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## “All Is Quiet in Arlington”: The Desegregation of Arlington County Public Schools and How We Remember It

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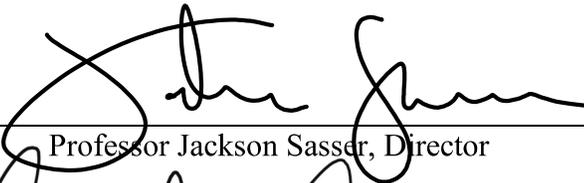
“All Is Quiet in Arlington”:  
The Desegregation of Arlington County Public Schools and How We Remember It

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in  
the Department of Government from William & Mary

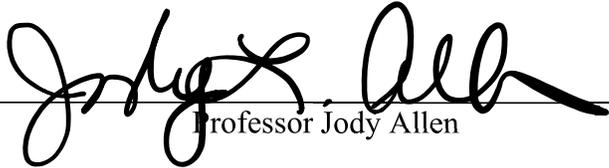
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## Introduction

Arlington, Virginia’s schools were the first to desegregate within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Newspaper coverage describes the day that four Black students walked into a previously all white school as “quiet” and “peaceful.” This image of the desegregation of Arlington County has been remembered and repeated, with the more difficult, divisive, and even violent parts of the story being erased overtime. There were around one hundred police stationed outside of the school in case something went wrong—a distinct possibility after racist hate-mail, crosses burned in yards, and neo-Nazi groups disrupting peaceful community meetings. The five years between *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* and the eventual desegregation of Arlington County are oft ignored. But the women and men who spoke up, wrote, and marched during those years — and the story they helped is crucial for understanding the dynamics of school desegregation from 1959 through the present.

There is a long history of scholarship around *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Known to many Americans as the case that initiated public school desegregation and ended the previous “separate but equal” standard, it affects the daily life of millions. The legacy of segregated schools still looms over the American education system.

This work explores the desegregation of Arlington County Public Schools. As the first school district in Virginia to desegregate, Arlington County carries a lot of pride about their comparatively fast desegregation process. However, compared to localities in other states, this happened quite slowly. Schools in Arlington began desegregating more than two years after the Little Rock Nine walked through the halls of Central High. State political actors successfully

enacted segregationist legislation preventing localities from making desegregation decisions for years after other states.

While Arlington is considered a liberal haven today, looking at the district's desegregation through this lens clouds what really happened. To understand what really happened in Arlington, I set out to answer three questions. First, why was Arlington the first district in Virginia to desegregate? Three conditions help explain the timing-- demographic change within the district, local legal challenges regarding desegregation prior to *Brown*, and a web of preexisting local interest groups. Second, why did the desegregation progress of Arlington slow? This builds off the interest group relationships mentioned in Chapter One, relating this to interest convergence theory and *Thompson v. County Board of Arlington County*. Third, how do we remember the desegregation of Arlington County? With an abundance of news releases and commemorative anniversaries, each painting a rosier picture of the process than the last, it is important to remember the events of Arlington as they truly happened. After discussing later legal action, starting in the 1970s, I will discuss the historical evolution of the memory of Arlington County's desegregation. Finally, I will relate these systems and cycles to today's school activism including the unique case of COVID-19 school activism.

### State and National Context

Arlington County's experience is best understood within state and national context. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka I* consolidated five cases concerning school desegregation from Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, and Washington D.C. In a unanimous decision delivered by Chief Justice Earl Warren, the Supreme Court disavowed the

“separate but equal” legal principle declared constitutional in the 1896 case *Plessy v. Ferguson*.<sup>1</sup> The Court ordered that schools must admit plaintiffs “as soon as practicable on a nondiscriminatory basis.”<sup>2</sup> School districts were tasked with creating “a system of determining admission to the public schools on a nonracial basis.”<sup>3</sup> *Brown* turned on a presumption, amply demonstrated in the cases’ records, that Black children attended inferior schools. While these schools were often underfunded, understaffed, and overcrowded, this assumption of the inherent superiority of white schools had a negative effect on desegregation and the retention of Black teachers in the years after *Brown*.<sup>4</sup>

Just one year after *Brown I* was decided, *Brown II* gave (slightly) more concrete direction to state authorities and local school boards. This decision, which was also unanimous and delivered by Chief Justice Warren, began by restating that racial discrimination in schools is unconstitutional. The Court granted “primary responsibility for elucidating, assessing, and solving these problems [how to desegregate]” to school authorities.<sup>5</sup> With *Brown II*, the Supreme Court established that schools must show a “good faith implementation of the governing constitutional principles.”<sup>6</sup> The Court notes that there will be differing amounts of time needed to start desegregation but puts the burden of proof on school systems to ensure that they are making a “good faith” effort.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of both *Brown* decisions, segregationists and desegregationists went to work in Virginia to ensure that their preferred social order prevailed.

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<sup>1</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Paul Green, “The Paradox of the Promised Unfulfilled: *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Continued Pursuit of Excellence in Education,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 73 no. 3 (2004): 268-284, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4129611>, 275.

<sup>5</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education II*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Before *Brown*, Virginia schools treated Black and white children very differently. Virginia's 1902 Constitution read "white and colored children shall not be taught at the same schools."<sup>8</sup> These schools were not "equal," "separate but equal" doctrine or not. In 1925, the Commonwealth of Virginia spent a quarter of the money dedicated to educating one white child to educate one Black child.<sup>9</sup> Educational reform, however, was not new in Virginia. Falling voter participation in the Commonwealth was met with increased educational activism immediately following World War II.<sup>10</sup>

After *Brown I*, Virginia Governor Thomas Stanley stated, "I shall use every legal means at my command to continue segregated schools in Virginia."<sup>11</sup> To understand all the legal means at his disposal, Governor Stanley appointed a 32-person group, officially called the Commission on Public Education but unofficially dubbed the Gray Commission, after its chair, in August 1954.<sup>12</sup> The Gray Commission produced a list of 12 recommendations to maintain segregated schools in Virginia, including that "no child can be required to attend an integrated school."<sup>13</sup> The Gray Commission advocated for pupil placement boards to approve transfer from a neighborhood segregated school as well as tuition vouchers for white children who wanted to attend private schools instead of integrated public schools.<sup>14</sup>

It was not until February 1956 that United States Senator from Virginia, Harry F. Byrd, used the term "massive resistance" to describe these actions. "If we can organize the Southern

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<sup>8</sup> Brian Daugherty, *Keep on Keeping On: The NAACP and the Implementation of Brown v Board of Education in Virginia*, eds. Deborah E. McDowell (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis, "Massive Resistance Revisited: Virginia's White Moderates and the Byrd Organization" in *The Moderate's Dilemma*, eds. Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Daugherty, *Keep on Keeping On*, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Daugherty, *Keep on Keeping On*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Rupert J. Picott, "The Status of Educational Desegregation in Virginia," *The Journal of Negro Education* 25 no. 3 (1956), 347, accessed August 8, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/2293444](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2293444).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

states for massive resistance to this order [*Brown II*],” he said, “I think that in time the rest of the country will realize that radical integration will not be accepted in the South”<sup>15</sup> This followed Virginia's early February 1956 interposition resolution, which claimed state authority over unconstitutional national action. Developed by *Richmond News Leader* editor James J. Kilpatrick, this states-rights focused argument supplied a facially race-neutral alternative for those who wanted to appear constitutionally driven.<sup>16</sup> Kilpatrick hoped that the interposition point “would lift the debate ‘above the sometimes-sordid levels of race and segregation.’”<sup>17</sup>

The Gray Commission proposed laws that were passed by the General Assembly in 1956 and meant to consolidate a statewide massive resistance policy.<sup>18</sup> These laws stripped power from local school boards, granting it instead to a state-run Pupil Placement Board, and threatened to defund desegregated schools.<sup>19</sup> The Gray Commission advocated for redistribution of teachers, aiding in the harmful practice of firing Black teachers. When schools were eventually desegregated, it was often the Black teachers and administrators who were fired.

Lindsey Almond, who served as Virginia’s Attorney General before succeeding Stanley as governor in 1957, strengthened the General Assembly and Byrd machine’s resolve against any desegregation at the beginning of his term. James Hershman Jr. claims that Almond made the most racist remarks of a Virginia governor in more than fifty years.<sup>20</sup> Almond claimed that desegregating schools would quickly lead to Black and white people marrying and said that the

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<sup>15</sup> Ira M. Lechner, “Massive Resistance: Virginia’s Great Leap Backward”, *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 74 no. 4 (1998): 632, accessed August 18, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/26438538](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26438538).

<sup>16</sup> Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis, “Massive Resistance Revisited”, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph J. Thorndike, “‘The Sometimes-Sordid Levels of Race and Segregation’: James J. Kilpatrick and the Virginia Campaign Against Brown”, *The Moderate’s Dilemma*, ed. Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 52.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis, “Massive Resistance Revisited”, 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>20</sup> James H. Hershman, “Massie Resistance Meets Its Match; The Emergence of a Pro-Public School Majority”, *The Moderate’s Dilemma* ed. Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 116.

desegregated schools of Washington, D.C., had the “livid stench of sadism, sex immorality and juvenile pregnancy.”<sup>21</sup> If Virginia schools were to desegregate, surely, Almond claimed, the same results would follow. Almond created the Perrow commission, a descendant of the Gray Commission.<sup>22</sup> While people deemed the Perrow proposals more moderate, they enabled the closing of Prince Edward County’s schools.<sup>23</sup>

While the government of Virginia was working to perpetuate segregation, the NAACP was continuing their work to desegregate schools. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the NAACP filed lawsuits to increase resources to Black schools and admit Black students into segregated universities. The Virginia Branch of the NAACP was established in 1935 as the first state branch of the national organization.<sup>24</sup> After *Brown I*, more than 100 representatives of local NAACP chapters gathered in Atlanta to discuss the best response to the inevitable backlash.<sup>25</sup> These efforts were set to be executed locally and on a personal level, utilizing the many local branches of the organization.<sup>26</sup> Following the national lead, the Virginia State Conference held a statewide meeting for local branches in June 1954, with a focus on a partnership between the NAACP and local school boards.<sup>27</sup> When this failed, the Virginia NAACP switched tactics. First, they would file petitions to school boards to let Black students into white schools. When these petitions were inevitably ignored, the NAACP was able to take the school district to court.<sup>28</sup> The NAACP filed more lawsuits in Virginia than in any other state.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 116.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 131.

<sup>24</sup> Daugherty, *Keep on Keeping On*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 126.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 27.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>29</sup> Lassiter and Lewis, “Massive Resistance Revisited”, 5.

The capabilities of the Virginia NAACP terrified Virginia politicians. These leaders knew how to manipulate the system to hold on to segregated schools as long as possible. Many, like Almond, ran on the platform of ensuring segregated schools. Despite being considered a Mid-Atlantic state or a Southern border state, Virginia was a hard case to crack for either side. “Nowhere across the South was opposition to school integration more keenly felt or vigorously expressed than in the state of Virginia,” posited historian James W. Ely.<sup>30</sup> As promised, Governor Stanley and his followers pursued all legal means to fight for segregation.

As actors on both sides struggled to convince citizens in Virginia, some hypothesize that a shift in thought was occurring among white Virginians. James H. Hershman Jr. describes the shift from caste-minded thinking, which was still dominant among conservatives, to class-minded thinking for moderate white people.<sup>31</sup> As massive resistance continued, it was clear that some parts of Virginia that were opposed to school closures even more than desegregation. It is important to distinguish between not only white conservatives and moderates, but also white moderates and liberals. The so-called “white liberal” group actively supported desegregation, but this group was relatively small, especially at the start of this period.<sup>32</sup> White moderates were much more common and conceived of limited change with integration. According to James Ely, white moderates discussed “‘some’ or ‘a little’ integration.”<sup>33</sup> Moderates were not pushing to overhaul the centuries-long racial dynamics in the Commonwealth, they were often people who thought that “a little” desegregation was better than a complete school shut down. In general, moderates were also more committed to local solutions over broad laws for all of Virginia.<sup>34</sup> The

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<sup>30</sup> James W. Ely, *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1976), v.

<sup>31</sup> Hershman, “Massive Resistance Meets Its Match”, 105.

<sup>32</sup> Ely, *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia*, 108.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 114.

<sup>34</sup> Lassiter and Lewis, “Massive Resistance Revisited”, 3.

desegregation that followed this shift in attitudes was largely tokenistic- desegregating in name only.<sup>35</sup>

The actions I discuss in Arlington did not appear in a vacuum. The national and state level decisions surrounding desegregation influenced people at every stage of Arlington's desegregation.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 17.

## **Chapter 1: Setting the Stage**

Norfolk, Richmond, and Prince Edward County all drew more notice — from contemporaries and historians alike — but Arlington County was the first Virginia school district to welcome Black students. This is a point of pride within Arlington, and a stark contrast with how other school districts in the change-resistant South addressed the situation. Reflecting on these moments, it can seem almost inevitable that Stratford Junior High would open its doors to Black students in 1959. However, it was far from a forgone conclusion that Arlington County Public Schools would desegregate. Rather, it was the result of work from interest groups, individuals, and local government employees. As I will discuss later, the portrayal of a united front among progressive and moderate political actors opposing conservatives is a false dichotomy, something that is often forgotten in retellings of the events. This is important because of differences between progressives and moderates, evident in the goals and actions of their organizations.

Residents of the now “progressive” Northern Virginia may be surprised to learn that their solidly blue state desegregated public schools after Tennessee and Arkansas. Virginia was seen as a turning point, both for progressive, civil rights activist groups like the NAACP--who believed if they could get Virginia to break, the rest of the South would follow--and for segregationists who believed that Virginia had to remain a wall keeping progressive policies from the South. The national dynamics discussed above cannot be ignored when conceptualizing this time and issue.

Why was Arlington County the first school district in the Commonwealth to begin desegregation? Three conditions prepared the district for desegregation. The first is a general

demographic change within Arlington leading up to the desegregation of the school district. Secondly, legal pressure to desegregate schools predated *Brown* in Arlington. While *Carter v. School Board of Arlington County* did not prompt immediate school desegregation, I think it may have been a catalyst for change. *Carter* worked to put the issue of desegregation on the radar of the average Arlingtonian. Finally, the *Carter* case was a wellspring for an array of preexisting interest groups within Arlington. These organizations applied pressure to the school board before *Brown* and stood ready to respond as Virginia passed legislation to keep schools segregated.

### Demographic Changes

As a report for the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools titled “The Citizens Fight for Better Schools in Arlington, Virginia” proclaims, “Arlington, Virginia is not a typical American community.”<sup>36</sup> This report was written to provide a retrospective, following the growth of Arlington County before desegregation. Importantly, the report includes information on the quick growth of Arlington County, to a population of 124,000 in 1948 from 37,000 in 1930.<sup>37</sup> This reflected the growth of Washington D.C. and an expansion of the federal government, with large new facilities built for the Pentagon and the Navy Annex.<sup>38</sup> Because of the rapid influx of federal employees, Arlington’s population grew exponentially, with an increased demand for housing, schools, and other county-provided public goods. The 1940 census, taken in the middle of this period of great growth, showed the population of Arlington as young, well-paid, and transient.<sup>39</sup> Gertrude Lillywhite, who drafted the report, took this to mean

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<sup>36</sup> B. Alden Lillywhite, Oscar R. LeBeau, Ivan A. Booker, Allyn A. Walters, and Reed K. Pond, “The Citizens Fight for Better Schools in Arlington, Virginia; Prepared for the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools,” *Project DAPS*, accessed October 29, 2020, <http://projectdaps.org/items/show/861>, 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Ophelia Braden Taylor, “Public Education for Negroes in Arlington County, Virginia, from 1870 to 1950,” *Project Daps*, accessed January 29, 2021, <http://projectdaps.org/items/show/124>, 83.

<sup>39</sup> Lillywhite, “The Citizens Fight for Better Schools in Arlington, Virginia”, 2.

that much of the community “had only a temporary or passing interest in the activities of the community which was their temporary home.”<sup>40</sup> Because most of the residents were there temporarily, reflecting military cycles and bureaucratic rotations following new administrations, many maintained voting addresses outside of Arlington. This, combined with poll taxes and generally low participation in local elections, led to only around 10,000 people voting in the local election in Fall of 1947, just around eight percent of the total population.<sup>41</sup> While this number would seem outrageously low with today’s standards, dismally low voter turnout was the goal of the powerful Byrd Machine.

Lillywhite also attributes this low voter turnout to the Hatch Act, which prevents Federal employees from campaigning for any political office or “participat[ing] in meetings where party policy is formed.”<sup>42</sup> This encouraged an ironic attitude of political apathy among the federally employed residents of Arlington. However, this was remedied as Arlington addresses became permanent and interest groups were built around loopholes in the Hatch Act. Young federal employees in Arlington wanted a say in local politics. Interest groups--like Arlingtonians for a Better County, discussed later--sought to engage federal employees in Arlington’s local government. ABC advocated for federal employees to be able to serve on the school board and the county board of supervisors, working to reach a substantial portion of Arlington’s population.

Arlington’s sudden growth stretched school facilities, as students were crammed in classrooms and school days, shortened. Insufficient school resources sparked local activism and interest groups. Arlington swung back from the political apathy that plagued the early days of the population boom as groups like Citizens Committee for School Improvement and ABC

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 3.

established themselves in the late forties. These interest groups worked to change the composition of the school board, which had a significant effect on desegregation and the county's relationship with Virginia's state-wide government.

As Arlington's population grew, the proportion of that population who was Black shrank. From 1870 to 1940, the percentage of Arlingtonians that were Black shrank from 62.7% to 10.6% of the population.<sup>43</sup> The enormous expansion of federal government facilities was only possible because land previously occupied primarily by Black citizens was bought or taken to complete these projects.<sup>44</sup> The decreasing proportion of Black residents had to do both then with the influx of primarily white Federal employees as well as evacuating primarily Black neighborhoods to build new federal office spaces.

Desegregation was often easier when Black populations were lower. In all of Northern Virginia, the percentage of Black residents was less than 30 percent in 1960.<sup>45</sup> Southeastern Virginia was more than 50 percent Black according to the same census.<sup>46</sup> This disparity in the Commonwealth's Black population was one reason the NAACP focused first on areas with smaller Black populations; white people would not protest as much, they reasoned, if only a small sliver of the population changed schools.

This demographic shift in Northern Virginia, a much more exaggerated version of what was occurring in the rest of Virginia, made Arlington an obvious place to implement the strategies of the NAACP. However, population shift alone was not the only factor leading Arlington to desegregate. This shift was mirrored in the rest of Virginia later, but to a lesser

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<sup>43</sup> Taylor, "Public Education for Negroes in Arlington, Virginia", 80.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>45</sup> Ely, *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia*, 34.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

degree. Nonwhite residents of the Commonwealth fell from 22.2% in 1950 to 19.9% in 1966.<sup>47</sup> Arlington's changing population stands out as a defining factor in school desegregation.

### Previous Legal Pressures

Litigation was an oft-utilized tool to force school desegregation. Making the choice to take a segregation case to court was difficult, but the NAACP encouraged it. State judges in Virginia were often sympathetic to segregation. Judge Albert V. Bryan, who heard both *Carter v. School Board of Arlington County et. Al* and *Thompson*, was a Byrd loyalist and entirely predisposed to side with the segregationists within Virginia government.<sup>48</sup> That being said, *Carter* was still influential, even without bringing a mandate for Arlington schools to desegregate.

*Carter* was heard more than ten years before Arlington County schools eventually desegregated. Constance Carter, a Black student attending Hoffman-Boston High School, was unable to take classes in typewriting, civics, or Spanish. She applied to transfer to Washington and Lee, the white high school, because it offered the courses she wished to take. When her request was denied, she sued the district for unequal education offerings. While Carter graduated before the case was heard, two other students became the primary plaintiffs to carry on the case. This case followed a straightforward logic in the pre-*Brown* legal world, adhering to the legal principle of "separate but equal" from *Plessy*. This reflected a carefully organized strategy within the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, traced back to Charles Houston in the 1930s. This suit posited that Carter's access to opportunity was not equal to her white peers because she was not able to take the classes she needed.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 189.

Charles Houston's strategy, which Spotswood Robinson and Oliver Hill adopted, "hinged on the absurdity of trying to make facilities for Blacks and whites truly equal."<sup>49</sup> Illustrating the impracticality of separate but equal, Houston hoped, would lead to desegregation for purely economic reasons. While Carter's claims seem to prove that she was not afforded equal educational opportunities, Judge Albert Bryan did not agree. Bryan denied the right to transfer on the ground that Hoffman-Boston spent more per student than Washington and Lee. As previously discussed, the population change within Arlington meant that less than ten percent of the population was Black at this time. In 1949, there were 300 Black students enrolled at Hoffman-Boston and 2,300 white students enrolled at Washington and Lee. With only 13 percent of Washington and Lee's population, Hoffman-Boston was found to be equal as long as it had more than 13% of its resources.

The economics of this decision did not compute, as there are flat costs to operating a school no matter its size. The library, building upkeep, and salaries of custodians and administrators have a cost floor, no matter how many students are enrolled. Teachers must be paid, no matter how many students are enrolled in their classes. An equal Hoffman-Boston would likely require far more than 13% of the resources of Washington and Lee. Judge Bryan also noted that Black and white teachers were paid the same by the state but made sure to include his own commentary on the fact. "If the teachers of the white school are paid more than in the colored school," Bryan noted in something of a non-sequitur, "it is because the former have more experience. They are not selected because of greater experience, but greater experience is more readily found among white teachers because the Negroes have not devoted their time to this profession from as early a date as the white population."<sup>50</sup> This kind of

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<sup>49</sup> Margaret Edds, *We Face the Dawn* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Carter v. School Board of Arlington County et al.*, 87 F. Supp. 745 (1949).

reasoning foreshadowed one of the largest negative effects of *Brown*, the large reduction in the number of Black teachers.<sup>51</sup> Clearly, the reasoning stems only from racism. It also provides a glance at Judge Bryan's political beliefs. Bryan could not keep this commentary out of his decision.

While some may argue that *Carter* slowed the desegregation of Arlington County schools, I argue that *Carter* primed the community to think seriously about what desegregation would look like and why. In the eyes of the NAACP legal team, *Carter* was not seen as one of many school desegregation cases. While the result in *Carter* did not immediately lead to desegregation, without many cases like *Carter*, there likely would not have been cases like *Brown* that made it to the Supreme Court. *Carter* was one small piece in the NAACP's overall plan for justice. Many interest groups were created in the years following *Carter*. It also set the precedent to take Arlington County to court, a frequent occurrence following the official desegregation of the school district. While Judge Bryan's comparisons of the high schools found a lack of discrimination on Black students (influenced by choosing statistics that oversimplified the situation), it did open a discussion comparing the schools. However, perhaps it is significant that desegregation in Arlington County began in middle schools and not high schools, which could also be a legacy of *Carter*.

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<sup>51</sup> This reduction in Black teachers has never corrected itself, with less than five percent of teachers being people of color in 2000, compared to thirty-five percent of students at that time benign people of color. See Green, "The Paradox of Promise Unfulfilled."

## Interest Groups

Local interest groups also had strong roots predating the eventual desegregation of Arlington County schools. Nationally, interest groups and political organizations played a large role in desegregation efforts. Locally, some groups were founded with the intention of bettering the school system or the county but adopted a pro-desegregation attitude as the issue came up. Not all interest groups revolving around issues of school quality chose to address desegregation, and at least a few Arlingtonians were involved in groups spreading vitriolic pamphlets and speech to try and stop the spread of integration.

As its work in Court suggested, the NAACP was influential nationally, statewide, and locally. The NAACP had both strong membership and leadership in its Virginia chapter. The Virginia chapter had more members than other Southern States, with between 25,000 and 30,000 members in 1955.<sup>52</sup> Leading the legal fight in Virginia, Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson had thousands of active citizens of the Commonwealth to assist with their goals.

Hill and Robinson had the advantage of a positive legacy, 13 employees working just for Virginia, and their exceedingly bright legal minds.<sup>53</sup> Thurgood Marshall initiated the NAACP Legal Defense Fund's further involvement in the push for desegregating Virginia's schools with Robinson at the helm in 1947.<sup>54</sup> This was designed to serve as a model for judicial efforts to desegregate schools in other Southern states.<sup>55</sup> This subscribed to the popular ideology that if Virginia desegregated, the rest of the southern states would follow. A rapid increase in NAACP membership in Virginia made it a good candidate for concentrated efforts and resources.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Andrew Bumi, *Negro in American Politics* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1967), 177.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>54</sup> Edds, *We Face the Dawn*, 158.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

The NAACP did not always advocate for complete school desegregation. Initially, the organization worked toward improving Black schools, working within the confines of a post-*Plessy* legal environment. However, the argument developed in the late 1940s, preceding *Brown* that the only way schools could claim true equality was through integration. This paradigm shift took work, advocating within the NAACP and among other interest groups. Specifically, the Virginia Teachers' Association were caught in an internal debate about whether they could endorse this goal, worried about employment prospects if it became the official stand.<sup>57</sup> However, this became the official position of the NAACP and the legal ends they hoped to achieve. This shift is evident within the case selection and arguments that led to *Brown*.

Several scholars have written about tension within the NAACP and tension between the NAACP and other Civil Rights interest groups. In his book, Manning Marable attributes this difference between Black moderates and revolutionaries (those who wished to work within the confines of a capitalist America and those who wished to revolutionize all aspects of American life) to the Cold War and an increased pressure for pro-system civil rights advocates to distance themselves from communism.<sup>58</sup> Drawing comparisons between the NAACP and CORE throughout the latter half of the 1940s, he argues that the organization and affiliations of the NAACP made it less appealing than CORE. Marable cites the Cold War, and more specifically the Red Scare, with a slowing of Civil Rights activism as many civil rights groups went out of their way to distance themselves from communists. However, this thesis is disputed by Derrick Bell, who argues that *Brown* and efforts to desegregate, however tokenistic we may consider them now, were spurred entirely by the desire to advance American interests on an international

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>58</sup> Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984).

scale.<sup>59</sup> Bell cites the United States' *amicus brief* in *Brown* to illustrate this international framing of desegregation. "[R]acial discrimination furnishes grist for the Communist propaganda mills, and it raises doubts," the Solicitor General's office wrote, "even among friendly nations, as to the intensity of our devotion to the democratic faith".<sup>60</sup> Perhaps these two realities can exist simultaneously; Marable's argument that the crucial period before *Brown* weakened the power of more revolutionary civil rights groups while bolstering the influence of the NAACP and Bell's argument that *Brown* was made possible because of the international benefits it could bring to the United States. This framing is important for evaluating the actions of interest groups, as well as taking a closer look at interest groups within Arlington.

There were several important interest groups throughout Arlington across a spectrum of opinions on desegregation, as well as groups working tangentially with the issue of schools and the school board. The Arlington League of Women Voters is one such interest group. While the League of Women Voters did not focus exclusively on school desegregation, they produced quite a few documents detailing local desegregation work. The Arlington League of Women Voters also produced several more general reports, detailing legislative action within Virginia and funding sources within different counties.

In a December 1955 report, the ALWV produced a detailed report on the actions of the Gray Commission. Nationally, the League supported "protection of minority groups against discrimination" as well as functioning public schools.<sup>61</sup> By clearly asserting these national principles, ALWV established their stand on desegregation. The League outlined the Gray

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<sup>59</sup> Derrick Bell, "Learning from the Brown Experience," *The Black Scholar* 11 no. 1 (1979), 9-16, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41066508>.

<sup>60</sup> Bell, "Learning from the Brown Experience", 11.

<sup>61</sup> League of Women Voters, Arlington Chapter, "League of Women Voters December 1955 Study Regarding the Gray Commission Report," *Project DAPS*, Accessed December 18, 2020, <https://projectdaps.org/items/show/929>.

Commission's plan, summarizing the key points of repealing Paragraph 141 of the Virginia Constitution to allow for public funds to support private segregated schools.<sup>62</sup> This report also covers the recently decided *Almond v. Day* Virginia Supreme Court case, which held that legislative action could not alone amend Paragraph 141 and so provide vouchers for private schools.<sup>63</sup> After assessing the situation at the Commonwealth level, there are a few paragraphs about what may happen in Arlington. Astutely, the report notes that Arlington would probably be permitted to begin integrating schools, however "there would "there would probably be a minimum of real integration since the Negro school population comprises less than ten percent of the total and is well concentrated in two residential areas."<sup>64</sup> Indeed, this was the eventual result.

The Arlington League of Women Voters had access to information about the percentage of Black students enrolled in nine different school districts throughout Virginia, as well as how much the district spent on their students and how much funding the district received from the Commonwealth. The League's assessment that the population of Black students was less than ten percent of the total was an understatement from the data they had access to, as the percentage of the 1950 population in Arlington that was Black was only 4.9%.<sup>65</sup> These numbers are written again in the margins of a 1959 memo detailing desegregation progress.

The reports produced by ALWV are interesting for both the statistics they had access to and their detailed summaries of legislation in Richmond. Four years before Arlington schools began desegregation, the League let their position be known while investigating the policy proposals of the Gray Commission. The League of Women Voters created and with

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>65</sup> "Table of Virginia Counties," *Project DAPS*, Accessed December 18, 2020, <https://projectdaps.org/items/show/928>.

infrastructure before the schools' debate, was able to mobilize and advocate in favor of desegregation, even with their thoughts that it would likely initially be tokenistic. The League of Women Voters continued to engage with the issue, notably by producing reports on legislation, such as that produced in April 1959.

Arlingtonians for a Better County, or ABC, initially focused on changing the makeup of the school board and the county board of supervisors. ABC supported the campaigns of more liberal school board candidates, and by 1947, ABC candidates filled each of the board's five seats.<sup>66</sup> The Arlington Branch of the NAACP had a hand in selecting ABC candidates.<sup>67</sup> ABC was generally made up of the "new" Arlingtonians, those federal employees who moved to Arlington for its proximity to the capital. ABC's work predated local governments' dilemma around adhering to both the demands of the Supreme Court in *Brown* and the imperative to receive state funding.

ABC and its candidates did not claim to support segregation or integration; rather the group took on a position popular among the more moderate swath of the white population. In a campaign mailer for Curtis Tuthill for Arlington County Board, ABC chose to include a section specifically dealing with "Segregation, Integration, and Our Public Schools".<sup>68</sup> First, the moral issue of segregation and integration is avoided with claims that personal opinions mattered most. ABC primarily fought against the closing of Arlington County schools. Arguments against the closure in this pamphlet mainly center around practical implications. Besides harming the educational progress of Arlington's students, school closure would hurt property values and

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<sup>66</sup> James McGrath Morris, "A Chink in the Armor: The Black-Led Struggle for School Desegregation in Arlington, Virginia, and the End of Massive Resistance", *Journal of Policy and History* 13, no. 3 (2001), 334.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>68</sup> ABC Campaign Committee for Curtis E. Tuthill, "ABC party Campaign Pamphlet for Curtis E. Tuthill," *Project DAPS*, accessed January 29, 2021, <http://projectdaps.org/items/show/1274>.

waste community money that had been invested in the school system. The Tuthill campaign information states that “ABC includes both segregationists and integrationists”.<sup>69</sup>

In a section italicized for emphasis, ABC promises that the organization “Will do everything in its power to assure that no Arlington child, white or colored, will be required to attend an integrated school.”<sup>70</sup> ABC worked in conjunction with other moderate interest groups to keep schools open without endorsing school desegregation.

Advocating for local choice in Northern Virginia was a way to oppose the segregationist laws proposed by Virginia’s legislature while simultaneously drawing an interesting contrast to the interposition theory. Interposition, or the idea introduced by conservative newspaper editor James J. Kilpatrick that “a state could protect its citizens by nullifying unconstitutional decisions of the federal courts” advocated for greater state control of education decisions.<sup>71</sup> Logically, a push for statewide control of issues because states were more familiar with what their citizens wanted would have implied that local control would have had even greater Constitutional merit. Alas, those within the segregationist ranks of the Virginia government knew that localities like Arlington may have narrowly voted to integrate and therefore advocated for dissemination of education policy authority only to the state-level.

The Committee to Preserve Public Schools (CPP), another Arlington-based group, was created after massive resistance policies were adopted in 1958. At its peak, this organization had 5,000 members.<sup>72</sup> The Committee was made up exclusively of white Arlingtonians who had a vested interest in the schools’ remaining open.<sup>73</sup> Similar to the language used by the ABC mailer,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>71</sup> Matthew Lassiter and Andrew Lewis, “Massive Resistance Revisited: Virginia’s White Moderates and the Byrd Organization,” in *The Moderate’s Dilemma: Massive Resistance to School Desegregation in Virginia*, eds. Matthew Lassiter and Andrew Lewis (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 6-7.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>73</sup> Morris, “A Chink in the Armor”, 351.

the Committee to Preserve Public Schools posted a flyer that articulated their goals. They claimed that first, they were “determined to pursue every legal means to keep public schools open.”<sup>74</sup> They note as well that they were “concerned neither with perpetuating segregation in schools nor hastening integration.” By showing support from across the political spectrum for keeping public schools open, the group hoped to convey that no matter the segregation status of the schools, Arlingtonians would support open schools.

Benjamin Muse, an influential moderate journalist, praised the Committee to Preserve Public Schools for not attaching a moral imperative to demanding desegregation.<sup>75</sup> Recounting his columns, Lassiter wrote that “Muse praised the Arlington group’s tactic of focusing solely on keeping public schools open and not taking a stand on the contentious issue of segregation itself.”<sup>76</sup> By creating a permission structure where people could ostensibly support segregation broadly while advocating for keeping schools open, the Committee to Preserve Public Schools gained popularity.

O Glenn Stahl, the president of the Committee to Preserve Public Schools, corresponded with Arlington’s state senator, Charles P. Fenwick to convey the opinion of his group. Despite being elected by the people of Arlington County, Fenwick did not agree. In fact, he urged Stahl to persuade the parents of Black children trying to transfer schools to stay at their home schools. “The simplest and most obvious method for keeping our public schools open,” Fenwick wrote to Stahl, “would be for the negro pupils not to exercise the right the courts have given them to

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<sup>74</sup> Interim Organizing Committee to Preserve Public Schools, “Flyer: To All Arlington Citizens”, May 11, 1958, *Project DAPS*, accessed January 29, 2021, <http://projectdaps.org/items/show/191>.

<sup>75</sup> Andrew B. Lewis, “Emergency Mothers: Basement Schools and the Preservation of Public Education in Charlottesville,” in *The Moderate’s Dilemma* ed. Matthew Lassiter and Andrew Lewis (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 182.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

apply for education to a white school.”<sup>77</sup> By placing this responsibility on community members to convince Black families not to exert their protected right to transfer schools, Fenwick tried to excuse himself from blame if Arlington schools shut down.

CPS was influential not only in Arlington, but also in the greater Virginia story. The Virginia Committee for Public Schools (VAPS) was created to emulate the results of Arlington’s Committee to Preserve Public Schools (ACPPS).<sup>78</sup> Much like Arlington’s Committee to Preserve Public Schools, VCPS did not explicitly choose segregation or desegregation as their preferred path.<sup>79</sup> Rather, they swerved around the issue by focusing only on keeping schools up and running.

These groups had a hand in Arlington--and the rest of Virginia--desegregating public schools. By allowing people to advocate against school closures without having to take a stand on segregation, these groups invited a larger group of people into the discussion. By centering the discussion around the real possibility of Commonwealth-enforced school closures, groups like VCPS and ACPPS engaged previously apathetic citizens. Armistead Boothe, a member of the Byrd organization, estimated that two-thirds of white Virginians “supported massive resistance before the school closings; but after the reality of school shutdowns, the proportions reversed with the majority favoring moderation.”<sup>80</sup> One might argue that these groups had a greater influence than more radically anti-segregationist groups because of their ability to focus entirely on an issue with great salience.

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<sup>77</sup> Charles R. Fenwick, “Letter from Charles R. Fenwick, State Senator, to O. Glenn Stahl, Organizing Committee to Preserve Public Schools, May 14, 1958,” *Project DAPS*, Accessed January 29, 2021, <http://projectdaps.org/items/show/186>.

<sup>78</sup> Lassiter and Lewis, “Massive Resistance Revisited”, in *The Moderate’s Dilemma* ed. Lassiter and Lewis, 16.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>80</sup> Hershman, “Massive Resistance Meets Its Match”, 122.

These groups were challenged by national and local interest groups opposing school desegregation. Relying on racist rhetoric, these groups campaigned in Arlington to get those opposed to school closures and desegregation to view the issue in a “moral” light. By spreading vitriol about views of a moral and patriotic duty to fight desegregation, these groups hoped to persuade people to fight desegregation plans.

Many of these groups created a presence after *Brown*, working to uphold the status quo. Eyes from across the nation turned to Arlington, as the county was one of few in Virginia to support, or at least not to staunchly oppose, desegregation. One opposition group of note was the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties. Segregationists masquerading as states’ rights activists, the Defenders took up the desegregation discussion soon after *Brown*. In a last-ditch effort to persuade Stratford students and families, the Defenders sent out a letter to all Stratford students on January 30, 1959.

The Defenders’ one-page letter, addressed to the junior high school students of Stratford, began with a history lesson, explaining the different branches of government and federalism. After stating that the Constitution is the law of the land and that the legislative branch writes new laws in the same spirit, the Defenders frowned upon what they consider judicial lawmaking, referring to *Brown*. Because the Constitution does not mention schools, they argued, their administration is left completely up to the states. The Defenders decide to take the rhetorical position that a state could separate students by eye color if they chose; instead, states decided separating students by race is best. The Defenders say this decision is based on “social as well as academic facts and on moral principle.”<sup>81</sup> Following the logic that the Judicial branch is acting

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<sup>81</sup> Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, “Leaflet: Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, Arlington Chapter, ‘Dear Stratford Student’, January 30, 1959,” *Project DAPS*, Accessed October 29, 2020, <http://projectdaps.org/items/show/2106>.

outside of its Constitutional bounds to oppress the moral and scientifically sound decisions of the state, the Defenders demand action.

The Defenders conclude by asking the junior high students to do their part. After all, the Defenders argue, they “have been placed on a great battlefield--perhaps the greatest our country has ever faced.”<sup>82</sup> The group tells students that they should bring all of their books home and stop going to school until “the great statesmen of Virginia” figure out a solution. This letter ends with a plea for students to ask their parents to “let you do your part to preserve your Constitution, your race and your white culture” by staying home. While only a small group of people, the Defenders’ chapter based in Arlington fought hard against desegregation.

The National Citizens Protective Association, a group based in St. Louis, published and distributed a pamphlet arguing against school desegregation because of their conclusion that it would lead to interracial marriage. This pamphlet was outright racist and brought in a patriotic message to support segregation. Interestingly, the National Citizens Protective Association connected the push for the desegregation of schools with Soviet interference. This pamphlet scoffed at Americans trying to stockpile weapons to defeat the Soviet Union, as the NCPA argued that the Soviet Union was working to take down the United States through desegregation. The logic in this one-page pamphlet is disjointed and racist at best, without any sort of persuasive argument. I believe it is of note because of the explanation of Cold War tactics as well as the intertwining of religious values, American values, and segregation.

After discussing Russia’s interference, the pamphlet argues that “Segregation is the law of God, not man, and is observed thru [sic] the whole animal kingdom. It is the cornerstone of all

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<sup>82</sup> Defenders of State Sovereignty, “Leaflet.”

civilization. It protects all life on our planet. It made America great.”<sup>83</sup> There is a lot to unpack within this section, but the takeaway that segregation was somehow God’s law--which should therefore be respected within the United States legal system--was preeminent. The message of this pamphlet is exceedingly harmful, using incorrect science and far-fetched conspiracy theories. It is interesting to me that this sort of pamphlet was distributed within Arlington, especially compared to the letter the Defenders sent out which at least attempted to lean on more logical, although still incredibly flawed and racist, grounds.

Interest groups played a large role in the comprehensive school desegregation conversation. Groups advocating against school closures had a variety of opinions on whether desegregation should be the result, but the combined pressure from these groups changed public opinion and helped the issue progress. Groups advocating against school desegregation were often formed in response to *Brown* and anticipated changes to the system. I think it is important to include these segregationist groups in discussions about Arlington County because of both contemporary and modern views that desegregation occurred within Arlington without any resistance.

The desegregation of Arlington County did not occur overnight. Factors priming the school district were being established ten years before. Some of the most influential include a long-term demographic shift within the county, previous legal cases existing within the county, and the work of interest groups at the local, state, and national levels. Fundamentally, Arlington did not desegregate because it was morally superior to other school districts in Virginia as modern rhetoric could lead one to infer. After exploring why Arlington County Public Schools

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<sup>83</sup> National Citizens Protective Association, “The Kiss of Death,” *Project DAPS*, Accessed December 20, 2020, <https://projectdaps.org/items/show/708>.

was the first school district within the Commonwealth to desegregate, it is important to ask why the desegregation could be described as, at best, tokenistic.

## **Chapter 2: Desegregation in Practice**

Arlington activists' work only began with trying to write and speak desegregated schools into existence. Tireless legal action also depended on their steadfast attention. We often celebrate the contributions of attorneys in these legal fights, but the parties—the families—behind the suits ran the greatest risk. Children were dragged to and from court at the ages of ten and older, their parents understanding that the cause of desegregation was worth entertaining an irritated sixth grader. One of the major legal actors was Dorothy Hamm, a civil rights activist who worked tirelessly for equality. Her son, Edward, was involved in numerous desegregation cases. In addition to her efforts on school desegregation, Dorothy worked to eliminate the poll tax and race designations from public forms.<sup>84</sup> Hamm wrote and produced several plays to honor civil rights heroes and Black history. Her book, *Integration of Arlington County Schools: My Story* has been invaluable in understanding the lived experiences of those fighting for desegregation in Arlington. When reading about the court cases, it is easy to get lost in cross motions for summary judgement and procedural defaults. A reading of *Thompson* is incomplete without understanding the passion for equality and justice that compelled dozens of parents to sacrifice evenings and weekends to bring their young children to court and endure threats and hate from others in Arlington.

In this chapter, I will discuss *Thompson v. County Board of Arlington County*, the case in which Judge Albert V. Bryan Sr. eventually mandated some degree of desegregation. I will establish a comprehensive background to *Thompson* before describing the actual case and why it

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<sup>84</sup> Yvonne Shinhoster Lamb, "Dorothy M. Hamm", *The Washington Post*, June 13, 2004, Web Accessed April 28, 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2004/06/13/dorothy-m-hamm/7b7a7e08-41da-4d83-bcd3-2176bbbe3376/?noredirect&utm\\_term=.689ddbc7292e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2004/06/13/dorothy-m-hamm/7b7a7e08-41da-4d83-bcd3-2176bbbe3376/?noredirect&utm_term=.689ddbc7292e).

matters. I will then shift gears, discussing the idea of interest convergence as it relates to desegregation of public schools, first looking at *Brown* and then discussing how some of the policy actors worked in Arlington, proving that it is an applicable framework for a small scale as well. Finally, I will articulate how the eventual divergence of interests affected how *Thompson* played out years later.

### Thompson Overview

The culmination of actions by parents, concerned citizens, organized interest groups, and outside legal pressure from the NAACP throughout the state, Judge Bryan's ruled in *Clarissa S. Thompson v. County School Board of Arlington County* that four Black students should be admitted to Stratford Junior High. Hill and Robinson, along with Frank D. Reeves and Otto L. Tucker represented thirty plaintiffs suing Arlington County's School Board for violating the Supreme Court's ruling on *Brown* and subjecting students to different educational conditions solely based on race.

*Thompson* was not an inevitability. While Arlington was an ideal location for the NAACP to pursue legal action, parents and private citizens took a tremendous amount of risk and uncertainty on themselves to ensure that their children would be able to transfer from Hoffman-Boston and the other schools for Black children to Stratford and the other schools for white children. Parents advocated for their children despite years of threats and harassment.

### Dorothy Hamm Background

To properly understand *Thompson* and the work of civil rights activists in Arlington, one must have background on Dorothy Hamm. Her work was crucial in the fight for desegregating

Arlington County Public Schools. Her autobiography, *Integration of Arlington County Schools: My Story*, written in 2002, was an invaluable resource for my project. Her daughter, Carmela, continues sharing her mother's experiences and kindly talked with me about my project.

Dorothy Hamm was born in 1919 and her family moved to Fairfax County in 1926 so she could receive an education.<sup>85</sup> Hamm went on to attend secondary school in Washington, D.C. due to an absence of any secondary schools for people of color in Northern Virginia.<sup>86</sup> Hamm moved to Arlington in 1950, where she and her husband, Edward Leslie Hamm, Sr., raised their three children.<sup>87</sup> Citing recently decided *Brown* as her call to action, Dorothy was one of the first plaintiffs in *Thompson*.<sup>88</sup> Dorothy's son, Edward, began attending Stratford a few months after the first Black students. Beyond advocating for desegregated schools, Dorothy was one of the primary plaintiffs in a case on desegregating public school sports. She also worked to desegregate Arlington theaters, eliminate poll taxes, and take the racial designation section off public forms and records.<sup>89</sup> Hamm served as an election officer in Arlington County for over twenty-seven years, and the chief election officer in the Woodlawn precinct for fourteen of those.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, she worked to commemorate civil rights and African American history through writing plays, including "Our Heritage: Slavery to Freedom 1776-1976" and "Out Struggle for Equality – 25 Years Ago."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> "A Fight for Educational Equality: Civil Rights Activist Dorothy Hamm," Arlington Public Library, February 27, 2020, <https://library.arlingtonva.us/2020/02/27/a-fight-for-educational-equality-civil-rights-leader-dorothy-hamm/>.

<sup>86</sup> "A Fight for Educational Equality," Arlington Public Library.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Yvonne Shinoster Lamb, "Dorothy M. Hamm," *The Washington Post*, June 13, 2004, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2004/06/13/dorothy-m-hamm/7b7a7e08-41da-4d83-bcd3-2176bbbe3376/?noredirect&utm\\_term=.689ddbc7292e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2004/06/13/dorothy-m-hamm/7b7a7e08-41da-4d83-bcd3-2176bbbe3376/?noredirect&utm_term=.689ddbc7292e).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

The Virginia House of Delegates passed a resolution in 2002 to honor her lifetime of service, and the building that housed Stratford Junior High was named in her honor in 2019. Hamm's activism and advocacy changed Arlington forever and every Arlingtonian should know about her.

### Establishing *Thompson*

The NAACP first filed suit against Arlington County in May 1956. The NAACP represented 22 children and 14 parents, including two white families.<sup>92</sup> Both white families were involved with the NAACP; Barbara Marx served as the vice president of the Arlington branch of the NAACP. With the addition of white children in the suit, the NAACP claimed that both white and Black children were being harmed by school desegregation because they were not permitted to learn together.<sup>93</sup> This was one of five simultaneous Virginia cases, and school officials in two of the other districts being sued, Newport News and Norfolk, appealed to Governor Stanley for help.<sup>94</sup> Injunctions stalled Judge Bryan's initial ruling that desegregation was necessary until the Pupil Placement Board came into existence and created a loophole through which segregation could be enforced while feigning compliance with *Brown*.

When Virginia adopted the Pupil Placement Board to divert responsibility for desegregation, students and families in Arlington were made to sign forms allowing the board to place their students wherever they deemed best. However, knowing that the board would find a reason to deny the transfer of students, some parents refused to sign the pupil placement forms. The Hamm family did not sign the pupil placement forms for their son, Leslie, who wished to

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<sup>92</sup> "NAACP Sues County", *The Daily Sun*, May 17, 1956.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

transfer to Stratford in the 1957 school year.<sup>95</sup> In September 1957, following the Hamms' denial to sign the placement papers, Mrs. A. J. E. Davis, a white woman, brought three children-- including Leslie Hamm-- to Stratford to try and register in person. Again, the 1956 Pupil Placement Act was the official reason to deny the transfers. Following this incident, the School Superintendent spoke out on desegregation and integration. The *Washington Post* reported Superintendent Hobart M. Corning said that "we now have desegregation. This means we have merely set up a new pattern of school operation. True integration is a much more complicated process, requiring much more time and a higher degree of consecration and ability on your part."<sup>96</sup> Desegregation was then conceptualized as the theoretical ability for Black children to attend school with white children, even without any instances of it actually happening.

While later reports of the day Arlington schools began desegregation would focus on the open-mindedness of the Arlington community and the ease with which the transition occurred, personal narratives tell a different story. After being escorted off Stratford's premises with the three Black students, Davis was described by *The Washington Daily News* as "visibly upset."<sup>97</sup> Reports detail Davis saying, "you know this means I'll have crosses burned in my yard."<sup>98</sup> Davis was one of the white Arlingtonians involved that put herself at considerable risk to further the cause. When asked why she accompanied the three children to Stratford, Davis answered "there were threats; someone had announced there would be bloodshed and I thought if there were bloodshed, it should be a white person's--mine if necessary."<sup>99</sup> Her actions, along with Barbara Marx and a few other white political actors, were motivated not by fear of school closures for

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<sup>95</sup>Dorothy Hamm, *Integration of Arlington County Schools: My Story*. 2002.

<sup>96</sup> "A Quiet School Segregation test, Eight Colored Pupils Rebuffed in Arlington", *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, September 6, 1957.

<sup>97</sup> "Arlington Schools Turn Away Negros", *The Washington Daily News*, September 5, 1957.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Hamm, *My Story*, 49.

their own children but instead by the drive for education for all members of the community. Comparing the motivations behind actions from white actors illuminates the difference between white progressives and white moderates.

When it was clear that the Pupil Placement Board would refuse the transfer of Black students requesting it, many of the parents involved in the suit refused to sign pupil placement forms or attend the interviews requested of them by the board. This almost led these students to not be able to attend any school at all, as the county tried to make signing a requirement for school attendance.

#### Opinion and Results of *Thompson*

*Thompson v. County School Board of Arlington County* was brought to the United States District Court in Alexandria on September 17, 1958. Oliver Hill, Spottswood Robinson, Frank Reeces, and Otto Tucker represented the plaintiffs, all Black students requesting transfer to another school in Arlington County. The main question in *Thompson* was whether the reasons used to deny transfer by the Pupil Placement Board were racially discriminatory. Bryan found that the denial of transfer of 26 of the students was not racially biased, but that four students, Ronald Deskins, Micheal Jones, Lance Newman, and Gloria Thompson, met every standard the board set. In the *Thompson* ruling, Bryan goes through the five different reasons the Pupil Placement Board denied transfer of Black students.

In his final ruling on *Thompson*, Bryan worked with three propositions to limit the overall effectiveness and applicability of *Brown*. First, he claims that the federal mandate against segregated schools was able to be carried out on a case-by-case basis. Next, he claims that the Pupil Placement Board may do whatever they wish, as they were established and reinforced by

the Virginia General Assembly's Pupil Placement Acts of 1956 and 1958. Finally, wishing to be rid of a constant string of court cases, Bryan rules that once decisions are made without the influence of race, United States courts no longer must be involved. With these statements, Bryan evaluated the categories by which Black students were denied transfer by the Pupil Placement Board.

The Pupil Placement Board denied thirty Black students transfer on grounds of “attendance problems, overcrowding at Washington and Lee High School, Academic accomplishment, psychological problems, and adaptability.”<sup>100</sup> Several students were denied for several of these reasons. Judge Bryan made clear that as long as a denial was not purely on the basis of race, he would let it stand. As a pro-segregation judge, Bryan took a non-interventionist approach, working to empower the Pupil Placement Board to deny transfers.

Eleven students were denied transfer because of “attendance problems”, the issue was not their attendance at school but instead a showing that they lived far from the school to which they wished to transfer. Redlining and segregated housing practices made denying a transfer based on where someone lives tantamount to denying their transfer based on race. However, Judge Bryan did not see it that way and notes in his opinion that bus routes must be considered when making transfer decisions. This reason for rejecting transfers was not found to be a violation of national policy nor the *Brown* decisions.

Twenty-two students were denied because of academic deficiencies. This argument relied on comparing students to a national benchmark. Those who fell below a certain threshold were denied transfer. While the case could be made that this was at the fault of segregated schools and an unequal education system, Judge Bryan found it a perfectly reasonable explanation to deny

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<sup>100</sup> *Thompson v. County School Board of Arlington County*, 159 F. Supp. 567 (E.D. Va. 1957).

transfer. Seven students were denied transfer based on psychological problems, a coded explanation that Black children might not enjoy attending school with white children. In his decision, Bryan quotes Sam Smith, the State Director of Psychological Services, saying, ““it would be unwise and possibly harmful to this child to subject him to the pressures which might result from attending a school’ having children of a different or another race.”<sup>101</sup> Again, this was seen as a reasonable explanation, but Bryan decided that because the State Director did not testify in the hearing, it had to be discounted.

There were five denials of transfer because of overcrowding at Washington and Lee, another reason Bryan found perfectly acceptable. Utilizing the same logic as in *Carter*, Bryan notes that Washington and Lee was built with a maximum capacity of 2,000 but was packed at 2,600 students. Clearly, five more students would have pushed it too far. However, Hoffman-Boston was built to hold just 375 students (525 with temporary classrooms) and was full with 575. Again, the overcrowding of Washington and Lee was seen as an acceptable reason to deny transfer.

Lastly, five students failed the “adaptability” test, the one Judge Bryan took issue with. These students were denied transfer because they would be inexplicably “injured” if they transferred schools. The four Black students who eventually attended Stratford from Hoffman Boston were initially denied transfer on the grounds of adaptability concerns. The fifth student’s denial was found just, as he was also behind grade level.

When this case concluded on September 17, 1958, Ronald Deskins, Michael Jones, Lance Newman, and Gloria Thompson were approved to transfer to Stratford Junior High School in

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<sup>101</sup> *Thompson v. County School Board of Arlington County*, 159 F. Supp. 567 (E.D. Va. 1957).

January 1959 to finish their seventh-grade year. With several months between the decision and the transfer, however, there was still plenty of time to petition and resist.

In response to the decision, the Arlington County School Board released a statement recognizing that most Virginians would rather uphold a system of segregated schools but that allowing more selective and token desegregation would ensure that the county wouldn't have to do more. This section from the release specifically captures this feeling of "settling" for minor desegregation instead of fighting the transfer of four students and being faced with a total systemic overhaul later.

"Whereas it is recognized that a majority of Virginians and Arlingtonians prefer segregated schools, but it is at the same time felt by the Arlington County School Board that orderly desegregation of their schools, in which high academic standards and achievement now prevailing would be maintained, would be preferable to mass integration, where such standards and achievements might be lost or seriously undermined."<sup>102</sup>

This document mentions Arlington trying to persuade the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals to stay Judge Bryan's ruling, however this did not happen. This statement also ensures that "no student will be required to attend a school in which the majority of the students in that school is of another race."<sup>103</sup> With desegregation initially prompted by legal challenges to the racist Pupil Placement Board, a slow start seemed likely.

This statement captures the reluctance of the Arlington County School Board to advocate for disruptive protests but also shows that the administration was not in favor of Deskins, Newman, Jones, and Thompson transferring to Stratford. This document, written just a few

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<sup>102</sup> Arlington County School Board, "Statement of the Arlington County School Board with Respect to Continued Operation of the Stratford Junior High School," *Project DAPS*, accessed October 29, 2020, <http://projectdaps.org/items/show/876>. 2.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

weeks before the students transferred, would be largely ignored in media coverage of the event, portraying a calm and welcoming community to the Black students. It is important to recognize that while Arlington schools stayed open, those working within the system did not view this decision favorably.

### After the Case... *The Day That Nothing Happened*

As mentioned before, the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties sent home a letter to every student at Stratford on January 30, 1959, just before Deskins, Newman, Jones, and Thompson were set to begin their first days. Very few students protested their arrival, despite the urging of the Defenders. One student, Shirley Kropp, stayed home in protest, as her father explained to her teacher that, “Shirley stayed home on Monday in loyalty to her race and in protest to a change which is not in the best interest of the vast majority, and certainly unnecessary.”<sup>104</sup>

This first period of desegregation, where just four Black students were granted admission to Stratford, is defined by the memories of the parents and students as well as the newspapers and media. In a 2016 oral history project, Micheal Jones recounted his first semester at Stratford, the first semester Arlington schools began their long process of desegregation. He remembered some name calling, but mostly a smooth transition. Records show hate letters and some harassment in school, but also reflect support from people nationwide who realized the nature of this action.

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<sup>104</sup> A. W. Kropp Jr., “Letter to Mrs. Friauf, February 4, 1959,” *Project DAPS*, accessed October 29, 2020, <http://projectdaps.org/items/show/872>.

The way newspapers reported on the events cemented what happened into public memory. Because of the longevity of newspaper records, headlines and stories have a further reach than simply informing people what was happening. The language used in newspapers about the desegregation of Arlington was very particular, with an emphasis on how little of note occurred.

Local newspapers, often based in Washington, D.C., seemed to celebrate the quiet and nonviolent occasion, glossing over more troubling details. Letters addressed to the students of Stratford aimed to dissuade them from accepting the inevitable desegregation of their school or applauded the young students for their acceptance and patriotism. These sources illustrate that Arlington did not have a uniform response. There was internal tension, even in a relatively progressive county with few Black students.

Newspaper articles written on the desegregation emphasize the normalcy of the event. In the article entitled “Pupils Calm Awaiting Ride to Stratford”, Ronald Deskins’ mother reports that they received around twenty calls from strangers wishing Ronald good luck before his first day at the new school. Micheal Jones reported that he, “Just [felt] like it’s a regular school day.”<sup>105</sup> Oral histories of Deskins, Jones, Newman, and Thompson conducted in 2016 by the Arlington Historical Society reflect similar sentiments.

The February 2nd article “Ronnie Overslept, Ate Burned Toast, Was Off” also emphasizes the normalcy of the day. This article from the *Sun* does mention the twenty reporters crowded into the Deskins’ kitchen, perhaps adding more excitement than the children reported. This article also is sure to note that the day’s attendance at Stratford was above average, indicating that there was no organized school boycott.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Dorothy B. Hamm, *My Story*, 97.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

*The Evening Star* published a similar article. “Stratford’s Attendance is Normal” notes that the average rate of absence was around 7%, but there was only a 6.8% absence rate on February 2.<sup>107</sup> Three white students either exited Stratford or never entered the building. All three students told reporters that their parents told them not to attend classes.

The Anti-Defamation League Bulletin published a similar story; “The Day Nothing Happened.” This article, written by David Krupsaw, the Chairman of the Arlington County Board and Anti-Defamation League, credits the lack of chaos to leadership in Arlington and Virginia. More than 90 police officers stood outside Stratford on February 2, instructed by the County Manager to “take every step necessary to maintain peace and order.”<sup>108</sup> While the police did not have to act, and their presence was reduced to just two officers by the first Friday the students attended Stratford, there were several bomb threats. While none of the anonymous calls alleging bombs were placed in the building were true, this was the only article that mentioned them.

Many of the articles about the day Stratford desegregated include adjectives like “quiet”, “uneventful”, and “peaceful.” An implicit contrast with schools whose desegregation did not occur peacefully, these words seem to almost undermine the struggles of the Black families who worked for years for Arlington to observe the Supreme Court’s ruling. They seem to diminish the discrimination faced by Black students and their parents. In her biography, Dorothy Hamm includes hate mail sent to her home and racist drawings that were left for the first Black children to attend Stratford.

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>108</sup>David L. Krupsaw, “The Day Nothing Happened Reprinted from the Anti-Defamation League Bulletin February 1959,” *Project DAPS*, accessed October 29, 2020, <http://projectdaps.org/items/show/865>.

While the students at Stratford clearly had no say in how the school would go about desegregating, people wrote letters to the students thanking them for their noble actions. One touching letter is from Naomi Chapman, a Black 5th grader from D.C. In a handwritten letter from just four days after Stratford began desegregating, Chapman thanks the students for their actions. She emphasizes that the white students of Stratford were able to look past the skin color of their new Black classmates because “you know they are American children also.”<sup>109</sup> Another letter of support from Mrs. Warren Brumleve, written on January 6, 1959, emphasizes how kind and good the students of Stratford were as well. Interestingly, this letter also highlights that their good deeds are American. The letterhead on this document reveals that Mrs. Brumleve was from Ohio, showing that this story reached people far outside of Arlington and Northern Virginia.<sup>110</sup>

### Interest Convergence Nationally

Looking at Derrick Bell’s theory of interest convergence has much to teach us about how desegregation came to Arlington. Succinctly put, the idea of interest convergence is that “the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest of whites.”<sup>111</sup> Bell holds that, operating as rational actors, there must be a reason for white people to give up some of their power, conceptualized as a limited resource, for Black people to gain more power. In the case of school desegregation, there had to be something white people valued more than upholding the social institution of segregated schools.

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<sup>109</sup> Naomi Chapman, “Letter from Naomi Chapman to the Students of Stratford Junior High School,” *Project DAPS*, accessed October 24, 2020, <http://projectdaps.org/items/show/874>.

<sup>110</sup> Brumleve, Mrs. Warren. “Letter from Mrs. Warren Brumleve January 6, 1959,” *Project DAPS*, accessed October 29, 2020, <http://projectdaps.org/items/show/870>.

<sup>111</sup> Bell, Derrick. “Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma,” *Harvard Law Review* 93 no. 3 (1980), 523.

Often, societal change is attributed to the brave activists who take personal risk to advocate for change that the wider society opposes. Without these activists, the greater public would not think about making the often-radical changes suggested. However, following Bell's theory, if activists begin a movement, reluctant moderates finish it. Without a critical mass of support, tides will not change, and activists will be known only as radical fringe actors.

When looking at *Brown*, Bell does not advocate erasure of the brave people who fought against an unjust segregated school system. Without the persistent work of the NAACP, CORE, SNCC, and many other individuals and groups, there would never have been *Brown*. Bell argues that the reason *Brown* was successful, that the reason the Supreme Court reversed hundreds of years of segregationist precedent, was because the demands of civil rights activists converged with the wants of policy makers or otherwise powerful and institutionally favored actors.

Bell places the wants of policy makers first on the international stage. *Brown* is situated within the Cold War, a time when the United States had a vested interest in proving the moral superiority of capitalism. This was hard to do when the rest of the world could see the government condoned inequalities within the United States. A segregated country was bad press for capitalism, and the federal government knew that. In an *amicus* brief for *Brown*, the federal government wrote that "racial discrimination further diminishes grist for the Communist propaganda mills, and it raises doubts, even among friendly nations, as to the intensity of our devotion to the democratic faith."<sup>112</sup> Warren does not mention international influence at all in his opinion, focusing on a more moralistic argument about the quality of public education.

Bell also argues that *Brown* came at a time when Black veterans of World War II were being treated horribly. After coming back from fighting for the United States--from what the

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<sup>112</sup> Bell, Derrick. "Learning from the Brown Experience", *The Black Scholar* 11 no. 1 (September/October 1979), 11.

Pittsburgh Courier famously made a “Double V” Campaign--they were not lauded like white veterans. Bell speculates that “*Brown* offered much needed reassurance to American blacks that the precepts of equality and freedom so heralded during World War II might yet be given meaning at home.”<sup>113</sup> Finally, Bell argues that this was an economic decision made to favor the industry of the South. Lagging economically in a more globalized world, the South had to catch up. State-sponsored segregation, argues Bell, was a barrier to a fully capitalist realization of the powers of industrialization. Wealthy white southerners and those with a vested interest in improved economic statistics for Southern states, namely politicians, had an incentive to push for desegregation. Poor white southerners did not. Thus, the election of populists who supported massive resistance, harnessing the fears and agitation of the poor white southerners who wanted to uphold the system as it had been. Anecdotally, this could be why Almond followed Stanley as governor of Virginia; Almond harnessed the white outrage over school desegregation explicitly.

The legacy of *Brown* is complicated, but we can better understand it when we view the result not as an indication that the moral tides changed among the governing class, but instead as a reflection that the interests of some wealthy white people happened to converge with the civil rights activists who had been pushing for desegregation for years

### Interest Convergence in Arlington

Interest convergence of white moderates and civil rights activists is what led to the desegregation of schools in Arlington. However, when the interests of these groups diverged, the prioritization of desegregation waned and there was no longer a critical mass of people advocating for change. First, I will articulate how the interests of these groups aligned and the

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<sup>113</sup> Bell, “*Brown v. Board of Education*”, 524.

different tactics used by each group to push for desegregation. Then, I will detail what happened after they were no longer united.

Before desegregation seemed a serious possibility, white moderates conceived of the policy options as either segregation, a preferable status quo, or desegregation, an unpopular change that would take a lot of work. However, once it became clear that Virginia was willing to close rather than desegregate schools, many white moderates changed their policy preferences. Just because they preferred segregation over desegregation did not indicate a preference for segregated but closed schools over desegregated open schools. While some residents in Virginia lauded the segregation-at-all-costs approach that many within the Commonwealth government preferred, when faced with the potential reality of closed schools, many changed their minds.

Arlington's Committee to Preserve Public Schools is a prime example of a white moderate group taking a stance not on the morality of desegregation but on the practical implications of a closed school system. The group had just under 5,000 members at its peak and was all white.<sup>114</sup> This was due in part to a membership drive in the summer of 1958, a push made before speaking with the governor.<sup>115</sup> From the early days of the group, bipartisanship was emphasized as a matter of importance, with promises to advocate for neither segregation nor integration.

Keeping their word, the group's legal advocacy team was concerned only with keeping schools open, not helping the groups working to desegregate the county's schools. While the legal team considered proactive lawsuits in the latter half of 1958, they ultimately decided to

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<sup>114</sup> Matthew Lassiter and Andrew Lewis, "Massive Resistance Revisited", 15.

<sup>115</sup> William M. Lightsey, "Arlington Committee to Preserve Public Schools - A Substantial Increase in our Membership," *Project DAPS*, <https://projectdaps.org/items/show/831>.

wait until a school was closed.<sup>116</sup> Ultimately, then, one could argue that the primary purpose of the Committee was to rally white moderates and show the numbers of voters opposed to school closings. By vocalizing the importance of schools staying open, the wants of this moderate group and the goals of more progressive civil rights groups aligned, creating a large enough population for things to get done. Once it was clear that schools would not be closed, however, the Committee faded away and the increase in activism among white moderates faded quickly.

The Committee kept up its work through 1959, even after schools had opened. While this may seem antithetical to my argument, the reason the group had not yet disbanded is best articulated in a letter from O. Glenn Stahl to the members of the organization. “We don’t know what is going to happen. We don’t know what turns the private school movement will take. We don’t know what this year’s elections will show.”<sup>117</sup> Uncertainty sparked fear and the desire to hold on to the network in case Virginia changed the rules again.

### Immediately After Desegregation

Stratford and the other schools of Arlington admitted more and more Black students over time. However, this increase in desegregation was not without challenges for Black students and their families. There were policies and barriers within the schools which led Black and white students attending the school to have completely different experiences.

The principal of Stratford, Claude Richmond, used his own discretion with respect to policy application. An agent of the district, Richmond had to decide how he wished to adhere to

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<sup>116</sup> Virginia Committee for Public Schools and William Marion Lightsey, “Booklet: "Organizing to Save Public Schools 1956-1959. How Virginians Rallied to the Defense of the Public School System in the Virginia Committee for Public Schools", by William Marion Lightsey. 14 pages.,” <https://projectdaps.org/items/show/160>, 3.

<sup>117</sup> Arlington Committee to Preserve Public Schools, “Letter sent to members of the "Arlington Committee to Preserve Public Schools", May 22, 1959.,” *Project DAPS*, <https://projectdaps.org/items/show/180>.

rules. Dorothy Hamm and Richmond were in frequent communication in the years her sons, Edward Leslie Jr., and Bernard, attended Stratford. Hamm advocated for her sons and other Black students at Stratford so they could have a meaningful and normal junior high experience. Richmond called Hamm on March 8, 1960 and made two requests of her. First, he asked her to tell the other parents that there would be required segregated seating at an upcoming junior high music festival.<sup>118</sup> He told her that Leslie Jr. would have to quit the wrestling team, as they were preparing for competitions with other schools.

With respect to the seating question, Hamm disseminated this information among the parents involved in the initial suit, resolving them to sit wherever they liked. This was the reality more than a full year after local papers declared success on a calm and uneventful school desegregation. This was not the first time Hamm and other Black parents were told that segregated seating would be necessary in school events.

In 1957, Hamm was the only Black person invited to speak at a PTA meeting on the eventual desegregation of Arlington schools. Before their meeting, Hamm was told that she needed to sit in her own separate section of the room to avoid arrest.<sup>119</sup> One white woman joined her in the separate section, leading Hamm to write that she, “no longer felt all alone, but I still had that feeling of being inferior by others.”<sup>120</sup> Hamm suggests that this sudden adherence to segregated seating had more to do with current events and political control than district policy. Around the same time she attended a School Board meeting, one of many in the almost decade since her family had relocated to Arlington.<sup>121</sup> While she had never been assigned a seat earlier, this particular meeting in either 1957 or 1958 began with School Board member Barnard Joy,

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<sup>118</sup> Hamm, *My Story*, 13.

<sup>119</sup> Hamm, *My Story*, 7.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

requesting that herself and the other two parents she came with would have to sit separately.<sup>122</sup>

Hamm reflects on this, saying, “this was the first time I did not comment at a school board meeting, but I was terribly humiliated.”<sup>123</sup> Hearing the effect of this discriminatory action on Hamm is striking-- on top of being a civil rights leader, she was a mom trying to advocate for her children to the extent it was permitted.

The establishment still worked insidiously to make Hamm and other Black parents feel less than, working to dull the ability of the parents to advocate for their children, perhaps as a reaction to concerns about forthcoming desegregation. By blaming this discrimination on state laws, local officials shirked responsibility for their actions and could be perceived as neutral actors. However, the racism and disempowerment hiding behind a thin veneer of procedural duty was impactful, even for Dorothy Hamm, who faced countless dangerous and terrifying situations in her activism.

With respect to wrestling, Hamm was not content to follow through with Richmond’s plan. Hamm and her husband met with Richmond on March 8, 1960, where Richmond explained to them that her son would not be permitted to engage in wrestling as there were competitions between schools, which was his interpretation of the law at the time.<sup>124</sup> Hamm’s son would also not be permitted to participate in Stratford’s Physical Activities Night, even though that event was contained within the school.<sup>125</sup> Hamm and other parents pursued a suit in 1960 to call for integrated school sports which was eventually successful.

Tracing the thread from *Thompson* through the desegregation of schools helps illuminate why school desegregation happened and why it slowed when the threats of school closure no

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Hamm, *My Story*, 123.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

longer loomed. Looking at Arlington through Derrick Bell's interest convergence perspective, we can understand more clearly why white moderates aligned with civil rights activists to keep schools open but were no longer interested in acting afterwards. Looking at the framing of an issue in the newspaper and memory also shapes how we understand it today. For example, the vocabulary used in articles about the desegregation of Arlington County portrayed a peaceful, positive new day. Meanwhile, individuals including Dorothy Hamm were threatened and harassed for their participation. Memory of the desegregation of Stratford will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

### **Chapter 3: Remembering Arlington's Desegregation**

How we remember the desegregation of Arlington County matters. Organizers, parents, teachers, and students took risk upon themselves to fight for something that was not going to happen on its own. Civil Rights groups faced burned crosses in their lawns and churches and threats to their lives. There was no guarantee that this would end without violence. There was no guarantee that Black students would walk through the doors of Stratford in the same decade *Brown* was decided. The way we view and talk about the people and political players involved with the desegregation matters, because it influences how Arlington conducts itself now and in the future. First, I will provide a brief historical overview of action in Arlington starting in the 1970s. Then, I will discuss how the desegregation of Arlington County Public Schools has been remembered and depicted. Finally, I will switch gears to talk about the response to the COVID-19 crisis and share some anecdotes which I believe will show the pervasive nature of these cyclical patterns of activism and reform.

#### **A Selective Contemporary History**

The final school in Arlington to desegregate was Drew Elementary School. Still segregated 10 years after Stratford, the school finally began desegregation in 1971. Arlington County noted that the neighborhood location of the elementary school exempted it from mandatory desegregation due to guidelines from The Department of Health, Education and Welfare.<sup>126</sup> The slow desegregation of the school followed threats of lawsuit.

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<sup>126</sup> "Arlington Studies Last All-Black School." 1969. *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, Dec 19, 1969.

Following the 25th anniversary of school desegregation within Arlington County, the school board decided to significantly modify the school busing program employed from 1971 through 1987. Like the desegregation practices of 1959, busing was primarily of Black students to white schools.<sup>127</sup> The plan accepted by a 4-1 school board vote would phase out the bussing of Black students to white schools but maintain cross-county busing of Black students to farther-away Black schools. Frank Wilson, the only Black member of the school board at the time, noted that some schools in North Arlington would be “almost totally white” because of the vote.<sup>128</sup> In his hesitation, Wilson also noted that mentioning only Black and white students did not account for Asian and Hispanic students, which was more than 30% of the system’s enrollment at the time.<sup>129</sup>

A 1990 article from the *Washington Post* tracks a group of Hoffman-Boston alumni working to solidify a written history of their school. After the school closed in 1964, lore about the old junior and senior high school was passed down through word of mouth. ““We don’t have a lot of history about our school,”” the *Post* reported organizer, Earlene Brevard Dixon saying, ““That’s one of the goals of this reunion. We’re trying to bring some of it back.””<sup>130</sup> Students and teachers alike gathered at the former home of the school more than 25 years after its doors closed. The *Post* made sure to note a sentiment repeated by Bernard Lee, class of 1942. According to The *Post*, Lee “had mixed feelings about the integration that caused the school’s closing. Today, he said, teachers don’t take enough time and interest in black students to

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<sup>127</sup>Evelyn Hsu, "Arlington Shifts Plan on Busing: Cross-Country Trips by Pupils Reduced," *The Washington Post* (1974-Current File), Mar 20, 1987.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Stephanie Griffith, "Alumni Revive Memories: Reunion Resurrects all-Black School," *The Washington Post* (1974-Current File), Jun 14, 1990,

motivate or discipline them.”<sup>131</sup> This discourse was evidently common at the time, along with the understanding that *Brown* and following school desegregation orders exponentially diminished the number of Black educators.

### Theories of Memory

Critical theorist Pierre Nora is instrumental in understanding the importance of memory and cultural construction of memory. His focus on what he calls *lieux de memoire* is useful in understanding how we view school desegregation now. *Lieux de memoire*, or the site of memory, refers to a specific instance where “memory crystallized and secrets itself... a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn.”<sup>132</sup> At a certain point, memory is definitionally constructed. There are no “true” environments of memory, or *milieux de memoire*, after a certain point. Nora draws on another memory theorist, Maurice Halbwachs, to discuss the social construction of memory. The *lieux de memoire* will be different for every group involved.

These societal changes in memory are replicable at a personal level. Halbwachs discusses how people can personally reconstruct their histories, by remembering the past with the perspective of one’s current self.

“We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the appearance they once had.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Griffith, “Alumni Revive Memories”, 1990, 2.

<sup>132</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*”, *Représentations* 26, Spring 1989.

<sup>133</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, “From *the Collective Memory*”, In *the Collective Memory Reader* ed. Jeffery K. Olick, Vered Vinitzy-Seroussi, Daniel Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Each person tweaks and twists personal memories constantly. This can be applied to the broader societal level of memory as well. Halbwachs argues that for society to function, very different groups need to unite and work together. There is then an incentive, at the societal level, to forget the things that divide us. In his own words, “it is also why society, in each period, rearranges its recollections in such a way as to adjust them to the variable conditions of its equilibrium.”<sup>134</sup> A type of erasure of divisive memories, then, can be seen as natural in a society.

One way to think about this is how schools teach about the history of slavery in America. A 2018 Southern Poverty Law Center report drew attention to the way slavery is taught and remembered in public schools in America. The report finds that only 8% of high school students identified slavery as the cause of the Civil War.<sup>135</sup> This illustrates the way collective memory and history can be shaped by those in power.

This is mirrored in discussions of the Confederate flag and statues and naming honors bestowed on Confederate soldiers. A resurgence of these harmful symbols followed civil rights efforts through the twentieth century. Their harm is often denied, their history twisted to portray the majority culture positively. When given the choice to talk about racist, violent, and harmful pasts, many communities choose to stay silent. “Municipal authorities across the country have traditionally avoided unflattering depictions of their cities past, which partly explains the incomplete and unjust way America remembers past racialized violence.”<sup>136</sup> If every city tries to portray their history in the best way possible, collective memory once again becomes unreliable.

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<sup>134</sup> Halbwachs, “From *the Collective Memory*”, 183.

<sup>135</sup> Megan R. Underhill, “Losing Memories, Preserving White Morality”, *Contexts* 17 no. 4 Fall, (2018): 60-61.

<sup>136</sup> Joshua F. J. Inwood and Dereck Alderman. "Taking Down the Flag Is Just a Start: Toward the Memory-Work of Racial Reconciliation in White Supremacist America." *Southeastern Geographer* 56, no. 1 (2016): 9-15. Accessed March 30, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26233766>.

Why am I emphasizing the importance of remembering this period of Arlington's history? Collective memory does not have to exist in the way Nora and Halbwachs describe it. By recognizing human threats to a complete picture of the past, we have the ability to build a larger social memory and remember, instead of forgetting, the parts of history that may run counter to societal narrative. Remembrance honors those who sacrificed so much for the desegregation movement but also pays respect to the Arlingtonians of today. Commitment to understanding the past can illuminate social patterns and cycles of the present. Or, as the adage goes, history repeats itself.

### The 25th Anniversary

On February 29, 1986, former School Board member James Stockard sent a letter to Dorothy Hamm. He wondered whether she or any other activists were consulted for an oral history being compiled by Arlington Public Library. He was afraid that Hamm and other Black people would not be asked, and the attention would instead fall on “people like Elisabeth Campbell and Barnard Joy”, moderates who served on the School Board.<sup>137</sup> He continues, “Dorothy, my intuitive judgement tells me that this project was revisionist history.”<sup>138</sup> With fewer Arlingtonians around with the knowledge on the time, it would be easier to interview those highlighted by the papers in 1959. Stockard notes that the *Washington Post* erroneously attributed the victory to himself, Campbell, and Joy in the 25th anniversary tribute to the school desegregation, with no mention of Black leaders.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Hamm, *My Story*, 138.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

By 1986, the students who walked through the doors of Stratford on “the day that nothing happened” had children and families of their own. They graduated from Stratford, high school, and college. Dorothy Hamm and the other parents who pushed for desegregation, both in the courts and more informally within the schools, were involved in new and different things. Simply put, with many of those involved in the desegregation of Arlington schools less involved, it was easy to reconstruct a narrative where the real threats and resistance they faced were quietly diminished. Choosing whom to interview will change any narrative and choosing to exclude primarily Black activists worked to perpetuate the white narrative of the ease of desegregation.

There was quite a bit of media attention surrounding the 25th anniversary of Arlington County’s school desegregation. An article published on February 1, 1984, includes plenty of quotes from Deskins, Jones, Newman, and Thompson. In a typical comparison, Newman recounted that the event “wasn’t Little Rock.”<sup>140</sup> This article, unlike others, draws a contrast between the comparatively liberal image of Arlington and the treatment of the students. The students recounted teachers ignoring them, students bullying them, and random passersby yelling at them.<sup>141</sup> However, the article is sure to mention that all four are, overall, glad that they did it, at least at that point in their life. Another article, published on the same day, leaned more into the typical narrative: that the desegregation of Arlington County Schools was peaceful and easy. “When four black seventh graders entered Arlington’s all-white Stratford Junior High School at 8:30am on Feb. 2, 1959, the accumulated fears of many seemed to vanish. As one historian later wrote, “the tranquility was devastating.”<sup>142</sup> The authors also attribute the shift to a liberal

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<sup>140</sup> Leah Y Latimer, "Four Recall Integrating Arlington School," *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, Feb 01, 1984.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> John Mintz and Nancy Scannell, "Arlington Officials Worked Hard to Achieve Peaceful Desegregation." *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, Feb 01, 1984.

coalition that “fought the segregationists and remade the schools in Arlington in the 1950s” an oversimplification that makes those hoping for schools to stay open morally equivalent with those civil rights leaders who fight for equality.<sup>143</sup>

### Arlington Today

In 2019, Arlington County celebrated 60 years of a desegregated school system. Since then, the district has changed, growing to 26,822 students for the 2020-2021 school year.<sup>144</sup> There are 34 schools within the county, and while Stratford has been renamed H.B. Woodlawn, Washington and Lee High School has changed only slightly to be called Washington-Liberty.

Arlington County is still segregated. Today, Arlington County Public Schools comprises 45.1% white students, 28.3% Hispanic students, 10.1% Black students, 9.1% Asian students, and 7.2% of students who belong to several racial groups (VDOE).

The county has four high schools, with 7,673 students enrolled in ninth through twelfth grades as of 2019. Even after 61 years of desegregation, the racial and economic makeup of Arlington County schools still diverge from the county’s average, reflecting a high level of unevenness.

The student population of Arlington High is 81.4% Hispanic, 7.2% Black, 6.2% Asian, and 5.2% white or multiple races (VDOE). 6.7% of students qualify as economically disadvantaged (VDOE). Arlington High is much smaller than the other three schools, with a student population of 194 in the 2019-2020 school year (VDOE).

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Virginia Department of Education, “Arlington County Public Schools.” Virginia School Quality Profiles. Virginia Department of Education. Accessed April 25, 2021. <https://schoolquality.virginia.gov/divisions/arlington-county-public-schools>.

Wakefield High School is made up of 43.8% Hispanic students, 24.9% white students, 18.2% Black students, 8.1% Asian students, and 4.9% students who are multiple races (VDOE). 37.6% of students are economically disadvantaged.

The student body of Washington-Liberty High School (formerly Washington and Lee) is 43.9% white, 32.5% Hispanic, 9.7% Asian, 7.7% Black, and 6.1% multiple races. 28.9% of students qualify as economically disadvantaged.

Yorktown High School is 65.5% white students, 14.6% Hispanic students, 7.3% students of multiple races, 6.9% Asian students, and 5.5% Black students. 10.8% of students are classified as economically advantaged (VDOE).

This is significant because there is persisting racial segregation within the county. This is only compounded by residential segregation and generations of inequality stratifying familial wealth. In such a small county, bussing would seem like a realistic solution, but the county faced such backlash in the 1980s and 1990s for bussing, that likely would not happen again.

### Arlington in Covid-19

Arlington County, like many other school districts in the area, closed the doors of its schools in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. After living through more than a year of the pandemic, one knows the emotional, social, and economic toll it took on most every American. Covid-19 took the greatest toll on people of color. According to the CDC, “Data on race and ethnicity for more than 90% of people who died from COVID-19 reveal that the percent of Hispanic or Latino, non-Hispanic Black, and non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native people who have died from COVID-19 is higher than the percent of these racial and ethnic

groups among the total U.S. population.”<sup>145</sup> This difference is even more pronounced when adjusting across age groups. While unemployment has increased across the board, it has disproportionately hit women and people of color. As of May 2020, the unemployment rate for Hispanic women rose 14.1%, while the unemployment rate of white men rose only 7.8%.<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, the rate of Black families living below the poverty line is more than twice the rate of white families, with 20.6% of Black households in America falling below poverty and only 8.1% of white households.<sup>147</sup>

Covid-19 has disproportionately harmed people of color. It has disproportionately harmed people of color within Arlington. Arlington Parents for Education is a group of parents advocating to reopen public schools in Arlington as early as August 2020. While there is not data available about the racial or demographic breakdown of the members in this group, anecdotally some of the most active members are white and wealthy. The homes with OPEN APS displayed prominently in yards or windows were typically those of wealthier Arlingtonians. Those organizing had to be able to take time off work during the day. Protesting can be a luxury.

The pandemic has been a stressful and overwhelming time for so many, and I am not in the position to criticize the choices and needs of families within Arlington. However, at the organizational level, Arlington Parents for Education echo the calls of the Arlington Committee to Preserve Public Schools, a group that advocated against school closing for their own interest.

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<sup>145</sup> Disparities in COVID-19 Deaths.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed April 25, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/racial-ethnic-disparities/disparities-deaths.html>.

<sup>146</sup>Valerie Wilson, “Inequities Exposed: How COVID-19 Widened Racial Inequities in Education, Health, and the Workforce: Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor,” Economic Policy Institute, June 22, 2020, <https://www.epi.org/publication/covid-19-inequities-wilson-testimony/>.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid.

Lines in the Arlington Parents for Education mission statement are eerily familiar. Arlington Parents for Education claims “We are Democrats, Republicans and independents.”<sup>148</sup> This echoes the Committee’s statements from more than 60 years earlier, claiming that they were a cross-party coalition with varying viewpoints on segregation and racial justice.

More importantly, Arlington Parents for Education advocated for opening classrooms without noting the disproportionate toll the Covid-19 pandemic took on people of color, a large proportion of Arlington’s public school population. The website for the organization includes testimonials from students, some who ended up transferring to private schools (a luxury not all families have).

The creation of this group during the Covid-19 crisis protesting the closing of schools creepily echoes the problematic group of Arlington’s past. It also shows that this kind of activism springs from the needs of the privileged. Before the pandemic, there were no groups this popular advocating for the expansion of the county’s childcare services or expanded daycare. Again, without shifting blame on the members of this group, families of Arlington trying to cope with an unprecedented and stressful pandemic, the existence of the group has eerie ties to one Arlington wishes it could erase.

Covid-19 has exacerbated the inequalities and cracks within the education system that have been easy to ignore by the privileged until now. Failing to understand the dynamics of school desegregation within Arlington makes it easier for similar patterns to repeat themselves. Teaching the desegregation of Arlington as a successful and easy incident with only good players misses the shades of grey and complex social dynamics compounded by the various interests of

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<sup>148</sup> “Who We Are.” Arlington Parents for Education. Accessed April 25, 2021. <https://arlingtonparentsforeducation.org/arlington-parents-for-education/who-we-are/>.

those involved. When we look closer, we can see that the dynamic described earlier is more common than one might have thought.

## **Conclusion**

As a life-long resident of Alexandria, I saw the inequalities and segregation within my school district while also hearing people sing its praises. Like Arlington, Alexandria is known as exceedingly liberal. I only learned that the former namesake of my high school, T.C. Williams, was astonishingly racist in the past few years. We never talked about pushback against desegregation in Northern Virginia. That was something that happened in “other places,” states in the “real” South like Arkansas. My fellow classmates and I were never taught what it took to desegregate Arlington, a county that borders my own. Ignoring the struggle for desegregation in Northern Virginia erases the experiences of those who fought so hard to achieve it. It also contributes to the myth of what I call “Northern-Virginia Exceptionalism.”

By this logic, Northern Virginia does not define itself as Southern and thus does not view itself as culpable for the acts of racism that persist there. And, following that logic, Northern Virginia does not hold itself accountable for persistent discrimination. By artificially imposing an overly progressive narrative on a complex past, they ignore the everyday manifestations of the oppressions they believe to be “solved.” Clearly, these logical fallacies are dangerous and can stunt future progress by ignoring the existence of continued oppression. The way Arlington views the desegregation of its schools exemplifies this tendency. By creating an uncomplicated picture of progress, they conceal the harsh realities faced by civil rights actors and marginalized groups.

When understanding the desegregation of Arlington County Public Schools, it is important to recognize its precondition. These include unplanned factors, such as a demographic change over time, and conscientious efforts like previous legal action and preexisting interest

group webs. These laid the groundwork for Arlington to open desegregated schools instead of falling to the Byrd machine's whims. Second, it is important to understand the dynamics between the web of interest groups. While the alliance between white moderates and progressives was tenuous, the convergence of their interests accelerated the push for desegregation. However, after it became clear that schools were going to remain open, moderates became less interested in participating in legal or social action to increase desegregation and improve educational offerings. Finally, the way we remember Arlington County matters. By remembering, we honor the memory of those who fought so hard for desegregation and we ensure that we do not ignore the persisting racial dynamics present from the 1950s to modern day.

Stratford was renamed Dorothy Hamm Middle School, an important first step in understanding and honoring the work that the Hamm family put in. Arlington County and the rest of Virginia owe it to Mrs. Hamm and other brave activists like her to teach the real history of school desegregation and ensure that their legacies live on.

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