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Integration With a Minimum of Integration

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On February 2, 1959, Ronald Deskins, Michael Jones, Lance Newman, and Gloris Thompson became the first black students to attend a segregated white school in Virginia when they entered Arlington's Stratford Junior High. This moment was the culmination of a five-year quest by blacks and whites in the state's smallest county to break free of the policy of "Massive Resistance." While many believed that integration was inevitable in Arlington due to the popularity of the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, there was by no means a consensus. Despite sparse instances of resistance, Arlington appeared progressive when compared to other places in Virginia, where in some cases schools were closed for years. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) saw an opportunity to break down segregation in Northern Virginia given that the integration of its relatively small black population would not be as drastic as the changes that would have to occur in Southside Virginia, where the black population approached fifty percent. As a result, Arlington was able to accomplish integration of its segregated white schools without having to close schools for a single day.

Despite the fanfare surrounding Arlington's initial integration measures in 1959, segregation remained in place in the county's schools for more than a decade. For years after the integration of Stratford, Arlington's traditionally black elementary schools remained almost entirely black. The dilemma confronting the Arlington School Board through the 1960s was how to accomplish desegregation while maintaining the traditional school districts. These traditional school districts ultimately resulted in homogeneity among the black elementary schools because the county had drawn the boundaries with the intent of segregating the races. In 1971, twelve years after the four students

integrated Stratford, the School Board introduced a new desegregation plan, which focused primarily on the county's last black school, Drew Elementary. The plan involved creating a model school for children from all over the county in the Drew school building while busing black children who formerly attended Drew to other elementary schools throughout the county. The plan confronted resistance not from white parents but instead from Arlington's black residents angered that the burden of busing rested solely on the shoulders of the black community.

When Arlington's Stratford Junior High became the first school in Virginia to desegregate, the county appeared to be a progressive place in a state desperately striving to maintain the status quo. Integration of the formerly all-white school occurred without any major incidents only a few months after the state government ordered other schools in Virginia closed. Despite the relative ease of integration in Arlington, the county failed to confront the problem of school districts designed to maintain segregation. As a result, Drew elementary remained almost entirely black until 1971, when the School Board introduced a desegregation plan for the school. The fact that the Board needed court orders to initiate the plan, coupled with the reality that the burden of busing rested solely on the black residents in 1971 brings into question the county's proud claim as being the most willing school system in Virginia to desegregate.

Arlington, Virginia, the smallest county in the state, consisted of the plot of land in Northern Virginia directly across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. This proximity to the nation's capital resulted in the roughly twenty-five square mile county developing a relatively different history from the rest of the state. Prior to World War II, Arlington maintained a sleepy, small-town-like atmosphere analogous to that of places

with similar population densities across the state. During the war years, large numbers of white moderate civil servants from every state in the union came and displaced the “Authentic Virginians,” as historian James McGrath Morris describes them. Around this same time, seventy-one Arlington blacks came together to form their own branch of the NAACP in the county.¹ The government employees, the members of the press, and the others who entered the county following the war ultimately molded the community, which had formerly consisted of primarily native Virginians.

The demographic differences apparent in Arlington as opposed to the rest of the state began to show themselves around the end of the 1940s. The moderate white newcomers to the county formed the Arlingtonians for a Better County (ABC) in 1946. They first targeted the conservative school board. After the ABC drafted a petition garnering more than five thousand signatures, the Richmond legislature allowed Arlington to become the first, and only, county in Virginia to have an elected School Board. The school board elections in November 1947 resulted in ABC candidates winning all five school board positions.²

Seven years later, following the Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision outlawing segregated schools, this elected school board began to butt heads with the State Board of Education, part of Governor Thomas B. Stanley’s administration. When the Supreme Court issued its ruling decreeing, “In the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal,” the state responded by instructing school districts to

¹ James McGrath Morris, “A Chink in the Armor: The Black-Led Struggle for School Desegregation in Arlington, Virginia, and the End of Massive Resistance,” *The Journal of Policy History*, Vol. 13, No. 3. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001, 334-335.

² James McGrath Morris, “A Chink in the Armor,” 334.

delay. In a letter, dated June 28, 1955, to the superintendents of Virginia's school districts, Dowell J. Howard, Superintendent of Public Instruction (a member of the Commonwealth of Virginia State Board of Education) made the state government's stance clear:

“Although the United States Supreme court placed on the school authorities the responsibility for assessing and solving the problems in accordance with the views expressed by the Court, the State Board of Education and the local political sub-divisions cannot initiate a plan to accomplish an orderly and logical adjustment within the law until the General Assembly has enacted appropriate legislation. The State Board is of the opinion that hasty action could well result in serious damage to the public school system.”³

This statement, issued a little over a year after the *Brown* decision, was a harbinger of the state's Massive Resistance policy. The state government made an attempt to take the integration decision out of the hands of the local officials and keep it in the hands of the state officials, who were much more likely to maintain the state segregation laws.

Nearly a month before Howard's letter, the Arlington County School Board proposed its plan for the integration of its public schools. The three-part plan, introduced on June 1, 1955, explained, “Negro children will no longer be required to attend a segregated Negro school out of their school district, but they will be permitted to attend such school if they so desire and transportation will be provided.” The memo continued on to say, “Whenever it is determined that a child's needs are not adequately served by the school he is attending, such child may be transferred to such school as it is determined will better fit his needs.”⁴ This decision by the School Board showcased the county's desire to comply with the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision despite opposition from the state.

³ Dowell J. Howard, “Policy Statement by Governor Stanley and the State Board of Education,” Supts. Memo No. 3164, Commonwealth of Virginia: State Board of Education, 28 June 1955.

⁴ Arlington County School Board, “Plan for Integrating Arlington Public Schools,” 1 June 1955.

The decision by Arlington's School Board was not altogether surprising, but decided against pursuing integration before the General Assembly reached a decision. Board Chair Warren Cox said on September 15, 1955, "This surely delays ultimate action. The United States Supreme Court has now twice unanimously declared that segregation in the public schools is contrary to the Constitution of the United States and illegal." His doubts about the direction the State government was heading did not stop there; he went on to say, "The first act of a school board member, any school board member, is to take an oath. The first part of that oath is an oath to support the Constitution . . . as interpreted by the Supreme Court. The defiance of the Federal Government is not likely to be either successful or profitable." Cox continued his defiance of the state two months later when he said that Arlington would pursue "integration with a minimum of integration."⁵

Cox's scathing rebuttal to the state's nascent massive resistance ultimately jeopardized Arlington's right to have an elected school board, the only elected school board in the state. The quest for school desegregation in Arlington received a serious blow when the state legislature stripped the county of its right to an elected school board. The legislature placed the power to select the school board in the hands of the more conservative County Board of Supervisors, thus ensuring that the state's policies would hold precedence in the county that had begun to become a nuisance. Arlington did not receive the right to an elected school board again for thirty-five years.

While progressivism on integration was stalled momentarily by the changes in the School Board, a high school student named Clarissa Thompson soon brought the desegregation issue in Arlington once again to the forefront. On May 17, 1956, two years

⁵ Warren E. Cox, "Statement at Fall Roundup of Arlington Public School Advisory Committees and Councils," Stratford Junior High, 15 September 1955. Connie Feeley, "Arlington Calm on Gray Report," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 17 November 1955.

to the day after the Supreme Court's decision, Thompson was the lead plaintiff as NAACP attorneys filed *Thompson et al v. the Arlington County School Board et al.* Declaring that she wanted to be considered an equal in anything she wanted to do, Thompson asked to attend Washington-Lee High School instead of the all-black Hoffman-Boston High School.⁶ Though Thompson was not one of the four who eventually desegregated Arlington's schools, her suit ultimately began to pave the way for integration as it marked the start of the NAACP's plan in Arlington.

The NAACP chose Arlington as a focal point for its push against Virginia's Massive Resistance policy because the black school age population in Arlington hovered around six percent whereas black students constituted a majority in some areas in Southside Virginia. Arlington also seemed a place where integration would proceed smoothly. Arlington NAACP president James E. Browne, in a statement said in 1956 that "Under the favorable circumstances prevailing in Arlington County, an additional year's delay can hardly be said to meet the requirements for 'prompt and reasonable action.' We are convinced that no further preparation of this community for integration is necessary and that delay can only beget difficulties."⁷ As a result of Arlington's school districting, only a handful of black students lived within the boundaries of a white school district. Most supporters of the plan to focus on areas like Arlington with small African-American populations felt that allowing one black child admittance to a school of a couple hundred whites would be much more difficult to oppose than allowing a large group of black students in a historically white school in a place with a higher black

⁶ Tony Mason, "Suit Charges Bias Against White Pupils," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 1 June 1956.

⁷ James E. Browne, "The Request From the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," 1956.

population. All in all, thirty black students in Arlington applied to the newly created Pupil Placement Board to gain admittance into a primarily white school.

The Pupil Placement Board, aptly named because of its creation via the 1956 Pupil Placement Act, became the primary stumbling block for public school integration in Arlington. According to state law, black students, and all students for that matter, had to apply with the Placement Board in order to transfer to a school they had not previously been attending. Since the Placement Board was a tool of the state legislature, the Board overwhelmingly denied all black applicants attempting to enroll in white schools. When a Federal Court injunction ordered Arlington to integrate on September 5, 1957, the schools could not integrate because the decision would violate the Placement Act. Admitting a black student to an all-white school would violate state law and could prompt the closing of the school and the cutting of state funding.⁸

Alexandria Federal Court Judge Albert V. Bryan took the teeth out of the Pupil Placement Act ten days later when he ruled on September 15, 1957, that the thirty plaintiffs in the *Thompson* case could not be denied entrance into a white school solely on the grounds of the aforementioned Act. In his decision, Judge Bryan wrote, "Submission to that Act amounts almost to assent to a racially segregated school," because the Placement Board could base their decisions merely on what they deem "the most appropriate (school) in accordance with provisions of the Pupil Placement Act."⁹ If he had allowed the Pupil Placement Board to be the deciding body when considering integration, Bryan would have been allowing the Virginia government to construct a roadblock against integration and maintain its policy of Massive Resistance. Following

⁸ Bess Furman, "Arlington Blocks Nine Negro Pupils," *The New York Times*, 6 September 1957.

⁹ Albert V. Bryan, "Text of Judge Bryan's Decision in Arlington Case," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 15 September 1957.

Bryan's decision, Arlington County scheduled the integration of its schools to take place for the fall term 1958, beginning on September 4.

At the time of Bryan's decision, the Virginia government was stepping up its Massive Resistance program and emphasized the stipulation in the 1956 legislation that any school where blacks were admitted as part of an integrated student body would summarily be closed. Fearing the closure of Arlington's schools, a large group of concerned citizens led by O. Glenn Stahl formed the Arlington Committee to Preserve Public Schools. In a statement to the School Board, the Committee stated its purpose as a group "concerned with neither integration nor segregation in Arlington County. Our main consideration is the preservation of our free public schools. We believe this is the major concern of the Arlington School Board."¹⁰ These sentiments were commonly held throughout Arlington's white community. White Arlingtonians were indifferent to integration as long as their schools stayed open. In a *Washington Post* poll from July 1958, two months before the scheduled integration, parents of Stratford Junior high students voted 154 to 40 in favor of "some measure of integration" over schools closing.¹¹ While a small number of residents feared "the mongrelization of the race and degeneration of our culture," the majority of Arlingtonians mainly wanted their schools to stay open.¹²

The reason that Arlingtonians were not openly against integration like several other parts of Virginia could have resulted from several factors. The first was that there was a relatively small black population and thus integration did not entail sweeping

¹⁰ Arlington Committee to Preserve Public Schools, "Statement to Arlington County School Board," 20 August 1958.

¹¹ "Poll Accepts Integration at Stratford," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 6 July 1958.

¹² "Anonymous Letter to Claude Richmond," Virginia Room, Arlington County Library, Record Group 7, Box 13, February 1959.

changes. Another possibility was that many of the residents had arrived during the war years or shortly thereafter and did not have traditional roots within the county, or the south for that matter. A population growing steadily, fed by newcomers from across the country, would not necessarily have been raised in Jim Crow Virginia and therefore would not support the state's policies. However, if integration meant school closures, then that was difficult to support as well. As a result, the general public opinion centered on the School Board doing whatever was needed to keep schools open.

State legislators from Arlington, however, were quick to deflect any blame for school closings and place it on whom they felt were to blame—the black students and parents seeking change. In a letter to O. Glenn Stahl, the state senator from Arlington, Charles R. Fenwick, informed the Committee leader that “the simplest and most obvious method for keeping our public schools open would be for the negro pupils not to exercise the right the courts have given them to apply for admission to a white school.”¹³ Fenwick's opinion, the one commonly held by state politicians, eerily foreshadowed the position taken by the local government twelve years later by arguing that the burden of solving the integration problem lay in the hands of the black students themselves instead of the white residents or the politicians.

As the integration day drew nearer, the consensus from Richmond was that Arlington's schools would need to close if desegregation proceeded as planned. Meanwhile, the Pupil Placement Board continued to deny the thirty plaintiffs admittance to the white schools they were trying to enter. When the case once again came across the desk of Albert V. Bryan (on September 18, two weeks after scheduled integration), the judge reviewed each of the thirty cases individually and decided that twenty-six of the

¹³ Charles R. Fenwick, “Letter to O. Glenn Stahl,” 14 May 1958.

denials were valid but ordered the other four to be integrated. The four remaining, Ronald Deskins, Michael Jones, Lance Newman, and Gloris Thompson, all twelve-years-old, would all be permitted to enter all-white Stratford Junior High. Bryan continued on to make a rather unprecedented decision. Instead of forcing immediate integration—as had been ordered in Charlottesville, resulting in school closings—Bryan ordered integration to be delayed until the start of the spring term in January of 1959.¹⁴ Arguing that integrating in the middle of a school term would only exacerbate problems, Bryan pushed back the inevitable for a few more months, conveniently placing the new integration deadline after higher courts might rule on the constitutionality of Virginia's Massive Resistance. Presuming that Virginia's policy would be ruled unconstitutional, Bryan knew that the state would have no choice but to allow the integration of Arlington's schools. While other localities might face school closings in the trials of massive resistance, Arlington could wait and see what happened.

The federal and state courts ruled Massive Resistance unconstitutional and on February 2, 1959, Stratford Junior High became Virginia's first desegregated public school. While the Arlington police surrounded the school grounds, equipped with GI battle helmets painted white, gas grenades and masks, batons, and other riot equipment, there were no extraordinary instances of disruption at Stratford that day. David L. Krupsaw, Chairman of the Arlington County Board of Supervisors—essentially the mayor—provided a reason for why the actual transition took place so smoothly in spite of the numerous court hearings needed beforehand. “Although we are, in one sense, a suburb of Washington, D.C.,” Krupsaw said, “we are still Virginians, and most

¹⁴ Robert E. Baker, “Bryan Delays Desegregation until January,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 18 September 1958.

Virginians do not welcome integration. But that was not the point. Responsible Virginians and Arlingtonians wanted no Little Rock. And there was no Little Rock.”¹⁵ Unlike the situation in Arkansas, there was no need for the National Guard and there were no mobs of angry whites taking to Arlington’s streets.

While there were no major disruptions on the day of Stratford’s integration, many black parents pushing for desegregation faced intimidation from angry whites. Dorothy Hamm, the mother of one of the plaintiffs in the case against the School Board and president of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at the black school, John M. Langston Elementary, confronted resistance from the community. A cross was burned on the lawn of her church—as well as on the lawn of Dr. Harold Johnson, another parent of a plaintiff—and Hamm’s son received a crude drawing of a lynched black man.¹⁶ The Arlington chapter of the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, one of the largest in the state, also waged a campaign to encourage Stratford students to boycott classes. In a letter sent to every student, the Defenders said:

“You and your parents have been placed on a great battlefield—perhaps the greatest one our nation has ever faced. . . . Would you not be willing to sacrifice a few weeks of your education while the great statesmen of Virginia devise a method, which will . . . reinstate that group of laws known as the Constitution so that the government of the people, by the people and for the people will not perish from the earth.”¹⁷

The Defenders’ plea to the students to boycott the school fell on deaf ears as the absentee total at the school hovered around the normal seventy-five absences. And while the hysteria surrounding Arlington’s desegregation finally reached its climax, the students,

¹⁵ David L. Krupsaw, “The Day Nothing Happened,” *The Anti-Defamation League Bulletin*, New York: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, February 1959.

¹⁶ Dorothy M. Bigelow Hamm, “Integration of Arlington County Schools: My Story,” Arlington, Va.: Dorothy Hamm, 2002.

¹⁷ Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, Arlington Chapter, “Letter to Stratford Student,” 30 January 1959.

according to principal Claude Richmond, were “paying more attention to the policemen than they were to the new students.” He went on to say that Stratford Junior High was “a school that any community can be proud of.”¹⁸

Stratford’s integration marked a serious defeat for the Massive Resistance campaign. Not long after the four black students started Arlington’s integration, more black Arlingtonians began to apply for admittance into white schools and within the next ten years Arlington integrated all of its white high schools and junior high schools to some extent without much fanfare. Integration had come to Arlington without the negative headlines of a Little Rock or a Prince Edward County. The people, somewhat detached from Southern heritage, merely wanted to keep their schools open. Despite the litigation needed to coerce integration, the county itself confronted the state and as a result lost its right to an elected school board. Everything in Arlington seemed to be moving in the direction of integrating easily, but the question that remained was what would be done with the black schools after the white schools were desegregated? To this question Arlington managed a decidedly different reaction than the seemingly friendly reception of integration in 1959.

By 1965, most of Arlington’s all-white junior and senior high schools had been desegregated. The sole black junior high school in the county, Hoffman-Boston, was still entirely black and black residents felt that this had to change. On December 6, 1965, the United States Court of Appeals for the fourth circuit took the case *Walter Raymond Wanner, an infant v. County School Board of Arlington County*, a case that had previously been heard by the Alexandria federal district court by District Judge Oren R.

¹⁸ Claude Richmond, “Memo from Stratford Junior High to Superintendent of Schools,” Virginia Room, Arlington County Library, Record Group 7, Box 13, 2 February 1959.

Lewis, who had replaced the retired Judge Bryan. Wanner and company were white students arguing that the county's proposed plan to desegregate Hoffman-Boston Junior High violated their Fourteenth Amendment rights. The District Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, citing that the School Board's plan to close Hoffman-Boston and combine it with Thomas Jefferson Junior High "was the product of an erroneous belief on the part of the School Board that it was under a court order to close the all-Negro Hoffman-Boston Junior High School." The District Court went on to say that racial balance was the prime criterion used in redrawing the boundaries and that considerations based on race are "constitutionally impermissible."¹⁹

In this instance, the Arlington School Board attempted to remedy the situation surrounding its still all-black junior high schools by closing Hoffman-Boston and combining it with Thomas Jefferson Junior High, with seventh grade still held in the Hoffman-Boston building and eighth and ninth grades in the Jefferson building. White residents saw this as an unlawful redistricting based primarily on race, a procedure that had been ruled unconstitutional because of the likelihood of manipulating districts to favor segregation. Judge Lewis agreed with the plaintiffs and struck down the School Board's plan. This marked the first time white Arlingtonians had filed a lawsuit to hinder the School Board's integration policy. While they were successful in convincing the district judge, their success was short-lived when the appeals court delivered its decision.

In a decision written by Circuit Judge Simon Sobeloff, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the District Court's decision and allowed the School Board to initiate its plan. The Court's opinion in a 1963 case, *Brooks v. County School Board of Arlington*

¹⁹ Simon Sobeloff, Circuit Court Judge, "Appeals Court Decision for *Wanner v. County School Board of Arlington, Virginia*," United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, No. 10,208, 7 February 1966.

County, “specifically noted the claims of the Negro plaintiffs that ‘the Hoffman-Boston district was originally created for Negroes when the maintenance of the segregated system was the avowed policy and practice’ and that ‘Hoffman-Boston remains as it was contrived, a Negro enclave entirely surrounded by white school zones.’” In regards to the current case, Sobeloff said, “No case was cited to this court, nor has one been found, which has *prohibited* a school board, when drawing or redrawing school attendance lines, from reducing or eliminating segregation, even when segregation was *de facto*, much less when brought about by a deliberate policy of separation of the races.”²⁰ Arlington’s school districts were originally created to maintain segregation within the county. The Hoffman-Boston school district, located in the southern part of the county, was surrounded on both sides by the school districts for the all-white Gunston and Thomas Jefferson Junior Highs. The court ruled that no neighborhood schools had been closed in an attempt to create racial harmony because Hoffman-Boston, nor Gunston or Thomas Jefferson for that matter, could be considered a neighborhood school. In some cases, white students would have to travel through the Hoffman-Boston district to get to their own school. Sobeloff and the other members of the Appeals Court saw the discrepancy between the Arlington school districts and allowed the School Board to initiate its proposed solution. The decision to close Hoffman-Boston made some in the white community uncomfortable enough to file a lawsuit because it forced a large number of black students into a traditionally white school. While the black students once again were the ones who were moved to a new building, the location of Thomas Jefferson was such that busing would not present that much of a hassle.

²⁰ Simon Sobeloff, “Appeals Court Decision,” 7 February 1966.

Following the desegregation of Hoffman-Boston Junior High, the focus of the Arlington desegregation debate turned to its last all-black school, Drew Elementary. Located in Southern Arlington, Drew existed right in the middle of the previously contested Hoffman-Boston school district. In December 1969, the Arlington desegregation issue was once again in the news as thirty parents of children attending Drew agreed to press the School Board into a “speedy” desegregation of the school. Black parents argued that separating blacks and whites in elementary school created more of a problem when they were forced to attend school together in higher grades. One black student said, “If we had gotten to know each other as persons in the young grades, maybe we wouldn’t be having some of the problems we have in high school now. Little kids don’t care about the differences in color.”²¹

After months of lobbying the school board provided nothing but an uneasy response and the promise to establish a committee to study desegregation options, the Arlington County School Board once again found itself in court. Arguing that the black students were having a tough time making the transition to integrated schools after six years at the all-black Drew, parents decided that it would be best to desegregate the schools, accepting busing when necessary. Unlike previous cases, the parents were not arguing that the black elementary school was lacking compared to white schools. In fact, they were quite proud of their school and felt it provided just as acceptable an education as any white school. While Drew’s performance on the national standardized achievement tests were below the countywide averages, the county still worked to provide the school with adequate supplies. Half of the \$132,000 in federal funds

²¹ Nancy Scannell, “Desegregation of Arlington School Pressed,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, 12 December 1969.

Arlington received for disadvantaged pupils went to Drew.²² Even though the parents felt that the school was adequate for their children's education, the strain that racial separation placed on their kids ultimately was too much of an issue for them to ignore.

The School Board ultimately adopted a plan to desegregate Drew that centered on closing the school and creating a model school in its place. According to the School Board plan, the model school that would utilize the Drew building would be "an experimental elementary school which would concentrate on programs of early childhood development, enrichment programs; would be ungraded, unstructured, and responsive in form, have low pupil to teacher ratios, and high parent participation."²³ The establishment of a model school where Drew once stood was only one part of the Board's desegregation plan. While sixty spots would remain open in the model school for black students, the majority of Drew's 590 black students would be bused to schools throughout the county beginning in the fall of 1971. According to the plan, black students would be bused to other Arlington elementary schools so that those schools would have "a ratio of black to white of as close to 11% as is practical within a range of 7% to 15%." Schools that already had higher percentages of black students were exempt from the busing. The Board insisted that family groupings and transportation for the students would be taken into account when deciding to which school they would bus each child.²⁴

White residents supported this resolution of busing black children to other elementary schools, but some black parents were furious with the School Board. George

²² Herbert H. Denton, "School Integration Asked," *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, 30 May 1970.

²³ Arlington County School Board, "Plans for the Desegregation of Drew and Hoffman-Boston Elementary Schools," 1971.

²⁴ Arlington County School Board, "Guidelines to be Used in Desegregating Drew and Hoffman-Boston Elementary Schools," 1971.

Richardson, member of the Hoffman-Boston Civic Association, was one of those angry at the Board. “We have only about 1,200 black people in grades one through six throughout Arlington,” Richardson said, “so we cannot provide all the schools with black students. If you need more black students, I think you ought to make provision for more black people in housing.”²⁵ Richardson brought up a compelling point as many black parents felt that stretching students and busing them across the county went from one extreme to the other as far as desegregation was concerned. Some black parents even suggested another alternative, the busing of white students to Drew, as a method for solving the desegregation problem.

The School Board’s plan received a boost when the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of busing in its April 20, 1971 decision in the *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* case. The Court declared that the busing of students as a means for desegregating schools was constitutionally viable and struck down North Carolina’s state anti-busing legislation.²⁶ Even though the Court carefully worded the decision to apply only to school systems that gerrymandered or manipulated school districts to maintain racial segregation, the decision sparked a nationwide debate as school boards throughout the country could pursue busing as a means of confronting residentially segregated schools.

In Virginia, the reaction to the *Swann* case was decidedly mixed. The lead editorial of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* on April 25 condemned the courts decision; saying that public education was too important to “wither simply because no one had the

²⁵ Jay Mathews. “Whites, Blacks Still Disagree Over Desegregation for Drew,” *Washington Post, Times Herald*, 20 July 1970.

²⁶ Judith F. Buncher ed., “Court Decisions: 1970-71,” *The School Busing Controversy: 1970-75*, New York: Facts on File, 1975, 15.

zeal or the courage to defend it against the blighting effects of massive busing.” The *Washington Post’s* April 22nd lead editorial, on the other hand, lauded the appropriateness of the Court’s “wise” decision.²⁷ Despite Richmond’s condemnations of busing as a means of integration, Arlington’s School Board knew that their manipulated school districts could be remedied by busing as stipulated by the Supreme Court. Busing remained a contentious national issue for the next five years as Congress repeatedly tried to pass anti-busing legislation and President Richard Nixon spoke out against the procedure.²⁸ Despite all the national interest in the busing debate, an official ban on busing never developed. As a result, Arlington continued with its original plan to bus Drew students throughout the county.

While the black parents of Drew pupils initially were the ones who prompted the push for desegregation, they eventually received more than they bargained for when the School Board’s plan was finalized. Black students who once had to deal with the disadvantage of attending a segregated, all-black school now had to bear the brunt of the burden of desegregating through busing. In an instant, the students would go from being similar to all of their classmates to being the vast minority as they entered new schools across the county. In order to delay the School Board from initiating its plan, some black parents again filed suit in federal court. Allison W. Brown, a lawyer on behalf of these parents, spoke of the School Board’s desegregation plan, describing it as “totally unacceptable in that it incorporates an invidious discrimination against black children . . . forcing them to be pawns . . . while not a single white student has been inconvenienced

²⁷ *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 25 April 1971. *Washington Post*, 22 April 1971.

²⁸ Judith F. Buncher ed., “Federal Government Policies: 1972-73,” *The School Busing Controversy: 1970-75*, New York: Facts on File, 1975, 135-143. For more information on the national busing controversy and Congress’s anti-busing legislation, *The School Busing Controversy* provides a timeline of events and dozens of editorial viewpoints taken from publications nationwide during the height of the busing debates.

[sic] in the slightest.”²⁹ Despite the efforts of the Drew parents, the District Court ruled in favor of the School Board and permitted the busing of students as an acceptable way to desegregate Arlington’s last remaining all-black school. Following the denial of the parents’ appeal, Drew Elementary School was closed and replaced by a model elementary school of the same name. The county began busing the 590 students who had formerly attended the school, as well as the 114 black students attending elementary classes at the old Hoffman-Boston school to various schools around the county, ensuring that each would have a minimum black population by percentage.

The Arlington School Board had responded to the black parents’ complaints by integrating to the fullest extent possible. The number of Drew students bused to a particular school ranged from as few as seven students to as many as sixty-six. The school that received sixty-six of the black students from Drew, Jamestown Elementary, previously had zero black students out of the 489 that attended the school.³⁰ Jamestown Elementary was located in the extreme northern part of the county, almost the furthest possible school from where Drew once stood. While Arlington is indeed Virginia’s smallest county, the bus rides from the all-black Green Valley neighborhood, which was where Drew stood to the wealthy white neighborhoods surrounding Jamestown took upwards of forty-five minutes. As a result, the former Drew students had to wake up earlier than most of their classmates in order to catch their bus. This same scenario played out across the county as buses transported handfuls of black children to most every other elementary school.

²⁹ Nancy Scannell, “Blacks Bear Bus Burden, Parents Say,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, 1 July 1971.

³⁰ Arlington Public Schools Department of Research, “Elementary Pupil Membership,” 25 June 1971.

In 1959, Arlington County prided itself on becoming the first county in the state to have desegregated schools. When the four black students entered Stratford Junior High, it marked the culmination of a struggle between local, state, and federal governments while signifying a devastating blow to Massive Resistance. Activism on the part of parents, both black and white, complemented by a progressive School Board and a cunning federal district court judge allowed Arlington to desegregate without closing schools for one day. Despite a few scattered opponents to integration within the county, the majority of the citizens preferred integration to the closing of schools and thus formed the Committee to Preserve Public Schools in order to prevent devastating closures from happening.

In the forty-five years since Stratford's integration, Arlingtonians have prided themselves on living in a county that appeared as a progressive enclave in a state so desperate to maintain its regressive laws. What is rarely mentioned in the history of Arlington is how the county reacted twelve years later when it became necessary to desegregate Arlington's final all-black segregated school. While desegregating a school that lies solidly within an all-black neighborhood with a school district designed to maximize the homogeneity of the school was necessarily a difficult task, Arlington responded by devising a plan that shifted the burden entirely on the students and families of that school without any concessions made from the white community. In fact, while the School Board accomplished its goal of creating a model elementary school to encourage a different kind of education, it did so by taking advantage of the students and community surrounding Drew. As a result, it appeared to many black families that Arlington's School Board had used the quest for desegregation to accomplish goals that

they felt were in the best interest of the county—the white county—and not necessarily in the best interests of the black parents.

While Arlington did manage to successfully desegregate Drew Elementary, black parents turned to litigation both at the beginning and at the end of the desegregation process. Despite the fact that their latter attempts were unsuccessful, they showcased a different side of the Arlington desegregation story. Even though Stratford did in fact desegregate peacefully in 1959, the remaining segregation of Arlington's black schools became something that the School Board would rather ignore than confront. The School Board's stubbornness to desegregate Drew ultimately led them to enact integration to the highest degree. While they claimed to take family groupings into account, the psychological effects of elementary aged children bearing the brunt of the burden of desegregation made 1971 Arlington appear like 1959 Arlington. The reluctance of the School Board to confront the problem and the fact that twelve years passed before any progress was made questions the commitment of Arlington to the cause of integration. While Arlington did fight valiantly in 1959 against the Massive Resistance machine, it refused to fight on behalf of black students in 1971 when Arlington realized complete integration.

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