dispatch, August 25, 1961, pp. 1, 6. The amount was broken down as follows: \$130,000 in local tuition grants; \$132,000 in state tuition grants; \$28,000 in transportation payments; \$56,000 donated by county residents and credited by the county treasurer as payments on account of county tax bills.

³⁷ Race Relations Law Reporter, Vol. 6, (1961), p.754.

injunction against using such grants.³⁸ However, several persons interviewed in the county told of specific instances in which Prince Edward County families had claimed residences in an adjoining county in order to receive state and local grants to enable their children to attend Foundation Schools. During 1961-62, for example, the Foundation received more than \$10,000 in grants originating in Cumberland County from the parents of children residing there and attending Foundation schools.³⁹

State and local scholarship grants do not cover the entire cost of schooling, and some families would need help even if grants were reinstated. Without these grants, needy students have had to rely on scholarship funds raised through contributions. The Scholarship money raised by the Foundation came to \$136,000 in 1961-62 and \$132,000 in 1962--63; the goal for 1963-64 is \$130,000.⁴⁰ During the 1962-63 school year, 378 families received partial scholarships and 16 received full scholarships, while 362 families had pledged or paid full tuition.⁴¹ Thus, over half of these families required some scholarship help. Even with such help, the strain is great for the poorer families. The Foundation has had to serve warrants to secure some back tuition payments, according to some of those interviewed. One hardship case came to light in the fall of 1962 when the three school-age children of a career soldier were barred from private school classes for non-payment of a \$720 bill at the School Foundation, a sum that amounted to one-sixth of the soldier's total annual pay. A Lynchburg newspaper gave publicity to the case.⁴² After studying the situation, the foundation adjusted the amount due by awarding a \$480 scholarship, leaving a balance of \$240. But the soldier could not pay even this amount, as he was already deep in debt. In order to keep his children in school, however, he borrowed the money and thus went even deeper into debt. The Farmville Herald reported in its January 17, 1964, issue that a white tobacco farmer enrolled four of his children in the integrated Free School because he was unable to pay the tuition costs at the Foundation Schools.

School Administrators admit that the development and maintenance of the private schools have been demanding and trying, requiring a great deal of money and effort and determination by many people.⁴³ Without question, private education is proving to be a heavy financial burden for the whites of Prince Edward County.

Program

The curriculum at the Foundation schools are similar to the curriculums in Virginia public schools. The upper school has academic offerings in the following subjects: English; Virginia, American, and world history; Latin, French, Spanish; math; general science, biology, chemistry, physics; geography

³⁸ See pages 29-30 and 32-33 above.

³⁹ Southern School News, Vol. 9, No. 1 (July, 1962), p. 5.

⁴⁰ Lynchburg News, November 3, 1963, p. C-2.

⁴¹ Southern School News, Vol. 9, No. 8 (February, 1963), p. 4.

⁴² Lynchburg News, September 30, 1962.

⁴³ Lynchburg News, November 3, 1963, p. C-1.

and government.⁴⁴ In practical arts there are courses in typing, bookkeeping, shorthand, home economics, shop, and agriculture. Foundation schools have been accredited by the Virginia State Board of Education during each year of their existence. School officials recently pointed out that fifty-eight percent of their graduates had entered, "without difficulty," institutions of higher learning in eight different states.⁴⁵

Extra-curricular activities at the upper school, including those of the student cooperative association, the school paper, the school annual, class organizations, and athletic teams, are held after regular school hours. Prince Edward Academy athletic teams compete with public school teams in the Southside area.

In October of 1963 a special education class was formed to give individual instruction to those children requiring it. Ten children, 8 to 12, comprised the special class held at the Prince Edward Academy.⁴⁶

Not all aspects of a school program are found in a summary statement about the academic and extra-curricular opportunities. Also communicated and taught are the attitudes and philosophies of administrators and teachers. Such teaching is difficult to measure, both in its nature and its results, because it is primarily indirect. However, indications can be gained from such things as public statements of officials and the outside speakers invited to address the pupils. The Prince Edward Foundation was born out of a strongly felt need to maintain racial segregation in schools, and those who have strongly supported the Foundation have made their pro-segregation stand clear. An example of the direct reinforcement of the racial segregation philosophy is seen in the commencement speaker invited to address the Prince Edward Academy graduates on June 12, 1963. The speaker was Dr. Henry L. Garrett, professor emeritus of psychology at Columbia University and visiting professor at the University of Virginia. Dr. Garrett has been an outstanding proponent of racial inequality and an advocate of racial segregation. His address was entitled, "The South and the Second Reconstruction." A newspaper report of his talk indicated that he challenged the scientific testimony which helped to form the basis of the Supreme Court decision declaring forced racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional, and he gave support to belief in Negro racial inferiority.⁴⁷ He claimed that desegregation would lead to racial amalgamation and "to a general deterioration in American standards of culture." Garrett's address clearly reinforced the philosophy behind the establishing and continuation of the Foundation schools, namely the notion that racial separation is not only desirable

⁴⁴ Most of this information is taken from a report by B. Hansbury, President of the Prince Edward School Foundation, and presented at the Third Annual Conference before the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights at Williamsburg, Va., in February, 1961, op. cit., p. 102.

⁴⁵ Lynchburg News, November 3, 1963, p. C-1.

⁴⁶ Farmville Herald, December 17, 1963, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Farmville Herald, June 14, 1963, pp. 1A, 7A. Dr. Garrett signed the Introduction praising Carlton Putnam's Race and Reason (Washington, D. C.: Public Affairs Press, 1961) which advocates the inferiority of the Negro race. Recently Garrett wrote a defense of the book in "Facts vs Opinions on Race and Reason" for a magazine called The Citizen (February, 1963, pp. 7-12). This magazine is the official journal of the Citizens' Councils of America, a pro-segregationist, white-supremacist organization.

but that it is also essential to "survival."

Sanctuaries for the Tradition of Segregation

Mary Ellen Goodman has characterized Virginia's new private schools that sprang up when massive resistance statutes collapsed as "sanctuaries for tradition."⁴⁸ The Virginia tradition referred to that the Prince Edward School Foundation as an organization has sought most of all to continue is that of racial segregation. In the earlier outline of the chronology of events in the county from 1950 to the present, it is clear that the chief motivation for the establishment of the Foundation was to preserve the racially segregated pattern of schooling. Whatever else may be said about the Foundation schools, they stand as a monument to the belief in racial segregation. To the Negroes of Prince Edward County, they say, in effect, that Negro children are not worthy of going to school with white children, that whites in the county are resolved to keep their children from associating with Negro children on a basis of equality, and that no price is too great to pay to maintain such separation.

Officials of the Foundation schools have sought to give the impression that their organization is not an instrument to preserve segregation. In testimony before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, the President of the Foundation asserted that his schools were not formed to circumvent any court decisions or to break down the public schools or to become involved in the segregation-integration issue.⁴⁹ In a recent newspaper, the present administrator of the Prince Edward Academy said much the same thing.⁵⁰ However, it is difficult from the record to divorce the development of the Foundation from a desire of white county leaders to perpetuate segregation. It is hard to see how the private schools could have started in the manner they did, by the movement en masse of pupils and teachers from the white public schools, unless the public schools had been closed. And the public schools were closed to avoid a court order to desegregate. In its rigid exclusion of Negro children, it is obvious that the Foundation stands for the segregation of races and that it is opposed to integration. In inviting such speakers as Dr. Henry A. Garrett, it is highly doubtful that the officials are unconcerned with maintaining the notion of white supremacy.

There is little question but that the Prince Edward School Foundation is well established and will continue whether or not public schools are opened. Four years of monopoly on the schooling of the white children, with the complete support of a politically and economically powerful white leadership, has assured continuity of some sort. However, it is doubtful that the Foundation can continue to provide schooling indefinitely for all of the white children of the county. We have already seen indications of the financial strain to which the whites are subjected in paying tuition and in raising scholarship and building funds. Now that the dramatic focus that first accompanied Prince Edward's stand against school desegregation has been somewhat lifted, it is doubtful that Foundation officials

⁴⁸ 18. Mary Ellen Goodman, "Sanctuaries for Tradition: Virginia's New Private Schools," Special Report (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1961).

⁴⁹ United States Commission on Civil Rights, Third Annual Conference, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96.

⁵⁰ Lynchburg News, November 3, 1963, p. C-2

can raise money outside of the county.⁵¹

The five members of the Prince Edward County School Board who resigned in April, 1960, voiced some of the doubt raised above. We referred earlier to the 14-page statement released by the Board at that time, and it is appropriate to quote a portion of it at this point:

We are aware that the Prince Edward Foundation has obtained contributions from those who have school age children and those who do not. No white child was denied admission to the Foundation's schools for the session 1959-60 because his parents could not make a contribution or because they could afford only a small gift. For this we stand grateful. Yet the people of Prince Edward County must face the question whether this method of voluntary support of schools can be depended upon -- year in and year out -- through good times and bad to pay the cost of education for all. . . . Unless some new system of education for all can take over the whole job of the public schools and have its cost guaranteed in a reasonable manner, we fear the economic consequences to the County.⁵²

In part, the future of the continuation of the Foundation schools as they are now operated depends on what happens to state and local tuition grants from public funds. Such funds could enable a number of the poorer whites now relying on scholarship help from the Foundation to pay tuition costs. However, the state and local tuition grant law is under attack in two ways. On the one hand there is open dissatisfaction among some Virginians with the tuition grant program. The Virginia Education Association, parent-teacher's association, and members of the state legislature have been among those who have expressed concern over the way the grants are being used.⁵³ On November 19, 1963, the Board of Principals and Supervisors of the City of Roanoke went on record in opposition to the state tuition grant program, and it adopted a resolution asking the General Assembly to enact legislation preventing the use of public funds for private schooling.⁵⁴ The Superintendent of Roanoke Schools called the increase in tuition grant payments "alarming" and termed the whole program "questionable." He said that enough had been spent in grants in Roanoke over the past four years to have built a new elementary school.

⁵¹ When Judge Lewis ruled in August, 1961 that tuition grants could not be used in the county as long as public schools were closed, Virginia Representatives William Tuck of the Fifth Congressional District and Watkins M. Abbitt of the Fourth District called a meeting on October 1st, 1961 to discuss ways of assisting the Foundation in raising funds. Racial segregationists all over the South have considered Prince Edward to be a "test case" in the preservation of segregation in schools. (See Southern School News, Vol. 8, No. 5 (November, 1961), p. 7.) But it appears that such support is short-range, to help the county whites during litigation, and it will not continue indefinitely.

⁵² Quoted in Goodman, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

⁵³ Southern School News, Vol. 8, No. 2 (August, 1961), p. 6. The Richmond Times-Dispatch reported a survey on September 2, 1962, p. 1, showing that most of the tuition grants were not being used for the purpose for which they were originally designed, namely to provide a "freedom of choice" between integrated and segregated schools. Many of the children were receiving grants in places where no integration had taken place, and others had used the grants to continue in the private schools in which they had been enrolled previously.

⁵⁴ Southern School News, Vol. 10, No. 6 (December, 1963), p. 5.

The other attack on the tuition-grant law was referred to in the preceding chapter. Counsel for the plaintiffs in the Prince Edward case have challenged the validity of the law on the basis that it provides public funds for racially segregated private schools and thereby gives public support to racial discrimination, in violation of the anti-discrimination rulings of the courts.

Temporary Programs for Negroes

When the county public schools were closed in 1959, Negro leaders sought to set up temporary arrangements to tide their children through what they hoped to be a short disruption of regular schooling. The goal of the Negro leadership was, and continues to be, the opening of public schools on a non-racial basis. These leaders are convinced that desegregated public education is essential to the development of equality of opportunity for Negroes in the county. Their legal position has been based, in part, on the fact that their children are denied a publically supported education and that both the state and federal governments have an obligation to remedy this situation. To have tried to set up a substitute system of private schools, financed by state tuition grants, Negro leaders felt, would have jeopardized their position in court. And, as already pointed out, county Negroes have severely limited resources with which to try to develop a school system, and they have not been interested in having the hard-pressed whites help them establish, at considerable expense, segregated private schools that would have to charge tuition. Furthermore, the general assumption in the state was that the public schools would not remain closed very long. Elsewhere, in Charlottesville and Norfolk, closed schools had been reopened after a few months. Many observers thought that the legal aspects of the Prince Edward County case could be settled within a year or two. In the interval, county Negroes began to set up informal, morale-building centers for their children and to place as many as possible in schools outside the county. They felt that those arrangements would be of short duration and would have to be endured in order to achieve the desegregated public schooling that they so much desired.

Winter Training Centers

One of the first moves of Negro leaders was to establish the Prince Edward County Christian Association and to place at its head a local minister, the Reverend L. Francis Griffin. Along with other activities designed to aid the education of Negro children in the county, the Association made plans for setting up a number of "training centers" in various parts of the county. The Association was helped and encouraged in these plans by other groups outside the county, including the National Council of Negro Women.⁵⁵ The first two of these centers were opened in February, 1960, and by the next February there were sixteen in operation serving a reported 650 children. The president of the Association described the program of the centers, as they operated in February of 1961, in the following way:

The supervisors and assistants (26 in number) create play-life situations and do a minimum of instructing. While the whole program is principally for morale building, it is designed to keep the minds of the children alert and sharp so that they will not be too far behind other children of the same age

⁵⁵ Southern School News, Vol. 6, No. 8 (February, 1960), p. 16.

level who are receiving formal training. Perhaps the most important outgrowth of these centers is that they offer an opportunity for supervised group activity.⁵⁶

The point was made more than once by the Association that these centers were not to be considered the equivalent of regular schooling. They were more comparable to "holding actions." The centers were located in homes, churches, lodges, and any other structure available to Negroes. They were supported by contributions from county Negroes, with some donations of money and supplies coming from outside the county and the state. Because of the shortage of trained teachers, severe limitations of supplies and facilities, and their original temporary nature, the training centers ceased operation after three years, in the spring of 1962. In each year of existence, they served, on the average, approximately one-third of the Negro children of school age who were not attending school outside the county.

Summer Crash Programs

During the summer of 1961, the Virginia Teachers Association, which is the state Negro professional teacher's organization, cooperated with the Prince Edward County Christian Association in conducting a "crash remedial program" in which about 425 Negro children participated. Thirty-three teachers from all parts of the state volunteered for the project and gave instruction in basic academic subjects. Classes were held in three Negro churches, a lodge building, and an old school owned by Negroes. An offer by the County school board for free use of public school buildings was turned down by Negro leaders.⁵⁷

The Virginia Teachers Association repeated its program in July of 1962 and were joined in their effort by the "Student Christian Federation of New England. Students from six different collages conducted classes for seven weeks in three rural churches. A total of 401 children were enrolled in the Virginia Teachers project, and 162 in the Student Christian Federation classes.⁵⁸

A 1963 summer program was carried out by a group of thirty-six Queens College students and New York public school teachers. The Queens students raised about \$7,200 through donations and benefits, and the New York teachers were sponsored by funds raised through the United Federation of Teachers. More than 400 Negro children participated in the program of remedial instruction in fundamental academic skills.⁵⁹

School Attendance Outside the County

⁵⁶ L. Francis Griffin, "Written Statement as President of the Prince Edward County Christian Association," in United States Commission on Civil Rights, Third Annual Conference, op. cit., p. 106.

⁵⁷ Southern School News, Vol. 8, No. 1 (July, 1961), p. 2.

⁵⁸ Ruth Turner, "Educational Report" (mimeographed, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1962). See also Southern School News, Vol. 9, No. 2 (August, 1962), p. 3.

⁵⁹ Southern School News, Vol. 10, No. 2 (August, 1963), p. 14.

A survey of Negro families in the county in 1963 by a research team from Michigan State University showed that during the four-year period of closed schools 583 Negro children attended schools outside the county.⁶⁰ This meant that about one-third (33.8 percent) of the 1,725 children of school age in 1963 had attended school for at least part of a year during 1959 to 1963. However only 5.0 percent attended for four full years. Slightly more than half of the children who attended school outside the county were helped by the Prince Edward County Christian Association, the American Friends Service Committee, and the Virginia Teachers Association. The other children were supported by their families, relatives, and friends. The majority of the children, 61.3 percent, did not attend any school during the four-year period. No information was obtained on the remaining 4.9 percent.

Parental Activities

The parents of the Negro children have, in general, cooperated readily with the programs of the County Christian Association, the American Friends, the Virginia Teachers Association, and other groups that have sought to help in the absence of public schools. In addition, a number of parents have tried to give their children some instruction at home.

When parents in a random sample of 206 Negro families in the county were asked in July, 1963, "What can a parent do to help a child while he is out of school?" the most frequent response was that the parents themselves could try to teach the child the basic subjects of reading and writing.⁶¹ But a number of the parents added that this would be difficult. One said, "A parent should teach them all he knows -- but I don't know much." Another replied, "Parents should teach their children, but I don't have time. I work all day."

When the parents in these 206 families were asked whether or not they actually tried to teach their children some things that they probably would not have taught them had they been attending school regularly, 36.9 percent replied that they had. However, in most cases the efforts were sporadic and inconsistent. Only 12.1 percent of these families indicated that they had tried to get together with other parents in their neighborhood to organize teaching activities for their children. Most of the families said that they relied on the winter training sessions and the summer crash programs for organized instruction.

It is of interest to note that 197 or 95.6 percent of the parents reported that their children watched television regularly, some as much as seven or eight hours a day.

Educational Losses from School Closing

Extensive retardation of the educational development of Negro children has accompanied school

⁶⁰ Robert L. Green and Louis Hofmann, "Preliminary Report of the Prince Edward County, Virginia Survey", submitted to the U.S. Office of Education, (East Lansing: Michigan State University, College of Education, June 30, 1963 -- mimeographed), p. 11.

⁶¹ From preliminary tabulation of Phase II of the Michigan State University study. The replies are summarized in Table 5 in the Appendix.

closing. The number of non-readers among Negro children greatly increased during the period of school closing. In 1959 only 3.0 percent of the Negro children of school age could not read, but after four years of no public schools, that percentage had increased to 23.2 percent.⁶² Preliminary reports of the Michigan State University study of the achievement levels of the children show such levels to be comparatively low, something that can be directly attributed to closed schools.

Another effect was the loss of children to formal schooling, for few of the children who were fifteen and over when the schools were closed expressed a willingness four years later to attend public schools if they were reopened.⁶³ Thus, a number of the children who were in high school in 1959 and who would have graduated have had their education irrevocably interrupted. The full development of their potentialities will not be as likely under the circumstances, and the county, the state, and the nation will suffer the loss.

What do school-age children do with their time when schools are closed? The majority in May, 1963 were "just around home," not doing much of anything.⁶⁴ At the age when American children learn basic skills of reading, writing, arithmetic, and discipline in organized school groups, the Prince Edward County Negro children were largely deprived of the chance for such learning. Whether or not the time lost and the "teachable" periods missed over the past four years can ever be fully made up is doubtful.

Another cost, difficult to measure, is that of the effect of school closing on the feelings of Negroes. The President of the Prince Edward County Christian Association expressed it in this way in his report to the United States Commission on Civil Rights:

This report cannot fully tell the story of all the problems created by closing the schools in Prince Edward. It is a story of frustrated adults and children, of families torn apart while children are in the formative, impressionable years, when they need the constant assuring love and guidance of both parents. This is a story of hatred, reprisals, harassments in which the principal characters are determined that stubborn wills are far more important than our inherited democratic way life, and the preservation of a free public school system.⁶⁵

In the next chapter, we shall see verbatim statements of feelings about school closing that came from a cross-section of county Negroes.

Prince Edward Free School Association

⁶² Green and Hofmann, op.cit., p. 21.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 12.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 22 (for details see Table 6 in the Appendix).

⁶⁵ Griffin., op. cit., p. 106.

The very difficult task of trying to make up for the lost years of schooling fell to the Prince Edward Free School Association. When the Association opened on September 16, 1963, it faced an enormous problem in knowing at what grade level to place children of varying ages, some of whom were ten years of age but had never been in school before. The problem was met by establishing a non-graded arrangement in which pupils have been organized by age groups rather than by strictly demarcated grades.⁶⁶ The Elementary School has two divisions, the Primary School made up of children of ages six through nine, and the Middle School which includes children ten through twelve. The Secondary School also has two divisions, the Lower School, which includes children of thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen years of age, and the Upper School, which includes all children of sixteen years of age and over. This arrangement has provided for flexibility, individual attention, learning at the rate of speed of which the individual is capable, and continuous learning for all. The Free Schools have utilized team teaching in which two or more teachers work together to take advantage of their special competencies and to give more individual attention to pupils.

The Officials of the Free Schools have expressed satisfaction with the operation of the schools. The chairman of the board of trustees, Colgate W. Darden, Jr., stated on November 5 that he felt the schools were going "very well," and that the goal of one million dollars to operate the school for the 11-month term would be reached.⁶⁷ By December 18 about \$850,000 had been raised, with around \$150,000 of this from individual contributions, \$30,000 from educational organizations, and the remaining \$670,000 from foundations.⁶⁸ The administrative head of the schools reported after a month of operation that attendance was excellent and that no discipline cases had appeared.⁶⁹ In a speech in Washington on December 18 he expressed his belief that the Free Schools were probably the best equipped in the United States. He elaborated by saying: "We have team teaching, teaching machines, and educational TV . . . Our vocational education program probably is second to none in the South . . . We have extensive business courses . . . We probably have the finest school library in the South . . . We have very small classes, with some children getting individual tutoring . . ." ⁷⁰ School officials have continued to stress the one-year basis on which the schools are organized.

The setting up of the Free School Association involved the help and encouragement of the federal and state governments and the cooperation of both the white and Negro leaders in the county. The person who conducted the quiet negotiations that resulted in the Free Schools, William J. vanden Heuval, special assistant to the United States Attorney General, characterized the organization in this way: "This is a project whose principal asset is good will. It will work as long as the good will lasts."⁷¹ This good will has been expressed by both Negroes and whites in the county. Whites interviewed by a

⁶⁶ Prince Edward County Free School Association, "Bulletin # 10," September 26, 1963 (mimeographed).

⁶⁷ Southern School News, Vol. 10. No. 6 (December, 1963), p. 6.

⁶⁸ Southern School News, Vol. 10, No. 7 (January, 1964), p. 2.

⁶⁹ Southern School News, Vol. 10. No. 6 (December, 1963), p. 5.

⁷⁰ Quoted in the Lynchburg News, December 19, 1963, p. A-2.

⁷¹ Southern School News, Vol. 10. No. 3 (September, 1963), p. 18.

Richmond newsman expressed the following favorable opinions: the Farmville Postmaster, "I'm glad they [county Negroes] are going to have schools to go to;" a county judge, "I'm very pleased about it;" the mayor of Farmville, "Since 1959 we have been trying to get the Negro leaders and parents to support a school such as is proposed here. I hope they will"; the editor of the Farmville Herald, "I have suggested the idea of having schools for Negro children from the very beginning . . . We have never been satisfied with Negro children not receiving an education." ⁷² Counsel to the Prince Edward Board of Supervisors, J. Segar Gravatt, said that the Free Schools would help provide the freedom of choice and the freedom of association, which, in his opinion, were necessary in solving the problem of school segregation in Southern counties.⁷³ Gravatt sounded a similar note to that of the mayor and editor when he stated that the white people of the county had always been willing and anxious to help provide schooling for county Negroes but that the Negroes had declined the help.⁷⁴

It is necessary for clarification to comment on the repeated assertion by the white leadership of the county that Southside Schools, Incorporated had offered the Negroes of the county, a form of schooling comparable to that provided by the Free Schools. There are at least four significant differences. (1) in the formation of the Free School Association, the advice and cooperation of Negro leaders were sought from the beginning, and its board of trustees is biracial in make-up. Southside Schools, Incorporated, was set up apparently without consulting Negro leaders, and its board included no Negroes; it was organized by whites for Negroes, in the paternalistic, white supremacy pattern. (2) The Free Schools are open to all children of the county, "without regard to race, creed, or color;" the faculties are bi-racial, and eight (four) white children attend. Southside Schools would be operated for Negroes and would maintain racial segregation. (3) The Free schools are open to all children without requiring tuition payments. Southside Schools would have charged tuition. (4) The Free schools have had strong financial backing from foundations and individuals all over the United States. The provision of funds by Southside Schools would presumably have fallen on Negroes with very limited financial resources and on whites already struggling to develop and maintain private schools for their own children.

Negroes of the county expressed relief and joy that their children would have formal schooling in the Free Schools after being deprived for so long. The Reverend L. Francis Griffin, local Negro leader and NAACP coordinator for the county, promised wholehearted support for "the model school system for all children of Prince Edward County without regard to race., creed, or color . . ." ⁷⁵ He added, "However, the NAACP will relentlessly continue its efforts to bring about a just solution to the problem which precipitated the closing of the public schools. We will expend maximum efforts to bring about the opening of the public schools on an integrated basis."

The Free School Association has provided, then, a temporary solution to the education of Negroes in

⁷² Richmond Times-Dispatch, August 15, 1963, pp. 1-2.

⁷³ Southern School News, Vol. 10. No. 3 (September, 1963), p. 18.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Prince Edward County. Only the reopening of the public schools will meet the need on a long-range basis.

Chapter V. County Reactions to School Closing

Essential to the understanding of the tragic closing of public schools in Prince Edward County is not only a description of what has taken place but also knowledge of how citizens of the county have felt about what has taken place. While some of the reactions can be inferred from what has already been presented, it is the purpose of this chapter to present them in a more organized and detailed manner. Again, as with other parts of this report, it is necessary to deal with differences in reactions on the part of whites and Negroes, for, as we have seen, much of the Prince Edward story involves a struggle of Negroes to change their traditional, subordinate position in the social structure and the opposition of the dominant white leadership to such change.

Most of the information about the feelings of whites toward school closing came from informal interviews with a cross-section of more than seventy-five whites during May of 1963. Official statements by the white leadership, editorials in the Farmville Herald, and letters to the editor of the Herald provided supplementary material. While informal interviews were held with about twenty-five Negroes, the chief source of information on Negro attitudes was from the responses of 206 Negro families in formal interviews conducted during the summer of 1963. These families composed a scientifically selected sample of all Negro families in the county with children of school age. Official statements of Negro leaders were also used. As in all summaries of information from a large number of individuals, oversimplification of variation is inevitable. Yet, types of reactions do emerge and these can help us grasp more adequately the overall picture in the county.

The Prevailing View of Whites

The point of view that has, in general, prevailed among the whites of the county is that the board of supervisors has been justified in refusing to appropriate sufficient funds for the operation a public schools. Initially spokesmen for this point of view justified the position on the belief that whites simply would not support a desegregated school system. As the court case increased in complexity, greater emphasis was placed on the feeling that the whites of Prince Edward County were fighting a legal battle for all of America, especially for local school districts. The battle in their eye came to be one of who would "control" the schools, the "locality" (presumably the white citizens who wanted to preserve racial segregation at any cost) or "outside" forces (usually identified as the federal government and the NAACP). This prevailing view has been clearly and frequently articulated in editorials of the Farmville Herald. It was stated in the Herald on May 7, 1963, in this way:

The people of Prince Edward County stand and have stood ready to support public education, which would be administered by the local school board, financed by acts of the legislative bodies of Prince Edward County and the Commonwealth of Virginia, under Virginia law.

The people of Prince Edward are not ready to support public education controlled by the federal government with forced racial integration by the

federal courts, or any other agency. The people and the county legislative body have made this plain since the summer or fall of 1954. And they stand there today.

And, again, on May 14, 1963:

The issue is not the people versus public schools, as much as some public school super-advocates would make you believe. The issue is: the control of public schools.

. . .

Locally and specifically, Prince Edward public schools were maintained until it became apparent that local control would be lost. Then the Board of Supervisors, acting upon the recorded request and petition of the people, declined to levy local taxes for public school support, and the system became inoperative.

It might be noted, parenthetically, that there are five references in the editorial excerpts above to "the people of Prince Edward County." Evidently, not included among "the people" are the Negroes of the county or the whites who have dissented from the prevailing view.

Support for the Prevailing View

Interviews with white supporters of the prevailing view revealed several lines of reasoning in such support. One approach was to place the blame for school closing on someone other than the dominant county whites themselves. The most frequent target was the federal government, as indicated in these responses: "The federal government is at fault for trying to force local taxes;" "The federal court rulings gave us no other choice;" "The President of the United States in against us;" "The United States government is going socialistic, and someone has to stop it;" "We are living in a police state." Some averred that the United States Supreme Court 1954 ruling was "illegal" and "unconstitutional" and should not be followed. Although these arguments implied a states-rights conservatism, there was also blame of the state itself: "Governor Almond sold us out;" "State leadership deteriorated when the governor did an about-face." Some blamed the NAACP: "The NAACP cause it;" "The NAACP is just a bunch of agitators;" "County Negroes had bad leadership from the NAACP." Finally, some of those interviewed claimed that communists were behind it all: "It is part of an international conspiracy to divide and conquer;" "Negro leaders have received four checks from the communists;" "The NAACP is communist controlled."

Another line of support stressed the closing of schools as necessary to preserve racial segregation and thereby "protect" both whites and Negroes: "The colored would not do well in integrated schools -- and the whites would retrogress;" "The mixing of the races just couldn't be allowed;" "It is not a matter of religion, but of two different races." Some felt that Negroes were not really interested in school: "Negroes don't really care whether they go to school or not -- go visit any Negro home."

A number of whites interviewed expressed regret that Negroes had no schools, but they placed the blame for the closing of schools on the Negroes themselves: "It was their own fault, for they could have stayed in their own schools" "If they had left us alone, we could have had separate schools."

Others thought that the Negro children who wanted an education were getting it: "A lot of the Negroes are going to school out of the county;" "They have the winter centers and the summer programs;" "The best training for Negroes is vocational -- they don't need much schooling." Some of the respondents indicated that Negroes in the county had not really appreciated what the whites had done for them: "Colored people are treated better in Prince Edward County than in Detroit;" "We gave them [county Negroes] everything -- and they didn't appreciate it;" "If it were not for the whites, the Negroes would starve to death;" "I've worked for good Negro education all my life;" "The colored are well treated here. When one lost his home in a fire, he got more in contributions than he lost -- and all come from whites;" "Some of my best friends are colored."

Those who have voiced and supported the prevailing view justifying the closing of public schools have not encouraged or condoned violence as a means of maintaining what they want. This does not mean that pressures have not been exerted -- they have, as we shall see in a moment. However, the dominant white leadership has stood for peaceful and legal means of settling differences, and it has also encouraged courteous behavior toward those who have visited Prince Edward County for census-taking, special teaching and research. For example, in welcoming the students from Queens College of Flushing, N.Y., as they prepared to set up their summer teaching program, a June 18, 1963, editorial in the Farmville Herald stated:

We hope the self-styled 'peace corps' from Queens College has made a study of Prince Edward County and its people, so that the project they propose will be successful and helpful to those who may receive their aid. We are sure they will be accorded the usual good will of the people of this county.

. . .

We will welcome the voluntary 'peace corps' in a spirit of good will. We trust that their efforts here will be in the same spirit once they have begun their work.

In fact, the "image" of the county that the white leadership gives from time to time is one of highly harmonious human relations in spite of school closing and differences of opinion. The following editorial from the July 30, 1963 Farmville Herald illustrates this:

Regardless of differences of opinions in Prince Edward County for the past eleven years, the people, both white and Negro have maintained law and order. They have suffered the right to differ in a magnanimous manner

To the everlasting credit of the citizens of Prince Edward may it be recorded:

That no violence has erupted between those of different opinions;
That economic pressures have not been exerted by one citizen against another;
That sympathetic relationships of long standing have been maintained;
That our failings have not outweighed our virtues;
That our differences have been aired in the courts, a practice as American as America.
Visitors of good will in any effort to relieve our burdens and our circumstances have been welcomed.

However, not all of the whites (and very few of the Negroes) interviewed would agree that everything in the county has been quite so harmonious, as we shall see in the rest of this chapter.

Doubts about the Prevailing View

A number of whites interviewed questioned the wisdom of shutting down all public school, some feeling this way from the beginning and others coming to this conclusion after the schools remained closed for so long. Most of those who disagreed with the prevailing view believed in and preferred racial segregation in the schools, but they felt that school closing was too great a price to pay for maintaining segregation. A business man said that Prince Edward County was being left behind in industrial progress, because new industry simply would not consider a place without public schools. We have seen earlier that the five members of the school board who resigned in 1960 expressed doubt that private schools alone could meet the long-range education needs of the county. One person in the field of education said that some persons of influence in the county had never believed very much in public education and that they "sabotaged" the public schools in order make sure that private schools could be set up and controlled by the dominant leadership. Some religious leaders had doubts about the morality of denying public schooling to Negro children regardless of the situation. Those who doubted the wisdom of closing schools did not openly oppose the closing, for fear it would do no good because of the power of the persons supporting the closing. They also stated that all sorts of pressures were exerted on them to conform to the prevailing view, particularly in the early days of the controversy. More than one spoke of the complete control of the town by a ruling "oligarchy," so powerful that few dared to oppose it. The interviewer was almost invariably requested by the whites doubting the wisdom of school closing that they not be identified in any way in this report.

Open Disagreement with the Prevailing View

From the very beginning a few whites have openly challenged the prevailing view that schools should be closed. They have pleaded for public schools in hearings on the school budget before the board of supervisors, in letters to the county paper, and in speeches both in the county and elsewhere. They have stated that it was morally wrong to deprive children of a public education and that closed schools hurt the county economically, politically, intellectually, and spiritually. Most of those who dared to challenge the prevailing racial views at a time when there was especially severe pressure for conformity are faculty members of the two colleges in the county. These early opponents of school closing have undergone various forms of social disapproval. Some have been the targets of social ostracism, of false rumors, and of petitions circulated against them. Such treatment has been the rule elsewhere in the South, especially for those native Southerners who openly and willingly encourage racial desegregation. However, in small towns and rural areas where contacts tend to be face-to-face and intimate, hostility of white segregationists against non-conforming whites can be intense. That this has been the case in Prince Edward County was found in interviews with non-conformists.

In the newspaper interview reported earlier (Lynchburg News, September 30, 1962) the white resident of the county whose children were barred from the private school because of unpaid tuition fees stated that the dominant leaders in Prince Edward had a "narrow view". He was quoted as saying:

"They [the leaders] are like horses with blinders. They see in only one direction.

They have a narrow view. They must be made to realize that slave days are out of date.”

The first open opposition of any magnitude to the prevailing view came in June of 1963 when E. M. M. Pairet, a Farmville businessman and a past president of the Farmville Chamber of Commerce, ran for a place on the county board of supervisors on the platform of reopening the public schools. As we saw earlier, he came in second in a three-man race. Pairet said during his campaign that he was not an integrationist but that he felt that the county had a moral obligation to open its public schools. Also, with public schools opened, the county could receive state scholarship grants and would less likely be passed over by new industry. He reported that of the more than 1,140 white voters' homes in which he had visited from 900 to 1,000 indicated “it is time to make some concessions.”⁷⁶ Even after his defeat Pairet is quoted as saying, “I still think a majority of the whites here feel as I do . . .”⁷⁷ He added that the whites were “confused about the issue” and that they were “inclined to sit tight” to protect their heavy investment in the white private schools. If this interpretation is correct, it means that the dominant white leadership will have greater and greater difficulty in maintaining the view that now prevails. On the other hand, the winner in the election claimed that his victory was an “endorsement by the voters of his stand of keeping the public schools closed while litigation continued.”⁷⁸

Reactions of Negroes

The prevailing view of county Negroes toward school closing is that a grave injustice has been done them. With the Supreme Court decision of 1954 that compulsory racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, Prince Edward Negroes assumed that government officials in the state and county would move toward compliance with the highest court in the land. Instead, state and county officials did everything within their power to delay school desegregation. When county officials could no longer continue to delay compliance with the Supreme Court's ruling, they closed the public schools. Negroes in Prince Edward resented this, for to them it meant that the white leadership of the county was acting to circumvent their constitutional rights and that the leadership believed that having no schools at all was better than having Negro children go to school with white children. And so the Negroes in the county, with persistence and near unanimity, have supported the efforts of their leaders to reopen the public schools on a desegregated basis to overcome injustice and to move toward greater equality of treatment of Negroes.

Responses by Negroes to the questions asked in the survey in the summer of 1963 showed general strong agreement with the position cited above. We now turn to a report of the survey.

Initial Reaction to School Closing

⁷⁶ Southern School News, Vol. 10, No. 1 (July, 1963), p. 12.

⁷⁷ Southern School News, Vol. 10, No. 2 (August, 1963), p. 14.

⁷⁸ Richmond News Leader, July 10, 1963, p. 6.

When the representative sample of 206 Negro parents were asked, "How did you feel when the schools closed in 1959?" well over nine out of ten (96.1 percent) replied that they felt "shocked," "terrible," "awful," or the like; 2.4 percent said that they did not feel so bad at first, because they thought schools would be opened again soon; 1.5 percent said that they did not know how they felt.⁷⁹

Typical of the replies of those who were upset by school closing were the following: "I felt shocked, terrible, angry;" "I felt like it wasn't real; "I almost went crazy." "I started praying that they would open soon;" "I was hurt, disappointed, astonished -- those that did it were irresponsible;" I felt awful. I felt that they closed them because they did not want our children to go to school with theirs. They thought theirs were better;" "It was like a death in the family;" "I cried all night;" "I felt that it was like going back to slavery;" "I felt it was terribly unfair;" "Lord, have mercy, I cried;" "I felt awful, because it destroyed my hopes for my children to finish high school and go to college."

Placing the Blame

To the question, "In your opinion, who was to blame for the closing of the schools?" more than half (52.4 percent) replied that it was the white people of the county, slightly less than half (45.2 percent) did not know or were not sure, and 2.4 percent blamed the Negroes in the county.⁸⁰ Typical responses that blamed whites were: "White people who don't want the colored to go to schools with whites;" "The other race;" "Whites, because they don't want the colored to know anything;" "Those old white folks in Farmville." Some in this category centered blame on the white officials: "I blame the county officials. They would not come up to the court orders;" "I blame the county supervisors. They had the privilege to close the schools or to keep them open." Others thought that the whites of money and power were chiefly responsible: "The big shots of Farmville;" "The rich whites;" "The rich white folks -- other whites didn't have a choice."

Among the responses blaming Negroes were these: "I feel it is our fault. I would rather see the schools open than like this;" "The Negro started it, but it doesn't seem as though we're going anywhere;" "Negroes, for not voting before schools closed." Only one Negro blamed the NAACP.

How Concerned Are the Whites?

Another question on the survey was, "How concerned do you think most whites in the county are that Negro children are not going to school?" The majority (52.4 percent) of the Negroes replied that whites were not at all concerned, or were very little concerned; 26.7 percent thought that the whites were somewhat concerned; 14.1 percent felt that most of the whites were very much concerned; the remaining 6.8 percent did not know or gave no response.⁸¹ Replies that fell into the majority category included these: "They are not concerned -- they don't care or aren't interested in Negroes;" "They are not concerned with us; they want our children to be ignorant;" "I don't think they are concerned at

⁷⁹ Table 7 in the Appendix.

⁸⁰ Table 8 in the Appendix.

⁸¹ Table 9 in Appendix.

all;" "There are very few that are concerned; the rest are only concerned about themselves;" "They don't care -- they don't want their kids to go to school with the colored kids;" "It seems to me that they do not have too much concern as long as they have their private schools;" "I have heard some say that they are concerned -- but they are not really concerned;" "They like it. They want the Negroes to always be ignorant;" "If the whites were concerned, they would open the schools;" "They don't care -- all they want to do is to keep the Negro down;" "Some are concerned from the mouth, but not from the heart;" "They are glad the colored children aren't going so they won't have to bother with them;" "They don't care; they are glad they are out of school just because they are colored."

Among the replies that were categorized as "Somewhat Concerned" were these: "Some are sorry; some don't care;" "Some are beginning to become concerned about the Negro after being out of school for four years;" "There are some on our side. All of the whites in the county are not against the Negroes."

Among the responses indicating the belief that whites were much concerned were these: "I think they are just as sorry as we are;" "I think a lot are concerned because they can't afford private schools;" "There are just a few whites holding up the opening of schools;" "Quite a few are, from the way they talk." A number of Negro respondents who stated that whites were very much concerned also added that these whites were afraid to speak out: "The whites are concerned, but afraid to say;" "They are divided on the issue; a lot are concerned, but they won't talk out;" "They are afraid to do what they want to do;" "Most want the schools open, but won't say."

One elaboration of a "Don't Know" response was: "I don't know their attitude -- I stay out of their way."

Who Can Open the Public Schools?

A fourth interview question with which this report will deal asked, "How do you think the schools can be opened again?" Answers varied but the most frequent response (37.4 percent) was that the federal government would have to do it; 13.6 percent thought that the Negroes themselves, by registering and voting and by greater effort, could open them; 11.2 percent felt that only the local white leaders could and that they would only if the schools were segregated. The rest thought that Negroes and whites cooperating could do it, or that it could be done through God's help, or that state officials could open them, or that they did not know what could be done.⁸²

Responses of School-Age Children

Three-hundred and thirty-two children of school age in the 206 families were also interviewed, and their responses can be considered to be representative of all Negro children of school age in the county. We shall look at replies to three of the questions as additional indications of the way county Negroes feel about closed schools and about race relations in general.

One question was: "Do you think everyone in Prince Edward County is treated more or less alike?"

⁸² Table 10 in the Appendix.

More than three out of four of the children (77.7 percent) said, "No."⁸³ Most of their explanations involved school closing; "No, because the white people won't let us go to school;" "No, the white people closed the school up and didn't want the colored children to go;" "No, the whites have schools and the Negro doesn't;" Some of the children cited restrictions on Negroes because of segregation as unequal treatment: "No, Negroes are segregated from whites and therefore looked down upon;" "No, the colored people are not treated right. The whites won't let colored people eat in their restaurants and won't hire them to work in stores;" "No, no colored can sit down and eat downtown, and we can't go to the movies;" "No., we don't have the "same chance for good jobs." Some mentioned the general attitude of whites toward them as a handicap: "No, the whites think they are better than Negroes and they don't get along;" "No, if you are colored no matter how old you are you are still called 'boy,' and instead of calling you Mr. or Mrs. you are called 'aunt' or 'uncle' by the whites." Among the 19.3 percent who said "Yes" to the question were these comments: "Yes, I think everyone treats me the same as they treat everybody else;" "Yes, because both Negro and white children got whippings;" "Yes, people seem to get along o.k. in this section."

A related question asked, "Do you think that everyone in Prince Edward County has about the chance to get ahead as everyone else?"⁸⁴ A majority of the children (55.7 percent) said "No," and, again, the most frequent reason given for replying in this way was the lack of public schools for Negroes: "No, because the colored have no schools and therefore no education;" "No, because the white people are already ahead, and they have schools and we don't;" "No, because a lot of us have already lost four years of education and it will take a long time to catch up." Some felt that Negroes did not have an equal chance because whites deliberately hold them back: "No, because the white man keeps Negroes down;" "No, when Negroes try to get ahead the whites keep pulling them back;" "No, Negroes don't because whites won't give them a chance to do anything;" "No, because the whites are ahead and they won't let us catch them." Some explained their "No" answers in terms of unequal job opportunity: "No, the Negro can't have the job he wants -- like in the stores if he is hired, he has to clean up and not clerk;" "No, white people in stores will not hire colored;" "No, job opportunities are unequal because of race, regardless of education and training." Most of the 33.1 percent who replied "Yes" did not elaborate, but those who did usually explained their answers in terms of the American ideal of hard work and equality: "Yes, if they work hard enough they can;" "Yes, if he tries hard enough;" "Yes, because we are all created equal;" "Yes, if we trust in God;" "Yes, if the Negro keeps fighting for equal rights;" "Yes, just because the white man closed the schools, he thinks the Negro cannot get ahead, but the Negro can get ahead."

The final question with which we shall deal was, "Do you think life could be made better in the county in any way?"⁸⁵ Of the 89.2 percent who answered "Yes," over half of them mentioned the opening of the public schools as a way in which the county could be made better. One out of five who said "Yes" mentioned the granting of equal rights, including the elimination of segregation, as a way improvement could be made. One out of eight suggested the improvement of job opportunities. Other

⁸³ Table 11 in the Appendix.

⁸⁴ Table 12 in the Appendix.

⁸⁵ Table 13 in the Appendix.

suggestions included various forms of better conduct, cooperation between Negroes and whites, and being more friendly. Here are a few of the responses: "I think the schools could be opened. I love Farmville. I was born here;" "Yes, if the schools were opened and if the whites weren't so mean;" "Yes, if the schools were opened and Negroes were allowed to do the same as whites and sit in restaurants and so forth;" "Yes, if they give us our freedom;" "Yes, by giving me a chance like the white people have, because they get any kind of job they want." Those who answered "No" (6.6 percent) either liked things as they were or were resigned to them: "No, it's all right as it is now;" "No. I like it here;" "No, because so many have tried and failed;" "No, personally I think life in Prince Edward County will never be better. The old white people want to keep things their way. Other people from other states have come; after they leave, things will go back like they were." The remaining 4.2 percent did not respond or did not know.

Chapter VI. Why Did It Happen?

Identifying causes of an event as complex as school closing in Prince Edward County is not easy, and it should be done with caution and with the realization that interpretation and opinion are involved. Yet it should be done, for there are important lessons to be learned from this tragic event, and the mark of a vigorous people is that they are able to learn from the past. America can profit by increasing its understanding of the factors involved in the closing of schools in Prince Edward, for although some of the factors are restricted in applicability because of time and place, other factors are present throughout the nation and can hamper the nation's move toward greater equality of treatment of all its citizens.

The Factors of Time and Setting

It is defensible to say that public schools were closed in Prince County simply because the dominant white leadership preferred racial segregation to public schools. When the county was required by the courts to desegregate its schools, this leadership chose to shut them down instead. But there are other areas in Virginia and in the South where the white leadership has clearly preferred racial segregation but where it allowed schools to be desegregated rather than to be closed altogether. Two factors which taken together have distinguished the Prince Edward situation from others are those of time and the nature of the locality.

The challenge to forced racial segregation in public schools came early in Prince Edward County, three years before the 1954 Supreme Court decision, and the county was one of the five original court cases on which that decision was based. This was a time when resistance by white leaders in the state, as well as in the county, was very high and such resistance brought about a long delay in the enforcement of the Supreme Court's order. White leaders in Prince Edward, strengthened by the stand of the state, had sufficient time to help crystallize the existing feelings against school desegregation to such a degree that most county whites were willing to abandon public schools rather than desegregate them.

The views against desegregation that prevailed in Prince Edward were also those being expounded at the time by the political leadership of the state. The massive resistance laws passed by the General Assembly required that schools which desegregated would have to be closed. Even after the Virginia

Supreme Court of Appeals declared the state school-closing law unconstitutional on January 19, 1959, Governor Almond continued to speak of the necessity for segregated education. In a statewide television and radio speech on January 20, he called upon all Virginians to stand firmly with him in the struggle to keep segregated schools. Almond said:

Abandonment of the principles involved anywhere is to forsake them everywhere. . . . The people of Virginia through their elected representatives and by registering their convictions in the exercise of their franchise have repeatedly made it crystal clear that they cannot and will not support a system of public education on a racially integrated basis. I make it equally clear that I cannot and that I will not break faith with them.⁸⁶

This is exactly what the white leaders of Prince Edward County had been saying. There is little wonder that they felt let down by the Governor when he turned so quickly from Massive resistance to local option. The dominant leadership in the county did not, and evidently could not, reverse its position so rapidly. They followed massive resistance to its logical end -- the closing of all public schools in the county.

During the period when Prince Edward moved to close its schools rather than desegregate them, other places in Virginia, including Norfolk, Alexandria, Arlington County, Warren County, and Charlottesville, complied with court orders to desegregate. Most of these places were urban centers or urban in outlook, and the tradition of keeping Negroes segregated was not so strong that the leaders wanted it to be continued at the price of doing away with public education. Persons prominent in business and industry in these places were among those who exerted influence to keep schools open, for they realized how detrimental school closing could be to their interests and to the economic growth of the locality as a whole.⁸⁷ However, as a rural Southside Virginia county, Prince Edward had a much stronger tradition of strict racial segregation. To the Prince Edward white leaders, apparently, the possibility of hurting the industrial and business growth of the county was not so bad as changing patterns of race relations. This traditionally oriented outlook of a predominantly rural county, then, along with the adamant position against desegregation built up from resisting the early attack on segregation combined to play an important part in the decision to close the schools.

The Factor of Leadership

White leaders said repeatedly in Prince Edward that the white people of the county would not support desegregated schools and by so doing the leaders encouraged the people not to give such support. In other places in the South -- as in Lynchburg, Virginia; Clemson, South Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; and Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee -- where dominant white leaders have taken a different stand

⁸⁶ Quoted in Southern School News, Vol. 5, No. 8 (February, 1959). p. 4

⁸⁷ In his account of the fall of massive resistance, Benjamin Muse points out the vitally important part that prominent businessmen of the state played when they saw that the closing of public schools was doing incalculable damage to Virginia's economic growth: Virginia's Massive Resistance, especially Chapter 22, "The Businessmen Move", pp. 106-110.

and have told the people that the change to desegregated schooling could and would be made, desegregation in public education has taken place almost without incident. While it is true that none of the places mentioned is in Southside, Virginia, neither is Little Rock or New Orleans where leaders did all they could to defy the directive of the federal courts and where great difficulties with school desegregation occurred.

Leading the county to the deliberate closing of public schools brought to those responsible the necessity for defending the action against those who challenged it and for upholding the action for the sake of the segregationists in the county, the state, and the nation who praised it. In the preceding chapter we have seen evidence of the unyielding stand of the leaders, of the feeling by some whites that the leaders formed an all-powerful "oligarchy", and of the pressures exerted against those who refused to conform to majority opinion. While there was willing support of most of the whites in the county for school closing, the leaders themselves did all within their power to maintain the position they had taken. And they had a great deal of power. They could help to marshal public opinion against any opponent and could draw on the financial resources of the county to employ able legal counsel to fight the court cases. And they could depend on the county newspaper to justify the position in clear, forcefully written editorials that repeatedly urged Prince Edward to "stand steady".

The school-closing action brought warm commendation from white segregationists in the state and nation. The county was pictured as a small, brave group of whites pitting themselves against the power of the federal government and the NAACP. Contributions came from many sources, and segregationists visited the county to learn how the private schools were organized and operated. The president of the Prince Edward School Foundation declared in October of 1961 that he believed "more and more people are beginning to realize that Prince Edward is a test case for Southside Virginia and the entire South for that matter."⁸⁸ With Prince Edward as a "cause celebre" for segregationists all over the nation, any modification of their stand became difficult for the white leaders, as it would involve loss of face. This does not imply that there has been clear-cut evidence that the leadership wanted to retreat from its stand, but it does point out how a consideration of any modification was made difficult under the circumstances.

Negro leadership in the county has been resolute in seeking the goal of opening public schools to all children of the county without regard to race. Since the Negro high school children protested against unequal facilities in 1951, Negro leaders, aided especially by state and national NAACP legal counsel, have not wavered in the struggle to establish non-racial public schools. In spite of the fact that they and their children would be the ones to suffer most while segregation was being challenged, most Negroes have stood behind their leaders, as shown in their refusal to accept the offer by whites of private, segregated schools, and as seen in the opinions expressed in the preceding chapter. The Prince Edward situation has been of concern also to those who want to promote desegregation. The court issues have been of great significance to the NAACP, whose lawyers have been the legal counsel for Negroes. And, as we have seen, different groups from the state and nation have tried to help Negro children in the county obtain some schooling. The stand of the leadership, then has been supported outside as well as within the county. If Negro leaders had been less determined, the challenge to racial segregation might have been too weak either to precipitate the actions against

⁸⁸ Quoted in Southern School News, Vol. 8, No. 5 (November, 1961), p. 7.

unequal facilities in the first place or to continue the long struggle for non-racial public schools after the schools had been closed.

There is little question, then, that leadership on both sides has been vitally important in the Prince Edward story. While it is true that the leaders have taken the majority of the people where the people themselves were willing to go and that the leaders have functioned within the limitations of a particular time and place, they have nevertheless functioned. In the chapter on reactions to school closing, we read that many whites blamed the Negroes and many Negroes blamed the whites. However, there is no question about which leadership had the power to close or to open the schools. This power was, and still is, vested in the all-white board of supervisors. What in reality was said in blaming Negroes was that if Negroes had been willing to keep their segregated "place," the schools would not have closed. But this is equivalent to telling Americans that they must accept an inferior status, and this is something that Americans have never done willingly.

Stated Factors: Local Control and Freedom of Association

Granted that white leadership was an important factor in the closing of schools in Prince Edward County, we need to ask why the leaders and the majority of whites who willingly followed them were so opposed to the orders of the federal courts that they would shut down their schools rather than comply with the orders. Among the issues which the leadership itself has claimed are at stake are the control of public schools and the freedom of association. These issues were mentioned earlier, and we shall now look at them critically.

The matter of control was stated again in a Farmville Herald editorial on January 10, 1964:

This issue is not the people vs public schools. The issue is the control of public schools.

Will public education be controlled by the people who pay for it, or by the federal courts, which under pressures of minorities, threaten to dominate it?

But just how realistic is this statement of the issue? To what extent are the courts seeking to "control" and "dominate" public education in Prince Edward County? To what extent have federal courts "controlled" or "dominated" public schools elsewhere in Virginia that have desegregated? Lynchburg, Virginia, for example, has complied with court orders to desegregate, and the Lynchburg School Board continues to be very much in charge of the city's schools. The Virginia Board of Education continues to say what program of schooling meets the minimum requirements to receive state approval. Translated into the real basis of objection, the white leadership of Prince Edward is saying that what it wants to "control" is the policy of racial segregation, which in the eyes of the courts and of most Americans, is a policy of racial discrimination. The federal courts have only said what the county may not do -- namely, that it may not discriminate racially. Beyond that the locality and the state are free to set up their school system in whatever way they wish, as has been the case all over Virginia where desegregation has taken place.

The issue of "freedom of association" has not played as important a part as the issue of control in the

support of school closing, but it has been very much in evidence. According to dominant whites, the freedom of association is destroyed by desegregation of public schools, for white children may then be required to "associate" with Negro children in school. But this is saying at the same time that whites should have the right to prevent this "association" by excluding Negroes because of their race. It turns out to be the right of racial exclusion, which, again, according to the interpretation of the Supreme Court is unconstitutional in public schools. Furthermore, this association in an integrated school makes no racial requirement in regard to the way a pupil chooses his friends, or what child he invites into his home or with whom he associates in a close and personal way. Children in integrated schools have freedom to associate in a close manner with anyone they desire.

The Crucial Factor: Racism

The stated issues of the white leadership, according to our interpretation, rest ultimately on the conviction that racial segregation should be maintained in the schools. In this search for the causes of school closing, we come finally, then, to the question of why so many whites in Prince Edward County, and, indeed throughout the South and much of the rest of the nation, feel that it is so vitally important to keep Americans segregated by race. The answer is that such a feeling is an expression of what may be called "racism", a set of beliefs and attitudes that a person's race is very important, if not the single most important, thing about him. According to racism, a person is first of all a member of a race, and only after his racial designation has been made clear can be treated as an individual different from other individuals. Race even overrides the notion of the brotherhood of man, cherished by Prince Edward whites in their churches, for such "brotherhood" must be nourished in racially exclusive churches. As one white was previously quoted in defending the policy of racial segregation: "It is not a matter of religion, but of two different races."

In racist beliefs and attitudes, races are not only considered to be fundamentally different but also some are thought to be superior to others -- and it is always one's own race that is the superior one.⁸⁹ While the belief in the innate inferiority of Negroes is not flaunted by whites in Prince Edward, it clearly underlies their belief that Negroes must be kept separate. Belief in Negro inferiority is nourished by the system of forced racial segregation which assures unequal opportunities for Negroes and which educates everyone that racial differentiation is of paramount importance. The belief is also bolstered by treatises on the inferiority of Negroes, for such treatises were found to be very much in evidence in the conversations and on the bookshelves of dominant whites.⁹⁰

Belief in racial superiority of whites is convenient both for explaining and justifying the lower social and economic position of Negroes in the county. Negroes, so goes the explanation of the racist, have poorer jobs and less money, not because of racial segregation and discrimination, but because of lower innate ability. In other words, it is not the social system which is unjust, but the "natural" outcome of

⁸⁹ At least one county Negro belongs to the Black Muslims, a racist organization that believes in the superiority of Negroes and the inferiority of whites. [sic]

⁹⁰ Prominent among the books and pamphlets declaring Negro inferiority are Race and Reason (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1961) by Carlton Putnam (a retired airlines executive); "The Biology of the Race Problem" (Prepared by the Commission of the Governor of Alabama, 1962) and Race, Heredity and Civilization (London: Britons Publishing Society, 1961) by W.C. George (a retired professor of anatomy of the University of North Carolina).

different racial abilities that produces the present result of unequal status. Exclusion of Negroes from white schools is not undemocratic for the racist, since the less able race will "pull down" the more able race if integration occurs. Such reasoning, then, can be used to support not only the desirability, but even the necessity of closing schools to avoid integration.

The basis on which racism rests, however, are refuted by the over-whelming majority of scientists who have devoted their lives to the study of race and race differences. A summary of the research and opinions of these scientists is beyond the scope of this report.⁹¹ Suffice it to say here that almost all geneticists, anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists agree that there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that intelligence, or character or cultural development have anything to do with race directly. While members of the same race share genes which determine such physical features as color of the hair and skin and shape of the nose and head, there is no evidence for "racial" genes that determine the capacity to learn or to be creative or to develop sound character. While genetic factors clearly play a part in how much a person can learn and in his ability to create, these genetic factors are not racially based in any demonstrable way. Such views of scientists do not mean that they believe that all races are "equal" in innate ability, as is sometimes charged. This would imply that race somehow determines the "equality." The views indicate, rather, that race per se is not relevant to innate capacities of the individual to develop intelligence and other abilities. Of course, when race is seized upon as a basis for discriminatory treatment, as is true of forced racial segregation, then race can be an indirect factor in restricting the development of many kinds of skills. But this becomes a social, not a genetic, factor.

Racists acknowledge the wide variation in ability that occurs among whites and among Negroes and the fact that on all sorts of measures some Negroes invariably excel most of the whites. But racists then say that where races are concerned, the individual must be judged and treated in terms of the "average" of the race to which he has been assigned, thus reflecting again the belief in the all-important place of the race. However, the views of most students of race show that the individual stands on his own feet, in terms of his own genetic heritage, and to judge such an individual by some abstract average makes no sense at all. Thus, a person can be treated as an individual rather than as a member of a race, and he can be given the opportunity to develop his abilities as an individual, in accord both with democratic ideals and scientific knowledge.

In their studies of hundreds of different cultures in all parts of the world, cultural anthropologists have shown that the unity of a people lies not in similarities of their skin color or hair form but rather in the ideals and values they share. Thus the notion of the racist that basic unity lies in racial membership, as seen in such terms as "racial pride" and "racial integrity," conflict with anthropological findings. All Americans can take pride in the accomplishments of a Marion Anderson and a Ralph Bunche, and we can feel shame in the actions of a Billie Sol Estes and a Lee Harvey Oswald, not because they are Negroes or whites, but because of what they, as individuals, have done. And what racial "integrity" can white Americans feel with an Adolph Hitler, a Joseph Stalin, or a Christine Keeler, all of whom

⁹¹ The reader is referred to the following scientific discussions of race differences: L. C. Dunn and T. Dobzhansky, Heredity, Race and Society (N.Y.: New American Library, 1952 -- a paperback); UNESCO, Race and Science (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1961); R. M. Dreger and K. S. Miller, "Comparative Psychological Studies of Negroes and Whites in the United States," Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 57 (1960), pp. 361-402.

happen to have been born whites? The unity of Americans lies in their devotion to a democratic way of life, not in the particular physical features with which they are born.

Conclusion

In summary, then, these factors appear to have operated together to bring about school closing: the time and the setting; a white leadership, with control of the county's resources, determined to keep public schools segregated, and an opposing Negro leadership just as determined to have non-racial schools; and strong racist convictions of most of the whites in the county. Evidently every one of these factors was required for the schools to have closed and remained closed. But insights that bring understanding by no means bring approval of what has happened, and most of America and many people throughout the world have been shocked that citizens of a democracy would deliberately close public schools in order to avoid desegregation. The dominant whites of the county claim that most persons outside the county "misunderstand" them, as indicated in the following Farmville Herald editorial of December 6, 1963:

Prince Edward County, Virginia, has been misunderstood, maligned, and abused publicly by more people than probably any other county in the nation. It is understood, encouraged and admired privately by more people than any other county in the nation.

Criticism of Prince Edward comes not from misunderstanding but from disagreement with the goal of the majority, however sincerely and resolutely the majority may be devoted to it -- the goal of maintaining forced racial segregation even at the price of abandoning public education. And the encouragement and admiration for the county have not been so private, for we have seen that extreme segregationists have openly praised the county for fighting to maintain segregation. They have had no difficulty in understanding the issue.

It is difficult at this point to see what the county has gained by its long fight against the desegregation of public schools. Its reputation has been damaged, as the writer of the above editorial implies. Some of its own businessmen, as well as the Governor of the state,⁹² agree that the county was lost economically. Certainly the intellectual development of its Negro children has been seriously harmed. And from their responses to questions on their reactions to school closing and the placing of blame, most Negroes in the county hold deep resentment against the action of the dominant whites. Thus the sense of unity in the county has been hurt.

Perhaps we can find in these results the true lesson of Prince Edward County, namely that whenever some Americans try to keep other Americans in an inferior position, tragedy results. This nation is built upon the principle that every individual is of worth and deserves the opportunity to develop his abilities fully and to move freely in such development. To try to prevent some Americans from being treated as individuals brings disaster, both to those who set themselves up as superior and to those

⁹² Governor Harrison is reported as saying that he did not believe the closing of the schools in Prince Edward had hurt Virginia's industrial development but that it probably had harmed the county's bid to attract industrial plants: Southern School News, Vol. 10, No. 7 (January, 1964), p. 2.

who are arbitrarily limited in their opportunities. All Americans need each other -- in Prince Edward County, in the rest of Virginia, and throughout the nation. To the extent that we can assure equality of opportunity and recognition of individual worth and dignity for every American, without placing artificial restrictions on him because of race or creed or anything else -- to that extent can we promote unity, utilize the talents of all, and thereby strengthen America to meet the challenge of today and the future.

APPENDIX

Table 1. Occupations, by Race, of the Civilian Labor Force in Prince Edward County, Virginia, 1960*

Occupation	Total Labor Force (N=4,720)	White (N=3,022)	Non-White (N=1,698)
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Professions, Technicians	8.9	11.9	3.0
Farmers, Farm Managers	12.5	12.8	12.0
Managers-except Farm	6.8	10.1	0.9
Clerical	7.5	11.0	1.2
Sales	8.4	12.5	1.0
Craftsmen	9.8	12.3	5.2
Operatives	15.7	15.5	16.1
Private Household	5.7	0.6	14.8
Service-except Private Household	7.3	3.9	13.4
Farm Laborers and Foremen	4.7	2.6	8.5
Laborers-except Farm	10.3	4.6	20.5
Occupation not Reported	2.6	2.2	3.4

* Source: United States Census of Population: 1960 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1961), PC (1), Chapter C, pp. 241, 280.

Table 2. Occupational Divisions, by Race, of the Civilian Labor Force in Prince Edward County, Virginia, 1960*

Occupational Division	Total Labor Force (N=4,720)	White (N=3,022)	Non-White (N=1,698)
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Farm (Owners, Managers, Laborers)	17.2	15.5	20.5
Non-Farm White-Collar Occupations**	31.4	45.5	6.2
Non-Farm Blue-Collar Occupations***	51.4	39.0	73.3

* Source: Table 1 above.

** Includes: Professions and Technicians; Managers; Clerical; Sales.

*** Includes: Craftsmen; Operatives; Private Household; Service; Laborers.

Table 3. Income, by Race, of Families in Prince Edward County, Virginia, 1959*

Occupation	All Families (N=3,235)	White Families (N=2,031)	Non-White Families (N=1,204)
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Under \$1,000	15.8	9.2	26.9
\$1,000 to \$2,999	30.6	22.7	52.2
\$3,000 to \$4,999	22.0	25.7	15.8
\$5,000 to \$6,999	12.9	18.8	3.0
\$7,000 and over	18.7	23.6	2.2
Median Income	\$3,043	\$4,070**	\$1,848

* Source: United States Census of Population: 1960 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1961), PC (1), Chapter C, pp. 263, 280.

* computed

Table 4. Years of School Completed by Prince Edward County, Virginia Residents 25-Years of Age and Over, by Race, 1960*

Years of School Completed	All (N=7,121)	White (N=4,513)	Non-White (N=2,608)
	Percent	Percent	Percent
None	4.8	2.7	8.3
Elementary, 1-7	44.0	30.3	68.1
Elementary, 8	8.1	9.7	5.2
High School, 1-3	11.9	14.8	6.7
High School, 4	14.8	19.6	6.5
College, 1-3	9.7	13.3	3.5
College, 4 or more	6.7	9.6	1.7

* Source: United States Census of Population: 1960 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1961), PC (1), Chapter C, pp. 230, 272.

Table 5. Responses of 206 Negro Parents in Prince Edward County, Virginia, in June 1963, to the Question: "What can a parent do to help a child who is out of school?"

Response	Number of Times Mentioned	Percent of the 206 Parents Who Mentioned This*
Teach them yourself	169	82.0
Read to them	21	10.5
Keep them busy and out of mischief	32	15.5
Teach them household duties and farming	25	12.1
Arrange for them to play with other children	16	7.8
Send them to church and Sunday School	12	5.8
Get them into education programs (both in and outside the county)	10	4.9
Teach them good manners	10	4.9
Be sure they watch good television programs	5	2.4
Take them on special trips	5	2.4
Don't know	5	2.4

* This column totals more than 206, because some parents mentioned more than one kind of help.

** This column totals more than 100%

Table 6. Activities of School-Age Negro Children in Prince Edward County, Virginia, in May, 1963*

Activity	Negro Children (N=1.725)
	Percent
Just staying around home	50.6
Attending School (outside the County)	23.9
Working for Pay	13.7
Working Around Home	7.6
Other Activities	1.3
No Information	3.0

Source: Green, Robert L. and Louis Hofmann, "Preliminary Report of the Prince Edward County, Virginia Survey," (East Lansing: Michigan State University, College of Education, June 30, 1963-mimeographed), Table 17, pg.22.

Table 7. Responses of Negro Parents In Prince Edward County, Virginia,, in June 1963,to the Question: "How did you feel when the schools closed in 1959?"

Response	Negro Parents (N=206)
	Percent
Felt "bad", "terrible", "angry"	96.1
Felt they would open soon	2.4
Did not know	1.5

Table 8. Responses of Negro Parents In Prince Edward County, Virginia,, in June 1963,to the Question: "In your opinion, who was to blame for the closing of schools?"

Response	Negro Parents (N=206)
	Percent
Whites were to blame	52.4
Negroes were to blame	2.4
Don't know, or not sure	45.2

Table 9. Responses of Negro Parents in Prince Edward County, Virginia, in June, 1963, to the Question "How concerned do you think most whites in the county are that Negro children are not going to school?"

Response	Negro Parents (N=206)
	Percent
Whites are not at all, or are very little, concerned	52.4
Whites are somewhat concerned	26.7
Whites are very much concerned	14.1
Don't know, or not sure	6.8

Table 10. Responses of Negro Parents in Prince Edward County, Virginia, in June 1963, to the Question: "How do you think school can be opened again?"

Response	Negro Parents (N=206)
	Percent
By the Federal Government	37.4
By Negroes, fighting for their rights	13.6
By whites, if the schools are segregated	11.2
By Negroes and whites working together	6.3
By the help of God and prayer	2.9
By the State of Virginia	1.5
Don't know, or not sure	27.2

Table 11. Responses of School-Age Negro Children in Prince Edward County, Virginia, in June, 1963, to the Question: "Do you think everyone in Prince Edward County is treated more or less alike?"

Response	School-Age Negro Children (N=332)
	Percent
Yes	19.3
No	77.7
Don't know, or not sure	3.0

Table 12. Responses of School-Age Negro Children in Prince Edward County, Virginia, in June, 1963, to the Question: "Do you think that everyone in Prince Edward County has about the same chance to get ahead as everyone else?"

Response	School-Age Negro Children (N=332)
	Percent
Yes	33.1
No	55.7
Don't know, or not sure	11.2

Table 13. Responses of School-Age Negro Children in Prince Edward County, Virginia, in June 1963, to the Question: "Do you think life could be made better in the County in any way?"

Response	School-Age Negro Children (N=332)
	Percent
Yes	89.2
No	6.6
Don't know, or not sure	4.2