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# School Desegregation and Urban Renewal in Norfolk, 1950-1959

Forrest R. (Hap) White  
*Old Dominion University*

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SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND URBAN RENEWAL

IN NORFOLK, 1950-1959

by

Forrest R. (Hap) White  
B.A. May 1966, Bucknell University  
M.P.A. August 1987, Old Dominion University

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

URBAN SERVICES

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
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Approved by:

Maurice Berube, Dissertation Chair

Member

Concentration Area Director

Member

Dean of Education

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ABSTRACT

SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND URBAN RENEWAL  
IN NORFOLK, 1950-1959

Forrest R. (Hap) White  
Old Dominion University, 1991  
Director: Dr. Maurice Berube

Although a number of scholars have examined the impact that the U. S. Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision had upon local school policies, there is a paucity of research on what repercussions that decision may have had upon a broad range of other related municipal issues. This historical case study explores the effect that opposition to court ordered school integration had upon the placement of school buildings and urban renewal projects in one Southern city, Norfolk, Virginia, where there was strong reason to believe that the municipal powers of school plant planning, redevelopment, and city planning were deliberately used to forestall court-ordered school integration. Census tract data, capital budget documents, school board minutes, planning papers, and contemporary newspaper accounts were used in combination with interviews with decision-makers, municipal officials, and newspaper reporters to write a history of school desegregation and urban renewal in Norfolk during the period both immediately before and after the Brown decision.



According to the research, the leadership in Norfolk, as well as in other Southern cities, made a concerted effort to plan for the demise of segregation, and that this preparation took place in three phases: an attempt before the Brown decision to make Black school facilities more nearly equal to those of whites, a quiet reassessment period following Brown, in which limited school desegregation seemed possible, and a frantic effort to massively resist by relying upon the urban renewal powers of the city to delay or negate the authority of the federal courts.

Although Norfolk, which before Brown had pockets of Black population spread throughout the city, appeared to use its urban renewal powers to move from segregation de jure to segregation de facto by tearing down mixed race, transition neighborhoods, closing or demolishing affected schools, and carefully dividing the city into single race school zones. In addition, the city shifted to reliance upon tiny "vest pocket" schools and the careful placement of public facilities to create racially distinct school districts. Shortly after the Brown decision, Norfolk launched in several major new and highly speculative redevelopment projects that tore down the homes of close to ten percent of the city's population, including the Black plaintiffs in its school desegregation suit. In spite of these efforts, Norfolk served as the chief battleground upon which the fate of "interposition" and Massive Resistance (to school desegregation) Plan was decided.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Because every major project of this sort relies at times on the effort of a group of supporters, advisers, consolders, and consultants, the author would like to take this opportunity to express his thanks to all those who helped make this group effort successful.

Chief among my supporters and consolders is, of course, my wife, Holly, who endured much in the seventeen years since the research was first initiated, abandoned, and finally resumed again. My parents also inspired my early interest in the period, and had the good sense to help in the collection of documents and clipping which were instrumental to the effort. In addition to those cited in the references, there were numerous others who encouraged the project and helped to provide insight and perspective into the people, events, and mood of the era under study.

The author wishes to thank the members of his committee, Drs. Maurice R. Berube, Peter Stewart, and Ulysses V. Spiva, for their guidance and assistance during the final phases of this project. Dr. Berube, as chair of the committee, provided the prod to keep the project moving. Thanks is also due to Professor James Sweeney for guiding the early stages of research and writing.

Special mention must be made of all those who helped in preparing this document for release. My sister, Ann White Pulley, gave tirelessly of her time and talents to prepare the first draft more than a decade ago. Through the wonders of modern computer technology that early type-written draft, once it had been transformed by high tech scanners, became the basis for most of the historical chapters. My brother, Mark, then helped me transform my own crude word processing efforts into a more sophisticated format. My office staff, especially Mrs. Peggy Murphy and Lynn Cohen-Hoelzer, had to endure the hardships of initiating me into the world of Word Perfect, and then assisting in the final push for completion.

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## INTRODUCTION

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Although the United States Supreme Court's decision in the Brown v. Board of Education cases sent shock waves of protest across most of the Deep South, only the extent of the decree actually came as a surprise to most of those who were charged with the planning and leadership of Southern cities. That some sort of decision from the Court overruling at least a portion of the South's elaborate system of segregated education was a foregone conclusion among many in leadership roles; clearly the "separate but equal" facilities maintained by communities, particularly those in the rural areas, were so far from equivalent that only the most callous court could disregard the distinction. Moreover, desegregation had already begun in the nation's military, interstate transportation, public accommodation, and recreational facilities, either through administrative action or legal intervention, and it was hard to imagine that a nation that had so recently committed itself to fighting wars overseas to avert repression would allow its own public schools to remain as the last bastion of racial subjugation at home.

The main thesis of this work is that the individuals charged with the leadership and management of Southern cities had ample time, plenty of opportunity, and strong motivation to plan for the demise of school segregation in their community, that this planning process began well before the Brown v. Board of Education cases were ever decided, and that it grew increasingly intense as the prospect of court-ordered integration became more and more a reality. Moreover, this research theorizes that these leaders took deliberate steps to use all of the powers at their disposal, including both the more obvious control over school plant planning, educational administration, and student attendance, as well as a full range of redevelopment, city planning, code enforcement, and urban renewal activities to delay and otherwise forestall court-ordered school desegregation in their community. The study focuses on the link between school desegregation and urban renewal activities in one community, Norfolk, Virginia, that most nearly fits the hypothesized variables.

Since 1938 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.) had advanced a withering legal attack on the peculiar practices that provided the basis for maintaining segregated schools. Although their assault was aimed at discrimination in graduate education, the intent of their approach was clearly to amass an irrefutable body of precedent that would lead to a court

decision striking down once and for all the logic that separate schools could be equal in American society. In Gaines v. Missouri (1938) the Supreme Court struck down the argument that a government could avoid the responsibility to maintain a (law) school for Blacks when it preserved one exclusively for whites.<sup>1</sup> Even though Missouri helped to send its Black law students to schools in other states, the logic of the N.A.A.C.P. was convincing to the nine lawyers who sat in judgement as justices on the Court: they understood that there were certain powerful advantages associated with attending a law school in the state where one intended to practice. In Sweatt v. Painter,<sup>2</sup> the Court decided that the makeshift law school provided for Blacks by the state of Texas to avoid the Gaines precedent could not provide equal educational experience for Blacks. Again the lawyers on the court were sympathetic to the argument that a law school that lacked an adequate law library, a distinguished faculty, and many of the other trappings of a quality legal education was clearly inferior, and therefore unequal. In McLaurin v. Oklahoma, the Court found that separate treatment of Blacks, even when they were allowed to attend the same school as whites, was also unconstitutional

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<sup>1</sup>Robert A. Leflar, "Law of the Land: The Courts and the Schools," chap. in Don Shoemaker, ed., "With All Deliberate Speed," (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Oliver Brown, et al v. Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas,, et al., as reprinted in Race Relations Law Reporter 1: 1 (February, 1956), p. 8.



discrimination. In the case, the plaintiff had been forced to sit in the hall outside of his classes, had limited access to the library, and had been subjected to other degrading treatments designed to limit his contact with his fellow (white) students.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, knowledgeable Southerners knew that the United States Supreme Court would have to follow these same precedents if it were faced with similar circumstances in public education, i.e., the absence of any facility for Blacks, separate facilities for Blacks that could be shown to be clearly inadequate or inferior, or instances of separate and degrading treatment for Black students. Four of the five cases accepted by the Court in its 1952 session were designed to do precisely that:

1. In the title case, Oliver Brown, et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas, et al., the Court was presented with the appeal of a Black elementary student who lived in a mixed race area. Although Topeka had integrated its secondary schools, Linda Brown was forced to ride a bus across town to the Black elementary school, while whites in her area walked to the nearby neighborhood school. The N.A.A.C.P. contended that in light of the McLaurin precedent, such separate treatment was degrading, and thus contrary to constitutional guarantees of equal treatment.

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<sup>3</sup>Robert A. Leflar, op cit., p. 2

2. In the Virginia case, Davis, et al. v. the County School Board of Prince Edward County, the county did not provide a senior high school for Blacks pupils. Since those Black students who wished to attend high school were bused to another county, the N.A.A.C.P. contended that, in line with the Gaines and Sweatt v. Painter decisions, such an arrangement was separate and unequal treatment in terms of the physical plant provided, the curriculum, and the extensive transportation required to access the facility.<sup>4</sup>

3. In Briggs v. Elliot, the N.A.A.C.P. lawyers argued that the physical facilities for Blacks in Clarendon County, South Carolina, were inferior to those provided for whites. The case was designed to follow the Sweatt v. Painter precedent: the Black schools in the county were older hand-me-downs from the white community, and many lacked playgrounds, ball fields, cafeterias, libraries, auditoriums, and other facilities present in the newer (white) schools. In addition, this case featured a whole new realm of social psychological research that pointed to the low self-esteem of the Black children who attended these inferior schools.

4. To support the N.A.A.C.P.'s contention in Gebhart v. Belton, university researchers in Delaware amassed a large body of literature to show that Black schools in that state were inferior to white ones in terms of pupil-teacher

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<sup>4</sup>Milton Finklestein, Hon. Jawn A. Sandifer, Elfreda Wright, Minorities: U.S.A. (New York: Globe Books, 1971).

ratios, teacher training, extracurricular activities, supplies, school materials, library books, and other curricular and instructional support qualities. The plaintiffs hoped to play on the Sweatt v. Painter decision and promote a finding that separate instructional programs, even in otherwise similar physical facilities, could be shown to be inferior, and thus contrary to the equal protection provisions of the U. S. Constitution.

5. The fifth case, which challenged the validity of federal statutes requiring segregation in Washington, D. C., had only limited application to other public school systems, since the schools in the nation's capital came more directly under the financial and operational control of the U. S. Congress than anywhere else in the country.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that the cases were first heard in the fall of 1952, re-argued during the 1953 session of the Court, and finally decided on May 17, 1954, gave the South plenty of time to prepare for the eventuality of an adverse ruling. Once decided, the Court held a second hearing on enforcement in April, 1955,<sup>6</sup> and it was not until May 31, 1955, almost three years after the initial cases had been accepted for review, that the Supreme Court issued its implementing

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<sup>5</sup>Leflar, op cit., p. 3; Brown v. Board, op cit., pp. 5-7; Walter G. Stephan, "A brief Historical Overview of School Desegregation," chap. in Stephan and Joe R. Feagin, eds., School Desegregation: Past, Present, and Future (New York: Plenum Press, 1980), pp. 11-17.

<sup>6</sup>Leflar, pp. 3-4.

decree requiring desegregation "with all deliberate speed." Even then, in mandating that school districts make a "prompt and reasonable start towards full compliance," the Court recognized that a "transition period" would be necessary before such compliance could be achieved. Nevertheless, the justices indicated that lower courts could "consider problems related to administration, arising from the physical condition of the school plant, the school transportation system, personnel, revision of school districts and attendance areas into compact units to achieve a system of determining admission to public schools on a nonracial basis" if these tended to promote separate and unequal treatment of students to maintain segregated schools.<sup>7</sup>

Although most Southern leaders expected to lose the Prince Edward County (no equal facilities), Clarendon, South Carolina (unequal facilities), and Delaware (unequal treatment) cases, where the quantifiable differences between Black and white schools could be remedied short of desegregation, the defeat in Brown proved to be the most troublesome, since it could only be remediated by school integration. Even if the South were to build literally hundreds of new and largely unneeded schools, it still might have to integrate some buildings in order to comply with the Brown dictate that similarly situated students not receive separate treatment just to maintain racial separation. Nevertheless,

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<sup>7</sup>Brown v. Board, p. 11.

the Brown precedent, because it focused on the long cross-town bus ride, cut to the core of what many urban Southern leaders, both Black and white, felt was most unjust about the separate but equal system of Black and white education that had evolved in most of their cities.<sup>8</sup>

The most immediate effect of the Brown decision was to strike down the laws requiring segregated schools (i.e., de jure segregation) in seventeen states (Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware) and permitted in four others (Kansas, Arizona, New Mexico, and Wyoming).<sup>9</sup> Although the focus of the court decisions was upon state laws requiring segregation, the obvious impact would be felt more directly in the local schools of thousands of communities across the Deep South and Border States of the Confederacy. The decision, however, left intact the kind of separate race schools found most often in the cities of the North, West, and Midwest, where the segregation, although not absolute, was due to the individual's choice of neighborhood and place of residence, i.e., de facto segregation. Thus, substantially equal

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<sup>8</sup>Pretlow Darden, former Mayor of Norfolk, interview by author, Tape recording, Norfolk, 13 August 1975; and Francis Crenshaw, former member of the Norfolk School Board, interview by author, Tape recording, Norfolk, 7 February 1991.

<sup>9</sup>Southern School News, 3 September 1954.

schools that served separate race neighborhoods were still permitted by the Court; only the particular circumstance presented by Linda Brown, a Black living closer to a white school than a Black one, was initially found unconstitutional. At least one major study of integration in 24 Northern, Western, and Midwest cities found that even in the areas of the country that had already desegregated, most schools could be clearly designated as single race institutions, and that a large percentage of children living under the rules of de facto segregation actually went to school with very few members of the opposite race.

Thus, most communities could comply with the dictates of the Court with only a minimum of integration, and most schools could continue as essentially single race schools except in the few areas of each city where there were mixed race neighborhoods, transition areas, or where two racially distinct areas would have to be served by the same school. Even then, the cities that had already desegregated had evolved an elaborate system of gerrymandered school districts, liberal transfer policies, "schools of choice," staggered enrollment procedures, in-school segregation by tracking, and other quasi-legal devices to avoid larger scale integration or to ensure that whites would not have to attend predominantly Black schools.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Robin M. Williams and Margaret W. Ryan, eds., Schools in Transition: Community Experiences in Desegregation (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1954),

This careful distinction between continued segregation by place of residence and court-ordered integration was one of the chief reasons that the Brown decree was met with only mild reaction in most areas of the Border States where there was a relatively small Black population, and where it was for the most part concentrated in a large, central, and over crowded section of the downtown, and only occasionally in small scattered settlements in other parts of the city. This distinction meant that the Northern model of de facto segregation could be adopted without undue hardship, except in those few cities of the Border South that had very large concentrations of Black population, a history of racial strife, or vast social class distinctions between their Black and white or ethnic citizens.<sup>11</sup>

The prospect of large-scale race-mixing in the public schools had Southern leaders more concerned than any other aspect of the Brown precedent. Indeed, several years before the Supreme Court actually rendered its call for desegregation, Southern newspapers openly speculated about the magnitude of the reaction that would follow an adverse ruling:

A decision of the Supreme Court that would provide for the admission of Negro students to public schools in areas where they would constitute a large proportion or a majority of the students might be the worst thing, rather than the best, that could happen in race

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pp. 45, 57, 102, 240, 242, and 443.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 40 and pp. 80 -110.

relations where people of both races were not ready for such changes. The law is a living instrumentality, and if society must live under it, [then] the law must also live with society.<sup>12</sup>

For this reason, a number of localities in the Border States, especially the larger cities, began almost immediately to take steps to comply with the dictates of the Court, while there was no integration at all in the eight states of the Deep South where Blacks comprised 22% or more of the population (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Virginia) until they were pushed to the wall by the courts.<sup>13</sup> There, the racial mores were more firmly rooted, and racial separation more firmly entrenched, especially in those areas with the highest percentage of Black population, a figure that could run as high as 70% to 80% in some of the rural counties. In these communities, desegregation meant not just the transfer of large numbers of Blacks to previously all-white schools, a situation that was rare even in the areas of the country that had already desegregated; it also would require assignment of whites to Black schools, a practice that was almost unheard of almost anywhere else in

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<sup>12</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 December 1952.

<sup>13</sup>Southern School News, September 1956; Southern School News, September 1957; and W. D. Workman, Jr., "The Deep South," chap. in Don Shoemaker, op cit., p. 89.



the world.<sup>14</sup> This difference was largely responsible for the violent reaction to the Court's decree.<sup>15</sup>

Although Blacks and whites lived and worked in greater proximity to one another in the South, the history of the region presaged a more violent reaction to an adverse Court ruling than elsewhere in the country. It was here that slavery had flourished and its abolition been most strongly resisted; and the area's strong state's rights philosophy, adopted as much for racial considerations as any other cause, meant that the authority of the Court was sure to be challenged. Southern leaders had every right to fear that the repercussions from an adverse ruling in the Brown case might cause deep disruptions in their way of life, their political stability, and their economic rejuvenation. Because of the sad history of slavery, interracial interactions had evolved from a master-slave relationship, a situation that was vastly different than in Northern and Midwestern cities, where Blacks were but one more immigrant group. Southern leaders pointed to several strong demographic differences between the races that made the assignment of whites to Black schools politically impossible. Although most of these distinctions evolved because of the condition of servitude and severe discrimination under which Blacks suffered, nevertheless whites expressed some legiti-

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<sup>14</sup>Williams and Ryan, op cit.

<sup>15</sup>W. D. Workman, op cit., p. 89.

mate concerns about the vast differences that existed between the two populations, even in the urban areas, in health and sanitation, especially the much higher venereal disease rate among Blacks; home environment, that included both social class distinctions and such indicators of poverty as higher incidence of unemployment, public dependency, and single parent families; morality, indicated by higher rates of illegitimacy, incarceration, and teenage pregnancy; and lower intellectual development, measured by lower reading scores, more illiteracy, and higher drop-out rates.<sup>16</sup>

Although a substantial body of evidence has been compiled about those communities that complied immediately with the dictates of the Court either voluntarily or under pressure from the courts, the history of desegregation in the Deep South during the period immediately after the Brown decision takes place almost exclusively in the chambers of the various state legislatures, and not in the local school systems that were most directly threatened by the decision. Thus the story of desegregation in the Urban South between 1954 and 1960 has been told in the hundreds of communities in the Border States that complied (Baltimore, St. Louis, Topeka, Washington, Chattanooga, Clinton (Tennessee), Louisville, Wilmington, and Little Rock,<sup>17</sup> but the record

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<sup>16</sup>W. D. Workman, Jr., op cit., pp. 89 -90.

<sup>17</sup>Robert L. Crain, et al., The Politics of School Desegregation: Comparative Case Studies of Community Structure and Policy-Making (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1968);

during this period is largely missing in the cities of the Deep South that resisted. There the focus has been so completely upon the legislative maneuvering of the states or the legal precedents of the federal courts that the actions of the school boards, city councils, planning commissions, housing authorities, and others charged with the responsibility for planning and leading the cities have been largely ignored. If the history of desegregation in these cities has been written, it has concentrated upon events that occurred after the schools were ordered by the courts to integrate, and not upon what the cities did to prepare for that eventuality during the substantial period of time, at least a decade in most communities, that they had to make arrangements for the demise of de jure segregation. Even then, the focus has been so completely upon desegregation suits and school board actions that the larger context of local governmental action is missing.

One hypothesis of this research is that local officials responded to the threat of court-ordered desegregation in the same manner as their counterparts in state capitals and the Congress, and used every means at their disposal to frustrate, delay, or defuse the impact of school desegrega-

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Southern School News, June, 1956; Southern School News, 3 September 1954; Jeffrey A. Raffel, The Politics of School Desegregation: The Metropolitan Remedy in Delaware (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); and Ray Rist, Desegregated Schools: Appraisals of the American Experience (New York: Academic Press, 1979).

tion in their community. Clearly they were as cognizant of the threat posed by desegregation as their colleagues in the state legislatures--the N.A.A.C.P. legal defense team lawyers began filing court challenges all across the nation shortly after Brown<sup>18</sup>--and the local electorate was making the same kinds of demands as the state-wide constituencies. And certainly local officials were as adept as their brethren in the legislatures in using the powers at their disposal to frustrate and circumvent the dictates of the courts. Even so, however, most of the case studies of local school desegregation controversies in the Deep South do not begin until almost a decade<sup>19</sup> or two<sup>20</sup> later. The record of school desegregation both before the Brown decision and between the decree and its implementation is so blank that one major history of school desegregation covers the entire period between 1954 and 1962 in less than a page;<sup>21</sup> another accomplishes it in six.<sup>22</sup> What happened

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<sup>18</sup>Lino A. Gragila, "From Prohibiting Segregation to Requiring Integration, chap. in Walter G. Stephan and Joe R. Feagin, eds., School Desegregation: Past, Present, and Future, (New York: Plenum Press, 1980), pp. 69-96.

<sup>19</sup>Robert L. Crain, op cit.

<sup>20</sup>Charles V. Willie and Susan L. Greenblatt, Community Politics and Educational Change: Ten School Systems Under Court Order (New York: Longman, Inc., 1981).

<sup>21</sup>George R. Metcalf, From Little Rock to Boston: The History of School Desegregation (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 3.

in the intervening years is largely unknown, although cities and school boards in the Deep South appeared to have both motive and opportunity to move the segregated status of their school systems from de jure to de facto, and possible to hypothesize that they took the same kinds of actions then that they would take a decade later to preserve that status. Only the historical record is missing.

Any attempt to hypothesize a concerted local response to the threat of court-ordered desegregation would have to imply several stages of reaction:

1. An Attempt to Make Separate "Equal," 1950-1955.

Since most Southern leaders were aware of both the legal effort to end school desegregation and the various precedents involved,<sup>23</sup> one thesis of this research is that many urban school systems made a concerted attempt to build new school facilities for Blacks and correct deficiencies in both funding and facilities that might have existed. Several Southern states adopted this approach during the period between 1950, when the threat of court-ordered integration first became apparent, and 1955, when the exact nature and intent of the U. S. Supreme Court and the various federal district courts became known. In 1953, Mississippi,

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<sup>22</sup>Walter G. Stephan, "A Brief Historical Overview of School Desegregation," chap. in Stephan and Feagin, op cit., p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>Sam Ervin, Jr., "The Case for Segregation," Look, 3 April 1956 (v. 20, no. 7), pp. 32-33.

in "anticipation of the U. S. Supreme Court's desegregation decision" created a "foundation plan to preserve segregation on a voluntary basis through [building] equal school facilities."<sup>24</sup> Georgia and South Carolina both began school equalization programs in 1951,<sup>25</sup> while Louisiana,<sup>26</sup> and Oklahoma<sup>27</sup> waited until after the initial Brown decision (1954) before providing massive new funding for school construction targeted to improving Black schools. In most cases, these efforts were begun with new taxing authority, new (sales) taxes, popular referendums and other measures that indicated strong public (white) support for building new schools and upgrading the dilapidated school facilities used by Blacks. The states obviously had their eye on the N.A.A.C.P victories in higher education, because their attention was on more than just the physical facilities of the schools. Everywhere the states felt a new urgency to provide additional funding, facilities, curriculum support, textbooks, and increased teacher salaries for their Black schools. Mississippi increased its appropriations so that 25% more per pupil was allocated for Blacks than whites;<sup>28</sup> salary scales for Black teachers all across the South

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<sup>24</sup>Southern School News, July 1956.

<sup>25</sup>W. D. Workman, Jr., p. 92.

<sup>26</sup>Southern School News, 3 March 1955.

<sup>27</sup>Southern School News, 4 May 1955.

<sup>28</sup>Southern School News, 6 December 1956.

suddenly shot up; and Alabama and Virginia found that Black teachers were actually paid more than whites (because of greater seniority and more advanced degrees).<sup>29</sup>

Thus, one logical extension of this finding is the hypothesis that this effort to create equal but separate schools had its counterpart on the local scene as well, and that during the period that the Brown cases were actually being decided, local school boards and communities turned their own attention to improving Black education: to building new schools; providing playgrounds, cafeterias, auditoriums, libraries, and other facilities to existing facilities; and increasing teacher salaries and spending for textbooks, supplies, training, and other measurable support items as away to ensure that segregation would continue even if such "separate" facilities were required to be truly "equal," the expected decree from the Court.

2. A Transition Period, 1955-1956: from Calmness to Hostility. Initially the states reacted calmly, even going so far as to indicate some intent to comply with the Supreme Court's decision, but this "Wait and See" attitude was quickly followed by open hostility and defiance when the courts began to move to enforce the Brown mandate. From school boards and political leaders all across the South the message was first that they could "handle" desegregation

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<sup>29</sup>Workman, p. 93.

without doing irreparable harm to public education,<sup>30</sup> but soon the states became involved in order to take away any authority local officials might have had to comply. In Virginia, for instance, the governor's attempt at moderation through local action (the Gray Plan) quickly gave way to more defiant measures,<sup>31</sup> and soon states were enacting a bastion of legal measures to insure that local schools would stay segregated.

Those areas in the Border States that attempted compliance with the Court's decree at the outset (i.e., St. Louis, Washington, Baltimore, Tennessee, and Delaware), began to experience an unexpected level of racial turmoil<sup>32</sup> that gave cause for concern to moderates in the Deep South. Hostility first to the Brown decision, and later to the Supreme Court began to grow as Southerners realized that they would receive very little, if any, transition period in their own community. The N.A.A.C.P. kept up its legal pressures, and soon suits were being filed all across the South.<sup>33</sup> In addition, other segregated institutions, such as state parks, city recreation

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<sup>30</sup>Southern School News, 3 September 1954.

<sup>31</sup>James W. Eley, Jr., The Crisis of Conservative Virginia: The Byrd Organization and the Politics of Massive Resistance, Twentieth-Century America Series, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), pp. 36-37.

<sup>32</sup>Southern School News, 4 November 1954.

<sup>33</sup>Lino A. Gragila, "From Prohibiting Segregation to Requiring Integration," op cit.



facilities, and public transportation<sup>34</sup> were being ordered by federal courts to desegregate, and both the intent and authority of the judiciary to enforce its integration orders were becoming clearer.

At the local level this "Wait and See" attitude probably had its most obvious impact upon school building programs, and a number of communities may have delayed new projects until they could better discern the impact of the courts' decisions. This situation at least appears to be prevalent at the state level: by 1956 Mississippi was reporting that only a third of its counties had actually complied with the plan to "equalize" Black schools;<sup>35</sup> Arkansas experienced similar delays in its own districts immediately after the Brown decision;<sup>36</sup> and Virginia newspapers indicated that "there was no longer any great pressure on local officials . . . to continue the special and costly attention to Negro school building programs."<sup>37</sup> One logical extension of this finding is the hypothesis that once communities began again to build schools in the period following Brown, the dictates of that decision were critical in determining the location and size of new buildings. Communities probably abandoned sites under consideration if

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<sup>34</sup>Southern School News, 7 April 1955.

<sup>35</sup>Southern School News, July 1956.

<sup>36</sup>Southern School News, 1 December 1954.

<sup>37</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 13 October 1954.

they were found to be too close to racial dividing lines, and turned instead to new locations that could continue to carry a single race designation.

Although many Southern leaders felt at first that Blacks in their community would be content with equal facilities, their attitude changed when they saw local Blacks aligned with the N.A.A.C.P. efforts to desegregate schools through the courts. At first Southerners tended to blame this change on "outsiders,"<sup>38</sup> and even to see it as a "communist plot,"<sup>39</sup> an inclination that parallels the experience of several Northern and Mid-western cities where there was opposition from the white community to school desegregation.<sup>40</sup> Just as in the cities that had already desegregated, race relations in a number of communities in the Deep South began to deteriorate as whites saw that their own local Blacks leaders had abandoned the call for equality, and were pushing instead for school desegregation.<sup>41</sup> This growing feeling of animosity between the races probably had other outlets in the politics and civic life of most communities, so that the coming crisis over school desegregation colored almost every aspect of racial dialogue. Moreover, those few local school boards that did persist in

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<sup>38</sup>Southern School News, 6 January 1955.

<sup>39</sup>James W. Ely, Jr., op cit., p. 31.

<sup>40</sup>Williams and Ryan, op cit., p. 237.

<sup>41</sup>Southern School News, January 1955.

their efforts to keep harmony between the races soon found themselves isolated by both the Black and white communities.<sup>42</sup>

3. Overt Attempts to Move from de jure to de facto Segregation, 1956-1960. The hostility to the U. S. Supreme Court, Brown, the N.A.A.C.P., and forced school desegregation began to find a number of outlets at the state level. Beginning in November, 1955, state legislatures all across the South began to turn to "interposition"--a long lost constitutional interpretation that compels states to "interpose" their own authority in order to protect their citizens from unjust actions of the federal government--as the answer to continuing segregation. The idea was especially promoted by James J. Kilpatrick, editor of the Richmond News Leader, and swept across the rhetoric of Southern politicians, even in the Border States that had already begun desegregation. Within 18 months after Kilpatrick began to promote interposition as a valid legal doctrine, all eight of the states of the Deep South had passed formal interposition resolutions and a package of laws designed to use the police powers of their state to enforce segregated schools.<sup>43</sup> In addition to the anti-N.A.A.C.P. laws that were enacted in most of the Deep South states, eight states passed pupil placement laws designed to block transfers between white and

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<sup>42</sup>Southern School News, June 1956.

<sup>43</sup>W. D. Workman, Jr., p. 97.

black schools, six states authorized the closing of public schools under the threat of integration, four states provided financial aid to students who attended private schools to escape court-ordered desegregation, and most weakened their laws on compulsory attendance, teacher salaries, transportation, term of teacher contracts, and the like.<sup>44</sup> Each of these laws was an attempt to delay desegregation by forcing the courts to peel away a layer of state government that had been interposed between the local schools and the courts. In addition to state authorities, the logic of interposition was at the heart of the Southern Manifesto signed by 100 Southern Senators and Congressmen; the Manifesto proclaimed that "integration was contrary to established law," and professed that government officials had a duty to resist integration "with every legal means" at their disposal.<sup>45</sup> Thus, one logical assumption is that local officials also attempted in their own way to "interpose" the authority of their own level of government between the courts and the schools. As the smoke from the political rhetoric began to clear at the state level, the focus appears to have shifted to localities, because they possessed a number of exclusive powers in the administration of public schools that could be useful in delaying even the most

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<sup>44</sup>Patrick E. McCauley, "Be It Enacted," chap. in Don Shoemaker, ed., "With All Deliberate Speed," op cit., p. 132.

<sup>45</sup>Walter G. Stephan, op cit., p. 12.

aggressive court: foremost among these was the power to actually assign pupils to schools. The editors of Southern School News indicated that seven states were investigating the potential of creative use of pupil assignment authority as a way to deter integration.

Authorities in school administration are of the opinion that the power to assign individual pupils to particular schools is an inherent one, essential to the efficient operation of the schools . . . . It is not necessary that a child be assigned to the school most conveniently located for his attendance . . . . Legal precedents supporting school boards' pupil assignment powers . . . uphold the authority of school boards to assign pupils on the basis of factors relevant to education and the efficient administration of the school system.<sup>46</sup>

Southern legal scholars also seized upon the assignment of school attendance zones as an administrative local power that was corollary to the actual assignment of individual students. Several factors, other than the race of the students, could be used to support the creation of school attendance zones: the distance from home to school, the maximum utilization of school space, transportation considerations, topographical barriers, and the conformity of institutions (in order to prevent frequent transfers).<sup>47</sup> One study of integration in Northern and Mid-

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<sup>46</sup>Southern School News, February 1957.

<sup>47</sup>"Report of the Subcommittee on Zoning," New York Board of Education, 14 December 1956, reprinted in Race Relations Law Reporter 1: 5 (October 1956), p. 847.

western cities found a distinct pattern of drawing attendance zones to fit the racial characteristics of the neighborhoods, rather than just the geographic proximity to the school.<sup>48</sup> One logical assumption is that Southern school officials became just as adept at blocking desegregation with this technique as their Northern counterparts were in limiting integration. The city of Charlottesville, for instance, when faced with court-ordered desegregation, divided itself into six elementary school zones; the lines of one zone were so carefully drawn that they included almost all of the Black students who had applied to go to previously all-white schools.<sup>49</sup>

Courts were also not disposed to dispute the power of local school boards to locate and build schools, even when the placement of the building had the same effect, because of prevailing housing patterns in the community, as designating the building as a "white" or "Black" school. This was the practice in several Northern cities with substantial Black populations, and it was able to withstand judicial review even when the evidence indicated that the choice of a particular school location was dictated more by the desire to limit integration than sound pedagogical considerations:

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<sup>48</sup>Williams and Ryan, op cit., p. 57.

<sup>49</sup>Southern School News, September 1958.

The fact that in a given area a school is populated almost exclusively by the children of a given race is not of itself evidence of discrimination . . . [thus] the choice of school sites is a permissible exercise of administrative discretion.<sup>50</sup>

Not only was the careful location of school buildings to minimize integration accepted by the courts, it was a course strongly urged by Richmond News Leader editor James J. Kilpatrick, who was fast becoming the chief spokesman of Southern defiance to the Court. In an editorial just a few days (May 20, 1954) after the U. S. Supreme Court's initial decision in the Brown case, and before any real enforcement effort was expected, Kilpatrick opined that:

A great part of the problem, especially in the cities, could be handled by the relocation of school buildings and the gerrymandering of enrollment lines.

Not only was such a course urged, at least one researcher has found strong evidence to suggest that the Richmond School Board, under the leadership of Lewis F. Powell, Jr., who was later to sit on the U. S. Supreme Court, built several new schools in Black neighborhoods in accordance with this effort to forestall desegregation efforts.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Shannon Marguerite Henry v. Walter Godsell, et al., U. S. District Court, Michigan, 12 August 1958, No. 14,769, reprinted in Race Relations Law Reporter 3: 5 (October 1958), pp. 914-916.

<sup>51</sup>James W. Eley, Jr. op cit., pp. 36, 134.

In addition to the placement of the building, the determination of the size of the building and the number of students to be served was also an undisputed administrative authority of local boards. So also was the ability to shift or realign the attendance zone of a school threatened by court-ordered integration so that its racial designation was dramatically changed. This strategy was applied successfully in Newport News, when Thomas Jefferson, the city's newest elementary school, was threatened with court-ordered integration. At the opening of the 1955-56 school year, parents of ten Black students tried to enroll their children. Within a week the School Board voted to shift the attendance zone, and turn the school over to the Black community rather than integrate it. The federal judge (Walter Hoffman) refused to intervene, ruling that even the post hoc assignment of attendance zones was a permissible administrative authority of local school boards.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, although almost every school board in the South was focusing, because of the particular precedent set in the Brown case, upon the proximity of Blacks students to nearby white schools,<sup>53</sup> a realization was growing that the boards were not powerless before the courts. Legal scholars were careful to point out that:

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<sup>52</sup>Southern School News, October 1955.

<sup>53</sup>Southern School News, August 1957.



The Constitution, in other words, does not require integration. It merely forbids discrimination. It does not forbid such discrimination as occurs as a result of voluntary action [such as choice of residence, neighborhood, city, etc.].<sup>54</sup>

One other assumption is that local governments, just like their school boards, were also willing to use every legal means at their disposal to delay or deter the threat of school desegregation. The single power most directly related to public education was the authority to control the finances of the school system. Especially in Virginia, a state with dependent school districts, education relied heavily upon the revenue support of local governments; evidence suggests that several of these municipalities used their power of the purse during the desegregation crisis to intimidate the Black community and manipulate the local school board. The state enacted a special funds cut off law that allowed localities to appropriate school funds on a month to month, instead of an annual, basis, and a number of rural counties relied upon this authority to indicate their willingness to close down public schools threatened with court-ordered desegregation.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to the powers to finance and administer public schools, which included the authority to assign students, draw attendance zones, locate and construct

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<sup>54</sup>Southern School News, August 1956.

<sup>55</sup>Southern School News, 6 July 1955.

buildings, local governments had the considerable powers of urban renewal--redevelopment, city planning, zoning, code enforcement, and economic development--at their disposal. Although the historical record offers very little direct evidence that these powers were used to forestall school integration, the director of the federal Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) has indicated that a number of Southern cities used urban renewal powers to break up integrated low-income neighborhoods in order to achieve de facto segregation:

Where, in a few Southern cities, there had been a protest against this, a compromise was sometimes reached involving proposed re-use for other than residential purposes. Thus a slum formerly housing both Negro and white families was proposed as the location for industry or a public institution. Urban renewal too often seemed to be an instrument for wiping out racially integrated living.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, if applied judiciously, urban renewal authority could be made to complement other local efforts to forestall court-ordered desegregation. In fact, many of the municipal powers of urban renewal parallel the powers of school boards to creatively administer their own authority in order to replace de jure with de facto segregation, only the unit of measurement changes: instead of schools, one is altering

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<sup>56</sup>Robert C. Weaver, "The Urban Complex," chap. in Jewel Bellush and Murray Hausknecht, eds., Urban Renewal: People, Politics, and Planning (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 94.

neighborhoods. For instance, since topographical barriers were a valid consideration when assigning school attendance zones, acquisition of additional land under the urban renewal powers of a city for parks, playgrounds, state colleges, industrial parks, or other public purposes could be used to place legal topographical barriers between neighborhoods, and thus preserve the racial character of the schools that served those neighborhoods, in spite of the fact that some Blacks may have lived closer to a white school. Similarly, the placement of an interstate highway, one of the strategies used in Mobile, Alabama, could be used to divide neighborhoods and school attendance zones into racially distinct areas.<sup>57</sup> Some evidence exists that these techniques were used in other cities outside of the Deep South. One major study of school integration found that St. Louis and Baltimore may have used a combination of natural geographic barriers and selective redevelopment to keep Blacks confined to racially distinct school attendance zones.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, just as they could tear down or close schools directly threatened by court-ordered integration and rebuild new schools in areas where the racial composition was more clearly defined, cities may have used their powers of redevelopment, as Robert Weaver has charged, to tear down

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<sup>57</sup>Willie and Greenblatt, op cit., p. 189.

<sup>58</sup>Robert L. Crain, et al., op cit., pp. 15, 72-73.

mixed race or transition areas where the racial composition of neighborhood schools would have been equally mixed.<sup>59</sup> Parallel to the power to size the school to the capacity of the neighborhood in order to keep its racial identity, is the authority, through redevelopment, to adjust the size of the neighborhood to meet the racial designation of the school. Also, just as school boards could alter attendance zones, cities could change their own size through merger and annexation, and thus alter the pattern of school attendance. When Newport News was faced with court-ordered desegregation in 1958, for instance, the city merged with Warwick County, and the resultant ripple effect on school attendance zones allowed it to successfully delay integration for another year.<sup>60</sup> Richmond also used this strategy effectively, and at least one study has indicated that its efforts to annex surrounding counties was motivated largely by racial and school desegregation considerations.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, local governments had at their disposal a much larger arsenal of powers than even the states that could be "interposed" between the courts and the schools in order to forestall court-ordered school desegregation. Evidence also suggests that some, if not all, of these powers of urban renewal and school plant planning were used in some cities

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<sup>59</sup>Robert C. Weaver, op cit.

<sup>60</sup>Southern School News, January 1959.

<sup>61</sup>Willie and Greenblatt, op cit., pp. 231-232.

to achieve de facto segregation as a replacement for de jure systems. Unfortunately, the state of school desegregation research is such that, except for isolated incidents that may be the exception, rather than the rule, insufficient evidence exists to determine just how far cities in the Deep South were willing to go in applying these powers in their effort to forestall integration. If the rhetoric of their counterparts in the U. S. Congress and state legislatures is to be believed, however, some assumption may be made that local officials were willing to use every lawful means at their disposal to prevent integration, and to this end the extensive arsenal of school administrative, planning, redevelopment, and urban renewal powers were used to carve out racially distinct school districts and attendance zones.

Certainly plaintiffs in a number of school desegregation suits have charged that cities used their various urban renewal powers deliberately to create segregated neighborhoods, strictly enforce well defined color barriers, isolate Black populations, relocate integrated schools, and otherwise frustrate efforts to desegregate.<sup>62</sup> Their claim has been in part supported by demographic researchers<sup>63</sup> and

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<sup>62</sup>Karl Taeuber, "Desegregation of Public School Districts: Persistence and Change," Phi Delta Kappan 72: 1, (September, 1990), pp 18-24.

<sup>63</sup>Gary Orfield, "Ghettoization and Its Alternatives," chap. in Paul E. Peterson, ed., The New Urban Reality (Washington, D. C.: Brookings Institution, 1985), pp. 161-196.

other social scientists,<sup>64</sup> but they have chosen to blame school boards, rather than redevelopment authorities, planning commissions, or city councils, for efforts to replace de jure with de facto segregation. Educational authorities, however, have largely overlooked these charges, and chosen to focus instead on the political implications of school board decisions only when they were finally faced with a court order to desegregate, an approach that ignores the fact that most communities had at least a decade to prepare for the demise of de jure segregation. For this reason, the actions of school boards, as well as those of other political and municipal leaders, during the period just before and after the Brown decision have remained largely unrecognized. In fact, the focus on school board actions so late in the controversy has lent credence to the school-board-as-villain theory in a number of communities, when the truth may be that school boards were merely being dragged along in the planning, redevelopment, and housing activities of other local authorities; that is, that the placement of schools and drawing of new attendance zones was the last act in a far more elaborate plot to replace de jure with de facto segregation--a drama in which Southern school boards may have really played only a minor role. Thus,

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<sup>64</sup>Karl Taueber, "Residence and Race: 1619 to 2019," chap. in Winston A. Van Horne, ed., Race: Twentieth Century Dilemmas--Twenty-First Century Prognoses (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 1989).

partly because the previous educational histories of the period focused so exclusively upon the events surrounding the actions of school boards only when they were finally implementing a court decision, they may have ignored the other cast of characters--the interplay of activity with other municipal agencies that may be involved--and also missed the first few acts of the school desegregation drama.

In fact, one further assumption is that cities used their urban renewal powers more often to forestall school desegregation in the 1950s than in the 1960s, the decade for which some documentation exists. Not only was the motivation perhaps stronger in the 1950s, because of the prevalence of the interposition doctrine, the courts and community groups would exercise less scrutiny of actions that bore the imprint of racial planning, partly because up to that point all planning in the Deep South, and most of the rest of the nation as well, was designed to support the "separate but equal" doctrine in housing and "neighborhoods of choice" concepts that were legally permissible for several years after Brown.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, even without the school desegregation controversy, the decade of the 1950s would have been challenging enough for the school boards and municipal leaders of the Urban South. The mass migration of Blacks that had taken place earlier from the rural South to

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<sup>65</sup>Heywood, et al. v. Public Housing Administration, 135 F. Supp 217, reprinted in Race Relations Law Reporter 1: 2 (April, 1956), p. 347.

Northern cities shifted after World War II to include the major Southern urban centers. Most of the older cities of the South did not have a central ghetto or Black district like their Northern counterparts; instead almost every white, middle-class neighborhood had a small concentration of Blacks living nearby from which its domestic workers were drawn.<sup>66</sup> Since both the housing and the schools were strictly segregated in accordance with state laws, the burden of maintaining separate race schools was placed almost exclusively upon Black children, who, because of the dispersal of their neighborhoods, had to be bused across town to achieve racially separate schools. Yet this was exactly the situation outlawed in the Brown case--Linda Brown was being bused past the white schools in Topeka, Kansas<sup>67</sup>--and it was the circumstance most directly under attack by N.A.A.C.P. lawyers.<sup>68</sup>

The changing pattern of Black migration was not, however, the only force defining the need for urban renewal. The military build up that had taken place during World War II continued through the Korean conflict and on into the Cold War era, placing enormous pressures on Sunbelt cities to plan and build for the influx of population and indus-

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<sup>66</sup>Karl E. and Alma F. Taueber, Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1965), pp. 23-122.

<sup>67</sup>Southern School News, September 1958.

<sup>68</sup>Walter G. Stephan, op cit., p. 13.



tries. Veterans returning from the war and their "baby boom" offspring began to place their own demand for more housing, schools, shopping centers, and public services. In short, the 1950s was a decade of shifting population, housing, and land use policies, especially in the Urban South, and it was here that the tools of redevelopment, land use planning, school planning, and urban renewal really came of age.<sup>69</sup>

In light of the enormous controversy surrounding school desegregation late in the decade, one reasonable speculation is that these same tools may have been just as easily applied to prevent certain land uses, especially those related to integrated school districts, as they were to promote others more acceptable to school and municipal leaders. The mammoth building boom that was going on in schools and houses could just as easily have been directed to preserve racially identifiable districts as to advance the other goals of community planning, but the record is either missing or unclear. Even so, in the Urban South there was both opportunity, in the shifting patterns of school attendance zones and housing that were taking place any way, and motive, in the effort to preserve a segregated society, to hypothesize that the powers of urban renewal were used to preserve segregated schools as much as

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<sup>69</sup>Carl Abbott, The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

possible. The older cities of the South also experienced an urgency of situation--Blacks living in closer proximity to white schools than their own--that added impetus to their motive. One prediction based upon these assumptions is that the level of official efforts to replace de jure with de facto segregation is directly proportional to three predictor variables: (1) the extent of opposition to court-ordered integration, a relative constant across the entire South; (2) the urgency of the situation, a measure of Black housing dispersion and potentially mixed-race schools as well as the immediacy of a court order to integrate the schools; and (3) ample opportunity in large scale planning, redevelopment, and urban renewal efforts. It is assumed that where these three variables were present to a large degree, new schools, highways, redevelopment projects, and other public initiatives were undertaken in part to achieve racially segregated school districts, i.e., to move from de jure to de facto segregation with all deliberate speed.

Part of the purpose of this work is to test the theory of a link between efforts to preserve school segregation and urban renewal activities by examining one community, Norfolk, with both strong motive and ample opportunity to apply the powers of local government to oppose court-ordered desegregation. In short, this effort will attempt to show that the placement of new school buildings, redevelopment projects, and major public facilities, both immediately

before and after Brown, was designed in part to delay or deter the threat of court-ordered school integration. Thus, this work, although largely an urban history of Norfolk during the 1950s, will attempt to fill in a major gap in school desegregation research on the decade.

When educational authorities have seriously looked at efforts to desegregate public schools, they have chosen either the "white flight" scenario advanced by James Coleman<sup>70</sup> and David Armor<sup>71</sup> or the more benign explanation of Orfield's economic choices,<sup>72</sup> Charles Willie and Susan Greenblatt's "tipping theory,"<sup>73</sup> the "avoidance" theory of Cataldo, Giles, and Gatlan.<sup>74</sup> Most of the research supporting these propositions comes from the 1960s,<sup>75</sup> however, and ignores any exploration of the

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<sup>70</sup>James S. Coleman, Sara P. Kelly, and John A. Moore, Trends in School Segregation, 1968-1973 (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 1975).

<sup>71</sup>David J. Armor, "White Flight and the Future of School Desegregation," chap. in Walter G. Stephan and Joe R. Feagin, eds., School Desegregation: Past, Present, and Future, (New York: Plenum Press, 1980), pp. 187-225.

<sup>72</sup>Gary Orfield, "School Segregation and Residential Segregation," chap. in Stephan and Feagin, School Desegregation: Past, Present, and Future, op cit., pp. 231-244.

<sup>73</sup>Charles V. Willie and Susan L. Greenblatt, Community Politics and Educational Change: Ten School Systems Under Court Order, op cit.

<sup>74</sup>Everett F. Cataldo, Michael W. Giles, and Douglas S. Gatlin, School Desegregation Policy: Compliance, Avoidance, and the Metropolitan Remedy (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Company, 1978).

<sup>75</sup>James S. Coleman, et al., op cit.

charges that school boards or other municipal authorities took deliberate efforts to replace de jure with de facto segregation before that time.

Thus, not only does a serious gap exist in the study of school desegregation efforts between the time Brown was contemplated and actually implemented, there is also a compelling need for a more complete analysis of the interplay between school desegregation, city planning, redevelopment, school plant planning, and urban renewal efforts. The current study proposes to fill that gap by focusing on one city where there was both ample opportunity and strong motive to hypothesize such a link.

Norfolk turns out to be a remarkable city for such a study: not only did it face an historic school desegregation controversy late in the decade that led to the closing of its previously all-white junior and senior high schools, it also gained national recognition as one of the cities that was most proficient in the use of the powers of redevelopment, land use planning, and urban renewal. In fact, by the end of the decade Norfolk had bulldozed more acres, demolished more homes, and erected more public housing units (per capita population) than almost any other city in the nation.<sup>76</sup> Thus, only two events make the history of Norfolk remarkable during this era--the ferocity

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<sup>76</sup>Jean L. Stinchcombe, Reform and Reaction: City Politics in Toledo (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1968), p. 134.

of its attack upon urban blight, and the tenacity of its resistance to school integration; that they may be inexorably linked should come as no surprise.

Not only was Norfolk the first city in the nation to qualify for federal urban renewal assistance, its initial redevelopment project was used by the rest of the nation as a model of careful and humanitarian planning considerations.<sup>77</sup> Like other cities in the Urban South, it faced tremendous pressures to build new schools, housing, and public facilities during the population boom of the 1950s. Even so, shortly after the implications of the Brown decision became clear, Norfolk launched into a new phase of both school construction and redevelopment that closed or demolished a dozen schools and the homes of 20,000 people--almost 10% of the city's population--and cleared more than 800 acres in and around the downtown area, giving it the appearance of one of the war-ravaged cities of Eastern Europe.<sup>78</sup> Even though the city had some really antiquated schools, the buildings closed or demolished were not the worst in the city; in fact many took on new life as administrative offices, textbook depositories, or maintenance facilities. Similarly, although the city had substan-

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<sup>77</sup>"Federal Slum Clearance Gets Its First Full Scale Tryout in Norfolk, Va.," Architectural Forum, May 1950, pp. 134-138.

<sup>78</sup>John C. Schmidt, "Norfolk: A City Remakes Itself," Baltimore, March 1969, reprinted by the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

tial slum properties, the areas that were demolished did not for the most part consist of the most dilapidated housing in the city; instead they were largely the environs of the white working class, complete with modern plumbing and central heat, in a spite of the fact that the city was still combating pit privies, community outhouses, and tar paper shacks. Norfolk in 1950 fit the pattern of most of the other older urban centers in the South, i.e., there were pockets of Black population scattered all across the city; by 1960, however, this arrangement had changed,<sup>79</sup> and these mixed-race or transition areas appear to have either been the focus of redevelopment efforts or else were served by new "vest pocket" schools sized to maintain separate but equal facilities.

Although the story in Norfolk may be more compelling than elsewhere, it is not thought to be unique; instead Norfolk was selected precisely because its extensive use of the powers of urban renewal and its historic school desegregation conflict make just such a revelatory case study possible. Motive is difficult, if not impossible, to infer from a single or even a string of isolated actions, but in Norfolk the trail is extensive enough to make such implications possible.

Even though the "motive" behind such actions may be difficult to determine in ex post facto research, one may

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<sup>79</sup>Taueber and Taueber, op cit., pp. 35-96.

still closely examine the elements that lay behind Norfolk's school plant decisions and its major phases of redevelopment. Jean Stinchcombe, in her classic study of redevelopment in Toledo and other cities, points to the four elements that are necessary to carry out such an extensive urban redevelopment program: strong political leadership, clarity and continuity of direction, administrative competence, and strong community support. Although she concludes that these are almost never present for a sustained period in cities with a council-manager form of government, a footnote points to Norfolk as an exception, a deviant case with extensive redevelopment activity.<sup>80</sup>

Because Norfolk appears so different in this regard, some other unifying element may have been present that was more powerful than the usual mix of politics and civic pride which helped this city overcome the limitations normally inherent in its form of government, and united both its citizenry and its political leadership behind a dramatic course of redevelopment activity. This dissertation hypothesizes that fear of school desegregation in Norfolk was a motivating force behind the city's sudden shift in school operations and the second phase of its redevelopment activities; and that, in Norfolk, the effort to preserve segregated schools provided the power to overcome a fragmented political structure, divided priorities over future

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<sup>80</sup>Jean L. Stinchcombe, op cit., pp. 129-150.

direction, shifts in administrative leadership, and apathetic community support.

The research for this study relies upon a variety of primary source materials: census tract data on the racial mix and condition of the housing in the redeveloped neighborhoods were used to explore the motive for their demolition; school board memoranda, legal briefs, planning documents, capital project budgets, and newspaper clippings have been examined in an effort to determine the attendance zones, population served, location, and date of demolition of the school buildings effected by redevelopment. Secondary sources include books, journals, and articles from the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, Ledger-Dispatch, and Journal and Guide newspapers.

As a historical case study, the research probes the line between purely historical and case study research, especially applying the accepted methodology of critical case or exemplary case study research.<sup>81</sup> When the project was first envisioned (1974), a number of the principle subjects involved in the various planning and redevelopment decisions were still alive, and interviews were conducted at that time as part of a larger oral history approach. For the most part, the interviews were not really helpful: like Watergate witnesses, the subjects either developed a

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<sup>81</sup>See Robert K. Yin, Case Study Research: Design and Methods, Revised Edition (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1989), pp. 47, 113, 139.



selective memory of controversial decisions or else sought to smooth over any potential controversy with bland platitudes. Because many of the individuals are now deceased, interviews with several groups of secondary actors were also utilized. One such group included individuals in the bureaucratic, as opposed to the political structure, of planning and administration. By and large these persons are younger than the principles, and therefore more likely to be alive. The drawback in relying too completely upon this group is " that although they were more willing to reveal the influence of certain groups and individuals behind major decisions with which they were involved, they tended to see the city from a very selective view, that focused just upon school issues, city planning, code enforcement, or redevelopment decisions, for instance, without placing these in the larger context of just what motivated these decisions. For this reason, a second group of primary observers was developed from the newspaper reporters and editors who covered the various events of the era. These individuals also tended to be younger than the primary actors, but unlike the other secondary players, they were trained to see events both in detail and to place them in the larger context by analyzing trends, transitions, trade-offs, and trivialities. Several former reporters confirmed the wisdom of this approach by observing that newspapermen of this era earned their reputation by "how much they knew but didn't tell."

The project focused upon the link between school desegregation and the planning, politics, and redevelopment in the city of Norfolk from 1950 to 1959. Redevelopment and planning decisions were studied by examining what types of projects or public policies were planned, who proposed or opposed them, when they were advanced, and why--i.e., an assessment of their impact, both intended and actual, by looking at the target group or location. Educational decisions were examined chiefly in the context of the location of new schools and the relationship between site selection and the city's larger planning and redevelopment processes.

A second and related approach has been to more closely examine the relationship between these issues--desegregation, planning and redevelopment--and the various groups struggling for power. To this end, Robert Dahl's issues approach was applied to discern the various different types of power in the community, and especially who had the power to make certain decisions. In studying political, educational, and redevelopment decisions in New Haven, Dahl found that politicians tended to focus their efforts on the political arena, the city's big businessmen dominated redevelopment and planning decisions, and educational policy was left largely to middle-class community leaders who had little interest in either redevelopment or politics.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Robert A. Dahl, Who Governs? (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1961).

One thesis of the current research project is that while the focus of these different leadership groups may vary, a single compelling community controversy, like school desegregation may cut across all levels of decision-making. In the midst of such a controversy, the approach of these various groups will differ, even when they are faced with the same problem: politicians make political decisions, even on issues related to redevelopment policy or the location of school buildings; businessmen support economic ends so ardently that they will abandon even the most tightly held personal philosophy (i.e., segregation) to protect economic growth; civic leaders look to the potential for impact upon their own constituency; and social activists seek to enhance their own agenda. Although their motives may be different, a single unifying fear or compelling issue may be powerful enough to build a consensus for dramatic action even among these very different and disparate groups.

The initial stage of the research was conducted by utilizing the extensive local history collection at the Sargeant Memorial Room in the Kirn Memorial Library in Downtown Norfolk. Clip files are maintained in relative chronological order by topics (i.e., "School Construction 1," Government and Politics, Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority), location (i.e., Patrick Henry Elementary School, Atlantic City, Broad Creek Village) and by biographical entries. Back copies of the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot,

Ledger-Dispatch, and Journal and Guide newspapers were then reviewed during the time frame of major events, court decisions, project announcements, budget statements, municipal elections, or other transition points for background articles, editorials, letters to the editor, and contrasting opinions. In addition to these largely secondary sources, a few other depositories of primary source material still exist. Minutes of crucial school board meetings and documents held by the City of Norfolk, such as back copies of master plans, consultants reports, capital projects budgets, and the like were helpful in identifying key school, planning, and municipal actions under study. Historical materials held by the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority were also reviewed. The Archive Section of the Old Dominion University Library has the private papers of a few individuals or groups, including those collected for this work (i.e., the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools).

Once an extensive review of the written source material was complete, the research moved into an oral history phase that concentrated upon developing taped interviews with both the remaining living principals and key secondary participants. At this point in the research a more complete operational definition of both the "who" and the "what" under study was formulated in order to develop probing questions that would be used to explore the "how."

Interviews on a related topic were conducted earlier (in 1975) with the last remaining councilmen, planning commissioners, and housing authority commissioners, several of whom are now deceased. Only one city councilman and one school board member from the era were still alive for interview. The current study continued to follow that earlier format: each person was asked leading questions about their role in the events and decisions of the city, as well as their relationship with and perception of other key individuals, groups, or projects that took place during the period. Interviewees were not asked about the existence of a "power structure," as in Floyd Hunter's research,<sup>83</sup> but rather queried as to who actually made certain decisions about selected projects or policy directions familiar to the interviewee. Each individual was interviewed in his own home or office, and the tape recorder was placed on the least obtrusive setting (i.e., remote or battery power, condenser or directional mike) in order to reduce the subject's anxiety. After a few introductory questions to reconfirm the subject's formal role in the events, each person was asked to give his impression of the era as a means to set an informal tone for the interview. In order to reduce the interjection of bias on the part of the interviewer, each of the subjects was afforded a full

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<sup>83</sup>Floyd W. Hunter, Community Power Structure, (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1953).

opportunity to tell his own story without interruptions or unnecessary prodding. At the conclusion of this portion of the interview, each subject was asked a few issue specific questions related to his particular role or area of expertise, his impression of other competing power groups, and his conclusion as to who actually made certain community decisions of which he might have been aware.

The "what" includes the location of new school buildings, such as Tidewater Park, Roberts Park, Young Park, Titustown, Coronado, and Rosemont; the panoply of events surrounding the school crisis of 1958-1959; the development of major planning and redevelopment projects, such as Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority Project One, the master plan for the central business district, the highway plan, the placement of the public library and other community facilities, and redevelopment projects for the Atlantic City, Downtown, Broad Creek, Lamberts Point, and Brambleton sections of the city; and major innovations in municipal policy, such as the development of building, zoning, housing, and health codes, as well as their relative enforcement or the selectivity of enforcement.

The major risk in any such undertaking is that the historian, or his readers, will apply the moral perspective of the 1990s to judge events that happened more than three decades ago. Not only is this wrong, this judgement is unfair to the individuals who were forced to make critical

decisions in a difficult age. To say that events herein described are controversial is an understatement. Emotions were strong and key issues were hotly debated, albeit behind closed doors; unless we are free as students of the era to perceive and analyze events without injecting the biases of our own time, the field of serious local history will be abandoned to "puff pieces" and promotional tracts that sanitize the past in order to promote investment in the present.

The advantage of historical perspective--hindsight--is a crucial element to examining the events of any era, and enables a more complete analysis of the context, events, issues, motivations, and the various approaches to desegregation, redevelopment, planning and related issues in the pre- and post-Brown eras than was possible through contemporaneous studies, single issue treatises, or works from the period immediately following the era. Nevertheless, any approach would be unfair to the citizens of the 1950s if it required them to share the same advantage of our own more modern perspective in order to get fair treatment in a history of their own period. The public officials herein depicted were responding to tremendous public pressure to use whatever means were legal and appropriate to protect what was seen as an important element in their daily lives. That they enjoyed the overwhelming support of their constituencies in these undertakings is evident in the voting patterns of the era. In a democratic society we must be

prepared to accept the fact that powerful and principled elected leaders will do everything in their authority to respond to such a mandate without condemning in any way their actions. This is above all else a story of power-- power that was abused only when the moral standards and historical hindsight of the 1990s are inappropriately applied.



## PROLOGUE

### NORFOLK BEFORE 1950

Four sailors with a barmaid in tow steamed out into Granby Street and launched into a chorus of "Roll Out The Barrel." A single car cut out of traffic and pulled to the curb, jubilantly sounding its horn over their slurred rendition of the chorus. This mild commotion on an otherwise still August afternoon stirred onlookers from their shaded refuge in the shops and storefronts that lined the street; a few quick words were exchanged, and the news flashed through the gathering crowd. Other cars began sounding their horns in salute, and soon a blaring procession of automobiles was inching its way past the swelling throng. The taverns along Beer Barrel Row began closing their doors as their patrons rushed to join the melee in the street. The "Roll-Out-The-Barrel" boys had by now picked up a chorus line of converts that was snake-dancing arm in arm through the stalled traffic. Streamers of toilet paper drifted down from the offices above, the opening salvos in a furious fusillade of impromptu confetti that belied the constraints of wartime rationing. The merry-makers who danced in the streets below were the precursors of one of the most raucous, brawling,

celebrations in Norfolk's history. The day was Tuesday, August 14, 1945--V-J Day--and the radio had just signaled the end of World War II. Not since Patrick Henry's army of patriots had burned this Tory stronghold to the ground had the nation's domestic military forces had such a grand night on the town. One solemn sailor surveyed the jubilant commotion that surrounded him and summed up the frequent lament of his colleagues, "Of all the damned places to be when this thing happened, we had to be in Norfolk."<sup>1</sup>

The following day dawned quietly for the city; half of its population were nursing their worst hangover of modern times. The other half--Norfolk's more permanent residents--faced an even grimmer morning after. The city's streets were empty, its shops, banks and government offices having been closed for a day of prayer and thanksgiving. Gone were the sailors, the shipyard workers, the snake dancers, the blaring automobiles, and the drunken carousers of the night before; even the taverns and the bawdy houses of Beer Barrel Row were closed for the day. Here and there the white Dixie cup of a sailor's cap bobbed among the flotsam of confetti and other jetsam of the celebration. A handful of bleary-eyed strangers still ruled this empty roost from perches tucked away well off the beaten path.<sup>2</sup> To Norfolk's more permanent residents this panorama of desertion served as a

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<sup>1</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 August 1945.

<sup>2</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 16 August 1945.

grim reminder of what the city would be like without its Navy; while the war was raging overseas they had thought only of tolerating this domestic military invasion until they could reclaim the city as their own--the city had given little thought to really making a "home" for its transient population. Now that the war was officially over, however, the thought of empty streets and the fleet's departure struck the community to the core, rousing it from its civic stupor and infusing it with a thirst for fresh leadership and new direction.

Control of city hall had long been in the hands of the city's professional politicians, a group that had always shown tremendous willingness to run the show without external interference. The "Prieur Machine," as the local affiliate of the statewide (Harry F.) Byrd Organization was called, was run by Clerk of Courts William "Billy" Prieur. Time and circumstances over the course of the Depression and the war years had combined to make the Prieur Machine far more powerful than either the perks of office or the patronage of political organization would have indicated.

Since they were powerless to influence the deliberations at city hall, and unwilling to risk the ire of the Organization that controlled so many jobs in a hard strapped economy, Norfolk's business and financial leaders turned their attention instead during the Depression to a more receptive arena, the sphere of civic involvement. Not only

did they achieve great success in these endeavors, well separated from the political operations of the city, they also forged key alliances and learned to build a community coalition of their own that would one day rival the more entrenched political operatives. Through the Community Chest and a number of related charities, the businessmen worked tirelessly to relieve the suffering of their fellow citizens; through the National Recovery Administration and its volunteer successor, the Emergency Relief Commission, they learned to rely on federal support in this effort. Through their own Citizens Crime Commission they studied the harsh economic impact that slums had, not only upon the cost of city services, but also upon the lives of their inhabitants.

The war years had brought incredible hardships to the citizens and great turmoil to city government. Norfolk experienced a tremendous period of growth at the start of the war, and its population would double, even triple on the weekends, as thousands of sailors, soldiers, and shipyard workers descended upon the downtown area for leave on the town. This put an enormous strain upon both the city's municipal services and its aging housing stock; the politicians were so reluctant to provide even essential municipal services for these new, more "temporary," residents that the Navy Department had to step in to build schools, parks, playgrounds, recreation areas, highways, utilities, and a

host of other projects. The businessmen forged their own alliance with the Navy, and, acting as the Norfolk Housing Authority, built thousands of new housing units for the servicemen.

The first postwar problems, however, began to appear almost immediately as the specter of closed stores and empty streets served as a grim reminder of the fact that, in peacetime, Norfolk would again have to stand on its own financial feet: no longer would the Navy be willing to foot the bill for some much-needed and long overdue municipal improvement. That prospect so frightened city hall that the City Council called for a cutback in planned improvement projects and current levels of service.<sup>3</sup> This proved to be the final straw for Norfolk's business establishment: they had endured the national vilification of the city in the media and halls of Congress for its sordid nightlife, but they would not now stand for a self-imposed recession. Area businessmen knew that the city could not maintain its position in the world of trade by depending solely upon merchant shipping and local industries; Norfolk needed the Navy, now more than ever, and local merchants turned their efforts furiously into remaking the city into a place where the Navy would want to stay, rather than remain known infamously as the world's worst liberty port. The subsequent uproar of

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<sup>3</sup>Marvin W. Schlegel, Conscripted City: Norfolk In World War II (Norfolk: Norfolk War History Commission, 1951), p. 361.

merchants and businessmen over proposed municipal cutbacks prompted a dramatic turn of events. The powder keg of civic unrest was finally ignited.

Almost as suddenly as the tides of war began to recede, a new wave of community pride and civic boosterism rose to take its place. The war years that had witnessed a dramatic upsurge in citizen activity to accommodate and alleviate the bombardment of Navy personnel<sup>4</sup> now gave way to a new direction in civic involvement. The civic leaders who had gone all out to beef up the wartime charities to serve the new, transient population were not now content to rest. The club ladies who had knocked themselves out to provide wholesome entertainment for "the boys" were no longer content to sit at home. The volunteers who had staffed the bandage brigades and peopled the U.S.O.'s were looking for a new cause. The transient residents who had poured into the city during the war years were now almost as established as the old-timers; they would not tolerate a cutback in the very services and facilities designed to meet their needs. Thus, all of these diverse elements--the civic, the business, the volunteer, and the transient communities--had a hand in forcing the issue of Norfolk's postwar renewal out into the open; all of them urged a dramatic reversal of municipal policy.

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<sup>4</sup>Theodore A. Curtin, A Marriage of Convenience: Norfolk and the Navy, masters thesis (Norfolk: Old Dominion University, 1969), pp. 148-149, 130-138.

Another issue seethed beneath the surface of this desire for change. During the war crime had become big business in the city. Gamblers, prostitutes, racketeers, and bootleggers had invaded the area--as they invariably do to all boom towns--to cater to the more salacious desires of sailors out on leave and shipyard workers out on the town. Norfolk's finest citizens began to feel that too many of these mobsters and racketeers controlled city hall, replacing their own more legitimate voice with bribes and payoffs. The blatancy with which the city's "other element" conducted its gruesome activities shocked and enraged the citizenry; it was no wonder that such conduct was the talk of the town, and an open link between the gangsters and the politicians was widely suspected.<sup>5</sup> The citizenry had been long-suffering of all sorts of war-time carpetbaggers and entrepreneurs, but the prospect that these gangsters and racketeers would continue to control the city's fate in peacetime now became too great a burden to bear, and thus the closing months of 1945 became the winter of discontent for many Norfolk residents.

Political conformity had bred a closed society in Norfolk--afraid to accept outsiders, new ideas, or even dissension among its provincial little community. The city's close proximity to the Navy and government workers

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<sup>5</sup>Pretlow Darden, 13 August 1975, op cit., and other confirming sources.

during World War II had been a positive force that had done much to erase that stagnation. In many ways the war years had been a bitter experience--the crowding, the inconvenience, the crime, and the hedonism--for both the homeowners and the sailors alike, but in the end, it had opened the minds of many Norfolklans to a world beyond their own parochial realm, and many more had found an important mission in ministering to strangers from all parts of America. Norfolk had opened its doors to the Navy slowly, cautiously, and even grudgingly, but now a fear was growing that those doors, once closed, would remain shuttered forever.

The next few months would witness some remarkable changes for a city overly conditioned to accept the narrow scope and dreary conformity of its venerable political leaders. The citizenry that had so recently focused its full attention upon fighting despots overseas would suddenly turn its efforts towards resisting a more home grown version of totalitarianism. The hometown folks who had so recently despised the visiting sailors as an army of occupation would suddenly turn to welcome them instead as economic liberators. That bleak specter of closed stores and empty streets in Norfolk's downtown commercial district would prompt a fondness for the profligacy and crowded jubilation of sailor's revelry, and that longing would in turn provide the public mandate for a remarkable chain of events that would



sweep this once seedy little, backwater, port into the forefront of a national municipal reform movement, bringing as well an era of unheralded progress and prosperity.

CHAPTER ONE  
PLANNING THE NEW NORFOLK

When bulldozers ripped into the wall of a house in the 700 block of Smith Street on December 11, 1951, they marked both a new beginning and a crumbling end. At long last the city was moving from the quiet haunts of its earlier infamy into the spotlight of national attention. The house that first shuddered, shook, and then crumbled that wintry morning marked the beginning of the first federally financed slum clearance project in the country.<sup>1</sup> The event marked as well the passing of a very special style of government in Norfolk, and served as both the legacy and the tombstone of the final retreat of a progressive reform movement in the city.

Those first bulldozers were riding the crest of a wave of civic pride and boosterism that would jettison the city to the forefront of the Age of Redevelopment before it surged, and then dissipated against the shoreline of the future. The muffled applause of the gloved dignitaries who had gathered to witness this miracle of modern government faded as the bulldozers tore through the sagging structure.

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<sup>1</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 July 1961.

In their eyes the memories of yesteryear were giving way to a dynamic new effort to rebuild the shining metropolis of the future. Those first bulldozers were the most dramatic and tangible evidence that the dreams of an indolent age were at last on their way to becoming a reality.

That first house stood as well as a sad omen of what would come. As the small crowd that attends such functions gathered, crewmen bound the house in chains and clamped them to the bulldozer designated for the job. At the appointed moment, the machine started and lurched forward, dragging its chains through the underpinnings of the structure. The house shook, but did not fall<sup>2</sup>--a remarkable augury of blight's resistance to eradication. As if to prophesy the unseen forces of the future that would chart the city's course--as if to warn of invisible props that braced Norfolk's progress--the house still stood, its underpinnings completely destroyed. Embarrassed crewmen re-attached their chains to a more elevated point, expectant dignitaries and reporters chatted idly by, news photographers reloaded for a second shot, and history paused momentarily in the making. The second time the bulldozers lurched, the chain took hold, and the frame collapsed in a shower of crumbling plaster, rotting boards, billowing dust, and scattering functionaries.

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<sup>2</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 12 December 1951.

Norfolk was irreversibly embarking upon a bold, new venture, but it was more than just a fervent desire to erase the memories of an unpleasant past that had put the city in the vanguard of urban renewal. It was more than just the aimless longing for the golden dream of "A New Norfolk;" more than just the fulfillment of campaign promises. Norfolk had reached this pinnacle of regeneration because a specific group of men had possessed the courage to not just dream, but to act. Theirs was a bold vision, and it was shared by men and women all across the country, but the difference in Norfolk was that they were just the sort of individuals who could make that aspiration a reality. All were committed to the cause, and all were conditioned to success. They had made their reputations, both business and civic, by overcoming long odds; they knew how to gamble for high stakes, but, more importantly, they knew how to win. The men that sparked Norfolk's redevelopment were businessmen who wielded the personal power and prestige to overcome almost any opposition and drag the city into nearly any venture. Certainly the fine points of that redevelopment--the stakes, the expense, the delay, the social costs, and the human suffering--were as misunderstood by the general public of Norfolk as in any city in the country, but it was here that the city's leading citizens put their reputations on the line behind renewal. And that made all the difference.

The city-manager type of reform government was designed to be a "businessman's rule." The system was intended to take the power out of the hands of the political hacks and give it to the true leaders of the community, and then back them up with the technical and professional expertise necessary to make the very best decision for the community. City government, the theory went, had become too complex, its myriad services so vast, its management so technical, and its planning too vital to be left to amateurs. That was the ideal, but in far too many city-manager cities, the power had merely passed from one group of parochials to another. In most cities the real leaders, the real opinion-makers, had lost interest in municipal affairs; the result of their abdication was that a group of small businessmen and petty interests took over instead--a group that was still businessmen, but only second rate ones; they were capable only of dreaming small dreams, and often failed to comprehend the bigger picture. In most cities the directorship of the taxpayers' multi-million dollar municipal corporation had settled into the grasp of people scarcely off the assembly line--foremen, at best, who could only hold the machinery of government on course until the real leaders with vision returned to take control of the enterprise.

In Norfolk, however, a peculiar set of circumstances had befallen the city and was forcing a different sort of

leader to the top. The little men had so bungled the prerogatives of power that the first team had been forced out of their board rooms and counting houses to take over. At the close of World War I it was clear that Norfolk was in danger of folding altogether in the hands of the "small men" who ran most other cities; the lure of wartime profiteering, the power to control the expansion of municipal services, and the opportunity to promote political or parochial interests had been too much for them. The transfusion of new leadership that was taking place in Norfolk's reform movement came from the bluest blood in the city. At last the real corporate minds hoped to take over the directorship of city government. They understood management on a large scale, and they knew that even if they could promote themselves to the city's board of directors, that they could not fulfill their aspirations for the city alone; just as in their own private enterprises, they would need an army of specialists, planners, and consultants to plot and carry out their vision. Nevertheless, they dreamed big dreams, but they also possessed the dynamism, the energy, and the wherewithal to carry them out.

Even so, any move to snatch control of the city from the political organization that had ruled it for decades would be no mean accomplishment, especially in a Virginia election system that used every conceivable means, including the poll tax and early registration deadlines, to keep the

voting population small and manageable. In fact, when the frustrations of the city's business and civic leaders first began to surface and take on a political bent in the winter of 1945, the poll books for the June election had already been closed, thereby precluding any effort to register new voters who shared their hope of reform.<sup>3</sup> It was the stormy resignation following the war of Norfolk's usually staid city manager in "a violent temper" over the Council's proposed cut back of essential city services<sup>4</sup> that proved to be the culminating event. The resignation, and the manager's parting blast at machine politics, took the community by surprise, especially since he was just a few months away from becoming eligible for a substantial retirement pension.<sup>5</sup> Talk at a testimonial dinner hastily arranged in his honor by the business community soon turned to a political agenda. At first the businessmen sought an audience with Organization chieftain Billy Prieur, hoping to convince him of the need for a change in the leadership at city hall,<sup>6</sup> but when these efforts at appeasement proved futile, the People's Ticket of Richard D. Cooke, Pretlow Darden, and John Twohy was born.

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<sup>3</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 June 1946.

<sup>4</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 5 June 1946.

<sup>5</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 21 February 1946.

<sup>6</sup>Pretlow Darden and Vernon Gornto, campaign manager for the People's Ticket of 1946, interview by author, Tape recording, Norfolk, 17 August 1975.

The men that now proposed to take control of Norfolk had two undeniable loci of power: the one financial and the other civic. These were not the ordinary group of downtown merchants hoping to harness municipal spending to keep the central business district alive. There was not a single retailer in the lot; instead they were the heavyweights of the area's business community: bankers, realtors, brokers, builders, corporate attorneys, and building supply wholesalers--they had more than just a personal interest in Norfolk's rebirth and redevelopment, they had a financial stake in it. They were more than just the area's top businessmen, however, they were the foremost representatives of the city's civic pride and community spirit. Time and time again the city's charities had turned to these men during the Depression and war years because they not only knew how to get things done, they knew how to unite the citizenry in the process.

Although it was left to corporate attorney Richard D. Cooke, automobile dealer Pretlow Darden (younger brother of Virginia's popular wartime governor), and concrete magnate John Twohy to carry their standard, this was a group effort that found almost every substantial business and civic leader in the city aligned against one of the most powerful, well financed, and experienced local political organizations in the state; failure meant great risk and personal sacrifice for all who participated in this palace



coup. All had benefitted from their alliance with the Byrd Organization in the past, and now had much to lose if the selective enforcement, special treatment, and red tape of municipal government were suddenly turned against them. All relied too heavily in their business and corporate ventures on the rapid processing of building permits, legal documents, inspections, and applications not to fear a significant threat of intimidation if their venture were to fail. Once committed, they had no intent of not succeeding, and they threw themselves into the selfless work of the political campaign with the same vigor, skill, and determination evident in their civic and corporate achievements. It proved to be a hotly contested race--"the hottest political campaign in Norfolk's history."<sup>7</sup>

The "Silkstocking Ticket," as the Cooke-Darden-Twohy group was immediately labeled in the hardball oratory of the Prieur Organization stalwarts, hoisted the "Time For A Change" standard and ran carefully against the lackluster record of the wartime Council. They were determined to run as three conservative businessmen who had close ties of their own to the statewide Byrd Organization, thereby avoiding the appearance at least of challenging Prieur directly. It was a clever strategy, but it meant they had to both out do the existing administration in conservative rhetoric and out organize the Prieur Machine on its home

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<sup>7</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 12 June 1946.

turf. As part of that effort, they pledged not to seek re-election, thereby hoping to convince the traditional Organization voter that they only meant to revitalize Norfolk's governmental structure, not found another political dynasty.

Fortunately the People's Ticket had both the personal credibility and the backing to pull off one of the most dramatic upsets in the otherwise closed conformity of Virginia's political arena. Their election by a better than 2-to-1 margin in the largest voter turnout the city had ever witnessed, gave them a mandate to bring progressive government to Norfolk.<sup>8</sup> As if to seal their pledge of "business-like government, free from political influence and control,"<sup>9</sup> their first order of business was to set about hiring the "best city manager money can buy . . . not to get the best would be money wasted."<sup>10</sup> They turned quickly to Charles A. Harrell, past president of the International City Manager's Association. In addition to having a strong national reputation for long-range planning and careful administration, Harrell had grown up in Norfolk and had started his career in its service. Even though he left

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<sup>8</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 12 June 1946.

<sup>9</sup>"Things For Which We Stand: Vote 'The People's Ticket,'" a political handbill, undated (June, 1946), Sergeant Memorial Collection, Kirn Public Library, Norfolk.

<sup>10</sup>Pretlow Darden.

Norfolk when political favoritism blocked his path at home,<sup>11</sup> he had maintained close ties to the area. Even so, it was the Council's promise not to interfere in his administration, not the money or the home town connection, that proved successful in luring him away from his post in Schenectady, New York.<sup>12</sup>

Harrell set busily about the task of rebuilding Norfolk's tarnished national image and cleaning its squalid municipal house. There was a sense of urgency in the actions of the Silkstocking administration: years later former People's Councilman and later Mayor Pretlow Darden would remark, "We knew what we had to do, and we knew [because of the promise not to succeed ourselves] we were only there for four short years; so we did it."<sup>13</sup> As part of the campaign promise to bring "sound and efficient administration" to city hall,<sup>14</sup> the People's Council gave Harrell free reign to bring in an army of professionals and consultants to help chart the city's rebirth, and Harrell skillfully involved as many of the city's crucial business and civic leaders as possible in a new hierarchy of appointed boards and commissions that further removed the functionaries at city hall from the decision-making process.

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<sup>11</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 4 June 1950.

<sup>12</sup>Pretlow Darden.

<sup>13</sup>Pretlow Darden.

<sup>14</sup>"Things For Which We Stand," op cit.

The task of municipal house cleaning, however, ran into some serious opposition, especially from the well entrenched forces in the Public Safety (Police and Fire) Department. A fortuitous event, however, helped to break the back of the Organization in this arena as well. A young captain of detectives, Claude "Bubba" Staylor, who later served as both chief of police and a city councilman, took the initiative when the Organization's police chief was out of town to raid Norfolk's "protected" gambling and numbers rackets. The raid sent off howls of protest, especially when the police chief quickly returned to drop the charges against several of what the newspaper was willing to label as the city's "most notorious gangsters"<sup>15</sup> for lack of evidence, while more than a hundred of their customers languished in jail.<sup>16</sup> The blatant partiality of this treatment, and the fact that Staylor had uncovered evidence of bribes and payoffs to more than half the force, helped to unravel a comprehensive scheme of corruption in city government. A blue ribbon grand jury appointed from the city's business and civic elite used its charge to investigate the charges as an opportunity to bring down both the protected rackets and the police hierarchy.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 3 December 1948.

<sup>16</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 4 December 1948.

<sup>17</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 March 1949.

Silkstocking Takeover was thus complete, and the Organization's grip on City Hall was at last broken.

City Manager C. A. Harrell was not one to delay once he had achieved the circumstances conducive to action. The scandal in the police department and the publicity generated by its subsequent investigation had given him the mandate for reform that he sought; skillfully he shifted people at city hall to promote his professionals to a larger grasp of power. Although many of the experts who had descended upon the city returned quickly to their previous haunts in industry, commerce, and academia, they left behind the blueprints for progress in their voluminous charts, statistics, and analyses. Harrell conspired to shift as much of the burden of charting municipal expansion as he could from the offices in city hall to the volunteer boards and commissions that established the policies. He knew well that the work of these boards would outlast the electoral mandate of the People's Council; and attracting top notch men and women to these posts would be the most enduring legacy of the Silkstocking Takeover. The People's Council exercised such a strong personal pull that they acted as a magnet to attract others of similar talent from industry, commerce, the arts, the professions, and the charities into volunteer service to the city. By staffing these independent boards and commissions with his own professional advisors and then feeding them the reports of the hired consultants, Harrell

knew that he could broaden his mandate of progress beyond the limitations of the work force at city hall.

The roster of the postwar City Council, Redevelopment and Housing Authority, and the Planning Commission read like a listing of local Community Fund chairmen, charitable benefactors, First Citizen Award winners, and civic headliners --just the type of individuals who so rarely get personally involved in running the day to day operations of municipal enterprises. The men who had been forced to take over the rebirth and redevelopment of Norfolk were the true opinion leaders in the community. They had the power, the prestige, and the respect to personally dispense with the types of objections that hamstrung so many similar dreams of rebirth across the country.<sup>18</sup>

Harrell's plan worked better than anyone could have expected. Not a single community leader ever refused the Council's call to volunteer service,<sup>19</sup> and the city's boards and commissions began calling for new ventures that would have been unthinkable just a few years earlier. Norfolk's citizens soon began to discern the fruits of their labor: a municipal airport, water treatment plant, modern bus system, a bridge-tunnel link to Portsmouth, new connecting links to the downtown, and a host of other new highway

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<sup>18</sup>For a more complete analysis of this point, see Jean L. Stinchcombe, Reform and Reaction: City Politics in Toledo (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth, 1958), pp 129-150.

<sup>19</sup>Pretlow Darden.

and municipal ventures. Only a portion of Harrell's program was cast in concrete; the rest was set in careful planning and legislation. As part of the city's new housekeeping system, Harrell advocated a vast upgrading of the municipal statutes regarding property. The business and civic leaders who peopled the various volunteer boards and commissions took the lead in recommending revamped zoning ordinances, new building codes, stronger health and safety ordinances, and one of the nation's first minimum housing codes.<sup>20</sup> It was such an ambitious program that it would never have passed without their support. The new ordinances would effect more than 40% of the city's existing housing stock (based upon 1940 Census data), and had the recommendations come from bureaucrats, instead of established community leaders, the public would quickly have suspected that partisan motives or the type of selective enforcement that characterized the wartime Council were involved. Yet here were Norfolk's First Citizens, the leaders of its various charities, financial institutions, real estate firms, industries, and business enterprises calling for an uplifting that began with their own boot-straps.

The Norfolk Housing Authority, born of the Navy's need for wartime dwellings, had been among the first commissions to catch the spirit of rebirth. The Authority was determined not to die out with the end of the war effort; it knew

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<sup>20</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 July 1961.

how much the city still had to accomplish in order to provide adequate housing for its citizens. "Redevelopment" was added to its title for the first time at the close of the war, and now the new Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority began to revise its calling. Instead of just serving as the Navy's link to additional housing, the N.R.H.A. hoped to provide the means to eliminate much of the city's crime- and disease-infested slums.<sup>21</sup> It began to formulate a plan that included two phases: the first entailed the renovation of more than 1,000 wartime housing units to accommodate civilian public housing tenants; the second phase included an aggressive proposal to build 1,890 more public housing units in order to clear the path for slum removal. The Authority's sales pitch was accompanied by the release of a graphic pictorial publication, This Is It, designed to sell both the human and the economic elements of the plan. The Authority did not mince its words, the booklet was clearly designed to sell public housing as the essential first step to the rebirth of the rest of the city:

A 1937 study showed that the city was spending \$5 for every \$1 collected from real estate taxes and other income from five slum areas. Public housing cuts these service costs to a minimum. Public housing reduces the subsidy that taxpayers contribute every year to perpetuate Nineteenth Century hovels which

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<sup>21</sup>Theodore A. Curtin, "A Marriage of Convenience: Norfolk and the Navy," 1917-1967, op cit., p. 140.



injure the value of nearby property, impede the city's growth, and threaten the whole population with crime and disease . . . . The citizens of Norfolk will not, we believe, be satisfied with anything less than the complete elimination of every unfit dwelling in the city. Year by year, house by house, the reconstruction must go on until the combined efforts of the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority and private builders enable every family to enjoy a decent home.<sup>22</sup>

It was an argument skillfully designed to appeal to the business and civic leaders that the commissioners felt comprised their natural constituency; indeed, even under the wartime administration of the Prieur Organization, the Housing Authority had been the sole prerogative of the business and civic elite that now constituted the Silk-stocking Takeover. Now that the People's Ticket was in power, the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority became the showpiece of the new administration. All five commissioners were the very pillars of the city's new businessmen's elite: Charles L. Kaufman was a prestigious corporation lawyer who had strong connections with several of the city's leading financial institutions; Thomas N. Wilcox, a partner in Mayor Richard Cooke's law firm, had similar corporate credentials; David L. Pender was the president of the Southgate Brokerage Company and the 240-store chain of the Pender Grocery Company (later called Colonial Stores); C. W. Grandy was an investment banker who

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<sup>22</sup>Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, This Is It (Norfolk: N.R.H.A., 1946), pp. 30, 47-48.

also ran his own cotton brokerage; and James E. Etheridge was the president of one of the largest residential and commercial real estate firms in the area. Two earlier commissioners who had been important in the formulation of the Authority's present aspirations represented this same corporate elite: Louis H. Windholz had been chairman of the Norfolk and Southern Railway Company, the Baltimore Steam Packet Company, the Seaboard Airline Railway, and numerous other transportation and shipping concerns; George H. Lewis had served as a director of the Virginia Electric and Power Company (Virginia Power), Pender Grocery Stores, the Hampton Roads Maritime Exchange, and several other ventures.<sup>23</sup>

These men, by virtue of the very extensive civic and charity work, had gathered a constituency that was far larger than just the business elite they seemed so adequately to represent. Of the seven commissioners who had helped to formulate the Authority's postwar program, five had headed the Community Fund, four had been named First Citizen, three had served on Colonel Borland's 1937 Citizens Crime Conference, and all seven had actively studied the dreadful conditions of Norfolk's aging housing stock (the 1940 Census revealed that more than 40% of the housing units

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<sup>23</sup>Community Builders of Norfolk, Virginia (Norfolk: Community Builders, Inc., 1942); The History of Lower Tidewater, Virginia, vol. III: Family and Personal History (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1954); Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, This Is It, op cit., p. 10.

in Norfolk were dilapidated or lacked adequate plumbing and sanitary facilities). All had hung their heads in shame when Nathan Straus, a top federal housing official who was rounding out his tour of 137 cities, remarked of Norfolk's blight, "I have travelled all over the United States, from one end to the other, but I have never seen anything as bad as this."<sup>24</sup> The epidemic warnings of Public Health Director John M. Huff also helped to promote their efforts to convert the Navy's wartime housing from military to civilian use as public housing for the city's poor;<sup>25</sup> and each of the seven knew well that the unsafe health and sanitary conditions posed a very great danger to all the citizens of Norfolk.<sup>26</sup>

It was more, however, than just shame; it was more than just crime, taxes, property values, health, and housing conditions that motivated these men. All had lived through a most peculiar period in the history of Norfolk's growth: the crisis proportions of wartime conscription had strangely welded the entire citizenry into an active and cohesive civic force.<sup>27</sup> As members of the wartime Housing Authority, they had seen how quickly the people of Norfolk could

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<sup>24</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 July 1961.

<sup>25</sup> Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 29 November 1948.

<sup>26</sup>Thomas J. Wertenbaker, Norfolk: Historic Southern Port, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1962), p. 370.

<sup>27</sup>Marvin W. Schlegel, Conscripted City: Norfolk in World War II, op cit.

respond to alleviate the most intolerable hardships. The sense of shared emergency had made the city vibrant and alive; it had carried over into a post war boom that was unique for the city; it had provided the impetus for the reform movement that was the first tenet of their faith; and finally, it had awakened the citizens to the fact that for a community united, all things were possible. If they could once more promote the sense of shared emergency, once more strike the vein of civic shame that prompted action, then, the commissioners believed, they could translate these forces into a renewed impetus for growth in general and a personal mandate for redevelopment and public housing in specific. Theirs was an ambitious plan, and the commissioners knew that citizen support was essential to its adoption.

A series of timely events, however, helped to underscore the need for public housing, careful community planning, and quick municipal action. The Brambleton section of the city had for some time been convulsed with racial turmoil when several Blacks sought to defy the community's strict standard of segregated housing. During the war years the vast influx of families into the city had put a premium on housing space in the few small areas of the city reserved for Blacks. More than half of the Black families in the city had been forced to either take in borders or double up, just as in the white community, but in the Black neighborhoods, this meant two or more families

living in a one- or two-room apartment. There had been almost no private housing built for Blacks in more than a decade and a half, and Brambleton appeared as the ideal site for Black expansion. Brambleton was a small (1,100 homes) white community that was bounded on two sides by Black developments, and on the other two sides by industrial properties and the Elizabeth River. Once the first few Black families began to push across Corprew Avenue, the traditional dividing line between the Black and white communities, whites responded with attacks, threats, broken windows, and minor acts of vandalism.<sup>28</sup> After a series of stormy Council sessions, an interracial committee was appointed to study the situation. The Council had hoped that the issue would die without further incident, and that some way would be found to guarantee "the separation of white and Negro homes in the area,"<sup>29</sup> but Norfolk's award winning Black newspaper, the Journal and Guide, refused to let the issue drop. The aggressive attack of the editors helped to convince the white community that further incidents would occur unless something was done:

It cannot be emphasized too strongly, and it is worth repeating again and again, that the housing situation affecting Norfolk's Negro citizens is not only acute, but desperate, while, by a fair comparison, no such problem faces the white population.

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<sup>28</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 8 June 1946.

<sup>29</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 1 June 1946.

The housing predicament with which this community is confronted cannot be resolved by the simple expedient of viewing it as a racial matter. It is based upon an elementary human need and its amelioration must be on this basis alone.

It is an age-old story of the law of supply and demand . . . . Norfolk's Negro population has grown by some 25,000 in the last few years, but little new housing has emerged to shelter this population increase . . . while, on the other hand, construction of new white units has been over 5,000.

Even assuming that private capital were available and homes [for Blacks] could be built, under present restrictive conditions, where could the necessary land be found?<sup>30</sup>

The Black and white communities remained at logger-heads, and the interracial committee appointed by the Council failed to devise a new color line in the Brambleton area. Nor did the turmoil cease with the first few incursions; the breakdown of time-honored color lines began to affect other blocks in the Brambleton section. The situation failed to stabilize, and soon whole neighborhoods were in flight. The Journal and Guide continued to intimate that further incidents would occur unless the white community began to take some drastic measures to provide housing units for Blacks. The fact that the Journal and Guide's veiled threats of racial turmoil were reprinted for the white community in the Virginian-Pilot helped to build the momentum for some sort of intervening public action--some

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<sup>30</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 1 June 1946.

step that would alleviate the housing crisis in the Black community, yet also work to preserve the separate status of white neighborhoods. Thus, the Authority's push for public housing struck a core of need recognized by both the Black and white communities, and public support for the proposal began to build rapidly.

By 1948 a solid consensus in the community had been achieved: for two years the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority (N.R.H.A.) had been angling for official endorsement of its slum removal program; during that time the events in Brambleton and its surrounding neighborhoods had been simmering; the public had listened to Public Health Director Dr. John Huff warn of the epidemic dangers of crime and contagion in the city's slums; and opinion in the Black community had coalesced around the single, dominant theme of their housing crisis. The City Council was at last ready to take official action, but the nature of their commitment was, as yet, still undiscernible. The Council was quick, however, to agree upon two points; first, the city faced a "critical shortage of housing meeting the minimum health standards in Negro and some low-income white areas," and second, that "this condition is a matter of concern to all other Norfolk residents, regardless of their own pleasant living surroundings."<sup>31</sup> For ten years Norfolk's councils had agreed that it was "time to do something," the situation

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<sup>31</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 28 November 1948.

was "acute," the housing shortage was "serious,"<sup>32</sup> so the debate this time focused upon what official actions, short of encouraging private developers to enter the normally unprofitable low-income housing market--a step that earlier councils had repeatedly taken without success--could be taken to officially alleviate the crisis. One councilman recommended that the city "should be among the first in line"--those words would prove prophetic--for new federal redevelopment funds then under Congressional consideration.<sup>33</sup> The suggestion touched such a core of response that the Council, already straddled with heavy commitments to an aggressive array of capital improvements, was ready to embark upon "a pure gamble:"<sup>34</sup> it approved an additional \$25,000 appropriation to the N.R.H.A. for the purpose of further studying the prospects of slum removal. Thus the Authority was charged with the responsibility to develop a plan for urban renewal and public housing even before such a program was either legally or financially feasible!

The Council's gamble for federal funding was not an idle gesture to ameliorate an increasingly exacerbating situation; it was a carefully calculated risk. The Depression and World War II had left the core of many of the nation's cities in a condition comparable to Norfolk's; it

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<sup>32</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 4 December 1938.

<sup>33</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 28 November 1948.

<sup>34</sup>Pretlow Darden.



seemed only a matter of time before Congress cleared the way for such action. Norfolk, however, had every intention of leaping into the national limelight as the first municipality to embark upon a program of redevelopment; grabbing the headlines of urban renewal seemed the city's best opportunity to shake its sleazy wartime reputation and focus national attention instead upon all phases of its postwar renaissance. Publicity, however, was only one-half of the quotient: Norfolk, more than any other city its size, had seen clearly how federal funds could provide the needed transfusion for massive community expansion. For almost a decade the Organization Council had refused to embark upon any municipal project or extend any public service unless the Navy dangled the carrot of federal funding as an incentive. Federal funds had aided in the construction of more than 3,400 dwellings, had upgraded numerous municipal facilities, including schools, parks, playgrounds, highways, recreational centers, water and sewer projects; had poured millions of dollars into the area's economy;<sup>35</sup> and had helped, with both these new facilities and the multiplier effect of federal investment, to immeasurably increase the standard of living for all the citizens of Tidewater.<sup>36</sup>

The Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority had already sought to allay fears that its actions would be

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<sup>35</sup>Theodore A. Curtain, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup>N.R.H.A., This is It, p. 8.

competing with the private market by challenging the city's builders to begin their own redevelopment programs. This Is It, the Authority's official promotional tract, recalled earlier objections to its plans, and sought graphically to explain how the city could embark upon a mammoth rebuilding effort, even under existing legislation, and not expend any local funds. The commissioners knew first hand that federal funds had provided the impetus for the city's dramatic economic expansion over the past decade; all five commissioners were experiencing, along with the rest of the city's business establishment, the fruits of a local economic boom that had been financed largely with federal support, and there was really very little doubt that Norfolk would once again be in line for federal dollars as soon as new funds for housing and renewal became available.

The Authority hired planning consultant Charles K. Agle to study Norfolk's downtown slums and develop a master plan for a major urban renewal project. His report was a shock even for native residents who had long known that housing conditions in the area around the downtown were deplorable. Methodically he studied block by block, hovel by hovel, to reach his conclusions: "large scale redevelopment is the only chance the city ever has had to accomplish a drastic modernization of its heart."<sup>37</sup> Map after map,

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<sup>37</sup>"Federal Slum Clearance Gets Its First Full Scale Tryout in Norfolk, Va.," Architectural Forum, May, 1950, p. 137.

table after table, showed the same concentration of irreversible blight choking the central business district: blocks where every structure needed major repairs, where almost all of the houses dated back to the Nineteenth Century, where there were 13 or more fires over a two-year period, where there were 17 or more arrests in the previous months, and where there was a heavy concentration of tuberculosis.<sup>38</sup> As in many other cities, the streets of Norfolk's downtown area were the direct descendants of cow paths and carriage ways upon which a gridiron street pattern had been imposed.<sup>39</sup> All of the major highways that linked commuters to the downtown ceased a mile short of the central business district, discharging their traffic into a complex maze of back alleys and clogged feeder roads.<sup>40</sup> The City Planning Commission found that:

. . . many streets were less than fifty-feet in right-of-way width, and all were inadequate, even for single family neighborhoods . . . . not only are they inadequate for moving traffic, but they are [also] an economic liability . . . . some business decentralization is inevitable. However, if effective means are taken to increase accessibility, ease of movement and parking facilities in the central business

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<sup>38</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 July 1961.

<sup>39</sup>Architectural Forum, op cit., p. 135.

<sup>40</sup>E. T. Beall, George W. Price, and Donald R. Locke, "Face Lifting For Better Urban Living," Norfolk, XII: 1 (February, 1950), p. 7.

district, values can be stabilized and excessive decentralization of business can be avoided.<sup>41</sup>

The Agle Report was a sobering eye-opener in other respects. In addition to just reporting the slum conditions that cried out for renewal, it attempted as well to chart all of the potential obstacles to successful redevelopment. It was in this regard that many citizens found the report shocking. Few individuals realized how very profitable slum properties--even in an area as blighted as Norfolk's central ghetto--could be to its owners, and some of the city's finest families were shown to have heavy investments in slum housing. The report showed that even under rent control, an average slum dwelling assessed at \$400 in total value could achieve contract rents of \$142 a year per room, out of which very little besides the \$10.80 per year real estate tax bill had to be paid for maintenance and upkeep. One example, pointed to as typical of the inflated value of slum housing, sheltered 32 families in a rickety, wood frame building that had only four sinks and four toilets; it brought in \$4,500 a year in rent and paid out only \$98 in taxes.<sup>42</sup> A complex called the Tidewater Apartments proved an even more notorious example of slum profiteering: there were 152 single room units that netted the owners \$23,400 a year in rent;

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<sup>41</sup>City Planning Commission, Major Highway Plan, Part I, Major Highways and Collector Streets (Norfolk, 1950), pp. 15, 5.

<sup>42</sup>Architectural Forum, pp. 136-137.

the only facilities for cooking, cleaning, washing, drinking, and sanitation were six cold water privies consisting of a single faucet and toilet. The total tax bill for the complex was less than \$600 a year<sup>43</sup>--a highly profitable investment.

Thus Norfolk was compelled by a number of powerful motivators to become the first city in the nation to qualify for federal funds the following June, when President Truman signed the U. S. Housing Act of 1949. The act granted municipalities both the legal authority and the necessary funding support to buy up such properties. Before the act was passed, the city could rely upon its powers of eminent domain to purchase private property only if were to be reused for "public" purposes, such as land for schools, highways, and parks, but additional public investment in such a deteriorating neighborhood would have been foolish. Before this new power of redevelopment passed to cities, nothing in the municipal arsenal would permit cities to buy up private property, tear it down, and then resell it to other private residential, commercial, or industrial developers--the essence of urban renewal. The act empowered cities to buy up large quantities of slum housing for a "fair" price--roughly 60% above their assessed value, or less than two year's rent on most buildings--and to acquire the

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<sup>43</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 July 1961.

rest through condemnation proceedings.<sup>44</sup> The Agle Report had predicted that "the future of Norfolk for the rest of its history will be fixed by the action of the next ten years;"<sup>45</sup> it might just as well have added that the enabling legislation and supporting federal funding would be the city's only real chance to have much of a future at all.

At last assured of both federal funding and community support, the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority forged ahead with its program--the first urban renewal initiative in the country. N.R.H.A. Project One--the businessman's baby that had been so carefully nurtured along by the city's power elite--bore a striking resemblance to the blustery, full-speed-ahead approach of its sires: it proposed to bulldoze 120 acres of blighted land to make way for broad highways, light industries, new commercial districts, civic improvements, schools, playgrounds, and a giant convention hotel. It also bore the mark of City Manager C. A. Harrell's balanced approach of careful planning and community concern: almost all of the 1,800 families uprooted by the bulldozers would be relocated in modern, sanitary public housing units, and many would eventually move back into their own neighborhood, once it had been rebuilt at public expense. No one doubted the legitimacy of the undertaking: the slum properties cleared

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<sup>44</sup>Architectural Forum, p. 137.

<sup>45</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 July 1961.

represented some of the most squalid, festering hovels in the nation;<sup>46</sup> the municipal projects undertaken were those seen as most essential to salvaging the central business district; and the land cleared for renewal was seen as the most critical for restoring the city's flagging real estate tax base. Before demolition even began, however, the Authority rushed to completion several hundred new public housing units on vacant land in order to absorb the first wave of redevelopment refugees.<sup>47</sup> Each time the bulldozers poised to bite off another chunk of blighted land, the N.R.H.A. rushed to completion new housing projects to absorb its relocated residents. Indeed, this was all part of the careful, humanistic approach of the Silkstocking Takeover that promised "to alleviate as much as possible the hardships which are the by-products of such a project."<sup>48</sup>

Partly because this was the first redevelopment project in the nation, and Norfolk was aware that the rest of the nation was watching, and partly because the city had been so long prepared for this endeavor, N.R.H.A. Project One was a masterfully planned and conceived undertaking; certainly it was one of the most studied proposals ever advanced by a municipality. Ever since the Citizens Crime

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<sup>46</sup>Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Report (Norfolk: N.R.H.A., 1957), pp. 5-6.

<sup>47</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 August 1950.

<sup>48</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 August 1951.

Conference of 1937 exposed the financial and human cost of slum life, the city's business elite had dreamed of downtown renewal. The Authority's own study in 1946 (This Is It) and the 1949 Agle Report had added depth and dimension to the vision. It took five years to complete N.R.H.A. Project One, but the enormity of its carefully planned success was apparent to all. In the end, the project offered something for everyone: broad new thorough-fares provided downtown merchants with their first really modern link to the rest of the area; a new light industrial zone on Tidewater Drive was attracting so many new private investments that it was prompting as own multi-million dollar construction boom;<sup>49</sup> new businesses were already moving into the redeveloped commercial areas; backers of a major new convention hotel (the Holiday Inn Waterside) were examining a corner site in the project;<sup>50</sup> and the former residents of some of the city's most dilapidated dwellings were able to reclaim their old neighborhoods, now completely rebuilt as planned communities. More importantly, the whole community was caught up in the feeling of pride and boom psychology that accompanies such a dynamic undertaking, and the spin-off effects could be seen in hundreds of other unrelated expansions, investments, rehabilitations, and storefront

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<sup>49</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 March 1956.

<sup>50</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 July 1961.



modernizations.<sup>51</sup> Urban renewal proved to be a spark that kindled the area's entire business community to action, and Norfolk raced to blot out the memories of its sordid past.

A more complete description of the size and scope of N.R.H.A. Project One is necessary in order to fully comprehend its full impact. The project included one 80-acre section that is bounded by Virginia Beach Boulevard on the north, Lincoln Street on the east, Brambleton Avenue on the south, and Monticello Avenue on the west; it then extended east along Brambleton Avenue to include a broad strip surrounding Tidewater Drive--roughly 127 acres. New York's Stuyvesant Town was the biggest housing project then in existence, but it was a little more than one-third the size of N.R.H.A. Project One; New York had 40 times the population of Norfolk in 1950, but less than twice the slum clearance acreage contained in Norfolk's undertaking.<sup>52</sup> Land acquisition cost \$5.7 million, of which the federal government paid two-thirds (\$3.8 million). Norfolk's \$1.9 million share was not a cash loss, because it was worked off in land set aside to build a new school, recreation center, fire and police station, utility lines, and street improvements for which the city would have had to pay anyhow. The project generated an additional \$18 million in public expenditures

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<sup>51</sup>George J. Hebert, "Downtown Norfolk: Commercial and Municipal Progress," Norfolk, XXI: 1 (February, 1950), p. 10.

<sup>52</sup>Architectural Forum, p. 132.

generated an additional \$18 million in public expenditures --more than half of which came from the state or federal government for public housing and highway improvements--and \$15.6 million in private construction.<sup>53</sup> The total cost to the federal government for building the 3,000 public housing units planned by the N.R.H.A. commissioners was close to \$30 million<sup>54</sup>--a sizeable multiplier in any economy.

The business leaders who sired N.R.H.A. Project One saw redevelopment as more than just a means to eradicate blight, relieve deprivation, and cure downtown traffic congestion; they were focusing as well on a more serious situation that struck deep at their own sense of financial security. Norfolk had too many of its economic eggs tied up in one basket; its huge naval installations made the city essentially a one-industry town<sup>55</sup>--an enterprise that was virtually exempt from real estate, personal property, and other local tax assessments. After World War I Norfolk paid a heavy price for this over reliance when disarmament left the nation with a one-ocean navy that, after the outbreak of

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<sup>53</sup>Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Report to the City Council (Norfolk: N.R.H.A., 1974), p. 46; Architectural Forum, p. 132; Ira R. Hanna, "The Growth of the Norfolk Naval Air Station and the Norfolk-Portsmouth Metropolitan Area Economy in the Twentieth Century," masters thesis (Norfolk: Old Dominion University, 1967), p. 92.

<sup>54</sup>Architectural Forum, p. 132.

<sup>55</sup>Architectural Forum, p. 134.

the West Coast.<sup>56</sup> A brief inspection of the waterfront gave ample evidence of the fact that coastwise shipping--once the economic staple of the area--had been almost completely absorbed by rail and trucking facilities; other than shipbuilding and coal export, the city had no other private industry of any magnitude,<sup>57</sup> and, in fact, suffered a severe shortage of available industrial land. A few million dollars clipped off of a naval appropriation by an errant congressional committee could well send the area into an economic tailspin.

Since the end of the war the city's economic leaders had given serious attention to attracting new business as a hedge against such congressional capriciousness,<sup>58</sup> but had achieved little success. City Manager Harrell had already recommended an aggressive plan of annexation or, he warned, "the city would die by inches,"<sup>59</sup> but annexation under the present state of Virginia politics was both a costly and a risky proposition, although one to which Norfolk was deeply committed. Even with the prospect of acquiring vacant land through annexation, however, the city's business leaders

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<sup>56</sup>Thomas van Wertenbaker, Norfolk Historic Southern Port (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1962).

<sup>57</sup>Charles K. Agle, A Master Plan for the Central Business and Financial District (Norfolk, 1956), p. 79.

<sup>58</sup>Architectural Forum, p. 134.

<sup>59</sup>C. A. Harrell, The Norfolk Story: Annual Report for 1948, (Norfolk, 1948), p. 9.

still had to face the harsh reality that Norfolk could not hope to serve as a major industrial hub simply because it lacked a cheap source of power.<sup>60</sup> A plan to attract light industry into newly developed sites close to the heart of the area's financial and commercial district--a scarce commodity in any community--was Norfolk's only hope for a competitive alternative. For this reason, a major redevelopment project that entailed massive clearing of land close to the downtown, was seen as the one best hope for the area's continued financial success. More than a third of the land cleared in N.R.H.A. Project One was thus dedicated to developing prime industrial and commercial sites with both rail and major highway access.<sup>61</sup> The catch was that in order to be able to provide new land for these kinds of critical business and industrial uses, the majority of the land cleared under redevelopment powers had to be "residential" in nature. Federal law at the time also mandated that the majority of the land must continue a residential use. Thus cities, like Norfolk, could clear a slum, but they had to balance residential, industrial, commercial, and public uses in the type of carefully planned undertaking exemplified by N.R.H.A. Project One.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Architectural Forum, p. 135.

<sup>61</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 16 April 1952.

<sup>62</sup>Housing and Home Finance Agency, A Guide to Slum Clearance and Urban Development (Washington, D.C., 1950).

Finally, N.R.H.A. Project One was successful at alleviating a part of the housing shortage for poor Blacks. Not only did it create 3,000 new public housing units,<sup>63</sup> it proposed to split these between the project site and newly acquired vacant land on the outskirts of the downtown. This was in keeping with the housing pattern in the rest of Norfolk at the time: Black neighborhoods were spread across the city instead of concentrated in a single downtown district, as in most Northern cities.<sup>64</sup> Since only 1,800 families would be moved out of the project area during demolition<sup>65</sup> (and 3,000 units were being built), this represented a significant net gain in housing for Blacks. The fact that the new Black housing area would be carefully isolated by broad new thoroughfares (i.e., Virginia Beach Boulevard on the north, St. Paul's Boulevard on the west, Brambleton Avenue on the south, and Tidewater Drive on the east) also was a plus for the white community fearful of encroachments into white housing areas. In addition, a new recreation center, fire station, police precinct station,<sup>66</sup> and the first elementary school (Young Park)

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<sup>63</sup>Architectural Forum, p . 132.

<sup>64</sup>Karl E. Taueber and Alma Taueber, Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change. (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 35-96.

<sup>65</sup>N.R.H.A., Report, 1957, op cit.

<sup>66</sup>N.R.H.A., Report to the City Council, 1974, op cit., p. 46.

built for Black students<sup>67</sup> (the others were hand-me-downs from the white community, a standard practice in the South) were included as part of the project. By designating the new school, park, and recreational facilities for use by Blacks (under the practice of the day), the city hoped to relieve some of the pressure to integrate white facilities in adjoining neighborhoods.<sup>68</sup>

City Manager C. A. Harrell also saw redevelopment as a panacea for many of the city's other municipal needs as well. Throughout his tenure as city manager, Harrell placed a strong emphasis on neighborhood needs: upgrading schools and residential streets, decentralizing police and fire facilities, building parks, playground, recreation areas, and community centers. N.R.H.A. Project One bears the imprint of his careful community planning as well. Besides meeting the obvious commuter transportation needs of the area by building two additional highway approaches to the downtown, the project represented the city's first full attempt to create a planned public community for its Black residents. Although surrounded by the updated highway system, Young Park, a 752-unit public housing project (named for P. Bernard Young, Sr., founder of the Journal and Guide, Norfolk's distinguished Black newspaper) would be built upon

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<sup>67</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 19 April 1958.

<sup>68</sup>Sam J. Ervin, Jr., "The Case for Segregation," Look, April 3, 1956 (vol. XX, 7), pp. 32 and 33.

a neighborhood street concept that would make it virtually inaccessible to through traffic. Population density would be reduced from the pre-redevelopment levels of 50 families per acre to only 20. In addition, the phased development of the project was designed so that every family would have a place to go as the project gained momentum<sup>69</sup>--a goal that in reality was far easier to work out on paper than in practice, especially since a number of families and single individuals were ineligible for public housing.

As part of his concept of professional community planning, City Manager Harrell was taking active steps to prevent future slums from occurring in the ring of older middle-class housing which separated the downtown area from the newer postwar subdivisions on the outskirts of the city. Roughly one-third of the city's housing could be described as in danger of slipping from relatively good housing for its era into the dilapidated state that precedes a full fledged slum<sup>70</sup>--all of it in this middle-class ring that included all or portions of the city's first streetcar and automobile suburbs--Ghent, East Ghent, Lamberts Point, Park Place, Colonial Place, Riverview, Highland Park, West Highland Park, Fairmont Park, Ballentine Place, Lafayette Residence Park, Winona, Villa Heights, Brambleton, Chesterfield Heights, Atlantic City, and the soon to be annexed

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<sup>69</sup>Architectural Forum, p. 134.

<sup>70</sup>Architectural Forum, p. 136.

sections of Ingleside, Estabrook, Norview, and Coronado. The tremendous influx of people attracted to the Tidewater area during the war--Norfolk's population increased by 48% or almost 70,000 people between 1940 and 1950<sup>71</sup>--placed a premium upon existing houses, and many of the homes in these areas either took in boarders or were cut up into multi-family dwelling units. The transient nature of this new renting population and the inadequacy of many of the remodeling jobs left deteriorated dwellings in even the finest neighborhoods.

The major weapon in Harrell's arsenal against blight was the newly formulated minimum housing code, which was scheduled to go into effect on January 1, 1954. Housing codes were still a relatively new concept at the time that Walter Hoffman (later, a federal judge) and his committee of lawyers and building officials put together one for Norfolk; in fact, less than a dozen other cities across the nation had begun experimentation with code enforcement as a way to prevent blight. Housing codes provide "livability standards" for dwellings, rather than concentrate on the more limited coverage afforded by fire, building, and health codes. Examples of provisions in Norfolk's new code included: at least one window per room, running water inside the building, a flush toilet connected to a sewer

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<sup>71</sup>U. S. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population, 1950, vol. II, Characteristics of the Population, Part 46, Virginia, Chapter B (Washington, D.C., 1952), pp. 26-27.



(but not necessarily inside the dwelling), adequate means of garbage disposal, and a safe form of central heating with a flue to the outside of the building--none of them extravagant standards by any measure, but they did represent a distinct improvement over the conditions that existed in many semi-blighted areas. The Norfolk code writers were obviously setting their standards on the low side of "livability," because they realized that strong enforcement would be the key to its effectiveness as a slum deterrent.<sup>72</sup> As a tribute to the wisdom of the code writers, almost 2,500 dwellings were rehabilitated during the first two years of the code's operation; only 173 buildings were vacated as a result of enforcement activities, and most of these were re-occupied later after completion of the required renovations.<sup>73</sup>

The small crowd of dignitaries and city officials who gathered outside the hovel at 755 Smith Street that wintry morning in 1951 had come to cheer the revitalized spirit of a New Norfolk as much to applaud the singular event they were witnessing. The New Norfolk was as blustery, bold, and bullish as its sires in the city's business establishment; it was as compassionate and humane as the civic leaders and charity workers who presided at its birth; it was as level-headed, pragmatic, and professional as the planners,

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<sup>72</sup>Architectural Forum, pp. 136-137.

<sup>73</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 October 1956.

designers, and consultants who fussed over its infant developments; and finally, it was as careful, concise, and well directed as the city manager who tutored it. In electing the Silkstocking Ticket, the voters had opted for a change from the cautious, humdrum course plotted by the wartime Council; they got more than for which they had bargained. In 1946 the people had been swept up in the vision of a New Norfolk, sleek and shining in the shimmering sunlight; by 1951 they were witnessing the bricks and mortar, the concrete, steel and glass, of its realization. A revitalized redevelopment and housing authority was plotting eradication of the city's blight; a new port authority was bent on reclaiming the glory of its past; new zoning laws and subdivision laws regulations extended the promise of orderly expansion; annexation initiatives held out the assurance of continued growth; revamped health, housing, fire, and building codes served as an omnipresent guard against future deterioration; a massive capital improvements program was rapidly solving the physical needs for more schools, water, sewage, street lighting, traffic control, and transportation facilities; construction was already underway on a new bridge-tunnel link and a modern airport terminal; extended highway access promised an end to the city's isolation;<sup>74</sup> and everywhere there was evidence

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<sup>74</sup>C. A. Harrell, "Norfolk--A Progress Report," Norfolk XII: 2 (Autumn, 1950), pp. 9-14.

that the citizens themselves had caught the spirit of these ventures and were embarking on their own fix up, expansion, rebuilding, and modernization campaigns in thousands of smaller endeavors.

For many, Redevelopment Project One represented the highwater mark of the city's effort not just to tear down the old and build the new, but to do it with such style and vision that it would capture the attention of the nation, and thereby erase some of the taint of its earlier infamy. It marked a sharp contrast between the foot-dragging of the wartime Council and the foot-racing of the Silkstocking administration. Buoyed of spirit, restored of confidence, and optimistic once again in outlook, Norfolk's citizens were finally prepared to face the future without trepidation.

Redevelopment Project One represented as well a remarkable diversity of personalities, a fortuitous display of insight, and a timely turn of events:

1. Charles L. Kaufman and the other citizen elites that served as commissioners of the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority had first envisioned the dream of renewal in the days of Colonel Borland's 1937 Citizen's Crime Conference; they had nurtured that dream through the war years as the Norfolk Housing Authority; they had revived it in the post-war era when their mission shifted from planning military accommodations to managing public housing

units; and they had lobbied the Silkstocking Council for a risky advance to solidify their plans for redevelopment. At long last they were able to step back with pride and watch the transformation of the N.R.H.A. from the ugly duckling of public largesse to the single, domineering force in the city's renewal renaissance. Throughout this decade and a half, the seven men who had served as commissioners never wavered from what they saw was the mission of their organization, and they had the perseverance to see it come about.

The seven commissioners were the true giants of the city's business and civic establishment; they possessed enough status and personal power in the community to overcome all opposition to redevelopment, and that was no mean task. Profiteering from Norfolk's blight and over charging its poorest residents were as widespread among its slumlords and a certain segment of its real estate community as anywhere in the nation;<sup>75</sup> in many instances the profits were collected by families and individuals that had almost parallel standing in the community. But the commissioners of the N.R.H.A. had the sheer force of commercial and financial persuasion to stare down opposition from even these well connected property owners. Their standing in the community was so high that they were able to launch the city boldly and irrevocably into what was in most of the other

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<sup>75</sup>Architectural Forum, p. 137.

council-manager cities of the nation a torturous and easily side-tracked course.<sup>76</sup>

2. The People's Ticket of Pretlow Darden, Richard Cooke, and John Twohy, in combination with a loose voting alignment with independent Councilman Rives Worsham,<sup>77</sup> possessed much the same kind of community power and prestige. By ripping political control of city hall from the grasp of the Prieur Organization, they restored faith in municipal government--a step that was necessary before any progressive measure could be taken with citizen support. The people of Norfolk would never have stood for the impositions provided by the revamped building, fire, health and minimum housing codes if they had feared indifferent or selective enforcement for political gain; they would not have stood for either the cost or the inconvenience posed by massive municipal construction initiatives if they had doubted the motives behind such improvements; neither would they have had granted their government the power to acquire and destroy private property in preparation for the eventual resale to other private investors--the real teeth in the redevelopment process--if either end of urban renewal had been controlled by ring politicians.

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<sup>76</sup>For a more complete explanation of this point, see Jean L. Stinchcombe, Reform and Reaction: City Politics in Toledo (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1968), pp. 129-150.

<sup>77</sup>Pretlow Darden.

The People's Ticket maintained dignity and devotion to principle in spite of the controversy that raged about them. Nobody doubted their motives or questioned either their integrity or their purpose, but a group that embarks on so many unparalleled municipal endeavors must inevitably make enemies and provoke opposition. The Council chambers reverberated with the hubbub of both civic support and fierce opposition throughout the brief tenure of the People's administration, but the Council plunged onward despite the controversy, always careful to explain each step of the undertaking to those who would follow. This was the true mark of their partisan independence, for no political group could have long endured the intensity of the public debate, the level of criticism, or the unpredictability of popular support posed by each new initiative. Nevertheless, the People's group had the courage to persevere and risk being judged only by their accomplishments.

3. City Manager C. A. Harrell was the right man at the right time to carry out the initiatives of the People's administration. He represented absolute incorruptibility and professionalism at a time in which both were sorely needed at city hall. Twenty years after his reign as manager, Norfolk was still completing the final phases of the ambitious program he had set forth. More than any other single individual, Harrell understood the true potential for municipal planning and government. He was responsible for

snatching control over the operation of city government from the grasp of short-sighted governmental functionaries and then tutoring both citizens and municipal workers alike on what could be accomplished. His was a vision of greatness for city government that would be hard to forget, even long after he had passed from the local scene. Harrell brought the best technical and professional minds in the county to study the city's problems and to help chart its growth; many of them decided to stay on and lend a hand in achieving the realities promised in their reports. Harrell made Norfolk City Hall one of the most desirable locations in the country for aspiring public servants: not only was the city continually at the forefront the newly developing fields of municipal planning, urban renewal, and code enforcement, the People's administration promised that these new powers would be used exclusively for municipal service, free from the taint of political interference or partisan purpose that was apparently so prevalent elsewhere. Harrell dared to empower the citizens--both the dynamos of its civic and business elite and the sparkplugs of its neighborhood leagues--to help plan and promote municipal endeavors. He inspired the best from his own employees and was able once again to restore a sense of pride and accomplishment to city offices. Harrell's vision, backed up by the proposals of numerous citizen groups and consultants, provided Norfolk with the basis for a Master Plan for city growth and development--a

step that put it almost two years ahead of other areas in the competition for federal urban renewal dollars. Other writers have bemoaned the lack of unity and leadership that plagues most council-manager cities and precludes for the most part decisive action; thanks to City Manager C. A. Harrell and his close connection and cooperation with the People's Council and its corporate elite, Norfolk suffered no such disability. In fact, Norfolk, because it had such leadership, thrived in the area of urban renewal where most other council-manager cities failed: it was precisely because it had truly achieved such a professional and non-partisan atmosphere that such action was possible. Most other council-manager cities, because politics was mixed in with their administration, failed to achieve the level of consensus that was possible to sustain such activities--a level of unanimity that was ordinarily only possible in the highly partisan strong mayor cities.<sup>78</sup>

4. Lawrence M. Cox, the executive director of the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, headed a promising young staff of planners and designers who moved quickly to seize their opportunity before the momentum for progress dissipated. "Hustling young Larry Cox," as he was described by one trade magazine,<sup>79</sup> was ambitious and demanding enough to get quick results. The Authority's

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<sup>78</sup>see Jean L. Stinchcombe, op cit.

<sup>79</sup>Architectural Forum, p. 136.



program for relocation, as well as the total design for N.R.H.A. Project One, set a standard for the rest of the nation. Cox had been head of the N.R.H.A. almost from its founding, and over the years, especially during the hectic war years, had developed a capable staff that was both loyal to him and fully committed to redevelopment. Close collaboration between Cox, the N.R.H.A. Commissioners, the City Council, and the business community helped to push N.R.H.A. Project One off of the drawing boards and into reality.

5. The support of Norfolk's two major daily newspapers, the morning Virginian-Pilot and the evening Ledger-Dispatch (later the Ledger-Star after a merger with the Portsmouth Star), was instrumental in advancing both the cause of the Silkstocking movement and the accomplishments of its administration. The two papers, although fierce competitors, were owned and published by the same family group; together they served as the spokesmen for the city's business elite, and the accolades of triumph from the newspapers for the latest ground breaking or achievement frequently sounded brassier than any possible press release. The support of the papers, especially the more progressive Virginian-Pilot was critical to the People's efforts to win election, maintain momentum through the police scandal, and promote its program of redevelopment, code enforcement, and bonded indebtedness. Reporters for both papers were

insiders to both the events and the intrigue at city hall, and this access to the decision-makers, as well as the fact that a reporter in this era kept a fixed beat for years, gave them a stake in protecting their sources. In those days a reporter's reputation depended as much upon "what he knew and didn't tell as it did upon what he knew."<sup>80</sup>

6. The spirit of adventure and self-sacrifice that prevailed among Norfolk's citizenry helped enormously in clearing the hurdles inherent in redevelopment. The People's Ticket had been elected in 1946 with an overwhelming mandate for progress, and the citizens waited patiently through the initial stages of planning and development. Seizing control of city government took more, however, than winning a single election, yet the citizens did not lose faith even during the darkest hours of the police scandal--an event which could have easily wrecked all hope of progressive action in most administrations; in Norfolk, instead, it helped to assure success. The citizens were prepared for action, and they watched patiently as each new step unfolded. Norfolk's growth in population during the war year had been enormous, and municipal services had suffered greatly under this additional burden, but the people never lost faith that City Manager Harrell and the

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<sup>80</sup>Robert H. Mason, former editor of the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, interview by author, Tape recording, Norfolk, 27 September 1979.

Silkstocking Council would eventually catch up to this level of growth with their own ambitious program of expanded municipal services.

Other cities that were similar to Norfolk in many ways found their own plans for growth and redevelopment stymied because their own citizens lacked either the vision or the spirit of sacrifice to participate in progress; not so with Norfolk. Redevelopment, especially of the magnitude that had been planned, called for enormous personal hardships from many individuals, especially from those who could least afford to suffer more, and yet they bore their discomfort, and for the most part, bore it in silence. The People's government and its attendant push for progress truly represented the efforts of a rejuvenated body politic; the bulldozers that ripped through the sagging walls of the first Smith Street structure and the adjacent areas in N.R.H.A. Project One represented the high point in the momentary blaze of glory that characterized the Silkstocking Takeover.

CHAPTER TWO  
PREMONITIONS OF CRISIS

N.R.H.A. Project One would take more than five years to complete, but even before the bulldozers ripped through that first house on Smith Street, the men who had charted the meteoric rise of Norfolk's corporate stock had already retreated back to the plushness of their board rooms and counting houses. The individuals who had so carefully planned and nourished its inception were already fading from the scene. Each new ground breaking or ribbon cutting ceremony marked the passing of the old order: the planning phase was over, and now it was time for the builders.

The Silkstocking Takeover had run into a snag: as part of its promise to clean up city government and make it more responsive, the People's Ticket of Cooke, Darden, and Twohy had promised not to seek a second term; now the very events that served as tributes to their triumph stood as well as a tombstone to their passing. The Silkstocking Ticket was unable to propagate successors. The spirit of renaissance and reform that had vaulted it to victory had by 1950 dissipated, and then dissolved completely.

At first, as their term drew to a close, the reform movement sought to find others who would carry their banner,<sup>1</sup> but the sense of shared emergency that had propelled their postwar successes was giving way to an "Era of Good Feeling."<sup>2</sup> The business and civic leaders who had been drawn to the city's rescue now began to answer other callings; no one was willing to take again the risk they had earlier dared and openly oppose the Prieur Organization. The sense of urgency and shared emergency that had brought the reformers to power had passed; the Outs had become the Ins in the type of political perversity that always hastens the doom of such reform movements; dramatic change had become altogether too commonplace in Norfolk; and the extraordinary, the unusual, had become all too customary. Business was booming, and the citizens were no longer forced to turn to the corporate community to avert certain financial ruin. Local prosperity, aided by the Cold War state of military readiness, had lulled the citizens into false sense of overall contentment, fully prepared to count their blessings in the privacy of their own homes, untouched by and undemanding of municipal government.

When their search for successors came up dry, the stalwarts of the People's group again sought an audience with Organization chieftain Billy Prieur, hoping to find

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<sup>1</sup>Pretlow Darden.

<sup>2</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 July 1961.

some middle ground that would continue their legacy of progress within the more limited confines of machine politics. Finding compromise candidates was no easy matter, especially because Prieur would not agree to anyone who had played even the slightest role in the Silkstocking Takeover. Eventually the political negotiators were able to agree upon one man who emerged at the top of everyone's list of potential contenders.<sup>3</sup> W. Fred Duckworth was an ideal choice to head the Harmony Ticket that would emerge from these backroom discussions: as a relative newcomer to Norfolk from small-town North Carolina, he had no close financial, civic, or strong connections with the Silkstocking crowd. On the other hand, he possessed the type of outstanding managerial skills necessary to head up Norfolk's complex municipal organization. Duckworth had been brought to the area in 1936 by the Ford Motor Company to manage its South Norfolk plant, one of the few major industrial concerns in the area not directly owned by the People's reformers. Several years later he left that position to manage the area's War Production Board, a post that expanded his circle of community contacts. After the war he opened up Cavalier Ford, his own car dealership,<sup>4</sup> a project that received heavy financial backing from some of the Silkstocking group. Even though he was not a Norfolkian by

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<sup>3</sup>Pretlow Darden.

<sup>4</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 July 1961.

either birth or heritage, the People's group was favorably impressed by his managerial acumen, his impressive array of skills, and the extent of his commitment to his adopted city.<sup>5</sup>

The People's group were not as pleased with Duckworth's two running mates, both of whom were chosen less for their accomplishments than because nobody could find solid grounds to scratch them from the list. N. B. Etheridge, an independent garage owner, was a political unknown without any apparent ties to either the Organization or the Silkstocking crowd. Lawrence C. Page had served on the City Council just before the war, but had shown the good sense to excuse himself from office before being branded for its wartime failures. Although a real estate broker by profession, he had no close ties to the powerhouses of the People's group, and since he had also run as a Republican for the U. S. Senate against Organization scion Harry F. Byrd, Sr.,<sup>6</sup> he was obviously no longer closely associated with Prieur's crowd. For the People's forces, the Harmony Ticket of Duckworth, Page and Etheridge represented a marriage of necessity, rather than a bond of trust between these two disparate political groups.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Pretlow Darden and Robert W. Mason.

<sup>6</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 June 1942; and 14 June 1950.

<sup>7</sup>Pretlow Darden.

Shortly after the bulldozers ripped through the wall of that first house on Smith Street, City Manager C. A. Harrell, the one man who more than any other had been responsible for the rebirth and rejuvenation of Norfolk, departed to accept a similar position in San Antonio, Texas. At the time, the most common explanation for his departure was that he and Duckworth, the new mayor, had clashed bitterly over who would run the show at city hall.<sup>8</sup> The city could not endure two chief administrators pulling in opposite directions, and Duckworth, with his "bulldozer drive and directness," was bent on running the city from the mayor's office, a marked contrast to the free-wheeling independence granted Harrell under the People's reign.<sup>9</sup> For his part, Harrell had indicated for years that he would resign his position before violating his strict professional creed of independence from partisan considerations;<sup>10</sup> the arrival of Duckworth and the Harmony Ticket, however, meant that the Organization was again advancing a foothold in city hall. When Harrell left, with him went all hope of continuing the municipal reform brought about by the People's group; shortly thereafter his police chief and a number of other key administrators instrumental in carrying out his

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<sup>8</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 July 1961.

<sup>9</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 4 July 1975.

<sup>10</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 4 June 1950.



program also departed with indications that they had been fired by the new Council.<sup>11</sup>

Mayor W. Fred Duckworth was the perfect man to step in now and fill the gap in leadership left by Harrell's departure: he offered a continuation of the progress and prosperity without necessitating any further decision or dissension on the part of the citizens. He was an extraordinarily able leader, and if the decorum of democracy was somewhat abridged under his tutelage, the voters did not seem to mind very much. The Planning Stage had passed, the Builder had taken over, and the people approved unquestioningly the fruits of his labor, giving credit equally to the Planners and the Builder alike. Duckworth was above all else a bricks-and-mortar man, and he presided daily over the construction of the New Norfolk; as the building blocks of its bright facade were laid in place, nothing, not even the heavy storm clouds of racial disunity building on the horizon, seemed capable of diverting that progress.

The Organization made no attempt under Duckworth to return to the corrupt and profligate practices of its wartime administration; its members had been absent long enough from the seats of power that they were content to settle for positions, without demanding authority. Although hard-headed, and occasionally dictatorial, Duckworth had no

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<sup>11</sup>Claude J. Staylor, former Chief of Police and City Councilman, interview by author, Tape recording, Norfolk, 25 July 1979.

problem adapting to the programs begun under the People's group. He continued Harrell's administrative innovations, merely rerouting the technical advisors through the mayor's office. He was extremely aggressive, but like Harrell, he had a sense of how to handle himself; when he moved, he moved decisively, but he never moved until he was satisfied that all the conditions were favorable. Harrell's departure brought relations with the People's group dangerously close to a head, but Duckworth stepped in with a firm hand to take personal control of city government, and so assuaged some of the fears of machine politics.

During the Duckworth era, Norfolk was clearly run from the mayor's office: Council policy was invariably decided there during the private pre-sessions before the regular public meeting, and those councilmen not in attendance were told later how to vote. Duckworth thrived on consensus, and minor differences between Council members at the public session took on major proportions in his mind. Although protective of the Organization's interests, Duckworth would not brook incompetence. He rose quickly to the top of the Organization and soon, along with Prieur, dominated its decisions as well. This combination of elected authority, political power, administrative expertise, and driving personal force was devastating to city employees who faltered or got out of line.

Duckworth did not have to bargain for acquiescence from the People's group; he won it through strength. The Silkstocking crowd respected Duckworth's ability and integrity, or at least they feared crossing him without a guarantee of victory. Although more political than they had been, Duckworth's program did not differ perceptively from their own: city hall was still well run; there was little evidence of corruption; business leaders were still consulted; the authority of the expert consultants and advisors was still in tact; and the framing of Harrell's blueprints was well underway. All in all, the business establishment had few complaints, although plenty of reason to feel uneasy: such power, concentrated in one man, if misdirected, could prove disastrous for the city. The citizens, too seemed relatively content with Duckworth's administration, and councilmanic contests during this time produced very little in the way of a challenge to the Mayor's preeminence.

This was truly the "Era of Good Feeling," as one local historian labeled it:<sup>12</sup> even the corporate and civic leaders who had wrested control of the city's growth from the courthouse ring politicians now breathed as well the chloroform of prosperity. Business as usual prevailed at city hall: "the reformers had grown tired, the regulars had

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<sup>12</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 July 1961.

taken over, and things would have to get pretty bad before the reformers would stir again.<sup>13</sup>

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Brown v. Board of Education case struck like a thunderbolt through this false sense of local optimism that prevailed in May of 1954. By the time the citizens of Norfolk looked up to discern the dangers ahead, they found the state's political leaders scurrying in panic for punitive strictures and hastily contrived extra-legal shelters as a means of diverting the raging force of racial discontent that had been building for centuries in the backwaters that surrounded the city. There was never any question that Norfolk would be left free, or that its leaders would even be willing for that matter, to pursue an independent course of reaction, separate from the rest of the state. The very fact that Duckworth was now so firmly entrenched at the throttle of municipal control would mean that the path of response would follow as well the same dictates of the Byrd Organization.

It is ironic that Norfolk would become the main battlefield upon which the fate of Virginia's Massive Resistance (to school integration) plan would be decided: it was one of the most liberal cities in the South, and vast

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<sup>13</sup>Louis I. Jaffe, as quoted by Harold Sugg, "1945-1965: Youth Takes Command," chap. in Lenoir Chambers and Joseph E. Shank, Saltwater and Printer's Ink: Norfolk and Its Newspapers (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p. 368.

segments of its population had little use for those racial codes and strictures, both written and unwritten, that were primarily Southern. The storm whipped waves of Massive Resistance would break as well over Arlington, Charlottesville, Prince Edward County, and Warren County, but these would be small scale tests of its voracity when compared to a city of Norfolk's size. At the time, Norfolk had a population rapidly approaching 300,000 and was earning new status as Virginia's largest city. More than one-third of its population represented directly the liberalizing influence of service in its naval or N.A.T.O forces; the rest of its citizenry greatly benefitted in their day-to-day contact with these as well as other representatives of vast national and international interests. Norfolk, particularly under the able leadership of Harrell and the People's administration, had forsaken its obligatory glance to Richmond for guidance, and instead looked to the rest of the world for approval.

The many, varied opportunities of government service in Tidewater had made the city a mecca for southern Blacks hoping to improve their lot in life. The integration of the military forces that had taken place during the administration of President Truman meant that Blacks could rise to positions of leadership in an integrated society that existed just on the periphery of Norfolk's own. The lure of steady employment in the area's many fine shipyards and

re-work facilities had prompted a continual stream of job-hunters that began pouring into the city before the hostilities of World War II had even begun. Although most Norfolk Blacks were of relatively low economic status when compared to their white neighbors, a middle class was growing at a faster pace than elsewhere in the South. Although most of the major trade unions had not yet been cracked, the door of opportunity to non-discriminatory positions in government and war-related industries had just been opened, and opportunities in the private sector would soon be available as soon as Blacks had achieved success in these endeavors.

All in all, the history of race relations in Norfolk had been good, especially under the even-handed municipal management of C. A. Harrell and the Silkstocking crowd. Only 27% of Norfolk's 300,000 citizens were Black, a Black population "large enough to provide leadership, but not so large as to be believed to threaten established patterns."<sup>14</sup> But to Duckworth, the Black leadership had already proven itself a thorn in the side of municipal unanimity, and Duckworth was not one to overlook even the slightest irritant. Even though Black councilmanic challenger P. B. Young had posed no real threat in the 1952 race, Duckworth was apparently miffed that the Black

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<sup>14</sup>Jane Reif, *Crisis in Norfolk*, (Richmond: Virginia Council on Human Relations, 1960), p. 1.

community had opposed his own "harmony" slate. There were other, more serious signs of a growing challenge in the Black community, far more significant than the periodic offering of token opposition candidates. By 1954 Blacks found themselves in the position of increasingly vocal opposition to the Mayor's policies in the fields of housing, development, recreation, and municipal finance. The Supreme Court's decision in May of that year only opened up an area of dissension that was more readily visible to the general public.

Ever since the first Blacks began moving in to the white section of Brambleton in the mid-1940s, a succession of City Councils had been incapable of halting the demise of traditional barriers to integrated neighborhoods. The tub-thumping of the Organizations' wartime Council gave mute sanction to a wave of white violence and vandalism that temporarily halted the spread in the Brambleton area,<sup>15</sup> but the election of the People's Ticket in June of 1946 gave new impetus to that transition. The People's group tried to maintain an air of orderly calm and reasonableness; their approach was to talk out differences with committees comprised of members of both races. In the atmosphere of calm that prevailed under their reign, traditional barriers to color advancement in Brambleton fell quickly. Brambleton had always had led a somewhat tenuous existence as the sole

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<sup>15</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 1 June 1946.

white community in the zone of the city dominated by Blacks, and its white residents had relied heavily on the combination of natural, geographic, and traditional barriers to keep it that way. Once the color barrier around Corprew Avenue was successfully breached and violence had subsided, the area fell quickly to growing pressure to provide homes for the emerging Black middle-class. In 1949 Ruffner Elementary was opened for the diminishing white population of Brambleton and the Stonewall Jackson School was turned over to the Black school system.<sup>16</sup> In 1950, the John Goode (Elementary) School, ironically named for Norfolk's Confederate congressman and president of the Virginia Constitutional Convention instrumental in stripping Blacks of the power to vote,<sup>17</sup> was turned over to the Blacks. In 1952 Ruffner was reopened as a junior high school in the Black school system, signaling the final defeat of the area's last white holdouts.<sup>18</sup>

Once the color line had been successfully breached and finally broken in the Brambleton section, it fell more easily in other parts of the city as well. Norfolk in the 1950s, like many other older Southern cities, was unlike its Northern counterparts: it did not have a single, central,

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<sup>16</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 1 June 1946.

<sup>17</sup>Henry S. Rorer, History of Norfolk Public Schools (Norfolk: by author, 1968), p. 207.

<sup>18</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 19 April 1958.



Black ghetto surrounded by a ring of white suburbs.<sup>19</sup> Instead, Norfolk was an amalgamation of a number of small communities, most of which had their own sections for Black housing. Successive annexations had brought these communities within the city boundaries, but the result was that Norfolk's Black population occupied a number of isolated districts that spread out from the central downtown housing area. Consequently, by 1950 Black communities existed next to whites in the Atlantic City, Lamberts Point, Granby (Bollingbrook), Sewells Point (Titustown), Berkley, Campostella, and Tanner's Creek (Oakmont) sections of the city.<sup>20</sup> There was some pressure to expand the color lines in these areas, but the traditional proximity of Black and whites in the city had forestalled the white exodus that had taken place in Brambleton, Chesterfield, and in some areas of Berkley.<sup>21</sup> Thus, there was little apparent danger of open racial conflict within the city boundaries in 1954 when the Supreme Court's school desegregation decision was handed down: the city's traditional residential patterns, its history of good race relations, opportunities for advancement in the military and government service, already integrated military housing, and the increasing desegregation of the city's private charitable, health

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<sup>19</sup>Taueber and Taueber, op cit., pp. 35-96.

<sup>20</sup>U. S. Census of Population, (1950), op cit..

<sup>21</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 29 May 1946.

religious, welfare, and educational boards<sup>22</sup> seemed adequate to surmount any submerged hostilities.

Increasingly, however, local attention began to focus on the working class neighborhoods of the Tanner's Creek District of Norfolk County, scheduled for annexation into the city on January 1, 1955. Portions of the district had been unpoliced cesspools of crime, gambling, prostitution and roadhouses that operated under quasi-official auspices just beyond the legal reach of city enforcement; other areas were characterized by vast tracts of substandard housing without adequate plumbing or facilities. The area had already prompted uncharacteristic bickering on the otherwise harmonious City Council over unexpectedly high cost of annexation versus the dire necessity of Norfolk's continued need for room for industrial and suburban expansion.<sup>23</sup>

By the summer of 1954, Norfolk County officials had all but washed their hands of the area, its annexation having been officially sanctioned. The Tanner's Creek District existed in a state of limbo: Norfolk County officials refused to maintain costly municipal services in an area that would soon no longer be their problem, and the City of Norfolk had not yet acquired title or authority to deal with the area. Norfolk's eleventh-hour hesitations over the exorbitant asking price and the reluctance of a few

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<sup>22</sup>Jane Reif, Crisis in Norfolk, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 March 1954.

councilmen to close the deal only served to increase the area's sense of isolation from governmental authority. At any rate, Tanner's Creek residents began to grow accustomed to the idea of handling matters in their own manner without any official intervention.

By mid-summer, the area's sense of isolation and helplessness was further increased by the breakdown of traditional color barriers in the formerly all-white Coronado section. Coronado was a small (300 homes) community of white, middle-class wage earners; it lay between Tidewater Drive and Sewells Point Road with its northern boundary at Widgeon Road. Since a large number of its families were military, the area had a more rapid turnover of ownership than would be otherwise expected. Like many other areas in the city, Coronado was bounded on two sides by the well-defined Black neighborhoods of Oakwood, Oakwood Park, and Rosemont.<sup>24</sup> Most of the homes in these traditional Black sections were far below the level of the all-white Coronado homes: 85% were found to be substandard in terms of plumbing, utilities, and "tarpaper construction."<sup>25</sup>

Coronado was bounded as well by one of the few housing areas for middle-class Blacks, and only narrow Widegeon Road separated the white and Black developments. Chesapeake Manor Apartments (332 units), Chesapeake Manor Gardens (389

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<sup>24</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 August 1954.

<sup>25</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 6 August 1955.

homes), and Mamie Homes, Incorporated (150 homes), all built since 1950, made the northern boundary of Coronado a haven for Black middle-class families, many of them displaced by Redevelopment Project One. The Black community faced a severe shortage of available middle-class housing, and the long waiting lists at all of the properties north of Coronado had put a premium on housing there.<sup>26</sup> In addition, a number of Black leaders complained that most Black neighborhoods "were generally denied city improvements"<sup>27</sup> such as curbs, gutters, parks, playgrounds, sewer and street repair. All in all, Coronado, with its plentiful supply of middle-class housing, city improvements, and high rate of turnover, was a natural target for Black expansion. Trouble began when a Black couple was looking at a house in the Black section on the north side of Widgeon Road; a white Navy housewife spotted them, walked across the road, and asked them if they wanted to buy her house. Because of the huge demand and short supply of middle-class housing for Blacks, this first Navy family received a higher price for their home than they would have received from a white buyer. Other Navy families followed suit, and soon panic gripped Coronado's more established white residents. At about this time the market in Coronado for sale to white buyers all but disappeared; the white banking establishment, realizing the

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<sup>26</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 August 1954.

<sup>27</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 31 August 1954.

inevitable, refused to finance white buyers in Coronado, and the Veteran's Administration appraisals were dropped as they "generally do go down in areas where Negroes are moving into what was once all-white territory".<sup>28</sup> Once the pattern had begun, white home-owners found it impossible to reverse: they were trapped and limited by powers beyond their grasp.

The harassment of Black buyers began innocently enough: two elderly white ladies had allowed a bundle of papers to blow out their car window; other passing motorists stopped to help them retrieve the papers. When others learned that the panorama of stopped automobiles lining both sides of the street had frightened off a prospective Black buyer, the idea of neighborhood caravans was begun "to show that it was a white neighborhood."<sup>29</sup> The idea caught on immediately; although a number of homes were sold to Black buyers, few Blacks had actually moved into their houses. As the word spread to outlying areas, outsiders began to join in the caravans. Soon random acts of violence, especially against unoccupied dwellings already sold to Blacks, became commonplace. Bricks and bottles were hurled as missiles, a "No Nigers (sic) wanted" sign appeared,<sup>30</sup> the pipes to one house were ripped out before a Black family could move

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<sup>28</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 August 1954.

<sup>29</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 30 July 1954.

<sup>30</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 16 August 1954.

in,<sup>31</sup> a bomb was thrown at another house, a dozen white youths rocked the car of a Black couple,<sup>32</sup> another house and automobile were bombed,<sup>33</sup> bullets were fired into Black homes,<sup>34</sup> and soon armed caravans of whites and Blacks began roaming the area looking for trouble.<sup>35</sup> The prospect that the present rate of property damage, if not halted, would escalate into human tragedy became more and more evident.

Blacks in and around the Coronado area were clearly terrified by the racial turmoil they confronted. The Norfolk County Police, still the legal authority in the Tanner's Creek District, were not much help in appeasing their fears. The County Police came promptly when called, but they engaged in only minimal defensive patrolling. Often the Police stood among crowds of jeering whites and were indistinguishable from the taunters. County officials were understandably eager to play down the true extent of the threat that existed in Coronado, but one officer's characterization of the site of a bomb blast, "the hole appeared to be that left by a dog trying to bury a

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<sup>31</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 August 1954.

<sup>32</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 August 1954.

<sup>33</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 September 1954.

<sup>34</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 20 September 1954.

<sup>35</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 August 1954.

bone,"<sup>36</sup> only aroused Blacks to the fear that little was being done to protect them. Black leaders turned first to the Norfolk City Council for help,<sup>37</sup> and then to the governor when their pleas for assistance were denied. Duckworth refused to provide police protection for Black families because the city would not acquire jurisdiction until January 1, 1955; Governor Stanley was powerless under state law to commit the State Police or National Guard unless the local governing body first requested aid. The fact that former Council aspirant P. B. Young, Sr., carried the request to the governor over the protestations of the Norfolk City Council, further enraged Duckworth.<sup>38</sup> After a month of escalating violence had passed since the request for city assistance, the Virginian-Pilot stepped in with some harsh words of criticism for the Mayor and the rest of his City Council:

The leadership in the Norfolk City government has been short-sighted in deciding not to show any interest in Coronado; the residential area just outside the City line . . . .

It does not make good sense for a city to use its authority one mile beyond the city limit to make a numbers racket raid, such as was made Thursday by Norfolk police, but to withhold its influence and authority from a problem which has potentially much more tragic consequences than a numbers game.

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<sup>36</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 30 August 1954.

<sup>37</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 August 1954.

<sup>38</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 12 September 1954.

It would be better to provide too much law enforcement than what may tragically prove later to have been too little and too late. The hoodlum elements ought not to be left in any doubt as to what confronts them if they continue to make an unpleasant situation worse.<sup>39</sup>

In desperation, the Black leaders finally approached their old contacts in the Silkstocking crowd who, although no longer in control of any governmental authority, nevertheless still possessed enormous financial power and corporate authority. A reporter for the Journal and Guide summed up the resultant beefed-up county patrols this way:

The powers-that-be Downtown, after caucusing with the Uptown [Black] leaders, brought pressure to bear upon county officials, and the tragedy that could have been Coronado was averted.<sup>40</sup>

A serious breach between the city's Black community and its white political leaders was growing, and the fact that P. B. Young and others had effected, with Silkstocking backing, a successful flanking maneuver around the Council only made matters worse. Duckworth and the Organization were clearly opposed to any further expansion of the Black population within the city, and they set about to severely chastise anyone who strayed beyond the acceptable boundaries. The city government had done all that it could legally do to block a group of Black developers from

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<sup>39</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 September 1954.

<sup>40</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 7 January 1956.



acquiring a large tract of land off Broad Creek Road; the white leaders were strongly opposed to any development that allowed Blacks to settle along the City's major approach route from Virginia Beach (now Virginia Beach Boulevard). Once they saw that the deal could not be prevented, the City Planning Commission stepped in to prevent residential use by Blacks, and zoned as much of the tract as possible for industrial and commercial purposes.<sup>41</sup> When Black leaders persisted in attempting to develop the remaining acreage into an attractive subdivision (Broad Creek Shores), the city employed its powers of eminent domain to buy up some of the land as a further obstacle. The City Council passed an ordinance authorizing the Department of Parks and Recreation to acquire a 40-acre tract "by purchase or condemnation, if necessary," for use as a public park and school site.<sup>42</sup> The Black population of the city was enraged and could see "no other apparent valid reason for seizing the land, other than to prevent colored home owners from locating on it."<sup>43</sup> The action prompted a 40-hour whirlwind drive in the Black community to collect enough signatures on a petition for a referendum, and thereby block the ordinance from taking effect.

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<sup>41</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 31 August 1954.

<sup>42</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 6 August 1955.

<sup>43</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 6 August 1955.

Newly appointed Councilman Roy B. Martin, Jr., rose with the Organization's response, a proposal to "study" the question, with an eye towards amending the section of the city charter that dealt with such referendums. The Black community had organized the petition drive (25% of the total vote cast in the most recent councilmanic election was needed; since the last race had been one of the "no-contest" elections for which Duckworth became famous, only 5,456 votes had been cast. Black leaders collected 2,488 signatures in less than two days) in order to affect some sort of compromise with the city,<sup>44</sup> but the Council and the Black community remained at loggerheads for more than a month. At last, with the day of the referendum fast approaching, the Organization agreed to a compromise; it was wisely unwilling to test its strength at the ballot box in what was seen by many white leaders as an illegal and arbitrary use of power. The city agreed to take only 24 of the original 40 acres in the site, and leave the other 16 acres, already platted and under contract, for development as Broad Creek Shores. The city's chief concern, that the Black housing development be widely separated from all-white Ingleside Elementary School, was met,<sup>45</sup> and the Blacks were able to keep a large tract of waterfront property,

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<sup>44</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 6 July 1955.

<sup>45</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 September 1955; Roy B. Martin, Jr., former Mayor of Norfolk, interview by author, tape recording, Norfolk, 18 February 1991.

clearly separated by the city's acquisition and natural geographic barriers from nearby all-white communities, for expansion. Councilmen Page, Abbott, and Riley, hardliners to the bitter end, dissented in the decision because it included paying a premium price to the Black developers for the city's share of the original tract. The final balloting on the matter produced one of the few split-votes ever recorded on the Duckworth Council,<sup>46</sup> and ensured the Mayor's bitter enmity for cracking the facade of his previously united front. The Black community left the Council chambers congratulating themselves for their victory, unaware that Mayor Duckworth, a sore loser at the game of power politics, was already plotting their demise.

At the height of the Broad Creek Shores controversy, the city had appointed a three-man committee to study "the need and desirability of obtaining additional sites for use in constructing private homes for our colored citizens."<sup>47</sup> At the time of its appointment, the Land Committee, or Kaufman Committee as it was called in the Black community, had been a part of Mayor Duckworth's efforts to compromise the impasse short of granting land in the Broad Creek area to Black developers. Recognizing the city's "desperate need" for additional, suitable sites for Black development outside of Broad Creek, the Mayor turned to the Silkstocking

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<sup>46</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 29 April 1956.

<sup>47</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 6 August 1955.

crowd to solve the dispute peaceably. The three most powerful representatives of the old People's group still left in the city's government--N.R.H.A. Chairman Charles Kaufman, Planning Commissioner Henry Clay Hofhemier, II, and John S. Jenkins--were appointed to the committee. Privately the committee was charged with the responsibility of finding additional room for Black expansion in areas that would not threaten white housing developments or segregated schools; no one wanted a repeat of the racial strife that characterized the Coronado settlement.

Initially the committee received a hostile reception from the Black community because of its association with the Mayor's position on Broad Creek shores, but gradually the panel's outstanding reputation for fairness and the high esteem in which its members were generally held, won over the support and cooperation of the Black community. The Journal and Guide apologized for its initial inhospitality, terming it "a natural reaction to an unnatural determination on the part of City Council."<sup>48</sup> After considerable study and numerous meetings with Black leaders, the committee failed to find appropriate sites for new developments; indeed Norfolk's desperate need for more space for all types of expansion was the driving motivation behind its costly annexation initiatives.

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

Instead the Land Committee adopted a proposal to undertake an extensive reclamation project in a section of the new Tanner's Creek District that included Oakwood, Lincoln Park, and Rosemont--a 370-acre site that included more than 1,000 dwellings, all of them already occupied by Black families. Oakwood began its existence as a shanty town on the outskirts of existing (white) settlements before the turn of the century. For as little as \$50 a Black family could purchase a small tract of land and then scrounge scrap lumber, tarpaper, and materials to build a shack. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the homes were sub-standard; few had adequate sanitary facilities; and even fewer could be rehabilitated to comply with existing city codes.<sup>49</sup> Even the Journal and Guide recognized that the area contained "some of the worst imaginable slums," and applauded the committee's decision.<sup>50</sup> The committee proposed a massive redevelopment and reclamation project that would rebuild the community to accommodate 2,500 families--1,500 more than at present--in individual homes, semi-detached housing, and garden apartments. The project would include an elementary school, playground, and small shopping center.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 29 April 1956.

<sup>50</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 6 August 1955.

<sup>51</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 29 April 1956.

The proposal was well received by members of both the Black and white communities; "inasmuch as the site proposed for reclamation has been occupied by colored people for the past sixty-five years, the segregation factor does not enter the package."<sup>52</sup> In point of fact, no other alternative existed for the area. Most of the homes would have to be condemned and torn down anyway under existing health, fire, safety, and building codes, and the city would be unwilling under current spending formulas to extend sewer and water lines to the area or pave streets, provide sidewalks, streetlights, or gutters. The Redevelopment and Housing Authority sought to allay the fears of Oakwood residents by promising to give a "liberal" appraisal for existing homes, relocate those homes sound enough to save, provide financing for new homes, give residents priority in site selection, and even trade comparable land for redeveloped sites.<sup>53</sup>

Kaufman and the N.R.H.A. were surprised then to hear the voracity of the Oakwood community's opposition to renewal. Most residents knew they were too poor to afford the new development even if their current substandard dwellings were generously appraised; they lived in Oakwood because there they could survive on little or no regular income. "We old people can't buy new homes," said one resident, "If you take our homes, we'll just be out in the

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<sup>52</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 6 August 1955.

<sup>53</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 29 April 1956.

street."<sup>54</sup> Home owners were understandably unwilling to take their turn in the waiting lines for a unit in Norfolk's already overcrowded public housing. They had heard horror stories from other Blacks who had been resettled during N.R.H.A. Project One; thus, they were content instead to stay where they were, as they were. The strong anti-redevelopment sentiment forced a critical re-examination of the Oakwood project on the part of the city's Black leadership. Attorneys J. Hugo Madison and Joe Jordan objected that the project tended to perpetuate residential segregation.<sup>55</sup> Others began to question the advisability of crowding an additional 1,500 families in an area that already held more than 1,000. Most stated they would oppose it until the current residents were given sufficient guarantees, written or otherwise, to sway a majority of local support. Thomas Young, president of the Journal and Guide, and Rev. W. L. Hamilton, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Dr. Lyman Brooks, president of Norfolk State College (now University) and other Black leaders who maintained a strong attachment to the Silkstocking crowd, still favored the project, but the growing split in the Black community over the city's use of its redevelopment and housing powers was quickly pushing younger, more activist leaders to the forefront.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 29 April 1956.

<sup>55</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 31 March 1956.

<sup>56</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 29 April 1956.

The Oakwood Redevelopment controversy was an important episode in the history of the period for a number of reasons. First, it marked the emergence of an important coalition between Mayor Duckworth and the remnants of the People's group still in power. Both groups were committed to continuing the city's informal practice of segregated housing and eager not to repeat the horrors of the Coronado situation. Mayor Duckworth may have been rebuffed at his premature attempt to forestall a Broad Creek Shores settlement, but with the Silkstocking crowd and the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority firmly in his camp, further efforts would be both more calculated and more successful. Oakwood represented the willingness of the old People's representatives to harness the powers of redevelopment to insure segregated housing developments. It also indicates the area of the city that was the most natural target for new redevelopment activity: few of the homes in Oakwood could ever hope to pass the city's minimum housing codes, and blight and dilapidation were evident throughout the neighborhood.

Finally, Oakwood points to a growing split in the Black community between the older, business oriented leaders like P. B. Young, Rev. Hamilton, and W. T. Mason and the younger, more aggressive activists like Joe Jordan, Victor



Ashe, and J. Hugo Madison.<sup>57</sup> The next round would be fought in the courts, and the younger leaders had neither the commitment to compromise nor the skill at bargaining possessed by their elders. Oakwood proved that these younger, more aggressive leaders were gaining a ready audience of listeners willing to hear the message that the forces of state and local authority were being piled up against them and that a new tack was both desirable and necessary. The more established Black leaders such as Young, Hamilton, and Mason still commanded enormous respect in both the Black and white communities, but all their powers of amelioration would be needed to avert future strife between their charges and the Organization.

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<sup>57</sup>For a more complete explanation of this point, see Henry Lewis Suggs, P. B. Young, Newspaperman (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1988), p. 183.

CHAPTER THREE  
FIRST REACTIONS TO BROWN

The intensity of the school integration controversy may best be seen within this context of an ongoing power struggle between segments of the Black and white communities; in both instances, Norfolk's pattern of residential segregation, because it brought Black and white neighborhoods within close proximity to one another, was the cause of friction between the races. Even so, the initial reaction in Norfolk to the Supreme Court decision was a decided calmness. School Superintendent Brewbaker spoke for the educational community when he urged:

. . . an intellectual rather than an emotional approach. We must accept these decisions and give them considered judgment and not let our emotions get in the way . . . . We will do everything we can from an intelligent point of view.

Brewbaker went on to forecast "very little mixture" of races due to the residential "lines" within the city. Councilmen Ezra T. Summers and Roy Martin echoed the political sentiment:

Norfolk will probably be less effected than any city in the state because of the geographical set up here [that includes] well-defined residential districts.

The Virginian-Pilot also pointed to the bulwark of de facto segregation that stood against integration encroachments:

In Norfolk and other Virginia cities where Negro and white schools are built largely in conformity with the white and Negro patterns of residence, where the Negro population is distinctly in the minority, and where the two races respect each other, adjustment to the new order will be gradual and not likely to produce deep change for a considerable time . . .

The majority of Southerners, and the best of [the] Southern leadership will strive to work out their civilization in accord with the constitutional requirements."<sup>1</sup>

Newly elected Governor Thomas B. Stanley, fresh from his narrow victory over Republican challenger Theodore Roosevelt (Ted) Dalton, reacted calmly as well. He contemplated "no precipitate action" and stated that the "views of leaders of both races will be invited" in approaching the problems created by the court. But Stanley's calm reaction was met with a hail of abuse from Southside Virginia, from whence had come his winning margin over Dalton, and soon he assumed a more militant posture, "I shall use every legal means at my command to continue segregated schools in Virginia." Former Governor Tuck accurately expressed the Southside's sentiment:

There is no middle ground, no compromise . . . If the other [areas of Virginia] won't stand with us, I say make 'em . . . If you ever let them integrate anywhere, the whole state will be integrated in a short time.

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<sup>1</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 18 May 1954.

A new political group, the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, was then being formed in the Southside to feed the venom of the state politicians and give credence to their pledge to resist integration at all cost. The Defenders did not represent the night-rider or confederate-flag-waving brand of resistance, but as a state-wide organization they gave backbone to all those politicians, both state and local, who similarly pledged unyielding opposition to integration in any form.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the hysteria that characterized the Southside in general and the leadership of the Byrd Organization in specific, the reaction on the part of Norfolk citizens remained one of tranquility. A sampling of letters to the editor of the Virginian-Pilot revealed that by a two-to-one ratio the writers expressed "a calm, rational attitude towards desegregation and/or a strong disapproval of the public stand of Virginia officials." A local group for interracial cooperation concluded from this analysis that:

There exists in this area [Norfolk] of the South a body of moderate, informed, thoughtful, educated, and earnest public opinion which would accept desegregation easily. Extremist opinion is always noisy, and people who are against anything shout louder than those who are simply acquiescent.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Virginius Dabney, Virginia: The New Dominion, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 528-531.

<sup>3</sup>The Women's Council For Interracial Cooperation, "Letters to the Press: A Sampling of Public Opinion on Desegregation," W.C.I.C. News Sheet, March, 1955.

One predictable response from Norfolk officials was the immediate halt and quiet reassessment of the city's dramatic school building program. The postwar baby boom had brought the state-wide need for classroom space to crisis proportions, and Governor John Battle had arranged to set aside \$75,000,000 in state funds for school construction during his four year (1951-1955) term. The localities had previously been held responsible for all such construction --a fact that put Virginia's school system at the bottom of any listing of quality or funding effort: in 1950 Virginia had the lowest percentage of high school attendance in the nation, next to the highest percentage of high school drop-outs before graduation, and next to the smallest percentage of school age children in school--and the state had never before done much to help its localities meet their pressing needs.<sup>4</sup> Norfolk, in the waning days of the People's administration and City Manager C. A. Harrell's tenure in office, jumped at this chance to receive its share of state funding and embarked upon an aggressive \$13,000,000 school construction program that included new buildings and improvements to both the Black and white school systems alike.<sup>5</sup> This program included the first new school buildings for Blacks in the city, the others having been hand-me-downs from the white community as population shifts and

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<sup>4</sup>Dabney, op cit., pp. 522, 524.

<sup>5</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 28 January 1955.

needs dictated.<sup>6</sup> Four new schools, (Bowling Park, Young Park, Diggs Park, and Lindenwood) three of them built in part with federal funds as a consequence of the city's redevelopment efforts, had been added to the Black system prior to the Brown decision,<sup>7</sup> and other funds were spent on additions or improvements to existing schools<sup>8</sup>.

The Norfolk School Board went to great lengths to spell out its position as clearly as possible:

1. We intend, without mental reservation, to uphold and abide by the laws of the land.
2. We believe in the Public School system, and pledge our efforts to its continuation in this City.
3. We believe that our primary duty is to preserve and promote the welfare of all the children involved, through education, and that any system by us administered must be devised to achieve this end, within the framework of the law.
4. Unstudied action, or mere lip service to a principle could jeopardize the aims of all, and might well lead to disintegration, rather than integration of any form.
5. We do not believe that local conditions permit the customs, habits, or prejudices of over a century to be abolished overnight by fiat, but rather can be met or reconciled only by prayerful deliberation, by reasoned planning, and by the will and desire to succeed.

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<sup>6</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 19 April 1958.

<sup>7</sup>W.P. Sullivan (Director of Buildings and Grounds), "Cost Data, Outline Specifications and Facilities in the New Schools Constructed in Norfolk, Virginia, Since 1951," a report to the Norfolk School Board, 15 February 1956, Norfolk Public Schools files.

<sup>8</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 28 January 1955.

6. We do not think it is legally within our powers to immediately effect these changes, but rather we contemplate that the State Department of Education, under whose rules and regulations we now operate by law, must first make these changes possible, as and when prescribed by the Legislature of Virginia. We assume and rely on the fact that this will be done within the time and in the manner required.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of their careful appeal to the political realities of the day--"it is [not] legally within our powers to immediately effect these changes"--and obeisance to the State Department of Education and the state Legislature, both controlled by the Byrd Organization, the fact that their statement also carried the code words of compliance--"abide by the laws of the land,"--and indicated their intention to preserve public education "within the framework of the law," gave further reason for the state's political leaders to question whether Norfolk's School Board intended to abide by whatever plan of opposition they eventually dictated. Norfolk's hope that "reasoned planning" would eventually get them out of the dilemma offered no solace to the rest of the state, but at least indicated a course of action for local political leaders.

Behind the scenes the School Board worked to insure that, through "reasoned planning,"<sup>10</sup> it could back up its assertion that integration could be minimized with careful attention to the geographic location of its schools.

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<sup>9</sup>Formal School Board Minutes, 1 July 1955, Norfolk Public Schools files.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

Although new school construction had been halted following the Brown decision,<sup>11</sup> rapid expansion of the whole Tidewater area, the advent of the postwar "baby boom" generation, and the pending annexations meant that new schools were needed almost immediately. The first order of the Board was to get its building plan back on track as quickly as possible.

At the time of the Brown decision, the school system had several projects under consideration which were jeopardized by the changing political landscape. In addition to Oceanair Elementary, which was already in the planning stages, three other sites were under active consideration for new schools: a tract South of Indian River Road at the Virginian Railroad tracks was proposed for "Southside Junior High School" for Blacks; a large parcel of land on Maltby, Shoop, and Withers Avenues in the Ballentine area was supported as a replacement for the aging Lafayette School; and a site just west of the existing facility was proposed for rebuilding the equally dilapidated Titustown Elementary school for Blacks (see Figure 1, page 148).<sup>12</sup> All three projects faced new scrutiny, apparently as a result of the Brown v. Board decision, and the Board's intention to continue building facilities for Blacks seemed to dissolve: "Southside" (i.e., Campostella) Junior High

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<sup>11</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 13 October 1954.

<sup>12</sup>Letter from J. J. Brewbaker, Superintendent of Schools, to H. H. George, Norfolk City Manager, 11 November 1954, Norfolk Public Schools files.



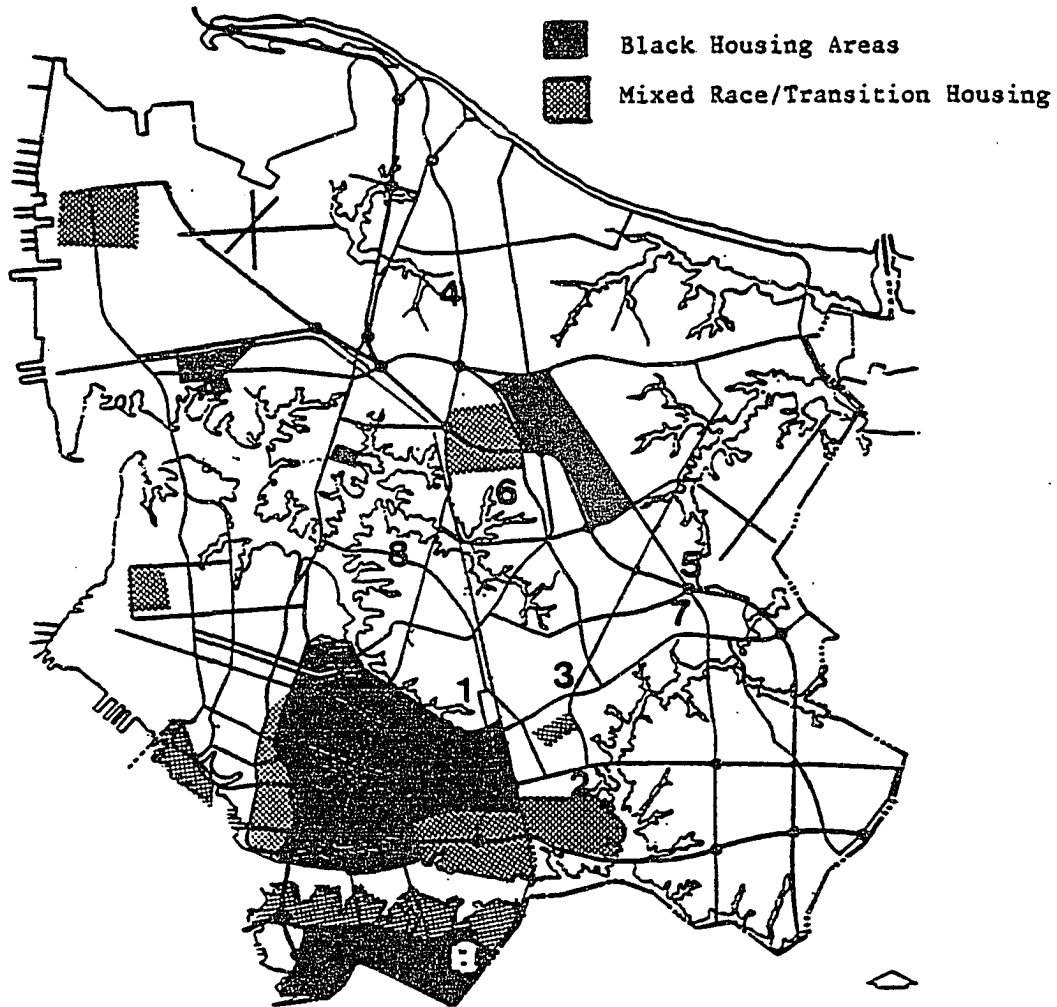


Figure 1. School Sites Under Consideration in 1954

- |          |                                |          |                           |
|----------|--------------------------------|----------|---------------------------|
| <b>A</b> | Titustown Elementary Annex     | <b>4</b> | Cottage Toll Road Site    |
| <b>B</b> | Southside (Campostella) Junior | <b>5</b> | Military Highway Site     |
| <b>1</b> | Maltby Avenue Site             | <b>6</b> | Norview Junior High       |
| <b>2</b> | Ingleside Junior High Site     | <b>7</b> | Lansdale Junior High Site |
| <b>3</b> | Atterbury Road Site            | <b>8</b> | Lakewood Junior High Site |

was not built until almost a decade later; the Maltby Avenue tract was sold to a private developer; and, although an addition was built on a portion of the third site, Titustown Elementary was never rebuilt as originally intended.

In addition to these projects, Superintendent Brewbaker indicated that the City Planning Commission had assisted in selecting five other sites in the Tanners Creek district scheduled for annexation, where there was an "urgent need" for two new junior high schools and three 700-pupil elementary schools. The School Board proposed building one of the junior high schools on additional land around Ingleside Elementary, and a 33-acre tract in the Sherwood Forest area (bounded by Atterbury, Birch, and East Sewells Point Road) was being considered for both an elementary and a junior high school; the other tracts under consideration included a 20-acre site on Cottage Toll Road (later Tidewater Drive) and Norman Avenue extended, a 12-acre tract one half block west of Military Highway, and an eight acre site north of Norview High School.<sup>13</sup> In spite of the urgent need for new facilities, only one of these sites was found acceptable. Ingleside Junior High School was never built, the site was too close to Broad Creek Shores and other Black housing developments (see Figure One, previous page). Although the Board did decide to build Sherwood Forest Elementary on a portion of the tract on Atterbury and Sewells Point Road, the land was also

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

apparently too close to Black housing to win approval for a junior high in the era of school desegregation; the Cottage Toll Road tract, site of a city nursery, was found to be unsuitable for development (three decades later it became Northside Park); the Military Highway tract was rejected when it was found to be in the path proposed for Interstate 64; and the smallest site of all, the eight-acre tract north of Norview High School was used to satisfy the critical need of the district for a junior high school (Norview).

Because of the urgent need for new school buildings, there followed a furious period of planning by the School Board. School Board files indicate that a number of plans were considered by the school administration over the next few months, but the School Board only advanced those that could clear all of the possible political objections. Gone was any focus on rebuilding aging Black facilities; gone also were any sites that might prove to be too close to nearby Black communities, and thereby pose a threat to continued school segregation. When construction plans for 1955 were finally announced, School Superintendent J. J. Brewbaker assured the city manager that:

. . . desegregation will have no effect on this building program. With the exception of the addition to Oakwood [Elementary School], all other construction is for and needed for white children.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Letter from School Superintendent J. J. Brewbaker to Norfolk City Manager Sherwood Reeder, 8 August 1955, Norfolk Public Schools files.

Even so, finding a suitable site for a badly needed junior high schools in the Tanner's Creek District proved to be a difficult task. In addition to the Ingleside and Sherwood Forest tracts, plans to locate the school at Lansdale and Lakewood were also submitted to the Council for approval.<sup>15</sup> The Board even went so far as to have architects draft plans for a Lakewood<sup>16</sup> and a Lansdale Junior High. In end, however, after much behind-the-scenes maneuvering, the Council scratched the Lansdale and Lakewood sites from an extended list of proposed projects, and converted Willard Elementary into a junior high instead.<sup>17</sup>

Even though a consultant had indicated that Norfolk's school population would increase by more than 4,000 students per year for the next few years<sup>18</sup>--the equivalent of five new schools a year--Norfolk elected to move slowly and deliberately, even if this meant badly overcrowding some existing facilities and adding a double shift at others.<sup>19</sup> Instead of launching an aggressive new building program as originally envisioned, the Board opted to adopt a safer

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<sup>15</sup>"Summary of Long Range Building Program: School Construction Needs, 14 September 1956, Norfolk Public Schools files.

<sup>16</sup>Pentecost & Courtney (Architects), "Lakewood Junior High School," undated (1957), Norfolk Public School Files.

<sup>17</sup>"School Construction and Site Acquisition Program," 25 March 1958, Norfolk Public Schools Files.

<sup>18</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 17 September 1955.

<sup>19</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 February 1956.

course, and instead add new wings to its most overcrowded, but existing, facilities.<sup>20</sup>

One of the schools marked for immediate construction was a combination elementary-junior high for Black pupils in the Oakwood-Rosemont section, where a large number of the N.A.A.C.P. plaintiffs lived. In a letter to City Manager Thomas Maxwell, School Superintendent J. J. Brewbaker hinted at the need for the combination school:

Negro junior high pupils attend Jacox, which is approximately seven miles from the section in which they live. The nearest junior high is Norview.<sup>21</sup>

Virginian-Pilot reporter Luther J. Carter went even further when he surveyed the proposed building program with an eye cocked towards the desegregation suit:

One obvious effect of a combination school would be to accommodate some Negro junior high pupils who might otherwise want to attend Norview Junior High School, a white school and by far the closest junior high to the Oakwood-Rosemont area.<sup>22</sup>

The School Board also pressed its case to build "Southside" (i.e., Campostella) Junior High School in the Berkley section of the city to accommodate the growing Black

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<sup>20</sup>Henry S. Rorer, History of Norfolk Public Schools, op cit., p. 346.

<sup>21</sup>Letter from J. J. Brewbaker, Norfolk School Superintendent to Thomas F. Maxwell, Norfolk City Manager, 13 February 1957, Norfolk Public Schools files.

<sup>22</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 October 1956.

population in that portion of the city.<sup>23</sup> Again reporter Luther Carter noted the changing racial composition of the city as a motive for the proposed facility: "School officials have noted a pronounced tendency for whites to leave Berkley, and for Negroes to move in."<sup>24</sup>

In fact Norfolk had made tremendous advances under the Battle funds and C. A. Harrell's \$13 million building program. By 1953 the Norfolk School Board could say for the first time that the cost of educating a white pupil and a Black in the city's schools was equal,<sup>25</sup> before Harrell's reign the city's effort was determined by a complicated formula that was weighted heavily upon the percentage of total revenues received from Black and white taxpayers. By 1950, however, the city was actually paying, on the average, more to its Black teachers than to its white,<sup>26</sup> having raised salary of Blacks some 62% since the Organization's wartime Council dominated school spending.<sup>27</sup> In fact Norfolk was cited by Senator Sam J. Ervin, Jr., of North Carolina, for its efforts to improve its Black educational system. In an article he wrote for Look magazine defending

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<sup>23</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 January 1957.

<sup>24</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 October 1956.

<sup>25</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 21 August 1953.

<sup>26</sup>This is due to the fact that 89% of the Black teachers held a bachelors degree, while only 75.7% of the white teachers held similar certification; Black teachers also tended to stay longer, and thus were paid higher on the scale because of this longevity.

<sup>27</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 13 December 1951.

continued school segregation in the South, a picture of Norfolk's newly constructed Young Park School (built in part with federal redevelopment funds) bore the caption:

New Negro schools, like this one in Norfolk, Va., attest [to] efforts of [the] South to meet [integration] problems in its own way.<sup>28</sup>

At any rate, the impact of the Supreme Court's desegregation decision and the over-reaction of statewide political leaders forced a temporary halting and reassessment of school construction plans,<sup>29</sup> in spite of the fact that the Norfolk school population was growing by 3,000 students each year.<sup>30</sup>

The Ledger-Dispatch summed up the attitude of the leaders in charge of the local school construction effort:

In recent years Southern states have been making great financial outlays to put Negro schools on a par with those for white students . . . however, once the court's rejection of separate but equal theory became known, there was no longer any great pressure on local officials . . . to continue the special and costly attention to [the] Negro school building programs.<sup>31</sup>

In spite of the official "go slow" attitude of the Norfolk City Council, the School Board began to take its

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<sup>28</sup>Sam J. Ervin, Jr., "The Case for Segregation," Look, April 3, 1956 (vol. XX, 7), pp. 32 and 33.

<sup>29</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 13 October 1954.

<sup>30</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 16 January 1955.

<sup>31</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 13 October 1954.

first few cautious steps toward compliance with the spirit of the Supreme Court decision and toward strengthening a base of public support for moderation in dealing with the crisis. First, the School Board advanced a proposal to create a bi-racial study group to recommend possible courses of action. The move was immediately endorsed by the Education Association and the Council of P-T.A.'s,<sup>32</sup> but opposed by the local branch of the N.A.A.C.P. One Black leader broke the deadlock with his endorsement of the concept, "There is no harm in studying and bringing integration about in an orderly manner." Next the School Board voted down the state's proposed 30-days notice clause of teacher contract terminations, a step recommended as a preliminary to prepare for the eventual school closings in the event of court-ordered integration.<sup>33</sup> Gradually the School Board's commitment to keeping schools open and complying with the spirit of the Supreme Court decision began to win it both accolades from the international press and a few denunciations from Southern writers. Typical of the positive reaction was this statement from the Roanoke World News:

[The Norfolk School Board has supplied] the first official word of calm in Virginia's heated integration debate. In so doing it has broken the solid front of opposition to the Supreme Court's decision and decree.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 3 June 1955.

<sup>33</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 18 June 1955.

<sup>34</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 11 July 1955.



Norfolk School Board Chairman W. Farley Powers appeared somewhat embarrassed by the sudden notoriety and stated:

I do not want to get into any controversy [with the rest of the state]. We might make some preliminary moves [to keep-schools open], but we must abide by state law.<sup>35</sup>

School Superintendent Brewbaker was equally aware that Norfolk's progressive attitude marked it in some sections of the state as a "hotbed" of liberalism because:

We have been conscious that a change [from segregation] is inevitable. We have not been trying to think up ways to circumvent the ruling.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed the rest of the state appeared to occupy their time by thinking up legal angles to circumvent the eventuality of the Supreme Court's ruling. Richmond News Leader editor James J. Kilpatrick happened upon the century-old doctrine of "interposition", whereby the state was supposedly able to "interpose" its own authority between that of the federal government and its local political subdivisions, and the interposition craze was begun. The state's official reaction was the Gray Plan--named for State Senator Garland Gray of Sussex County who chaired the parent legislative committee--that provided numerous ways for the state to "interpose" its authority and so block integration. The plan called for a state pupil placement board that would

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<sup>35</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 3 June 1955.

<sup>36</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 11 July 1955.

take over the pupil assignment duties of the local school boards; the scheme, ostensibly not based upon racial considerations, allowed the state to assign students to a given school on the basis of individual health, aptitude, availability of transportation, and "the welfare of the particular child as well as the welfare and best interests of all other pupils attending a particular school." The Gray Plan also called for special tuition grants of public funds to the parents of school children who attended private schools, parochial establishments, or public schools in another jurisdiction, as well as an amendment to the compulsory attendance laws whereby no child would be forced to attend a desegregated school. Few politicians and only the Virginian-Pilot of all the state's newspapers opposed the Gray Plan. Provisions within the plan that would have allowed local subdivisions to desegregate on a local option basis if the federal courts persisted were scrapped by the Legislature when Senator Harry F. Byrd, Sr., the scion of the Organization, pointed out the need for all local governments to stand together in "massive resistance" to the dictates of the Supreme Court. In response, the Legislature passed the Stanley Plan, which required the Governor to close any school under court order to integrate and cut off all state funds from any school district which tried to reopen in spite of the Governor's interposition.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Dabney, pp. 532-539.

While the rest of the state was reeling under the bombast prompted by the Gray Plan, the Stanley Plan, Senator Byrd's Massive Resistance, and Kilpatrick's Doctrine of Interposition, the citizens of Norfolk had another plan with which to contend: the Summers Plan. Under Duckworth's rule, Councilman Ezra T. Summers was the closest thing Norfolk had to a maverick politician or independent voice on the Council.<sup>38</sup> In July of 1955, Summers introduced a surprise proposal whereby the city could achieve court-ordered integration if it ever came under a court order: the first step would be to have every parent in the school system, both Black and white, fill out an intention card listing the names and ages of their school-age children and whether or not they wanted them to attend an integrated or segregated school. The School Board would then compile this information and determine how many schools it would have to operate on an all-white, all-Black, or integrated basis, and then assign each pupil to the school of his parent's choosing. Obviously the unwritten key to the Summers Plan was the hope that under such a framework, few parents, especially white ones, would choose to send their children to integrated schools; those that did would be duly punished by isolating all the "trouble-makers" in just a few schools that drew not from any discernible neighborhood, but rather from a city-wide constituency. Of course unofficial pressures and economic sanctions could be applied to any white parent who

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<sup>38</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 6 March 1956.

unwisely chose to send his children to an integrated school; if no white parents chose integrated schools, then no schools would be integrated. Local politicians, including Duckworth's city manager, who should have known better, jumped on Summers' bandwagon by extolling the plan as "in keeping with the Supreme Court's decision" because it did assign every child to the school of his or her choice.<sup>39</sup>

Obviously the Summers Plan added little positive thought to the discussion of the day, but it does indicate the political mood of obfuscation and deceit that ruled. There were people in Norfolk who understood the Supreme Court decision and its ramifications, but by and large they refused to believe that Norfolk schools would have to be integrated or that public schools would have to be closed. They placed too much faith in the hands of local and state politicians who could promise them a plan, any plan, no matter how ill-conceived and contrived, to circumvent the Supreme Court's ruling.<sup>40</sup> The true leaders of public opinion in Norfolk--the business and civic elite--had been so quashed by their recent political defeat and expurgation at the hands of the Organization that they sat idly by while the forces of irrationality gripped their city. The clear, small voice of reason provided by the School Board was all too often left howling in the wilderness as the public rushed to seize each new political panacea.

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<sup>39</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 27 July 1955.

<sup>40</sup>Jane Reif, Crisis in Norfolk, op cit., p. 2.

Undaunted by the political bombast of the period, the Norfolk School Board went quietly about its business, hoping to keep a low profile and so avoid confrontation with the Organization leaders that dominated the rest of the city government. Taking a page from the old People's book on how to deal with impending problems, the Board went ahead with its plans to appoint a bi-racial committee to recommend action; then it commissioned an exhaustive study--the Stiles Report as it came to be known--of the Board, its policy, practices, and the future needs of the Norfolk school population. When local politicians pointed frantically to the need to stand toe to toe in Massive Resistance with the rest of the state--as one local legislator did with this rhetorical outburst concerning the Southside counties with their heavy concentrations of Black population:

Their house is on fire. They want us to send firetrucks to help them. I think it is our Christian duty to help put out the fire for them [by opposing desegregation].<sup>41</sup>

--the School Board resisted their impassioned pleas with great aplomb. School Board member Paul Schweitzer pointed to how greatly Norfolk's situation differed from that of the Southside:

There are only thirty per cent Negroes in the Norfolk School system . . . geographically located so that they are well taken care of in their present schools. If we adopt a gradual

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<sup>41</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 September 1955.

plan of integration, there would be so little you wouldn't notice it.

School Superintendent Brewbaker echoed this theme:

There would be few Negroes in white schools because of existing "residential segregation . . . I think we are all in favor of segregation . . . It is just a question of what is the best plan . . . I'm not in favor of integration, I'm in favor of carrying out the Supreme Court decree with the least harm to pupils . . . and to the schools."<sup>42</sup>

Other school officials pointed to the Navy, N.A.T.O., and government service as liberalizing influences that had exposed many Norfolk students to a variety of cultures without undue harm. One principal stated that about one-third of his students had already attended integrated schools elsewhere without problems.<sup>43</sup> In fact, when Norfolk Catholic High School was integrated by the Catholic diocese following the Brown decision, the event passed without comment from the press or protest from the public.<sup>44</sup>

The School Board's air of official calm had bought a year of grace from legal pressures to integrate; the Board had hoped to use that year to prepare the public for calm compliance with the desegregation dictates, but time and events had conspired against it to block this intention.

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 5 January 1956.

<sup>44</sup>Jane Reif, op cit., p. 2.

Unlike its counterparts in other parts of the country, the Black community in Norfolk had not rushed into court to force immediate integration of the schools; instead they had followed the more temporizing course of petitioning the School Board to desegregate.<sup>45</sup> The threat of court action of course lay behind that petition, but it was an important first step towards finding a peaceful solution to the desegregation controversy. Unfortunately the School Board could not respond in kind: too much had transpired in the year since that initial petition had been filed. Instead, the new state laws and overt political hostilities conspired to block any authority the Board might have had to voluntarily comply. The Coronado and Broad Creek controversies had bred a climate of racial mistrust and resentment--a feeling that cut off all previous channels of communication that existed between the races. Unfortunately, and without choosing such a course, the Board was now locked into a larger political confrontation in which neither side could afford to accept defeat. Similarly, any opportunity the Board might have had to defuse the approaching crisis with token gestures of appeasement was now gone. The year of grace had passed, and only the courts could now decide the outcome.

In the mounting atmosphere of racial tension that now prevailed, the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People began to step up the fire

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<sup>45</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 14 July 1955.

power of its assault upon the city's racial institutions. Accordingly, attorneys Victor Ashe and Hugo Madison formally abandoned the petition process and filed their school desegregation suit in Federal Court in May, 1956,<sup>46</sup> almost two years to the day after the landmark Supreme Court ruling. Their suit reflected the changing mood of the Black community: a majority of the petitioners were from the still racially tense Oakwood and Coronado sections of the Norview area; most of the rest were from the transitional neighborhoods of Atlantic City and Broad Creek, where racial boundary lines were not yet clearly drawn.<sup>47</sup>

In spite of this late start, litigation in Norfolk quickly proceeded, and was soon two or three steps ahead of that in the rest of the state. Part of the reason for this fast pace was Federal Judge Walter Hoffman's no-nonsense approach to litigation in his court. Even though he had strong local credentials, Hoffman was rapidly earning a reputation as a distinguished jurist who would not brook the obfuscation and delaying tactics employed elsewhere. For their own part, the local N.A.A.C.P. attorneys pressed vigorously on the case, obviously encouraged by the fact that Hoffman had already struck down segregated barriers in the city's parks<sup>48</sup> and public transportation systems.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot; 11 May 1956.

<sup>47</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 14 July 1955.

<sup>48</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 August 1956.

<sup>49</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 April 1956.



The School Board closely followed this judicial trend, and so proceeded cautiously under the assumption that Norfolk's schools would similarly soon be under court orders to integrate. The Board appeared in all its pronouncements to be fully prepared to operate a desegregated school system under such auspices. The City's political leaders, however, were cognizant of the fact that integrated classrooms, no matter how slight their impact might be upon the functioning of the local school system, were diametrically opposed to the policies of the state government:

Norfolk is already looked upon with suspicion by some sections of the state; if we are forced by Federal Courts to be the first in Virginia to integrate, it would be held against us by the rest of the state for the next twenty years.<sup>50</sup>

Norfolk faced the very real possibility that the state would act to close down its public schools indefinitely rather than see them integrated, just as Virginia had done when nearby Sea Shore State Park fell under a court order to desegregate.<sup>51</sup>

Since there had as yet been no shred of sympathy for Norfolk's predicament, the School Board sought a closed-door audience with Mayor Duckworth, the City Council, and the city's legislation delegation; its members hoped to develop some plan of action that would protect the city from

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<sup>50</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 May 1956.

<sup>51</sup>Jane Reif, p. 1.

political reprisals from the rest of the state. Norfolk's only real hope in this regard lay in taking the final decision to desegregate out of the hands of the local School Board and passing the onus back to the state for resolution; thus, if the state government could be forced to take the blame for ordering desegregation of Norfolk's schools, then there would be no reason for imposing economic sanctions or exacting legislative retribution against the city for complying. To Norfolk's political leaders the threat of reprisals from the rest of the state was very real, and one that they feared more than the authority of the federal courts: the confrontation at Little Rock had not yet taken place, and no one knew just how forcefully the federal government would move to back up its court orders to integrate. On the other hand, the city's desperate wartime financial experience provided ample evidence of just how devastating the consequences of reduced state funding could be to the city's economy.

Simply put, Norfolk's plan was to ask the state to "interpose" its own sovereignty between the federal courts and the Norfolk School Board. To Norfolk's leaders there appeared to be a great deal of logic behind this suggestion:

We can't put a window in a school without the state telling us what size it must be, and on a matter as far reaching as segregation, the state should be willing to stand up to it. This is clearly a matter in which the state should tell us what to do.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 May 1956.

Accordingly the meeting broke with the resolve that the city would request a special session of the General Assembly in order to assure timely enactment of the necessary legislation. Public pronouncements of Norfolk's interposition plan were highly touted by members of the State Legislature and City Council in attendance; almost immediately the School Board began to back away from the inflammatory language emanating from the closed-door session. Members of the Board felt that interposition really meant "imposition"--that the plan only gave the rest of the state a chance to impose its more conservative, provincial philosophies upon the errant liberalism of its urbane sister city--and that shutting down the Norfolk School system was a step the rest of Virginia might be willing to take, especially if Norfolk alone were to bear the consequences. This was a move the School Board meant to resist at all cost: they had been charged with the responsibility of running the largest school system in Virginia, and running the schools meant keeping them open under any circumstances, even if the rest of the state disapproved. Members of the Board, therefore, attempted to soften the impact of the city's interposition plan by stating that Norfolk was merely seeking "the advice and guidance" of the State Legislature. They recognized that under current state laws they were "unable to act alone"<sup>53</sup> in the face of court-ordered desegregation, but a spokesman

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<sup>53</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 14 May 1956.

stressed that the Board "wants to conform to state policies, but the continued operation of public schools here is of utmost importance."<sup>54</sup>

The Board's reluctance to back Norfolk's interposition plan publicly was the first sign of a coming confrontation between the appointed members of the School Board and the elected officials that made their appointments. Unlike the Council, the members of the Board were not responsible to any particular partisan constituency, and not dependent upon popular re-election for continuance; they were thus free to choose the course they felt was best for the community without all the posturing and puffery of the politicians. Partly for this reason, researchers all across the South were reporting that appointed school boards dealt far more moderately with the desegregation crisis than did their elected counterparts.<sup>55</sup> In Norfolk the Council had a particular reason to mistrust any evidence of independence emanating from the Board: in the past the Council had used the Board as a convenient dumping ground for business leaders from the People's ranks who still deserved special recognition and appointment because of their high standing in the community. Up to then the School Board had been a relatively powerless body--the decision to close schools or

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<sup>54</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 May 1956.

<sup>55</sup>See Robert L. Crain, et al., The Politics of School Desegregation: Comparative Case Studies of Community Structure and Policy-Making (Chicago: Aldine, 1968).

keep them open in violation of state law had never before been an issue--and Council's strict control of the budget and spending served as a powerful check on even the most errant body. In the past there had been very little danger in stacking the School Board with key business leaders closer to the People's persuasion than the Organization's own philosophy--membership on the Board carried the requisite high community status of such an appointment without any of the spoils potential of the city's Housing, Planning, Zoning, or various Inspection Appeals boards--and the Council felt that a display of strong business support for public education was important for the city. Finally, the Council had sometimes employed the tactical strategy of blaming the School Board for community ills when it came time for reelection, and had thus always sought to avoid placing any of the Organization's faithful in such a role. It was this scapegoat role that most concerned Norfolk's Council now: they feared that the public pronouncements of the Board indicated a willingness, however reluctant, to serve as a whipping boy for the whole state and accept desegregation if it were so ordered by the courts. Thus the move to embrace the philosophy of interposition may be seen as a timely ploy to subvert the authority of the local boards and place control of the decision to resist desegregation back into the hands of more partisan operatives at the state level.

In spite of the School Board's apparent willingness to accept court-ordered desegregation, it nevertheless pressed vigorously its legal efforts to resist such an eventuality. In private the Board may have been willing to defy the state's authority, but in court it argued forcefully that public school segregation was a valid exercise of the state's police powers to protect its citizens, and was therefore legal. Similarly it indicated that the Board itself was an agency of the state and thus subject to the same privileges, protections, and immunity from suit as the state. Further the Board contended that the N.A.A.C.P. suit was filed against the wrong party: technically the Board lacked the legal jurisdiction to establish and maintain a school system on its own and merely served in an advisory capacity to the City Council, against whom the suit should have been brought. The Board's final argument carried a little more weight: the court lacked jurisdiction in this dispute, it contended, since only people duly qualified for admission to the public schools and whose request for transfer between schools had been denied could legitimately prove harm.<sup>56</sup> This was a telling point, since the Brown cases had been brought on behalf of Black school children who had applied to white schools and then been denied that the "equal opportunity" to attend the school of their choice; the Norfolk case, however, had been brought by leading Black citizens who were petitioning the court to end

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<sup>56</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 June 1956.

a perceptible public wrong; none of the Norfolk petitioners could show a personal harm.

The members of the School Board knew, however, that they were merely buying time with their legal arguments, and that in a few months the N.A.A.C.P. would return to court with the right defendants duly enjoined and the proper mix of plaintiffs able to prove injury by rejection of their transfer applications. The Board's legal maneuvering had bought enough time to forestall school integration in Norfolk for one more school year;<sup>57</sup> they knew it would take this long for the Board to receive, deliberate, and then ultimately reject the petitions. Their spirited defense was enough to keep the state politicians off their back for one more year; in the meantime they had begun to develop a plan of their own which might take some of the pressure off of the N.A.A.C.P. desegregation suit. The School Board approached the Council with a request for an additional \$15 million building program, much of it earmarked for adding cafeterias, libraries, music centers, resource areas, multi-purpose classrooms, and other facilities to existing Black schools.<sup>58</sup> School Board member Benjamin J. Willis was candid enough to comment on the sudden upgrading of Black schools: "The better their [i.e., the Black] facilities, the less pressure their argument will

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<sup>57</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 3 July 1956.

<sup>58</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 October 1956.

have."<sup>59</sup> One of the schools marked for immediate construction was a combination elementary-junior high for Black pupils in the Oakwood-Rosemont section, where a large number of the N.A.A.C.P. plaintiffs had been located. Virginian-Pilot reporter Luther Carter surveyed the proposed building program with an eye cocked towards the desegregation suit:

The School Board has indicated that when all appeals against the federal court order have been exhausted, it will attempt to minimize its effect by using a plan for gradual desegregation. [The Oakwood-Rosemont combination school] would appear to be in line with this policy. Superintendent Brewbaker also indicated that eventually a combination junior and senior high might be needed in the area [to further ease desegregation pressures].<sup>60</sup>

As part of the overall plans for expansion, another junior high school (Campostella) was being rushed to the drawing boards to accommodate the growing Black population in the Berkley section of the city.<sup>61</sup>

The Norfolk School Board's proposed building program was not meant as another legal gimmick to head off school desegregation; instead it indicated a thorough acceptance of the reality that such a court order was imminent, and the fact that the Board was merely trying to soften the impact of shattered traditions. Theirs was a moderate approach and, as such, it put the Board in opposition to most of the

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<sup>59</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 January 1957.

<sup>60</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 8 March 1957.

<sup>61</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 October 1956.



state's senior political leaders who felt that the day of integration could be forestalled forever. There was some hope as well that by giving the Black community their own, top-quality schools, even in the remote areas far removed from their existing, segregated schools, the School Board would be relieving some of the pressures to integrate from that quarter. The certain appeal of such a sensible plan was not, however, apparent to the local politicians. City Councilman Ezra T. Summers, ever the most vocal of an otherwise close-mouthed Council, issued a strongly worded statement supporting the state's Massive Resistance efforts and advocating a "go-slow approach" in local school building programs "until the integration disputes are settled." Summers' insistence that the matter "should be studied more carefully"<sup>62</sup> dealt a death blow to the School Board's construction plans. The rest of the Council was more diplomatic in their rejection; instead they asked the Board to revise its plan "to what we can afford" in light of the precipitate rise in school bond interest rates now being extended to Southern school systems threatened by desegregation. Then, as a final slap at the School Board, the Council indicated that it was prepared to go ahead and borrow money at those same inflated interest rates in order to construct other capital improvements that might attract additional state and federal funding.<sup>63</sup> The School Board

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<sup>62</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 May 1956.

<sup>63</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 19 December 1956.

made their best case before the Council--they brought surveys indicating that 97% of Norfolk's parents and 93% of nonparents favored increasing school funding<sup>64</sup>--but it was still rejected outright. The inference was clear: the Council had higher priorities for spending than granting money to Black schools just in case the court really ordered desegregation.

There was nothing inherently wrong with the School Board's plan: it had been based upon the soundest and most moderate judgement of the time; it relied upon professional growth surveys indicating that the schools and improvements would be needed anyway, even if the school system was permitted to remain segregated. What was wrong was that the Board's plan had come too late; the city had just paid an exorbitant price to annex a large section of Norfolk County, and the Council could legitimately point to the fact that it had a pressing financial need to extend full municipal services to this area as soon as possible.<sup>65</sup> This was reason enough to block a costly school building program that was, at best a stopgap effort to defuse the desegregation crisis and, at worst, a reckless gamble to lure potential Black plaintiffs away from the N.A.A.C.P. suit with the promise of building and expanding their own segregated neighborhood schools. Norfolk had already made a precipitate effort in the last decade to bring its Black schools in

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<sup>64</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 15 February 1957.

<sup>65</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 17 December 1956.

line with their all-white counterparts and so offer equal, although segregated, facilities for both races. The city could ill afford the Schools Board's building proposal, the Council argued, especially if integration could be averted through other, less costly means.

Politically as well the School Board's move came too late: the calm racial attitudes that prevailed in Norfolk in the summer of 1956 had, by the winter, taken a nasty turn, and the city's white residents were giving ample evidence that they were no longer willing to buy off the Black community with promises of separate but equal facilities. A shift in the desegregation stance of the city's legislative delegation was the best bellwether of this changing attitude. In the summer, the bulk of the delegation had stood behind the School Board's stance to keep the schools open, even if desegregated. The legislators went so far as to vow to fight the governor "in opposition to any measure designed to deprive Norfolk's schools of full financial support."<sup>66</sup> A year later they would back down from this moderate posture and declare that they held only minor differences with the governor; they disagreed on the tactics of how best to fight court-ordered desegregation, but both the governor and the local legislators were in full accord that integration must be fought with every legal means available.<sup>67</sup> Within a year of that

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<sup>66</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 July 1956.

<sup>67</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 8 June 1957.

statement they had gone full circle from opposition to support of the Governor's efforts to close public schools and cut off state funding as means to show Virginia's Massive Resistance to integration.<sup>68</sup>

One reason for this apparent shift in public opinion was the growing impact of the N.A.A.C.P. legal victories: in the spring of 1956 Norfolk's public schools were but one target in the scatter-shot legal approach of the local N.A.A.C.P. as they rushed to achieve integration. By the fall, however, N.A.A.C.P. court action had forced all of the area's parks, recreation centers, and public transportation facilities to either desegregate or close indefinitely. To many, the public school system now stood as the last bastion against a fully integrated society, and the N.A.A.C.P.'s unrelenting legal pressures to crack this barrier as well was causing increasing bitterness in the white community. A feeling was growing that Norfolk needed more time to adjust to changes that had already taken place, and that continuing the battle to desegregate the schools was only making racial moderation more and more difficult.

It was inevitable in the growing climate of racial antipathy that new groups would emerge to capitalize on this force and direct it to serve their own needs. Formerly the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties had been a predominantly Southside effort by small businessmen to combat desegregation in that area; now, however, the

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<sup>68</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 10 March 1958.

Defenders were gaining increasing acceptance in all parts of the state. The Defenders were not the hood-wearing, night riders like their counterparts in the White Citizen's Councils farther South; instead they had made every effort to establish in Virginia a legitimate and gentlemanly interest group, and one that clearly carried much weight among the leadership of the Byrd Organization.<sup>69</sup> Locally the Defenders had rallied around the banner of the State's Rights Party and were backing fellow Virginian T. Coleman Andrews for President; they had established a political headquarters to test public opinion, and, having found it favorable, now planned to mount major challenges along Massive Resistance lines to the city's legislative delegation.<sup>70</sup> One other event at about the same time indicated an escalation in both the rhetoric and expertise of race politics. Just as the city's business and civic elite were kicking off their traditional fall Community Fund drive, Norfolk was inundated with hate pamphlets aimed at one of its beneficiary organizations. After a hasty series of meetings, the business community was forced to drop the Urban League from the drive for its supposed support of "race-mixing." Although the local origin of the pamphlets was unknown (the Defenders disavowed any responsibility), the pamphlets were traced back to publication by a wing of

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<sup>69</sup>Virinius Dabney, pp. 531-533.

<sup>70</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 October 1956.

the Christian Nationalist Party, renowned experts on "rabble-rousing and sensational hate-mongering."<sup>71</sup>

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The emergence of these two groups, the apparent success of their organizational efforts, and the mounting hostilities directed at the N.A.A.C.P. were giving rise to a climate of political desperation. All around racial barriers were falling under the onslaught of litigation; with them were crumbling institutions of long-standing importance in the white community. The hate groups were preparing to fan the flames of racial unrest into a dangerous political force. The School Board had been rebuffed in its efforts to moderate the desegregation dispute with an exorbitant building program aimed at lessening the impact of desegregation. The city's legislative delegation had once stood firm in their opposition to closing Norfolk's schools even if the courts ordered integration; now they were backing away from that stance and instead were preparing to vote for legislation that would turn over the control of the city's schools to the very state politicians most disposed to shut them down. The liberalizing forces of the People's group were nowhere to be seen; they had been beaten back to their board rooms and counting houses, and now only emerged to take part in lackluster deliberations on relatively unimportant boards and advisory commissions. Even the old warhorses of the Organization had accepted a diminished role in governmental affairs; they had been

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<sup>71</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 October 1956.

beaten back by the People's group, lost interest, and now had resigned themselves to a backseat position as the price of going along for the ride. The entire city looked instead to the one person who had emerged as the strong man in all municipal deliberations.

Of all the major politicians in the city, only Mayor Duckworth had been truly silent on the desegregation crisis. At first the public assumed that the School Board and the Organization's legislative delegation accurately represented his thinking on the subject, but the vacillation of the local legislators and the dispatch with which the School Board's building proposal was dismissed gave rise to the belief first that there was some middle ground between the two, and finally lead to wide speculation that Duckworth, too, had plans to save the city from integration.

By this time Duckworth was firmly in control of the city and able to direct its growth towards attainment of his own ends, and, since he had spent so much time erecting the edifices designed by C. A. Harrell and the People's administration, he was impatient to get on with the task. Like Harrell, Duckworth had a vision of a New Norfolk, but unlike Harrell and unlike the Silkstocking crowd, Duckworth had shown little commitment to the city's past and little compassion for its people. He saw himself as a manager, both of the city's politics and its physical plant. His attachment was thus to Norfolk's structures, its administration, its political Organization, and its efficiency--the

bricks and mortar of city growth. It was a subtle distinction, but one that would not be lost in the years ahead.



CHAPTER FOUR  
THE BULLDOZER ERA

As the city's chief politician and highest elected official, Mayor W. Fred Duckworth remarkably had not yet spoken out on the subject of school integration. Most people supposed that, because of his political affiliation with the Organization, his personal sentiments rested with those who preached resistance at all cost, yet he had endorsed none of the myriad scenarios of resistance that had already been proposed by Governor Stanley, Senator Byrd, the Defenders, the Gray Commission, Councilman Summers, James J. Kilpatrick, and others. He had never been directly caught up in the rhetoric of interposition, and had been remarkably tolerant of others who spoke up in an attempt to relate the city's official position. In an administration prized for its closed-mouth unanimity, it was remarkable to witness the School Board left free to pursue its own moderate course while Councilmen like Ezra Summers veered off in more extreme tacks. Most observers conceded that Duckworth was at least opposed to undertaking the expense of the School

Board's building and modernization program, but even in this regard there were those who felt that his resistance to the concept was only temporary, and that the Mayor was only withholding his approval as a bargaining chip in some grander design: as yet the city lacked the clout to force the Black community to accept such a proposal as a token victory short of desegregation.

By the winter of 1956 the Mayor had already built his reputation as a consummate politician and a powerful force in any endeavor touching municipal government. In a matter as far reaching as school integration, the Mayor oddly had as yet advanced no opinion. Although no one knew what course of action Duckworth proposed to follow if the city's schools were really faced with the threat of court-ordered integration, most citizens assumed that he would act as dramatically as he had already done in almost every other field of municipal action. In fact, the Mayor had effected such an overwhelming personal presence in every sphere of government that the citizens, once so actively involved during the days of the People's rule, had by now been lulled into a state of civic withdrawal. The machinery of municipal government appeared to roll on so smoothly with Duckworth in control that the watchful eye of the public had long ago deserted its overseeing position.

Duckworth had apparently achieved the promise of his 1950 Harmony Slate: he had united professional expertise,

business acumen, and political savvy into a single, concentrated focus of power that carefully balanced the concerns of both the business community and the Prieur Organization. His new political force, and this was by all rights a personal victory, was obeisant to neither the Silkstocking Crowd nor the Organization, although it took its cues from both camps. Duckworth had found in action and accomplishment the common ground that united these two once opposing forces. The only real challenges to Duckworth's administration had come from the Black community: P. B. Young's councilmanic candidacy, the setback at Broad Creek Shores, the bombings in Coronado, the racial unrest in Brambleton, and the court challenges of the N.A.A.C.P. The Mayor, however, had gained the near-unanimous backing of the city's banking, business, civic, and political leaders, and in the six years since he had come to power under the Harmony coalition, not a single effective voice had been raised in opposition to his authority; he and his councilmanic running mates swept to election victory year after year against only token, gadfly resistance from the white community.<sup>1</sup> One measure of the depth of Mayor Duckworth's support may be read in Norfolk's West Side voting precincts, the traditional stronghold of the city's Silkstocking establishment,

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<sup>1</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 14 April 1958.

where now the Mayor and his slate were running up electoral majorities that ran as high as ten-to-one.<sup>2</sup>

A number of reasons existed to explain the Mayor's enormous personal success. Foremost among them was the fact that both time and events had been good to Norfolk, and as a result the city was enjoying a period of unparalleled growth and prosperity. The city's financial success, and the unquestioned sense of security that such engenders in the general populace, had helped to bring about what one observer termed the "Era of Good Feeling" in Norfolk's history.<sup>3</sup> The citizens were now proud of all that had been accomplished in the decade since the war, and the public controversy and conflict that had characterized the planning stages under the People's government were now forgotten as the reality of new highways, tunnel connections, annexations, redevelopment, and related municipal facilities began contributing to the city's enormous growth and prosperity.

Just as the careful, cautious, consensual approach of the People's group had been perfect for the planning process, Mayor Duckworth's forceful dominance of city policy was ideally suited to the current building stage. City government functioned smoothly, almost too smoothly, under the Mayor's firm leadership, and clearly he maintained control over every phase of municipal operation. No longer

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<sup>2</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 June 1958.

<sup>3</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 July 1961.

were Council meetings the long, drawn-out affairs that characterized the People's sessions; instead Duckworth's Council met in his office with a select assemblage of advisors for a dress rehearsal. At these private "pre-sessions" those in attendance hashed out the controversies, arranged the compromises, and made all of the city's real decisions. Then, after all potential differences had been ironed out, the Council would emerge for its public session, a performance that ran, not surprisingly, as smoothly as if every member had a script: rarely was there a dissenting vote, unnecessary discussion, or less than unanimous approval of even the most far-reaching policy decisions.<sup>4</sup>

In council-manager cities such as Norfolk the mayor is granted very few official powers beyond those of the other members of the council; Duckworth, however, had added a considerable repertoire of unofficial executive and legislative powers to the traditional ribbon-cutting capacities of a weak mayor. Although lacking in official veto, budgetary, or appointment powers, Mayor Duckworth had parlayed his position as presiding officer into unquestioned authority over the rest of the Council. Council's private "pre-sessions" had helped to strengthen his unofficial grip on city policy, just as the smooth and polished public performance of the Council had helped to heighten the sense

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<sup>4</sup>Pretlow Darden; Robert L. Mason; and Harold Sugg, former reporter for the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, interview by author, Tape recording, Roanoke, 17 August 1979.

that he alone was firmly in control. This same sense of domination carried over as well into other phases of municipal government. No longer were the city's appointed boards and commissions functioning as the cutting edge of public participation in municipal decision-making; Duckworth had a strange habit of dropping in on the public session of such boards, "suggesting" a desired course of action, and then hanging around until he was satisfied that his instructions had been enacted.<sup>5</sup>

In a city that traditionally experienced a rapid turnover of both its top elective and appointive officials, the Mayor quickly emerged as one of the few stable personalities in the administration of municipal affairs. By 1956 almost all of the city's department heads, appointed board members, and legislative delegation had been replaced since the People's reign, and only Duckworth and Vice-Mayor George Abbott had served more than four years on the Council.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, both the People's government and the Organization's administrations that had preceded them had shied away from placing even the informal powers of the city's weak mayor position into the hands of a single individual such as Duckworth for too long a period of time: the office had shifted from Richard Cooke to Pretlow Darden at midpoint in the People's tenure in order to better promote the

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<sup>5</sup>Pretlow Darden.

<sup>6</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 3 September 1956.

appearance of popular democracy that they craved.<sup>7</sup> The Organization had followed a similar practice, but political considerations figured foremost in their decision to frequently rotate the seat: experience had proven that the increased exposure that came with the office made the incumbent mayor the most vulnerable candidate when facing re-election. Duckworth, however, apparently experienced no such qualms about either elective vulnerability or charges of authoritarianism. By 1956 he had held the office of Mayor longer than any other person since the city manager form of government had been instituted in 1918,<sup>8</sup> and he gave no indication that he would be the least bit willing to surrender his authority at any time in the near future.

Duckworth held far more than just the policy-making functions of municipal government within his grasp; in a very real sense he managed the day-to-day activities of city hall as well. Already operating under his fifth<sup>9</sup> city manager since he had taken office six years earlier,<sup>10</sup> the

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<sup>7</sup>Pretlow Darden.

<sup>8</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 3 September 1956.

<sup>9</sup>People's Manager C. A. Harrell resigned under pressure eighteen months after Duckworth's election; Public Safety Director Henry George served as Acting City Manager for eight months before receiving official appointment to the post in September, 1952; Sherwood Reeder died in office six months after succeeding George on July 18, 1955; S. C. Morrisette filled in for the interim until Thomas F. Maxwell was appointed on February 15, 1956.

<sup>10</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 9 February 1956.

city's department heads had learned to function smoothly under the constancy of his leadership, channeling their information directly to the Mayor's office in a route that circumvented the authority of the city manager and the rest of the Council. In this skewed hierarchy the manager served as little more than the Mayor's chief municipal adviser, a role which both irritated and exasperated the incumbents. In these circumstances Norfolk was lucky to attract Thomas F. Maxwell to the post. Maxwell, although a man of many talents that would ordinarily have recommended him for higher status, suffered one debilitation that would forever limit his rise beyond Norfolk's debased position: Maxwell was a binge alcoholic who could only survive at the top in a closed and protective society like Norfolk's where the periodic abandonment of his position made very little real difference to the administration of city government. Maxwell, however, had a wizardry with budgetary policy, fiscal planning, money management, and federal grantsmanship that made him both an invaluable addition to the Mayor's staff at this time and an important municipal asset as the city passed through its building phase of postwar growth.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in spite of the lack of official authority traditionally associated with his position, Mayor W. Fred

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<sup>11</sup>Robert L. Mason; Harold Sugg; and L. Cameron Gregory, former reporter for the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, interview by author, Tape recording, Norfolk, 20 July 1979.



Duckworth functioned as a strong mayor in an otherwise nonpartisan, professional, council-manager form of government; if all this power concentrated in one public official and a handful of advisers disturbed the citizens of Norfolk, Virginia, they gave little indication of such unrest. Occasionally a newspaper editor would level a mild rebuke at the Mayor:

The Administration in which Mayor W. Fred Duckworth has been the leading figure, has shown both good and bad points in its career. Its early weaknesses were a tendency to settle many questions at the euphemistically named "informal sessions" and a tendency to take sometimes too lightly the recommendations of qualified administrators and especially appointed commissions and agencies.<sup>12</sup>

Most citizens, however, apparently regarded such indelicacies as the natural consequence of having a strong-willed and effective leader at the helm. The Mayor's very personal style of leadership and his extremely hierarchical chain of command served in marked contrast to the spirited popular participation that characterized the People's regime. A surfeit of popular advice and consent had appeared to bog down the People's government in the planning process; Duckworth's "bulldozer drive and directness"<sup>13</sup>--the words themselves would prove prophetic --however, seemed quickly to cut through the preliminaries,

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<sup>12</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 6 March 1956.

<sup>13</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 July 1961.

and get on with the work at hand. As long as the Mayor continued to comprehend the full scope of municipal affairs and carefully weigh the true consequences of his actions, the people seemed to mind little if a few of the niceties of democratic decision-making were bulldozed in the process. Indeed, the major accomplishment of the Duckworth administration to date was "its ability to undertake large programs" and bring them swiftly to their conclusion,<sup>14</sup> and, as long as the Mayor continued to focus the broad powers of municipal government towards obtainable objectives, the citizens seemed to care little if he wielded those powers somewhat dictatorially.

Two examples of the city's planning process under Mayor Duckworth help to illustrate both the enormous control of the Mayor and the shifting emphasis of developmental priorities under his administration. The primary emphasis of city planning under the People's government had been the modernization and revitalization of Norfolk's downtown commercial center--the "New Norfolk" of which they boasted. Considering the size of the city, Norfolk had never had much of a real downtown, and even in the People's era merchants of the area's fragile commercial strip were already feeling the press of competition from more residential shopping centers. Originally Norfolk had been a city built around its waterfront, but hard times had befallen its shipping-

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<sup>14</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 6 March 1956.

support industries--the ship chandlers, sail makers, blacksmiths, repair and machine shops, rope and rigging merchants, tarpaulin manufacturers, and naval hardware brokers--since the demise of sailing ships and intracoastal shipping, and the downtown had shifted two blocks away from the rotting wharves and crumbling warehouses that bespoke the heyday of this seaport existence. The once prosperous and active waterfront area had fallen almost completely into disuse, and the city's remaining commercial strip gave ample evidence of its former residential origins: the classic lines of Georgian and Victorian houses rose above the polished marble and glass facades of first-floor business establishments; narrow streets and winding alleyways now clogged with the through traffic they were never designed to carry; church spires stood in lonely vigil over neighborhoods without residents.<sup>15</sup>

Because the downtown commercial center was already struggling to overcome its competitive handicaps, further expansion in the commercial sector was not felt to be practical; instead the city's Silkstocking planners looked to development of the downtown's non-commercial advantages as the only hope for its crowded, misplaced businesses. For this reason they looked to expansion of the city's cultural and waterfront potential as a way to keep customers in the

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<sup>15</sup>Charles K. Agle, A Master Plan For The Central Business And Financial District, (Norfolk: Planning Commission, 1956), pp. 19-20.

vicinity of downtown shops.<sup>16</sup> The only problem lay in how best to stimulate a cultural renaissance and waterfront recovery program. At the time, redevelopment laws forbade the taking of commercial or industrial areas,<sup>17</sup> even those that were abandoned and delinquent in tax payments,<sup>18</sup> and so the planners were forced to seek the kind of appropriate municipal expenditure that would best stimulate private construction. For this reason they turned their attention toward two theme-oriented extensions to the downtown, both of which combined a minimum of already necessary public expenditure as an attraction to similar private developmental efforts.

The first proposal focused on a Cultural Center to be located just to the northwest of the existing downtown commercial strip. The major cultural attractions to the center already existed with the Norfolk (Chrysler) Museum at one end and the city's Center Theater/Civic Auditorium complex at the other end of the designated area; in addition, the Planning Commission had convinced the Library Board to relocate the Norfolk Public Library to new facilities to be built in the center. The area already possessed an urbane

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<sup>16</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 28 May 1956.

<sup>17</sup>Housing and Home Finance Agency, Slum Clearance Under The Housing Act of 1949: A Preliminary Statement To American Cities (Washington, D.C., 1949).

<sup>18</sup>Charles K. Agle, A Master Plan For The Central Business And Financial District, op cit., pp. 19-20.

and international feeling, enhanced by the classic lines of the Georgian and Federal architecture of the neighboring Ghent and Freemason Street areas. The nearby Smith Creek Marina and the Hague Yacht Basin, replete with its foot-paths, bridges, and waterfront park, was a popular haven both for boaters who followed the Inland Waterway and others looking for a respite from the fast pace of urban living. The Commission hoped to build on this recreational quality of the area by relocating the city's Confederate Monument, Norfolk's obeisance to its Southern heritage, to a mini-park to be constructed in the middle of the Cultural Center, hoping that it would serve to attract lunch hour picnickers and pedestrian traffic to the area. A second benefit of the mini-park would be that it would help to re-channel traffic into the downtown area in a more acceptable pattern; at the time, five of the city's main downtown commuter streets --Olney Road, Llewellyn Avenue, Duke, Boush, and High (now Virginia Beach Boulevard) Streets--met in the middle of the proposed Cultural Center and wound their way tortuously into the main downtown commercial district.<sup>19</sup>

The Planning Commission hoped to use this new Cultural Center, replete with its library, museum, parks, theater, marina, and modern traffic connectors, to attract other similar cultural enterprises into this common area. The planners hoped that trade delegations and N.A.T.O emissaries

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<sup>19</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 December 1951.

would relocate to the area into a consulate's row, thereby continuing the international flavor already imparted by the Hague and nearby Ghent neighborhood. The Commission was already hard at work trying to encourage some of the city's leading charities and civic organizations to seek adjacent sites, and its members were confident that once the Cultural Center began to take shape, that a major convention hotel would buy a site in the area. The Silkstocking businessmen and the various boards and commissions associated with the planning of the center were trying to use their contacts to convince some of the city's major enterprises to relocate their corporate headquarters in the vicinity. The city was even reserving a site adjacent to the museum and proposed public library that could be used in the future for a municipal aquarium or naval museum.<sup>20</sup>

Plans for the Cultural Center were ambitious, but they seemed realistic enough considering the constraints of the period; the planners had every reason to believe that local businesses, restaurants, sidewalk cafes, and specialty shops would be attracted by the combination of public and private construction, fleshing out a new vitality to an area just outside of the narrow confines of the existing downtown commercial strip.<sup>21</sup> The public funds necessary to support such an undertaking were not large, and those earmarked for

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<sup>20</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 December 1951.

<sup>21</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 9 July 1952.

library construction and street improvements were necessary regardless of the success of the rest of the project.

Enthusiasm for the plan was especially strong during 1951 and 1952, while C. A. Harrell was still manager, and before the People's movement had wholly subsided from its position of advisory importance at City Hall.

At about this time the same planners were casting about for a parallel proposal to improve the city's deteriorating waterfront area; they knew that here, too, a similar combination of public expenditures for parks and promenades, plus the right kind of private investment, could attract a contingent of outdoor cafes and specialty shops. A number of proposals were being bandied about, including designs for a seawall, amphitheater, small boat marina, highrise luxury apartment buildings, new City Hall/Civic Center complex, naval museum, private housing developments, cordon bleu seafood restaurant, a seafood market, and a bazaar.<sup>22</sup> The most promising proposal for waterfront development came from the Norfolk Port Authority, a creation of the old People's Administration. Members of the Authority hoped to unite many of the aspects of earlier proposals around a single, two-staged development that would both attract new investment and encourage improvements to existing properties. Phase One of their project focused on the construction of a huge concrete pier that would extend

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<sup>22</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 14 August 1956.

far enough out into the main shipping channel to accommodate the loading and unloading of even the deepest draft vessels. Space along the pier would be rented out to shipping and freight forwarding concerns, and on the shore, as part of Phase Two of the project, a large quay would be built to facilitate drayage. The quay would be broad enough to accommodate specialty shops, travel agents, seafood vendors, a produce market, small restaurants, and outdoor cafes.<sup>23</sup>

Plans for both these projects--the Cultural Center and the harbor quay--advanced just as rapidly as they would have under the People's Administration; the city's volunteer boards and commissions proceeded in a vacuum just as if they had the same grant of power and responsibilities as before. The Port Authority began buying up property at the foot of Commercial Place and West Main Street and aggressively began to line up prospects interested in leasing space along the pier; local merchants and out-of-town investors alike had contacted the Authority to inquire about commercial opportunities along the quay.<sup>24</sup> The Planning Commission was moving just as aggressively to line up prospects for its own development at the other end of the downtown area: the Salvation Army, the Union Mission, I.B.M., and other leading corporate and charitable enterprises had been successfully recruited to locate in the Cultural Center. Thus, by the

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<sup>23</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 28 May 1956.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



time Council was approached for approval, both projects were well off the drawing boards and fast becoming a reality.

No official reason was ever given for the rejection of either proposal; in fact, the Council seems never to have docketed the items or given them public audience. In spite of widespread enthusiasm and the editorial endorsements of the Virginian-Pilot and Ledger-Dispatch, both projects were accorded a low profile, back-burner status that was unusual for such full-blown and well-planned undertakings. The only official action that was ever taken on either project concerned the Library Board's request to relocate the main library to a new site in the Cultural Center: for four years the Council delayed consideration of the project, and then finally announced in August of 1956 that the Cultural Center was "a long-range undertaking [that] has been accorded a lower priority" than other city projects.<sup>25</sup> It was a heavy blow to all those who had pinned their hopes on an East Ghent commercial revival, and even though portions of the project still survived independent of the others, the idea for a Cultural Center in downtown Norfolk was dead. The Port Authority, too, was forced to shelve its plans, and settled later for less expensive arrangements far removed from the downtown financial district.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 22 August 1956.

<sup>26</sup>It was either a stroke of genius or just a lucky accident that the plans for the downtown waterfront facility were so precipitously scrapped at this time, for the freight

Thus, by the winter of 1956, every major program of renewal or revitalization left over from the People's administration had either been fully activated or quietly put aside; the powers that controlled city hall had shifted dramatically in the decade since the rise of the Silk-stocking Ticket. No longer were the city's volunteer boards and commissions, or the business and civic elite they represented, a power in the planning and decision-making process; no longer were the more rancorous conventions of popular democracy--public hearings, open council meetings, and issue review committees--essential to the city's policy-making apparatus. It had been years since the city manager had functioned as Norfolk's chief executive; instead Mayor Duckworth and a handful of advisors ran every phase of municipal government, exerting the same sort of ironclad grip on the city's political structure as well.

The appearance that the city ran so smoothly under the Mayor's direction was no accident; Duckworth had made a special point to eliminate any opportunity for factionalism or opposition on the Council before such could emerge. In fact, except for Organization stalwart George Abbott, who posed no threat to Duckworth's continued direction, no other councilmen had stayed in office long enough to develop a

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handling utility of the project would have been rendered obsolete by the enormous space and specialized equipment needs of modern containerization. See Hammer, Green, Siler Associates, Economic Potentials in Downtown Norfolk, (Norfolk: Planning Commission, 1970), p. 11.

personal following. Councilmen and city managers came and went at city hall so rapidly during this era that one could easily see why Mayor Duckworth, even if he had not been a forceful leader, would be quickly recognized by the citizens as the only stable force in the city's administration. Councilmen were chosen from the broad ranks of independent but small-time businessmen--insurance agents, real estate brokers, wholesalers, and shopkeepers--who were successful overachievers in their profession, but who exhibited no remarkable capacity for autonomous action; none came to city hall with any special following, gleaned either through prior municipal experience, volunteer service, or through leadership in the business or civic community, and each owed his advancement to office entirely to Mayor Duckworth and those around him.

The circumstances behind an individual's selection to elective office at this time remain clouded, but obviously the unofficial nominating process that took place was shrouded in sufficient secrecy to preserve both the political viability of the chosen and the continued domination of the selectors. Perhaps because selection of his 1950 Harmony Ticket had been engineered by some considerable behind-the-scenes maneuvering, Duckworth and those around him apparently never really trusted the popular election process to elevate men of good standing and high ability to the Council. Two old standbys of the Byrd Organization were

employed in Norfolk to tightly control the nominating and elective processes: first, the official slate of Duckworth-endorsed candidates was held in secrecy until announcement at the last moment before the filing deadline, thereby eliminating those Organization hopefuls who had been passed over in the unofficial nominating process. Secondly, those who ran for elective office were not always those who served: Mayor Duckworth and those around him perfected the Organization's "planned incumbency" scheme whereby a trusted incumbent would stand for re-election and mysteriously resign so that a carefully selected successor could fill the slot without risking the perils of popular election; the newcomer would then have the advantages of an incumbent's experience and exposure when he stood for re-election in his own right two years later. Advancement by appointment had become a time-honored tradition in Virginia--most of the state's congressmen, senators and other top office-holders had advanced at least once in this manner<sup>27</sup>--and it quickly became a hallmark as well of Norfolk City government: thus in 1953, newcomer Roy B. Martin, Jr., was selected to fill the seat vacated when Councilman James M. Williams resigned; Lewis L. Layton similarly took over in 1956 when

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<sup>27</sup>In one of Virginia's most famous examples of planned incumbency, former U.S. Senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr., took over in December, 1964, the Senate seat his father vacated after having won re-election the month before. Norfolk's Clerk of the Courts William L. "Billy" Priour very nearly took office under similar circumstances when his predecessor announced his resignation on Election Night.

incumbent Robert F. Ripley stepped down shortly after winning re-election;<sup>28</sup> and Linwood F. Perkins was appointed in early 1957 when Councilman Ezra Summers died in office.<sup>29</sup> Norfolk was so obviously by-passing the popular election process that the editors of the Virginian-Pilot targeted the Duckworth administration for their lack of political decorum:

[The newcomer] is in no way responsible for it, but the changeover had one disconcerting aspect. Quite obviously the Councilmen, and some others, too, knew in advance that [the incumbent] would resign. But the intention was not made public until a successor had been agreed upon. It is a sounder procedure to give the voters a little advance notice before selecting a successor to a man they elected to office. Settling the whole problem behind closed doors is not good procedure even if the result, in all other respects, is satisfactory.<sup>30</sup>

Most observers conceded that Mayor Duckworth had the final word in the unofficial nominating process that selected candidates for municipal office in Norfolk. This was no mean achievement when one considers the enormous control exerted by Billy Prieur and his Organization during their heyday, but Prieur had apparently lost interest in municipal affairs since the near demise of his Organization during the tenure of the People's administration. Instead,

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<sup>28</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 6 February 1956.

<sup>29</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 26 June 1957.

<sup>30</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 6 February 1956.

like many other of his contemporaries in the statewide Byrd Organization, he had resigned himself to a lesser role. Local experts point to Prieur's acceptance of an increasingly moderate and independent-acting, "Young Turk" legislative delegation as a sign of his lessening involvement in the candidate selection and election process.<sup>31</sup> The Young Turks were so named because they were mostly men in their early thirties, who, although they were members of the Byrd Organization, sometimes refused to back the old Byrd hierarchy. Most were war veterans or urban legislators like Norfolk's own Walter Paige, Theodore Pilcher, Toy Savage, and Jack Rixey, who had on several occasions bucked the Organization establishment in order to support issues of urban concern or racial moderation. In one sense they well represented Norfolk's own urbane constituency, and were thus good choices for the city, but in another sense, the Billy Prieur of the 1930s, one of Harry Byrd's chief lieutenants and an Organization stalwart, would never have brooked such independence.

All across the state the Organization was in decline and, especially in its urban areas, was giving way to new leadership groups such as the Young Turks or Duckworth's businessmen's coalition. Prieur, who had always preferred the seclusion of the back room to the spotlight of public

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<sup>31</sup>Robert L. Mason, Harold Sugg, L. Cameron Gregory, and others.

recognition, was now apparently content to accept a partnership role with Duckworth that placed the Mayor in the lime-light. No one is really sure who held the upper hand, if indeed either party dominated the arrangement, for both men had powerful egos, and neither would have allowed himself to play a secondary role. It seems more probable that Duckworth and Prieur, both conservatives, were in basic agreement on most major matters, and that each held his own unchallengeable dominion. Prieur, who had by now made peace with Congressman Porter Hardy, controlled State and Federal patronage; Duckworth, on the other hand, controlled municipal policy without interference from the Organization.<sup>32</sup> The Organization in Norfolk seems to have evolved away from the potential for corruption that existed during the boom period of the war years, and, once battered by the municipal housecleaning during the People's administration, now seemed content to concentrate on the less important "favors" of city government that kept its machinery alive: controlling patronage appointments, government contracts, permit variances, ordinance enforcement, and overseeing promotions, especially in the more political agencies, like the Police and Fire Departments.<sup>33</sup> With a strongman like Duckworth

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<sup>32</sup>Claude J. Staylor; Harold Sugg; Robert Mason; and L. Cameron Gregory.

<sup>33</sup>Claude J. Staylor; and John F. Estes, former Police officer, interview by author, Tape recording, Norfolk, 20 September 1979.

at the helm of city government, the Prieur Organization now seemed both unable and unwilling to challenge the authority of the Mayor, thus giving him free reign to direct basic policy as he wished.<sup>34</sup>

If the people were worried about the fact that all this power, both political and governmental, was rapidly concentrating in the office of their Mayor, they gave little indication of such concern. By and large, those advanced by Duckworth and his advisors to both political office and appointive positions were men and women of good character who were probably more representative of all the people in the city than the selections of the Silkstocking crowd. If a special danger existed in so establishing W. Fred Duckworth as a benevolent dictator, it would come from one of several quarters: first, the Mayor and his advisors might lose touch with the public will; they had spoken so long on behalf of the citizenry in making all of the city's decisions that they might now discover that they had lost the ability to listen, and, in so losing touch, risk running contrary to the will of the people on some critical issue. Second, because the Mayor had been such an aggressive spokesman and the people were so obviously content to sit back silently, there was a danger that if a small and vocal minority ever became really well organized, then the Mayor might over-react to their pronouncements, as if all the

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<sup>34</sup>Robert L. Mason; Harold Sugg; and Claude J. Staylor.



people had spoken. Also, the famous Duckworth temper might intrude upon the Mayor's otherwise sound judgement. Already city hall was abuzz with murmured rumors about those individuals, even respected members of the city's business and professional society, who had dared in even a minor way to oppose the Mayor or one of his programs, only to find their livelihood suddenly threatened.<sup>35</sup> Stories also existed about how even senior city officials who had attempted to question a Duckworth decision had been publicly humiliated by the Mayor in a tirade of verbal abuse.<sup>36</sup> These, however, were only petty examples of an even greater danger; so far no one knew just how far the Mayor might go in a fit of pique to destroy a political opponent or some other, greater threat to his administration. Earlier in the decade the Black community had experienced a pattern of mayoral revenge for their political deviation, and the Broad Creek Shores controversy had shown that Duckworth was not opposed to employing the official powers of the city to punish his opposition, but these actions only hinted at the even greater dangers that lay ahead now that Mayor W. Fred Duckworth had achieved full domination over every phase of Norfolk's municipal operation.

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<sup>35</sup>Gordon Dillon, "An Exceptionally Talented Lad," Article One I, no. ii (May, 1970), pp. 17-19.

<sup>36</sup>Harold Sugg.

Finally, there was the danger that, in spite of all his power and demonstrated skills, Mayor Duckworth had not yet put his authority to work on any of his own programs. C. A. Harrell and the People's administration had left behind a very precisely planned and carefully orchestrated program of action, and Duckworth's success in bringing those plans to reality had brought him much well deserved popularity and unparalleled economic stability to the city. Now, however, the People's program was past--Redevelopment Project One was drawing to a close, the last units of public housing were under construction, the bridge-tunnel connector to Portsmouth was open, the ambitious annexation program was complete, hundreds of new classrooms had been added to the school system, new water and sewer works were already on line, revamped health, housing, sanitation, and building codes were being enforced, and the area was going through the greatest building boom in its history,<sup>37</sup> and if Duckworth had an agenda of his own, it was a secret as closely guarded as the announcement of his running mates in the next councilmanic election. Now that all these projects were complete, and the People's follow-up phase of development had been rejected, Norfolk was about to enter into a new stage of growth that would carry Mayor Duckworth's distinctive and, as yet, undiscernible stamp. The danger, of course, was that all the powers he had amassed by building

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<sup>37</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 March 1956.

to the People's blueprint might somehow be perverted by some as yet unseen factor--his propensity for revenge, his inability to discern the true voice of the people, or, in the face of some great public silence, that he would be prompted to over-react by a vocal and well-organized minority now that he was both the architect and the builder.

Now at the peak of both his political and municipal power, Mayor W. Fred Duckworth was preparing to launch at last his own program of development, only this time there was no fanfare, no minority advisors, no citizen involvement, and no prior publicity. That was not his style; the Mayor moved in a more deliberate and purposeful manner. He was unhampered by either the open accessibility or the frenzy of participatory democracy that had so preoccupied his predecessors as to bog them down in the form, instead of the substance of government, and thus they had lost the ability to continue. The Duckworth style involved instead both the acquisition of power and the display of its use, and he had done well in both regards, having constructed the base for unparalleled personal control from the blueprints left over from the People's administration. The Building Era was now past, and the last of the People's programs was either completed or put away forever. The Cultural Center, the planned waterfront development, and the harbor quay had all been tabled; instead Norfolk's priorities under Duckworth would now shift away from developing its assets

and turn toward destroying its liabilities. Chief among those liabilities, of course, was the impending school desegregation crisis, now bottled up in the federal courts on a string of technicalities that could snap at any moment. Since Mayor Duckworth had not yet spoken out on the desegregation issue, few residents could have guessed that in the coming months he would attempt to deal so directly with the crisis, using the powers of city government to oppose the threat of forced integration as if it were just another political rival. The stakes in such an undertaking were frighteningly high--the desegregation controversy was more than just a collection of human opponents, it represented the single most overwhelming force of the coming decade. Few people, however, were visionary enough at that time to discern just how powerful that force would become, and all across the Commonwealth the state's political leaders were hastening to erect paper barriers and legal obstacles to divert the onslaught of desegregation.

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Duckworth alone emerged with a plan carefully contrived to construct more permanent breastworks, and had his plan succeeded, it probably would have been imitated all across the nation. Still, few men anywhere in municipal government were in a better position to hazard such a venture: Mayor W. Fred Duckworth was riding high on the crest of a wave of municipal accomplishment, partisan consensus, and personal leadership; he had obtained absolute control over every

phase of his city's governmental machinery, and he had subdued almost every source of potent opposition. Even so, the risk was just apparent enough that the Mayor saw fit to hedge his bets in secrecy and couch his plan in the guise of the People's priorities. This was a masterful stroke: no matter how comprehensive the endeavor, if it failed, he would be able to step clear from its liabilities and disavow the complicity of his involvement.

Redevelopment leaped suddenly to the forefront of municipal policy, just as it had during the heyday of the People's administration, and events began to move rapidly--too rapidly for the citizens to fully comprehend either their significance or their comprehensiveness. In December (1956), the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority announced the commencement of two new undertakings, both begun after the Mayor had forcefully suggested their initiation.<sup>38</sup> N.R.H.A. Project Two would concentrate on clearing just over 37 acres of blighted housing in the Lamberts Point section of the city,<sup>39</sup> providing vital growing room to the Norfolk Division of the College of William and Mary and Virginia Polytechnical Institute (now Old Dominion University), finally enabling it to break out of the narrow confines of its two-year preparatory and trade

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<sup>38</sup>Pretlow Darden.

<sup>39</sup>Norfolk Redevelopment And Housing Authority, Annual Report to the City Council, (Norfolk: N.R.H.A., 1974). p. 39.

school curriculum. The second project proposed to bulldoze 90 acres in the Atlantic City portion of Norfolk,<sup>40</sup> the chief beneficiary of which would be Norfolk General (Sentara) Hospital, another popular but badly landlocked public institution. Before that phase of the project could even be approved, an additional 45 acres were added to the Atlantic City proposal to accommodate long-standing People's plans to improve adjacent health, highway, and tunnel facilities.

In marked contrast to Redevelopment Project One, no public housing was planned for either the Atlantic City or the Old Dominion (N.R.H.A. Project Two) Project, even though the two areas combined were more than twice the size of the People's N.R.H.A. Project One, and the Atlantic City area alone contained close to a 1,000 dwellings.<sup>41</sup> As a matter of fact, the Redevelopment and Housing Authority was just beginning to embark upon another venture which would destroy an additional 2,600 dwellings--units that would have been perfectly suited as temporary public housing and ease the relocation of refugees from the Atlantic City and Old Dominion Projects. By annexation, Norfolk had acquired the 468-acre site of Broad Creek Village, a temporary war housing project still occupied by the families of government

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<sup>40</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 8 December 1956.

<sup>41</sup>Frank Sullivan, "Norfolk's Redevelopment Story," Norfolk XVI: 7 (November, 1954), p. 9.

the Navy,<sup>42</sup> the Redevelopment and Housing Authority was in the process of razing those dwellings to make room for a mammoth industrial park,<sup>43</sup> thereby compounding even further the relocation problem.

Bulldozers were still roaring through the dwellings in the Atlantic City, Broad Creek, and Old Dominion Projects when the N.R.H.A announced a fourth venture, the Downtown Redevelopment Project. In a carefully concerted attack the Authority swept bare more than 200 acres in the oldest part of the city.<sup>44</sup> The central focus of the assault was Norfolk's notorious East Main Street sin strip, where once a vast array of bars, honky tonks, amusement palaces, tattoo parlors, flophouses, and burlesques had entertained the fleet and brought disrepute to more legitimate downtown businessmen. More than 400 commercial structures would fall in this massive attempt to wipe out a repugnant merchandising industry, and an additional 485 residences would be razed without the addition of any new public housing units for their evacuees.<sup>45</sup>

With the initiation of these four near-simultaneous endeavors--the Atlantic City, Old Dominion, Broad Creek, and

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<sup>42</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 June 1954.

<sup>43</sup>Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Annual Report To The City Council (1974), op cit., p. 39.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>45</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 July 1961.

Downtown Projects--the city was casting aside a sizeable portion of its developed land--more than 800 acres were scheduled for clearance--in exchange for new opportunities for growth. This new phase of redevelopment was unquestionably the Mayor's: although none of the four projects were new ideas to his Administration--all four had been kicked around, along with numerous other proposals, among the various planning and advisory commissions--the enormous scope of this undertaking was Duckworth's invention,<sup>46</sup> the size of the projects, the simultaneity of the endeavor, the speed with which they were undertaken, and even the rationale for such dramatic action all derived their impetus from his character. In just pure size, this new phase in redevelopment was staggering: the four projects encompassed an area ten times the size of N.R.H.A. Project One, which itself was twice the size of any development that New York or any other city had attempted.<sup>47</sup> More than 20,000 people, almost a tenth of Norfolk's population,<sup>48</sup> would be forced to flee the bulldozers in this new phase of demolition. More than 4,000 residential structures, many with several apartment, and more than 500 commercial structures would be razed in this unprecedented series of projects.

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<sup>46</sup>Pretlow Darden.

<sup>47</sup>Architectural Forum, op cit., p. 132.

<sup>48</sup>Based upon an analysis of census tract data for the four areas involved. See U. S. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population: (1950), op cit.



The rapidity with which all four projects were undertaken was almost as startling: less than nine months lapsed from the announcement of the Atlantic City Project to the time that demolition work actually began in earnest; the N.R.H.A. began tearing down structures in Broad Creek almost as soon as it took title to the land from the Navy. By marked contrast, Project One had been three years in the planning phase before the Council had made the first appropriation, and then another full year passed before demolition work actually began. Also by comparison, no formal plan existed for what would be done in the areas once they were cleared. Although the official explanation for all four projects was that they were desperately needed to provide room for industrial expansion, downtown development, and growth of the city's municipal, educational, health, and transportation facilities, no blueprints or scale models of such enterprises were trotted out for public display. Either the Mayor felt no need to "sell" the projects in this way, or else he really did not have any firm commitments yet for new hospital wings, educational structures, industrial facilities, or commercial ventures. N.R.H.A. Project One was one-tenth the size of the new undertakings, and it had still taken six years under the Duckworth administration to complete, and this in spite of the fact that it was vastly over planned in comparison to the new proposals.

In spite of the fact that plans for redeveloping the projects were at best only loosely formulated, the Duckworth administration had good reason to rush them off the drawing boards and into the demolition stage as quickly as possible. The rationale behind this seeming impulsiveness was not based upon any immediate demand for cleared land, for, indeed, the Mayor had never placed a very high priority upon the drudgery and precision of community planning; his forte was quick and dramatic action, and the singleness with which N.R.H.A. pursued condemnation in these projects was no exception. Ironically the administration that had built its reputation upon building to the People's specifications would now turn to rapid demolition of property before new plans for its use could be fully drawn, but the simple truth remains that new construction lagged far behind in the list of municipal priorities. The new focus was upon clearing land where existing uses were seriously threatening the continued prosperity of the city. It is easy to see why the sleazy bars and honky tonks, the festering slums, and the seedy business houses scheduled for removal in the Downtown Project were undesirable land uses, but why would a city suffering an acute shortage of adequate and sanitary housing units (the 1940 Census had demonstrated that 40% of the city's housing stock was either "dilapidated" or contained inadequate sanitation facilities)<sup>49</sup> suddenly turn to

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<sup>49</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 July 1961.

destroy more than 3,500 units with decent plumbing? Why, too, would a city desperate for low-cost housing units, especially for its Black residents, suddenly propose to bulldoze more than 4,250 such units without planning any additional housing, either public or private?

Each of the projects poses an interesting contradiction to sound planning practices. Broad Creek Village, for instance, was unquestionably an ideal site for future industrial development, but it would take years to fill the 468-acre site. In the meantime the area was occupied by 2,600 individual family homes, all less than 15 years old and all equipped with modern sewage and sanitation facilities. Although the homes had been built by the Navy during the war as demountable units, prefabrication was becoming more and more the rule in new home construction. Uncertainty about the future of the village had unquestionably contributed markedly to its decline, but the area still showed signs of health and usefulness as a solid working-class community. Broad Creek Village had served a very unique and successful purpose as a settlement of wartime government housing, but shortly after the Korean War the Navy sought to sever its relationship as landlord and turn that function over to public housing agencies like the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority. Since N.R.H.A. Executive Director Larry Cox had already gone on record as opposing the continuation of Broad Creek Village as either low income or public

housing,<sup>50</sup> the area residents were bitterly opposed to a N.R.H.A. takeover. Since the property was technically in a portion of Norfolk County still slated for annexation by the city of Norfolk, the residents fought vigorously to have the Navy turn it over to either the county or to some sort of tenant-sponsored mutual ownership organization. The N.R.H.A. publicly persisted in its desire to demolish the entire tract, and this bitterness between the tenants and the new landlord helped to speed the deterioration of the village once the N.R.H.A. actually did take over management. Angry residents blamed the deterioration upon the Housing Authority for failure to perform simple maintenance duties, but the condition can just as easily be traced back to the residents themselves, who, because of uncertainty over the area's future, failed to maintain the same level of upkeep as they had when the future of the project was secure under federal auspices.<sup>51</sup>

Hurricane Hazel struck in 1954 just as the N.R.H.A. was taking title to the property,<sup>52</sup> but the debate over which agency had responsibility to repair the damage, including more than 30 carloads of missing shingles,<sup>53</sup> soon became a moot point. Once the N.R.H.A. assumed full

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<sup>50</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 6 July 1955.

<sup>51</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 April 1955.

<sup>52</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 August 1954.

<sup>53</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 June 1958.

control, it began closing off certain sections and preparing them for demolition. The sight of barricaded streets, vandalized properties, and boarded-up buildings panicked the residents into agreeing to the total rezoning of the property for industrial use. They hoped that by agreeing to the rezoning and the eventual demise of the entire site that they were actually buying time; they hoped that the N.R.H.A. would change course and institute a program of gradual removal as prospects for industrial development solidified.<sup>54</sup> Their hopes, however, were short-lived; within three years most of the residents had been driven out.<sup>55</sup>

It really makes very little difference who created a slum out of Broad Creek Village, for by the time the bulldozers actually began to roll through the area, blight had become rampant. What had once been a valuable assemblage of relatively new housing units--all with two to three bedrooms, hardwood floors, deep sash windows, modern plumbing fixtures, and sturdy interior constructions--had degenerated quickly into a full scale slum, replete with vandalized and deserted buildings, piles of rubbish, and the look of despair that generally characterizes areas slated for demolition. In its heyday--during the war and the years immediately following when its survival had been certain--Broad Creek had been an ideal working-class community: it

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<sup>54</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 21 May 1955.

<sup>55</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 June 1958.

had almost no crime, the neighbors looked out for one another, shared a sense of purpose, and felt compassion and kinship with one another--in short it exhibited a remarkable unity of spirit and sense of community. By the end of the war it had lost its appearance as a military camp, and residents worked feverishly to tend their gardens, improve their dwelling, and save up enough to purchase their own unit. Although out in the county, Broad Creek natives felt that they had their own little city unto themselves: it had its own schools, churches, parks, playgrounds, stores, and commercial areas--and for more than 5,000 people it was "home," for many their first real home. No wonder that its residents fought so bitterly against the city's plans to tear the structures down; they could not believe that with all the newly-annexed farm land, Norfolk could not find a better place for industry than on top of their homes. Ironically, today, more than 30 years after Broad Creek Village was razed, many of its original "slum" dwellings remain in other parts of the city: many of the residents refused to have their units torn down, and so bought them from the Housing Authority for a couple of hundred dollars, and then paid to have them moved to other sites.<sup>56</sup>

Broad Creek Village was not, however, the only area of the city where residents blamed the N.R.H.A. for precipitating its decline by spreading rumors of destruction. When

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<sup>56</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 July 1979.

Norfolk first began talking back in 1949 about wholesale redevelopment of the city's aging neighborhoods on the fringe of the downtown, Atlantic City was one of the few predominantly white neighborhoods mentioned in the early speculations.<sup>57</sup> Founded around the cotton mill, Fort Norfolk, the seafood industry, and the Smith Creek marinas, Atlantic City had been one of Norfolk's first suburbs, predating Ghent, its richer cousin across the Hague (Smith Creek), by almost a decade.

Since Atlantic City contained the industries that supported the carriage set who lived in Ghent, most of its dwelling units were working-class row houses or multi-family structures. These lent themselves easily to over-crowding and exploitation by nonresident landlords during the critical housing shortage that prevailed throughout World War II and the years immediately following, but these conditions were prevalent in even the city's finest neighborhoods. As rumors of its redevelopment spread, however, those same property owners were understandably unwilling to undertake major repairs or improvements, and the area took on many of the appearances of a "blighted" neighborhood.<sup>58</sup> Atlantic City, however, should have been just the sort of neighborhood that the city's revamped health, housing, and building codes were supposed to

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<sup>57</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 4 October 1949.

<sup>58</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 1 July 1957.

rehabilitate; indeed, in the two years before the Atlantic City Project was formally announced, more than a thousand homes in the city had been rehabilitated.<sup>59</sup> Much of the housing scheduled for removal in the Downtown Projects had unquestionably deteriorated beyond repair: census tract studies indicate that more than 80% of the units had inadequate plumbing facilities, that 96% were built before 1920, that 94% were without any form of central heating, and that the median contract rent in 1949 had been only \$14.51 per month.<sup>60</sup> The Atlantic City Project, however, proves a sharp contrast: in 1949, at a time when the severe housing crisis in the community had precipitated subdividing many older homes into multi-unit apartments, almost a quarter of the Atlantic City homes were still single family, free-standing houses; another fourth were free-standing duplexes, a popular building style in many older neighborhoods; and close to 20% of the homes were less than 30 years old. In addition, more than 70% of the units had adequate plumbing (two apartments that shared a bathroom, a common practice in many areas of the city, were downgraded in the census report as having inadequate plumbing facilities). More than half of the units had central heating, and the median contract rent was \$34.86, more than twice the value in the structures

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<sup>59</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 October 1956.

<sup>60</sup>U. S. Bureau of Census, U.S. Census of Population: 1950, vol. III, Census Tract Studies, Chapter 38 (Washington, D.C., 1952). p. 22 (census tract 42).



torn down in both the Downtown Redevelopment Project or N.R.H.A. Project One.<sup>61</sup> Undoubtedly a number of structures in the Atlantic City project had deteriorated beyond rehabilitation, even by today's standards in which restoring older, central city homes has become so fashionable, but many of the deficiencies noted in the census studies were not only in keeping with existing city codes, they were also common practices during the wartime and postwar housing crises locally.<sup>62</sup>

Ironically, Atlantic City was chosen by the Norfolk Health Department for a major code enforcement initiative precisely because of the overall quality of its structures and the fact that they were so salvageable. Since federally funded redevelopment projects required that the locality rehabilitate one housing unit for each unit torn down, Norfolk had adopted one of the first comprehensive minimum housing codes in the country. Because Norfolk was only the second city in the nation (the other was Baltimore) to attempt large scale enforcement of its code, the Health Department was looking for a neighborhood that was good enough to salvage, but not so bad that code enforcement efforts would make little difference. After careful analysis of the 1950 census data and some preliminary field

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 21 and 22 (census tracts 35, 39, and 42).

<sup>62</sup>see Marvin W. Schlegel, Conscripted City, op cit., pp. 20 - 60.

work, the Health Department chose Atlantic City for the first concentrated housing code enforcement effort in the country. When the staff of the Health Department met with N.R.H.A. Executive Director Larry Cox, they were told that the Housing Authority had no plans to begin any redevelopment activity in Atlantic City for "at least five to ten years," and that were other areas of the city rated a much "higher priority."<sup>63</sup>

According to G. D. Monola, the former Director of Environmental Health who led the code enforcement project, the only badly deteriorated section of Atlantic City lay along the site of Brambleton Avenue. Because this area had mixed commercial, industrial, and residential uses, rental units had been allowed by absentee landlords to degenerate. Black families displaced by Project One had begun moving in to this section, but because it was separate from the other residential blocks, there was none of the violence or strong community reaction that had occurred in Brambleton or Coronado. In short, Atlantic City had "integrated without any difficulty . . . without any fanfare, any publicity, or any Klan activity." Moreover, the fact that Blacks were now moving into these units meant that they could command higher rents, and the landlords were thus more willing to make the investments necessary to bring the dwellings up to code.

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<sup>63</sup>G. D. Monola, former Director of Environmental Health, interview by author, Norfolk, 3 April 1991.

For this reason, the sudden announcement of the entire demolition of the neighborhood caught both the residents and the Health Department by surprise. The code enforcement project had just been completed, and nearly every dwelling unit had been brought up to the city's new minimum housing code, some at considerable cost to the property owners. According to Monola, the Health Department had been meeting regularly with the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, and the Authority had not mentioned the possible demolition of the neighborhood until the plans were announced in the press. The fact that the Housing Authority had used the Health Department surveys as justification for the demolition helped to deepen the rift between the two agencies. Although there were a "surprisingly large number of owner occupied dwellings" in the area and most of the dwelling units were well worth saving, especially now that they had been rehabilitated, the Housing Authority persisted in its effort, against the advice of the Health Department, to push for demolition of the entire area. Even though a building could meet all the requirements of the city's minimum housing code and still have major defects, the Health Department felt that the Housing Authority had gone overboard in its rush to expand the project beyond the fairly restrictive area of blight along the present site of Brambleton Avenue. Block after block where only a few defects were listed were included in the project, but because

these were lumped together with the worst cases, the area just did meet the minimum requirement of five defects per dwelling to qualify as a federally funded redevelopment project.

Thus, in an ironical twist, the Atlantic City housing units that had been rehabilitated as a result of N.R.H.A. Project One, were then torn down in Norfolk's second phase of redevelopment. Residents were furious with the Health Department, especially when they learned that the appraisal of their property from the N.R.H.A. was less than the cost of the improvements required by the Health Department to bring the dwelling up to the minimum housing code. The Health Department's code enforcement effort suffered as a result of the public uproar, and disagreements over the size and scope of the Atlantic City project eventually led to a severe split between the two agencies; no longer would the Health Department help in the housing rehabilitation efforts of the N.R.H.A.,<sup>64</sup> and even today the city and the Housing Authority operate separate housing rehabilitation units with overlapping authority, mission, and purpose.

Obviously after eight years of rumored destruction and the general state of despair and disrepair that follows such rumors, portions of the Atlantic City neighborhood were in danger of becoming a slum. The Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority pointed to the Health Department surveys

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<sup>64</sup>G. D. Monola.

as proof that it had higher incidence of tuberculosis, venereal disease, juvenile delinquency, dilapidated housing, racial unrest, crimes, fires, and rat infestation than other neighborhoods in the city,<sup>65</sup> but the residents complained that all of these had come to the area since the talk of redevelopment:

It seems that considerable time and effort has gone into preparing reports by various functions of the city government to show that Atlantic City has been a detriment to the rest of the city. If it was such a blight on our city, and its effects [were] so far reaching as to affect the whole city, wouldn't this fact have been so outstanding that it would speak for itself without having to be figured [in such a way so as] to prove it?<sup>66</sup>

Few citizens and even fewer organizations were willing to take up these cries, however, and oppose the project. Only those most affected by demolition--the owners of private homes, apartment buildings, or commercial property in the target area--showed any inclination to fight. The most vigorous opposition to the Atlantic City Project came not from the residents, but rather from yachting enthusiasts and environmentalists who opposed the closing of the Smith Creek Marina by the proposed low-level Brambleton Avenue bridge.<sup>67</sup> Replacing the old two-lane drawbridge with a

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<sup>65</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 June 1957.

<sup>66</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 1 July 1957.

<sup>67</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 5 January 1957.

broad fixed span was, however, one of the few really necessary proposals in the entire project: Norfolk desperately needed another thoroughfare connecting the downtown with the Hampton Boulevard corridor, and the proposed Brambleton Avenue route clearly offered the best planning alternative.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, almost all of the really deteriorated dwellings in Atlantic City could have been demolished by careful placement of this one highway project alone. The rest not only could have been spared, they were worth saving.<sup>69</sup>

Other aspects of the Atlantic City Project were either too vague for thorough assessment, too long-term in their design, too haphazard in their application, or else so incompatible with the other developments as to be strikingly ill-conceived. The project area itself was a strange configuration that zigged and zagged its way from Clairmont Avenue in West Ghent to Monticello Avenue in downtown Norfolk, never stretching more than just a few blocks in width (see Figure 2 on the next page). The lines were purposely drawn to exclude certain blocks, specific commercial structures, and even single residences from demolition while the area around them was completely

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<sup>68</sup>See Charles K. Agle, A Master Plan For The Central Business And Financial District, op cit., and Norfolk City Planning Commission, Major Highway Plan, Part I, Major Highways and Streets, (Norfolk, 1950).

<sup>69</sup>G. D. Monola.

leveled. The 700 block of Yarmouth Street, for instance, was spared by an odd gerrymandering of the district, while the neighboring 700 blocks of Botetourt, Dunmore, and Duke Streets were slated for removal. All the waterfront property along the southern edge of Smith Creek was slated for demolition while the rotting wharves, sagging warehouses, and crumbling storage facilities on the Elizabeth River just a block away were spared.

Outside of the close to 40 acres that would be used for hospital, public health, highway, and tunnel facilities, the rest of the project seemingly had little reason for inclusion. Plans for their use were as yet unspecified, but the N.R.H.A. speculated that the remaining 95 acres would provide a basis for industrial sites, semi-luxury apartments, and improvements along the Hague (Smith Creek) waterfront,<sup>70</sup> yet none of these uses was fully compatible with the realities of the site: the proposed path of the Brambleton Avenue thoroughfare swung too close to the southern border of the Hague to render all but a corner on each edge of the remaining waterfront property unsuited to these purposes. If the area was ever to have a real future as a highrise or luxury housing development, the sites along the Elizabeth River not yet scheduled for clearance would be far better suited. Similarly, the 56 acres that were set aside for light industry in the project, had little hope of

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<sup>70</sup>N.R.H.A., Report, op cit., p. 12.

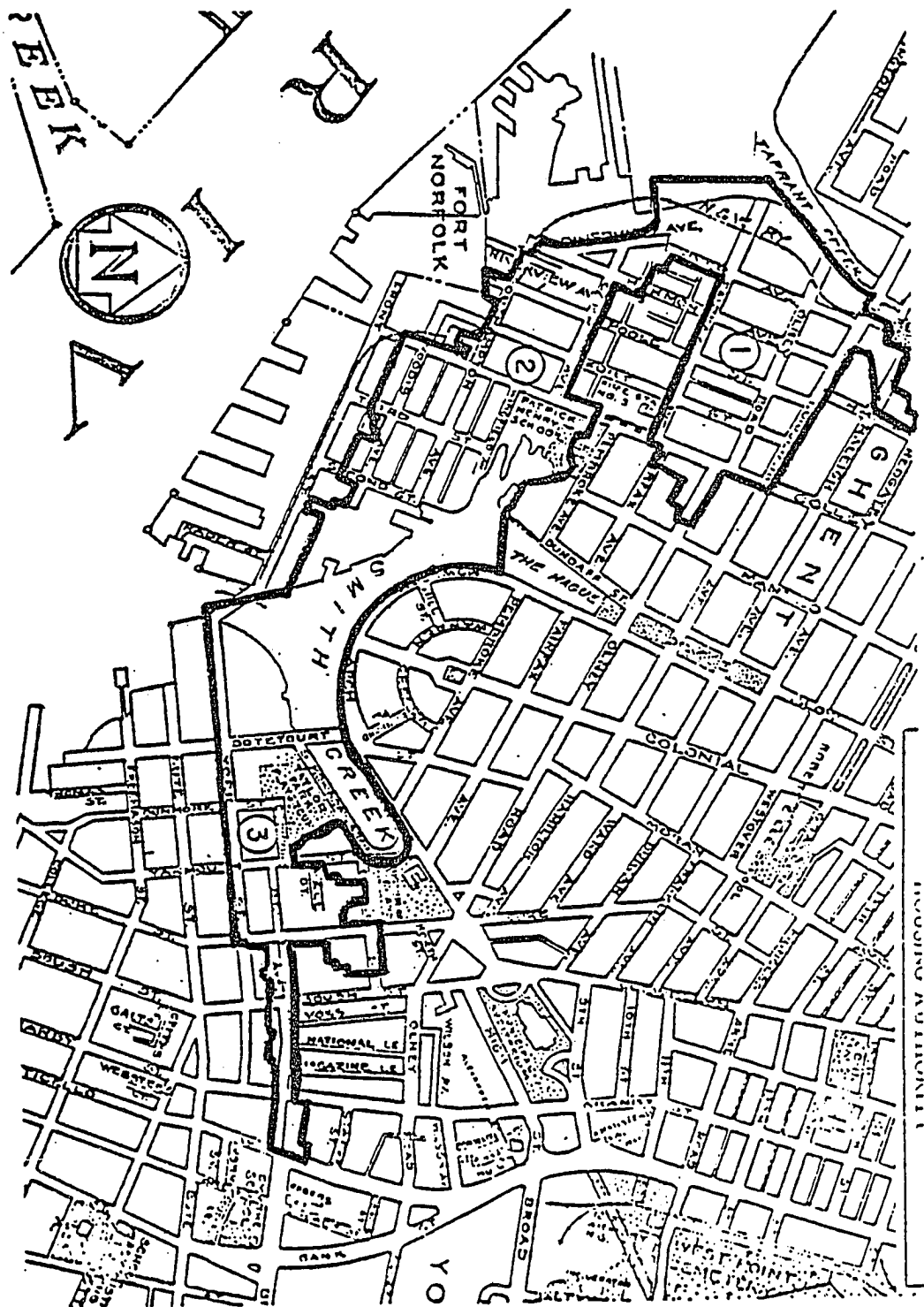


FIGURE 2. Atlantic City Redevelopment Project.



attracting prospective customers when realistically compared to the 468 acres of prime industrial land being opened up in the Broad Creek site. In addition to major rail and highway connections, the Broad Creek Industrial Park was close to both the central business district and the rapidly shifting population center of the Tidewater region; its sheer size meant that a number of related manufacturing, assemblage, and storage facilities could all be located in close proximity. The Atlantic City Project offered instead a number of smaller, odd-shaped parcels of land, all of which carried the higher taxation rate and building restrictions inherent in a downtown location.

In sharp contrast to earlier People's endeavors, planning of the public expenditure portion of the project was more than just vague, it was counterproductive. Only the proposals for highway facilities and tunnel access ramps were fully conceived before demolition began. It was true that Norfolk's hospital and public health needs would grow in coming years, but the Atlantic City Project proposed to clear in 1957 land for expansion of the medical center complex that would not be occupied for at least twenty years in the future.<sup>71</sup> At the other end of the project the N.R.H.A. was condemning the land around the Norfolk (now

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<sup>71</sup>The present sites of the Tidewater Red Cross, Tidewater Rehabilitation Institute, Mental Health Center, and Eastern Virginia Medical School were cleared fifteen to twenty years or more before their construction.

Chrysler) Museum upon which the People's planners had once hoped to build the Cultural Center extension of the downtown business district. Because of the city's extensive involvement with the Downtown Redevelopment Project--more than 200 acres in the heart of the city's commercial district were swept bare and "only a dozen buildings were left standing, giving the downtown the appearance of having been ravaged by a massive air raid"<sup>72</sup>--the library, monument park, civic center, naval museum,<sup>73</sup> and other public expenditures were needed instead to help fill in the hole left by demolitions further downtown. The land where once the People's planners hoped to attract a consulate's row, charity organizations, convention hotel, outdoor cafes, and specialty shops was given over instead to long-term parking lots, open fields, and misplaced convenience stores. Hopes for a Cultural Center and other orderly expansions of the central business district were decimated by the sudden oversupply of vacant land that now ringed the downtown.

Clearly there was no immediate need for all the vacant land that had suddenly been made available through the enormous scope of this redevelopment activity. Although each of the four projects had a noble purpose at its

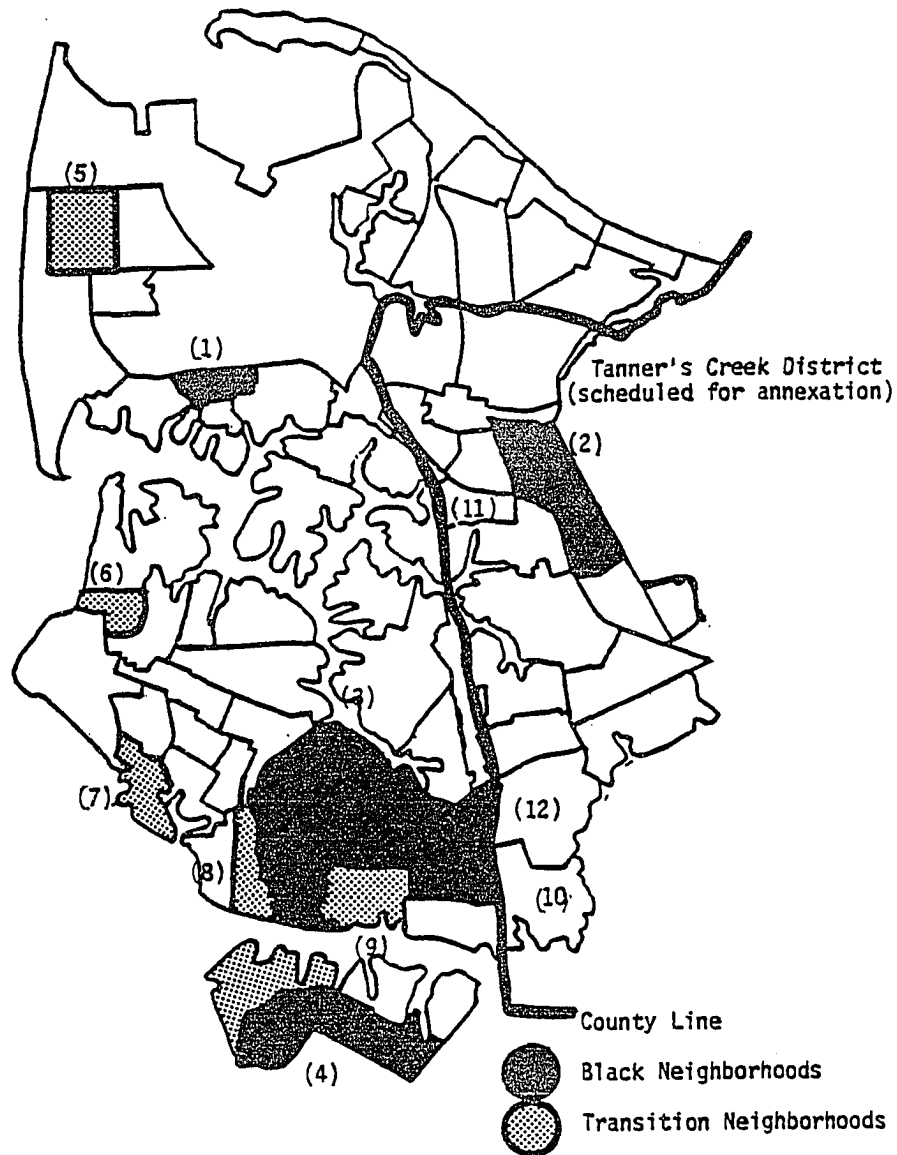
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<sup>72</sup>John C. Schmidt, "Norfolk: A City Remakes Itself," Baltimore, March 1959 (N.R.H.A. reprint). p. 6.

<sup>73</sup>Plans for a naval museum, which was to be built at the foot of St. Paul's Boulevard near the Omni Hotel property, collapsed more than a decade later.

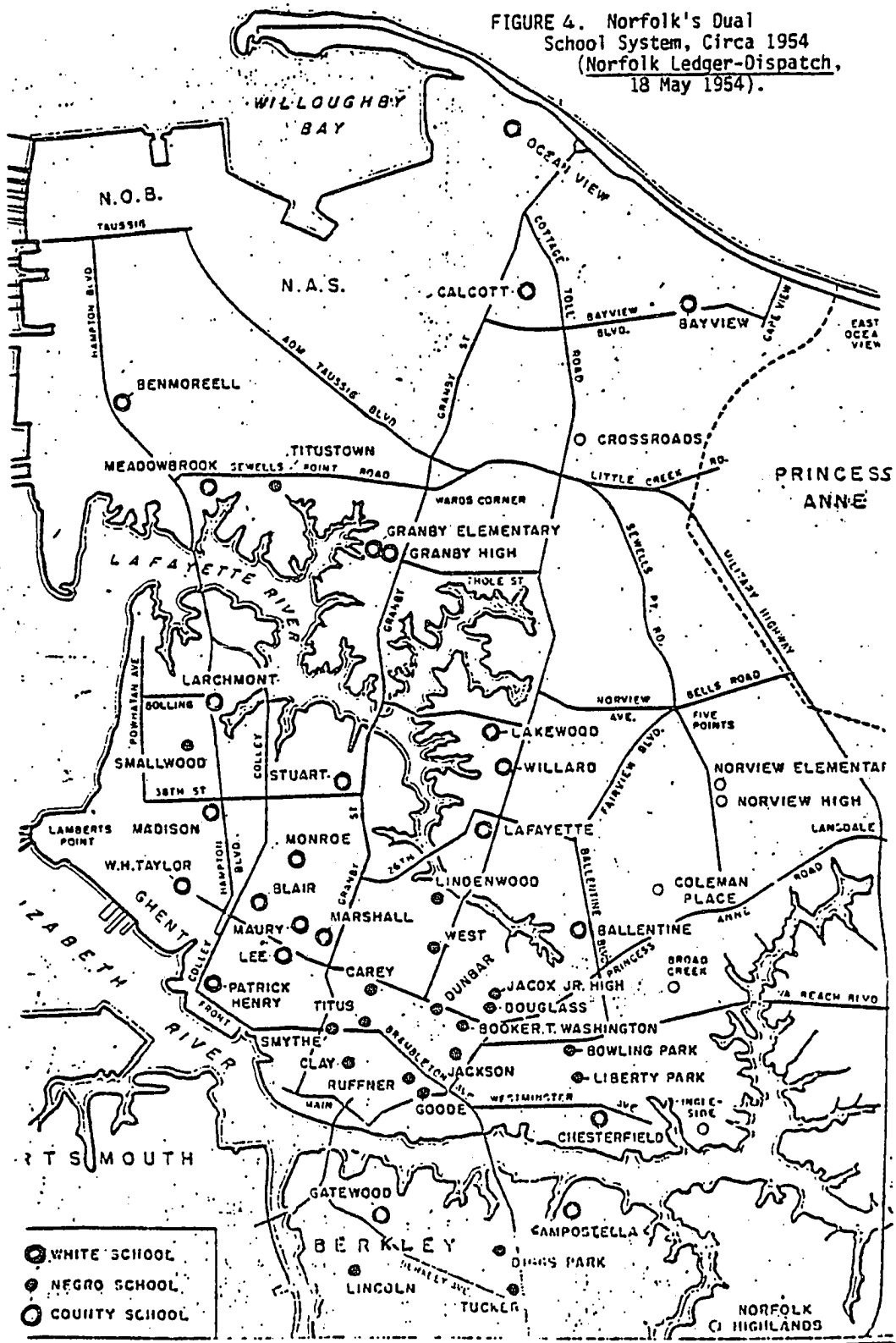
heart--expansion of industrial, highway, tunnel, educational, or medical facilities--none evidenced any of the signs of precision and clarity of purpose which so completely characterized the endeavors of the People's Administration. When one considers the tremendous destructive force unleashed upon the city in these four new undertakings, the more than 800 acres scheduled for clearance, the 20,000 individuals to be uprooted, the demolition of whole communities, the heavy financial burden that would be carried even far into the future, and the tremendous urgency with which the whole affair was undertaken, it becomes obvious that some underlying ulterior motive must knit these projects together into a unified plan of action, and that, whatever the objective, immediate demolition of properties that had somehow become offensive was granted a far higher priority than redevelopment. Mayor W. Fred Duckworth had proven himself to be too skillful at administrating the city's affairs during the Building Phase of municipal growth to so lose control during the Bulldozer Era; he had shown too great a mastery of power politics not to be brokering some sort of deal with these developments.

**FIGURE 3. Norfolk's Black, Mixed Race, and Transition Neighborhoods.**  
(from 1950 U. S. Census figures)



- |                            |                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Titustown / Carney Park | 6. O.D.U. / Lambert's Point |
| 2. Oakwood / Rosemont      | 7. Atlantic City            |
| 3. Uptown                  | 11. Coronado                |
| 4. Berkley                 | 12. Broad Creek Park        |
| 5. U. S. Navy Housing      | 9. Brambleton               |
|                            | 10. (Broad Creek Shores)    |

FIGURE 4. Norfolk's Dual  
School System, Circa 1954  
(Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch,  
18 May 1954).



CHAPTER FIVE  
REDEVELOPMENT RATIONALES

The process of planning and redevelopment had come full circle in Norfolk: what had begun under the People's administration as a noble attempt to build the great city of the future had become corrupted by more pressing political and social concerns. Thus Norfolk, because it was the very first city in the country to attempt redevelopment and among the foremost to initiate urban renewal on any large scale, also became one of the early leaders at manipulating its exemplary purposes to serve a more personal, partisan end. Redevelopment in Norfolk had fallen from its position as part of an overall program of community improvement and had instead become but one weapon in the arsenal of a powerful political leader, one who was willing to employ this new tool to chastise his enemies, reward his supporters, and otherwise strengthen his grasp on municipal government. Mayor W. Fred Duckworth was not so much trying to rebuild Norfolk as attempting to redesign it in a more personally acceptable form; in so doing he was guided as much by the vagaries of redevelopment law as he was by more salient considerations.

Although Norfolk's four new redevelopment projects proposed massive new public and quasi-governmental facilities--new hospital, public health, educational, highway, tunnel, and municipal structures--all of these, and in fact most of the other elements associated with the renewal plans could have been achieved without subjecting the city to the tremendous destruction necessitated by redevelopment. Norfolk already had the power under its grant of eminent domain to acquire private land for just such public uses, but the city was attracted by the additional grant of authority offered by redevelopment legislation. Under redevelopment, a city could legally acquire private property, clear it, and then resell it to new and different private owners. This was supposed to correct the misuse of valuable urban land, but, instead, it encouraged cities like Norfolk to acquire more land than they could ever use. Redeveloping an area, as opposed to just condemning the land necessary for public facilities, actually rewarded a city for expanding the scope of its public works proposals: first, it allowed them to acquire huge tracts of valuable private property that they could never have otherwise obtained; secondly, the cities were paid by the federal government in matching funds to clear the land for reuse; finally, redevelopment cost the city no more than it would have spent anyway on its smaller scale public works projects. Thus, although it had plans to use less than a

third of the acreage in the Downtown and Atlantic City projects for public facilities, Norfolk, because it could qualify the entire area as redevelopment projects, was able to acquire close to 200 acres of additional land on the edge of the central business district, including some of the most potentially valuable commercial and waterfront sites in the city. In addition, in purchasing, clearing, and redeveloping this land, the city did not have to put up a penny more than it would have had to spend anyway on the necessary public facilities.<sup>1</sup>

Thus redevelopment, because it gave the city these vast tracts of highly valuable land, was a boon both to the business community who sought their re-use and the power brokers who controlled their eventual disposition. The Atlantic City and Downtown Projects were an immediate hit with the leaders of Norfolk's Silkstocking establishment for a number of other reasons. Just as in N.R.H.A. Project One, redevelopment destroys unwanted uses of land, and it was easy to see why the old People's planners would have dreamed of wiping out the "uglies" contained in the two project areas: the Downtown site contained some of the city's worst slums that, because of their close proximity to the central business district, would forever impede further commercial expansion in the downtown area; in addition, the city's

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<sup>1</sup>Pretlow Darden; Roy B. Martin, Jr.; and Francis Crenshaw.



notorious East Main Street sin strip and red-light district, Norfolk's most repugnant reminder of the shady days of its wartime past, were likewise targeted for demolition; by contrast, the housing and small commercial establishments in the Atlantic City area were not nearly as deteriorated or as offensive as those downtown, but the Silkstocking crowd had never been happy with having this deteriorating working-class community so close to the prosperous in-town estates of the Ghent neighborhood, Norfolk's most prestigious real estate development and the home of most of its Silkstocking establishment. The declining fortunes of the Atlantic City area had already begun to affect real estate values in the neighboring Ghent communities, and the N.R.H.A. Commissioners, one of the last bastions of the old People's rule, felt that the demolition slated for the area was the only way to "save" Ghent from similar deterioration.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Old Dominion Project helped to create a convenient buffer zone between the working-class community of Lamberts Point and the wealthier subdivisions of Larchmont and Edgewater.

Some of the members of the old People's coalition undoubtedly had been in on planning at least a portion of Norfolk's new endeavors: since 1950 the People's Planning Commission had been proposing an additional access route to the downtown area by linking Broad Creek Road (now Brambleton Avenue) with an extension of Hampton Boulevard;

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<sup>2</sup>Pretlow Darden.

the Elizabeth River Tunnel Commission had been lobbying almost as long for an additional underwater link with Portsmouth at its Pinner's Point terminus;<sup>3</sup> the massive municipal Health Department that had been so much a part of the People's cleanup and code enforcement campaigns had been in desperate need of expanded facilities for some time; and for more than a decade a general consensus had prevailed among the business community that the fate of any New Norfolk would be invariably linked to proposals to expand the city's two-year college and its general hospital into vast urban educational and medical centers. Indeed, the list of those who served on the governing bodies of Norfolk General Hospital and the Norfolk Division of the College of William and Mary/Virginia Polytechnical Institute State University during these planning years very nearly matches any comparable listing of Norfolk's power elite during the People's administration. Not even the United Fund, the traditional civic endeavor of the Silkstocking establishment, could match the drawing power of these two popular institutions: at least five N.R.H.A. commissioners had served on the hospital's board; two city managers, two judges, one state senator, one city councilman, one school superintendent, three N.R.H.A. commissioners, two newspaper publishers, two Planning commissioners, and one former

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<sup>3</sup>see Norfolk City Planning Commission, Major Highway Plan, Part I, Major Highways and Collector Streets (Norfolk, 1950.)

governor of Virginia had served in a similar capacity for the fledgling precursor to today's Old Dominion University.

A number of other factors were involved in any redevelopment project, and in these four new endeavors particularly, that were immediately attractive to large segments of the business community. Redevelopment, especially when it was attempted on such a grand scale, was obviously good for business because it brought an infusion of new jobs, new revenues, new developmental opportunities, and numerous other spin-off and multiplier effects to the local economy. Some businessmen would obviously profit directly from the projects, either because they owned property affected or because their own enterprise would participate in some stage of the work. Those firms directly involved in demolition, construction, contracting, building supply, and related activities, including many enterprises owned by the power elite of the People's era, favored these new redevelopment proposals; the lawyers who would handle the condemnation proceedings, the real estate experts who would handle the appraisals, and a host of bankers, building and loan executives, real estate agents, and other professionals who stood to gain by having so many new people suddenly on the move. Others looked forward to unloading failing properties that might otherwise have been difficult to sell: slum housing faced with major renovations under the beefed up health and housing codes, landlords in the now

fading red-light district, expanding industries and commercial enterprises that needed to unload outmoded and obsolete facilities, and sagging retail establishments faced with heavy competition from suburban shopping centers. Others saw the massive clearance operation as a way to save their properties by placing open space barriers between their own establishment and deteriorated areas. Some would gain by the new development possibilities already under consideration--the new medical center complex, for instance, would enhance the practice of every Tidewater physician, attracting many of them to new office facilities within close proximity--while others felt that they would gain by participating in the design of future uses for the massive tracts of cleared acreage that were still uncommitted.

The myriad economic benefits of redevelopment were readily apparent to all who had participated in N.R.H.A. Project One: both to Mayor Duckworth, who had played a role in bringing it to a conclusion, and the People's planners who had participated in its design. N.R.H.A. Project One had provided an unparalleled economic boost to the area, and its well conceived Tidewater Drive industrial mini-park was filled almost before it opened.<sup>4</sup> No one doubted that Norfolk would continue with new redevelopment proposals, and new ideas were eagerly bandied about in the business community--some of that speculation may in fact have made

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<sup>4</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 March 1956.

new redevelopment projects necessary by hastening the decline of neighborhoods under consideration. There were also, however, some very solid reasons why no individual businessman or corporate entity would want to oppose the projects under consideration, no matter how far-fetched or ill-conceived they might be. Duckworth had never been an easy man to confront, and now, with the very special powers inherent to redevelopment, any person who openly sought to oppose the Mayor, his programs, or his policies would be committing an act tantamount to social and financial suicide. With so much of the Downtown and neighboring Atlantic City residential and commercial properties scheduled for clearance--326 acres with more than 500 commercial and 700 residential structures--four powerful new economic weapons fell into the hands of those who controlled the city.

Foremost among these was the power to determine the exact boundary lines of the project areas, and, by inference, to decide which structures would be exempt. Since few solid commitments for private development and even fewer irreversible proposals for public facilities existed at the time of demolition, the N.R.H.A. had tremendous leeway in determining which structures would fall and which would be spared. Initial plans showed that only 90 acres in the Atlantic City area would be cleared,<sup>5</sup> but later it was

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<sup>5</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 8 December 1956.

expanded,<sup>6</sup> and then enlarged again<sup>7</sup> to include an additional 50 acres of predominantly commercial properties. The final shape of the project zigged and zagged its way all the way from Clairmont Avenue in the heart of West Ghent to Monticello Avenue in the middle of downtown (see Figure Two, page 227), purposely avoiding a few commercial structures such as the newly built Greyhound garage facilities on Colley and Brambleton Avenues, and just as randomly including others for demolition. The Tidewater Construction Company, the largest commercial establishment effected, was ultimately so bitter about its inclusion that it departed Norfolk forever for headquarters beyond the city limits.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, the city had considerable leeway in determining the acquisition value of land scheduled for demolition. In most cases a flat fee, without regard for the actual condition or value of the structure, was offered by the city for all buildings in a certain class. Those whose buildings were equal to or below the value offered were obviously satisfied; those with more valuable properties faced the costly prospect of hiring an attorney and additional appraisers in order to undergo a prolonged legal battle. One local attorney, a member of an old line family

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<sup>6</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 17 February 1957.

<sup>7</sup>Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Annual Report to the City Council (1974), op cit., p. 39.

<sup>8</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 5 January 1957.

with solid connections into the Silkstocking establishment, was willing to fight condemnation and appraisals of business properties, but in case after case he found local appraisers unwilling to buck the city: they knew that if they attested to the true value of the properties in question, then they would never get any appraisal work from the city again.<sup>9</sup>

Corollary to the ability to fix the value of the building was the power to actually drive down the worth of property under consideration, a not uncommon complaint from the Broad Creek<sup>10</sup> and Atlantic City Projects.<sup>11</sup> Robert A. Caro tells in The Power Broker how New York handled recalcitrant property owners who attempted appeal low appraisals: bulldozers moved in to demolish uncontested properties, leaving the holdouts stranded in a vast wasteland of rubble and debris, replete with swirling dust storms and unguarded excavations. Electric, sewer, gas and water lines to remaining homes were cut by city workers. Hordes of scavengers and looters descended upon the area to pick the remaining buildings clean. Each day the holdouts had to fight their way through an increasingly tortured course of rubble, muggers, and derelicts. Still one resident held out until the city tore down an adjoining building with which he shared a common wall: he dropped the

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<sup>9</sup>see Gordon Dillon, op cit.

<sup>10</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 April 1955.

<sup>11</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 1 July 1957.

appeal and packed his family before his own home collapsed.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, redevelopment gave the city considerable leverage with the local banks and lending institutions. The National Bank of Commerce (later Virginia National Bank, and now SOVRAN Bank), the locus of power for the Silkstocking crowd--its officers and board of directors included two former People's Councilmen (Cooke and Darden), two N.R.H.A Commissioners (Kaufman and Darden), three Planning Commissioners (Hofheimer, Nicholson, and Miles), and numerous other bluebloods of the Silkstocking crowd, including John S. Alfriend, Frank Batten, Charles F. Burroughs, E. T. Gresham, John S. Jenkins, Jr., Harry Mansbach, Hunter Phelan, Dan Thornton, and Richard F. Welton, III;<sup>13</sup> a year later Duckworth was added to the board<sup>14</sup>--kept a sizeable chunk of both the city and N.R.H.A. funds, which ran somewhere between four and five million dollars at this time.<sup>15</sup> In 1970, the first year that such reports were

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<sup>12</sup>Robert A. Caro, The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York (New York: Random House, 1975), pp. 880-884.

<sup>13</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 9 August 1957.

<sup>14</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 9 June 1959.

<sup>15</sup>Mr. Lewis Conrad of the City Auditor's Office reports that between 1957 and 1958 the city kept a balance on hand of between \$2,582,817.92 and \$3,235,531.16 in four banks, one of which was The National Bank of Commerce; the city rotated its funds monthly from bank to bank. Mr. James E. Smith, Controller for the N.R.H.A., puts the N.R.H.A. 1958 daily funds at about \$1,500,000; funds were kept separately for each redevelopment project and housing development.



made available to the public, the N.R.H.A. kept more than a million dollars of its funds in that bank, while most of the other banks had less than a tenth of that amount. One establishment lawyer willing to oppose the N.R.H.A. not surprisingly found that his business clients were refused bank loans because "they had the wrong lawyer."<sup>16</sup> For most other attorneys, realtors, wholesalers, appraisers, contractors, and building supply houses, the lure of fat fees, healthy commissions, and the purchasing power of the N.R.H.A. and other city agencies was enough to assure their support.

Finally, the city was afforded considerable leeway over the disposition of land once it had been cleared. Redevelopment land suitable for business use was considerably cheaper than competitive sites that would still have to be cleared; thus the power to establish a pecking order to decide which business or corporate entity would be rewarded with prime building sites was an important motivator in the effort to drum up support. Whether or not the city actually ever used its considerable powers over commercial properties, finances, and land disposition on any grand scale to force compliance and cooperation really makes very little difference; there were those like the establishment lawyer mentioned above who suffered for their token opposition to the Mayor's redevelopment programs, and

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<sup>16</sup>Gordon Dillon, op cit., p. 18.

evident to all other members of the city's commercial and professional establishment. The fact that those powers, containing both awards for cooperation and punishments for opposition, existed in a virtual political vacuum and lay in hands that were not above using such powers to excise whatever was deemed objectionable, was enough of an incentive for at least tacit support in these undertakings. Businessmen, especially those with influence that stretched beyond the realm which the Mayor could ordinarily reach, soon found that cooperation with Duckworth's new redevelopment proposals could be a mutually profitable agreement; those who opposed the city or its agencies for whatever reason, faced the prospect of certain defeat anyway and probably considerable needless hardship. Those who might have spoken out to oppose plans so loosely formulated and so obviously capricious needed no other incentive to remain silent.

Thus, when the Mayor ran into heavy opposition from the Atlantic City residents,<sup>17</sup> he quickly scheduled a second public hearing which was packed, as one reporter described it, with members of "the leading business and financial interests representing organizations who [sic] foster the overall needs of the city."<sup>18</sup> With the backing of the Silkstocking establishment assured, the Atlantic City

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<sup>17</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 5 January 1957.

<sup>18</sup>Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Annual Report to the City Council (1974), p. 47.

Project was pushed through over the cries of its residents. Similar support enabled the Mayor to crush opposition to both the Downtown<sup>19</sup> and Broad Creek Projects.<sup>20</sup> The earlier warnings of Norfolk's two daily newspapers--"the powers of a housing authority should be zealously guarded and used only in proven cases as a last resort<sup>21</sup>"--the traditional spokesmen of the business community, were now hushed. Neither paper spoke to the vast uncertainties or incongruities in the projects; instead the Ledger-Dispatch praised the vision of the proposals:

This will be a dramatic second stage in a process that is giving much of Norfolk a splendid new look. But the really important factor--and the one which is encompassed in the very phrase "slum clearance"--is the ugly old look which the city is casting off.<sup>22</sup>

Even in its saddest editorial lament, a poignant piece that bemoaned the passing of a portion of the Atlantic City area that had "a Greenwich Village flavor" and a "Bohemian and cosmopolitan character," the Virginian-Pilot added that:

Change must come and better things for the whole downtown area will be wrought through the Atlantic City Redevelopment Project. <sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 September 1956.

<sup>20</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 June 1954.

<sup>21</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 20 May 1953.

<sup>22</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 27 July 1957.

<sup>23</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 31 January 1959.

No where did either paper question why so many acres had to be leveled so quickly, especially when so few solid commitments for new construction were evident; either the access to information was really limited to the official press releases, the editors were afraid to undertake an expose when so much of the city lay in ruins and the city's future was irrevocably tied to the success of the projects, or else, as one editor later revealed, a reporter really was measured by what he knew but couldn't write.<sup>24</sup>

The sad truth is that a local newspaper would never want to reveal the compelling motivation behind these four new redevelopment endeavors, nor would any scion of the business establishment seek to oppose the urgency of the projects. More was involved than a pressing need for new public service facilities, more than a desire to provide growing room for popular institutions, more than longing to destroy deteriorated or unwanted properties, and more than just a desire to build a new and exciting city. The actual size and shape of the Downtown and Atlantic City Projects were in part dictated by the requirements of the federal enabling legislation. Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 forbade the taking of land for non-residential uses, unless the area acquired was: "(a) a slum, deteriorated or

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<sup>24</sup>Robert L. Mason.

deteriorating area, and (b) is predominantly residential in character."<sup>25</sup>

In order to acquire the vast tracts of light industries, warehouses, flophouses, honky tonks, and commercial properties as proposed, the project borders were made to zig and zag their way through just enough slum housing to qualify the entire area as both "deteriorating" and "predominantly residential in character." The Broad Creek development, since it was not technically a redevelopment project at all but rather a gift from the Navy, was not bound by the same restrictions. The housing included in the Downtown Project was undoubtedly one of the worst slums in the city--more than 85% was badly deteriorated by U.S. Census estimates--but Atlantic City was no slum, in spite of massive efforts by the N.R.H.A to prove otherwise. The Atlantic City neighborhood may have been in danger of becoming a slum, and it might thereby legally qualify for clearance under the U. S. Housing Act, but Norfolk still had a number of other bona fide ghettos that should have merited first consideration for clearance long before Atlantic City; instead, the area should have been a prime contender for neighborhood rehabilitation and restoration, and not demolition. Premature talk of redevelopment and over-hasty speculation about clearance had produced a dramatic change in the

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<sup>25</sup>Housing and Home Finance Agency, A Guide to Slum Clearance and Urban Development (Washington, D.C., 1950), p. 7.

neighborhood--not a change in the housing or the living conditions, but nevertheless enough of a change in the character of its residents to vault the neighborhood to the top of the list of priorities for clearance under the political conditions that existed in the Norfolk of 1957. This same change in the character of population, not so much the need for the space or the condition of the buildings, was what doomed Broad Creek Village and the Lamberts Point neighborhood in the Old Dominion Project as well. In spite of the fact that the Atlantic City, Broad Creek, Downtown, and Old Dominion Projects meant the almost simultaneous uprooting of more than 4,000 families and the destruction of a large percent of the city's lower-end, middle-income housing stock (probably close to eight percent of the city's total housing stock), the simple truth is that the political leaders that controlled Norfolk had no interest in preserving these neighborhoods in their existing character, regardless of the condition of their structures; and, in fact, were in a hurry to demolish them as quickly as possible.

A similar situation existed with Norfolk's schools. Although the city had at least three schools still in service that were built before the Civil War (i.e., J. C. Smythe, Lott Carey, and John B. Goode), these buildings would see almost two more decades of service. Instead, Norfolk was proposing to tear down Broad Creek<sup>26</sup> and

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<sup>26</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 21 December 1957.

Benmoreell<sup>27</sup> elementary schools, both barely more than twelve years old; close Pineridge Elementary<sup>28</sup> (it would reopen several years later), built within the last decade; and convert the Patrick Henry Elementary School for use as administrative offices.<sup>29</sup> Although Benmoreell and Pineridge were wood frame buildings that were erected as "temporary" structures during the war years, they were still serviceable, especially if funds were invested in their upkeep. Pineridge was a concrete block structure built in 1947 that sat on a ten acre site at Sewells Point and Progress Roads. It contained 19,500 square feet, 15 classrooms, eight demountable classroom units, an art room, library, and multipurpose room.<sup>30</sup> Both Pineridge and Broad Creek were in the rapidly expanding Tanners Creek section of the city just annexed from Norfolk County where the School Board had just been told it needed to add the equivalent of four new schools a year for the next ten years.<sup>31</sup> Patrick Henry Elementary, built in 1892 and

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<sup>27</sup>Letter from J. J. Brewbaker, Superintendent of Schools, to John Corbell, Clerk of the City of Norfolk, 7 May 1956, Norfolk Public Schools Files.

<sup>28</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 February 1956.

<sup>29</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 August 1960.

<sup>30</sup>Memorandum from Philip A. Steadfast, Director of the Norfolk Department of City Planning, to Paul Smith, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance, 27 January 1976, Norfolk Public Schools files.

<sup>31</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 September 1955.

expanded in 1920,<sup>32</sup> was being converted to office use even though the School Administration had been saying for several years that it wanted to move out of the downtown area to a site closer to the center of the district.<sup>33</sup> Why would it now acquiesce to such a drastic plan of school closings, demolition, and reuse?

The reason why may best be seen in the Atlantic City neighborhood: the 1950 Census revealed that it was the only predominantly white neighborhood in the city where Black families comprised more than ten percent of the population;<sup>34</sup> since that time the newspapers noted "the changing character of the neighborhood from white to Negro."<sup>35</sup> Premature talk of redevelopment had helped to break down the already tenuous color barrier, and landlords who refused to make major improvements to property threatened by demolition found they could still charge full rental fees to Black families because of the housing crisis in the Black community. One contemporary news account described the situation this way:

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<sup>32</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 9 August 1957.

<sup>33</sup>Letter from J. J. Brewbaker, Superintendent of Schools, to Sherwood Reeder, Norfolk City Manager, 8 August 1955, Norfolk Public School files.

<sup>34</sup>U. S. Bureau of the Census, (1950), op cit., p. 22; and Norfolk Chamber of Commerce, "Population and Housing Survey," Norfolk XVI: 7 (November, 1954), pp. 10 - 20.

<sup>35</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 March 1957.



The talk in Atlantic City is that property owners are realizing higher rentals from Negroes than they had in the past from whites. "A lot of them are partitioning the interiors (into additional units) to get a lot more money," one resident says.<sup>36</sup>

The fact that Atlantic City was a transition neighborhood going through a dramatic change in its racial make-up was underscored in a caption to a Virginian-Pilot photograph: "I've no idea where I would go . . . but I won't live with Negroes all around me."<sup>37</sup> Years later former Mayor and N.R.H.A. Commissioner Pretlow Darden would admit that the Atlantic City Project was undertaken, at Mayor Duckworth's insistence, in part to "protect" the nearby Ghent area,<sup>38</sup> still the city's chief Silkstocking neighborhood.

Similarly the Lamberts Point neighborhood, a predominantly white settlement, showed, even in 1950, a small concentration of Blacks in the vicinity of the college;<sup>39</sup> by 1957, this small Black community had expanded due to the squeeze put on the Black housing market by redevelopment, the city's general population explosion, and the lack of homes built especially for the Black community. Broad Creek Village had begun its existence in 1943 as a Navy housing project for whites only, but when President Truman

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Pretlow Darden.

<sup>39</sup>Norfolk Chamber of Commerce, op cit.

integrated the armed forces after World War II, a number of Black families began to appear in the project. As uncertainty about the project's future increased in the 1950s, so also did the small percentage of Black population, isolated at first only in one small corner of the community.<sup>40</sup> A similar situation existed in the Benmoreell Navy Housing Complex on Hampton Boulevard just outside of the Norfolk Naval Base: although a relatively small number of Blacks were shown living there in the 1950 Census,<sup>41</sup> their numbers had grown as whites gained other housing opportunities in the growing number of private, whites only, developments which ringed the base. The housing shortage for Blacks had cracked the previous racial barriers in the Berkley section of the city, and the School Board noted with dismay "the pronounced tendency for whites to leave Berkley, and for Negroes to move in."<sup>42</sup> The Downtown Project areas, which had been predominantly Black for decades, still housed at least 19 white families.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, one of the major reasons for Mayor Duckworth's sudden and massive reliance upon the powers inherent in redevelopment was to accomplish the one thing that neither

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<sup>40</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 3 January 1958.

<sup>41</sup>U. S. Census of Population, (1950), op cit., census tracts 9 and 11.

<sup>42</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 October 1956.

<sup>43</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 3 January 1958.

the courts nor the legislature, nor any political leader, local or national, could promise: Mayor Duckworth was attempting to replace de jure (i.e., segregation mandated by "Jim Crow" laws) with de facto (i.e., the separation that occurs more naturally as a result of one's choice of residence in a predominantly Black or white neighborhood) segregation. The Duckworth Plan proposed to do more than just control urban blight, it aimed to wipe out all of the city's transition neighborhoods where indistinct color lines had failed to produce two distinct neighborhood school communities, the one Black and the other white.

The concept of geographic proximity and neighborhood schools is essential to understanding the mastery of Duckworth's approach. The U.S. Supreme Court had been carefully lead to its finding that separate schools were inherently unequal by meticulous documentation of three instances:

1. The Brown case involved the child of a Black minister who was living in an otherwise all-white neighborhood. Because Linda Brown was forced by state law to attend an all-Black school farther from her residence than the all-white school attended by her neighbors, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that this separate treatment of Black students living in white neighborhoods was unequal, and therefore unconstitutional.

2. A companion case involved Prince Edward County, Virginia, which had no public high school for Black pupils.

Because attendance at the county high school was restricted to whites only (Blacks were bused to an adjoining county), the Court ruled that in such instances where no public schools existed for Blacks, then the doctrine of separation was unequal and therefore unconstitutional.

3. Other companion cases involved school systems where lawyers could show by a preponderance of statistical evidence--per-pupil expenditures, teacher salaries, quality of textbooks, age of physical plant, support facilities, and the like--that the Black schools were clearly inferior to those for whites only. In such instances, the Court ruled, where separate schools are demonstrably unequal, then the laws requiring such separation are unconstitutional.<sup>44</sup>

Thus a careful reading of the legal situation at the time revealed that segregation was safe from attack as long as the city had enough high quality Black schools closer to all of the city's Black residents than were the white institutions.

Norfolk was no longer worried that its Black schools could be found inherently inferior to its white institutions: the city had made vast strides at improving and up-grading its Black schools, even to the point where its Black teachers were better paid, more educated, and more

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<sup>44</sup>Milton Finkelstein, Hon. Jawn A. Sandifer, Elfreda S. Wright, Minorities: U.S.A., (New York: Globe Books, 1971), pp. 123-130.

experienced than the white teachers.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, writing in February, 1957, U. S. Federal District Court Judge Walter Hoffman commented on Norfolk's success in achieving a "separate but equal" dual system of education:

The sum and substance of the School Superintendent's evidence is that the City of Norfolk has substantially complied with the "separate but equal" doctrine, which was applicable prior to the decision in Brown v. Board of Education. The City of Norfolk is to be commended for its rapid strides in bringing about an equalization in physical equipment, curriculum, teacher load, and teachers' salaries. If the "separate but equal" doctrine were now in existence, there would be no grounds for relief to be afforded these [Black] plaintiffs.<sup>46</sup>

Mayor Duckworth was worried, however, that a close scrutiny of the city's neighborhoods would reveal several areas where color lines were indistinct or where Black students actually lived closer to the all-white school than the Black school they were attending. The Duckworth Plan aimed simply at stomping out any potential variance to the de facto segregated school concept tentatively still approved by the Supreme Court because it was based upon geographic proximity rather than state law. Top priority among those schools that would have been forced to integrate

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<sup>45</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 13 December 1951.

<sup>46</sup>Leola Pearl Beckett, et al. v. School Board of the City of Norfolk, et al., Civil Case No. 2244, U. S. General District Court, Eastern District of Virginia, reprinted in Race Relations Law Reporter 2: 2 (April, 1957), p. 338.

on the basis of neighborhood proximity was the Patrick Henry Elementary School in the Atlantic City section of the city. The Virginian-Pilot underscored the Mayor's concern in this regard:

The increase of Negro population in Atlantic City in recent years is reflected in Patrick Henry School, which would feel the highest proportionate integration of the thirteen Norfolk white schools in "fringe" districts. Recent figures indicated that there would be 50 Negro pupils to 300 white pupils at Patrick Henry in the event of desegregation.<sup>47</sup>

Thirteen of the plaintiffs in the N.A.A.C.P. school integration suit lived closer to Patrick Henry Elementary School than to the Black institution they were attending when the suit was filed in May of 1956.<sup>48</sup> When the Atlantic City Project was announced, the case had just finished its discovery phase, and Judge Hoffman was preparing to order the integration of Patrick Henry Elementary, which had previously served just the white students in Atlantic City.

According to the testimony of the Division Superintendent, there are some localities in the City of Norfolk, which will create individual problems in the elementary school system, particularly at the Patrick Henry School and the Gatewood School where the percentage of white to colored students would be approximately four to one, with the preponderance of the student body being white, which allocation is based upon the

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<sup>47</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 March 1957.

<sup>48</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 21 May 1958.

one, with the preponderance of the student body being white, which allocation is based upon the assumption that the school children are assigned only in accordance with normal geographical consideration.<sup>49</sup>

Judge Hoffman obviously realized that the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority was rushing to reduce the impact of his decision to integrate Patrick Henry Elementary:

. . . . as to the Patrick Henry School, there is a redevelopment and housing plan now in its early stages which, if carried through to its completion, will substantially reduce the number of colored children who would ordinarily be assigned to [the] Patrick Henry School.<sup>50</sup>

Not even Judge Hoffman realized the speed with which the Housing Authority would undertake its planned demolition of the project area. Although the project was not announced until December (1956), its boundaries were not really set until late May (1957); even so, by the start of the 1957-1958 school year, demolition had been extensive enough that more than two-thirds of the Patrick Henry classrooms stood empty.<sup>51</sup> By the time the crucial 1958-1959 school year was ready to begin, the school had closed entirely.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Leola Pearl Beckett, et al., v. School Board of the City of Norfolk, Va., et al., op cit. p 339.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 339.

<sup>51</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 9 August, 1957.

<sup>52</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 21 May 1958.

Five other plaintiffs in the N.A.A.C.P. suit lived closer to the all-white Gatewood School in the Berkley section of the city than to one of the Black schools there; by the time the 1958-1959 school year was about to begin, the Gatewood School, the other school that Judge Hoffman had indicated would experience extensive integration,<sup>53</sup> had been shifted to the Black school system, thereby relieving that threat as well. The political powers that governed Norfolk at the time were well aware, as was the Virginian-Pilot, that such actions dissipated the strength of the N.A.A.C.P.'s argument:

The significance of a plaintiff's proximity to a school has been pointed up repeatedly in other places where desegregation was ordered . . . Two elementary schools that formerly faced the prospect of desegregation apparently don't any longer. Gatewood School, now white, will become a Negro school next fall. For five plaintiffs, it was the closest school. Patrick Henry School is nearest for thirteen plaintiffs, but this school will be converted to administrative uses.<sup>54</sup>

The other nine plaintiffs in the original N.A.A.C.P. complaint lived closer to a Black school than a white one,<sup>55</sup> thereby giving the School Board "legitimate" reasons for denying their applications for transfer. The

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<sup>53</sup>Leola Pearl Beckett, et al., v. School Board of the City of Norfolk, Va., et al., op cit., p. 339.

<sup>54</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 March 1957.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.



N.A.A.C.P. suit had been filed in May of 1956,<sup>56</sup> and only the city's headlong rush into redevelopment of the Atlantic City area had averted the immediate threat; bulldozer diplomacy had achieved the desired result in less than two years' time from conception to completion.

The Mayor and his advisors were well aware that under current state law, if even one of Norfolk's 46 elementary schools were forced to open with mixed classes, then state funds, which then accounted for one-fourth of the local school budget, would be cut off to all 46 schools in that category.<sup>57</sup> Although their precipitate actions in the case of Patrick Henry and Gatewood Elementary Schools had temporarily "saved" at least the elementary school system, they were not in the least disposed to take any chances: for this reason Pineridge Elementary School in the Broad Creek section was closed,<sup>58</sup> and Henry Clay Elementary School in the Downtown area<sup>59</sup> and Broad Creek Village School<sup>60</sup> were torn down as a result of the other redevelopment projects. The School Board, whose earlier \$15 million school building program had been rejected because of past differences with the Council, now was sent scurrying

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<sup>56</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 May 1956.

<sup>57</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 21 May 1958.

<sup>58</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 February 1956.

<sup>59</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 3 January 1958.

<sup>60</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 21 December 1957.

back to the drawing boards for a quick, and less costly, revision. Their revised \$5.5-million proposal included an immediate go-ahead on the combined elementary, junior, and senior high school for Blacks in the Oakwood-Rosemont area and cutting back the proposed additions and improvements to existing Black schools by 40%.<sup>61</sup> The Oakwood-Rosemont combination school was clearly designed to alleviate the triple threat of integration to Norview Elementary, Junior, and Senior High schools in the newly annexed Tanner's Creek District. Mayor Duckworth was anxious that the School Board dispense with the preliminaries and get on with the building "as rapidly as possible." A Virginian-Pilot reporter quoted the Mayor's rationale:

This is the school that the School Board promised the court it would build by this fall. Let's go ahead with it as rapidly as we can.<sup>62</sup>

The only other area that might possibly be effected immediately by court-ordered integration lay in the Lamberts Point section of the city. Although six of the original N.A.A.C.P. plaintiffs attended the Smallwood Elementary School (Black), all lived closer to that school than to nearby Madison or Larchmont elementary schools (white).<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the city's Old Dominion Redevelopment Project

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<sup>61</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 28 March 1958.

<sup>62</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 14 January 1959.

<sup>63</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 21 May 1958.

(N.R.H.A. Project Two) would bulldoze 40 acres in the area, wipe out the transition neighborhoods, and re-establish readily identifiable color lines in that community. Thus, of the more than 500 Blacks that were determined to "threaten" the sanctity of the white segregated school system in the winter of 1956,<sup>64</sup> fast action towards redevelopment and school construction had alleviated the legal standing based upon geographic proximity of all but about 40 of the potential plaintiffs, and none of these as yet posed any immediate threat in current litigation. Duckworth's plan to make de facto segregation a permanent substitute for de jure segregation appeared to be a masterful success: only Black students in the tiny Bollingbrook community (near Suburban Park School) in the Granby district and secondary students in the Titustown and Benmoreell areas remained as yet unaffected by changes already instituted. Of the 16 schools potentially threatened by a court order to integrate based upon the theory of geographic proximity, two (Patrick Henry and Broad Creek Village) were in the path of the redevelopment bulldozer, another (Benmoreell) was to be torn down by the city for a park, two (Robert Gatewood and John Marshall) had been transferred from the white to the Black school system, one (Pineridge Elementary) had been closed, three others (Norview Senior High, Norview Elementary, and Norview Junior High) had been spared by the

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<sup>64</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 February 1957.

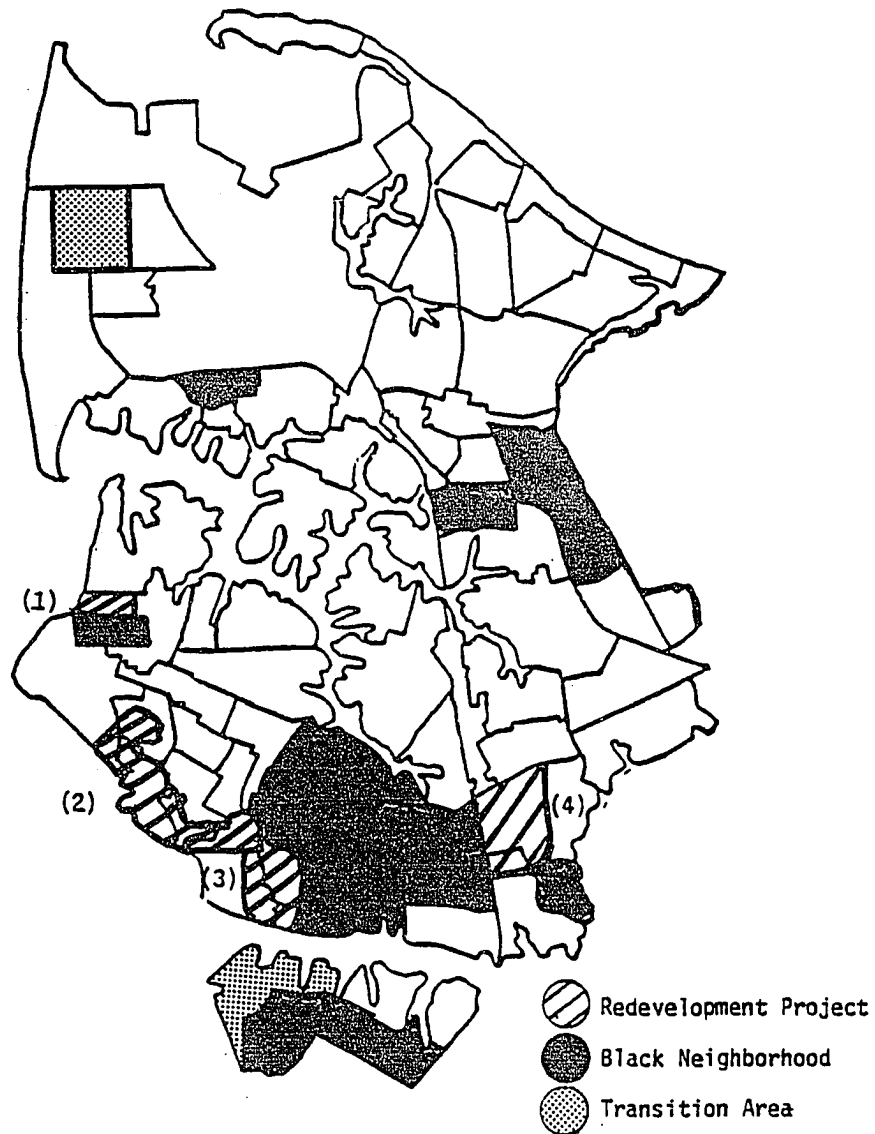
Rosemont combination school then under construction, and four others (W. H. Taylor Elementary, Blair Junior High, Maury High School, and James Madison Elementary) had been rescued from much of their potential threat by an aggressive redevelopment program (see Figures 5, 6, and 7, on the following pages).

Mayor Duckworth's plan to achieve total de facto segregation was in full keeping with the political realities that then existed in Virginia. The School Board, the City Council, the city's legislative delegation, and other savvy political leaders knew full well that if Norfolk took any action towards potential compliance with the impending desegregation litigation, then such action would "provoke" the rest of the state into a "Stop Norfolk" movement that could have dire consequences for the city.<sup>65</sup> Political leaders knew that the city's best hope lay in delaying the eventuality of such a decision long enough so that a number of other localities would be forced into the "same boat" as Norfolk, and thereby form the impetus for a more realistic approach by the rest of the state. A crisis hitting several localities simultaneously, most political leaders believed, would build up quick political pressure for the governor to convene the legislature in a special session to enact some sort of "reasonable" plan for gradual desegregation. The city's best hope in the winter of 1956-1957 was to hold out

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<sup>65</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 16 March 1957.

FIGURE 5. Norfolk's Racial Patterns and Redevelopment Areas, Circa 1958.



(1) Old Dominion Project (NRHA #2)

(3) Downtown Redevelopment Project

(2) Atlantic City Project

(4) Broad Creek Industrial Park

FIGURE 6. FROM DE JURE TO DE FACTO: SCHOOL RESREGATION IN NORFOLK, 1956-1958

SCHOOL	POTENTIAL BLACK POP.	ACTION	DISPOSITION	DATE
Patrick Henry Elementary	50	Atlantic City Project	Closed	7/10/57
Robert Gatewood Elementary	50 - 60	Transferred to Blacks	Transferred	5/20/58
James Madison Elementary	25 - 30	Old Dominion Project	Rezoned	7/10/57
Norview Elementary	35	Construct Rosemont	Rezoned	3/27/58
James Monroe Elementary	1 - 3	Not Available	--	--
W. H. Taylor Elementary	1 - 3	Atlantic City Project	Rezoned	7/10/57
Pineridge Elementary	Navy Housing	Broad Creek Project	Closed	2/09/57
Broad Creek Elementary	Navy Housing	Broad Creek Project	Torn Down	12/20/57
Benmoreell Elementary	Navy Housing	Closed the School	Torn Down	5/7/56
John Marshall Elementary	extensive	Transferred to Blacks	Transferred	3/21/57
Norview Junior High	200 - 225	Construct Rosemont	Rezoned	3/27/58
Blair Junior High	some	Atlantic City Project	Rezoned	7/10/57
Granby High School	some	Not Available	--	--
Maury High School	some	Atlantic City Project	Rezoned	7/10/57
Norview High School	75	Build Rosemont & Coronado	Rezoned	3/27/58

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 February 1957.

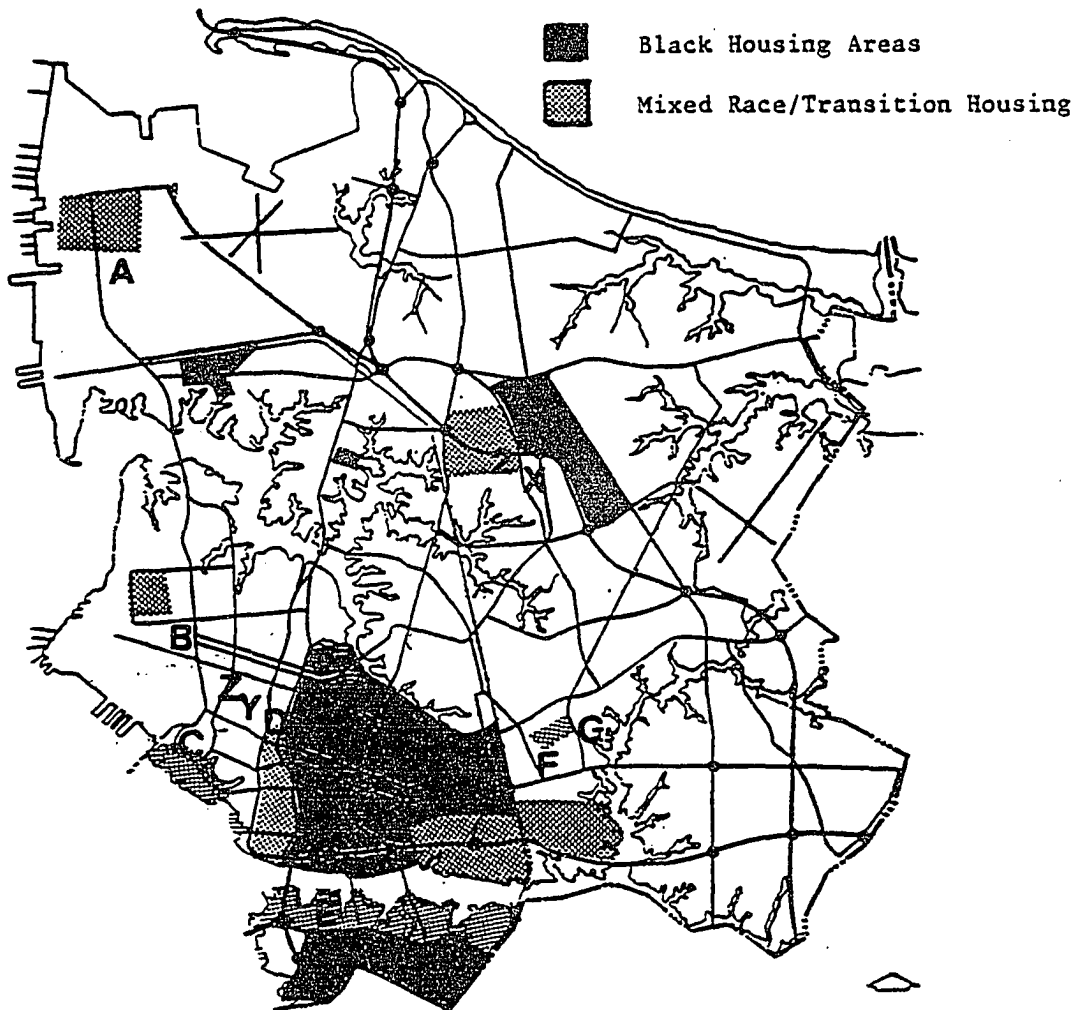


Figure 7. Impact of De Facto Segregation and School Locations

<b>A</b>	Benmorell	<b>G</b>	Pineridge
<b>B</b>	Madison	<b>X</b>	Norview Junior, Senior and Elementary
<b>C</b>	Patrick Henry	<b>Y</b>	Maury High
<b>D</b>	Marshall	<b>Z</b>	Blair Junior
<b>E</b>	Gatewood	<b>1</b>	Rosemont Elementary/Junior
<b>F</b>	Broadcreek	<b>2</b>	Coronado Elementary

long enough for cases already pending against Arlington, Charlottesville, Newport News, Prince Edward County, and, hopefully, other localities to achieve a simultaneous decision.<sup>66</sup> The Norfolk case, which was decided by Judge Walter Hoffman on February 12, 1957,<sup>67</sup> was by then winding its way through the appeals process to the Supreme Court, but local legal experts privately doubted that legal maneuvering could stall desegregation for the one more year it would take the cases in other cities to catch up.<sup>68</sup> The emergency state laws that established the state pupil placement board had already been declared unconstitutional in the Norfolk case, and that decision had been upheld by the U. S. Supreme Court.<sup>69</sup> It seemed that in the winter of 1956-57 that there was little the city could do to forestall desegregation of its white public schools in the fall (1957)--at least a full year before any other locality would be faced with a similar crisis--except sit back and accept the calumny of the rest of the state.

Thus, the Duckworth Plan, although no such proposal was ever publically announced, was introduced within this atmosphere of political panic; there was no announcement of any concerted program to achieve anything other than the

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<sup>66</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 March 1957.

<sup>67</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 February 1957.

<sup>68</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 March 1957.

<sup>69</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 October 1957.



publicly espoused goals of the various redevelopment projects and school building programs, nor was there any widespread understanding of just why the city was taking these particular steps; nevertheless, a certain calm prevailed among the citizenry that "something" either would be or was being done to avert the crisis, regardless of the cost of such a diversion. The immediate action--the time between the first public hearing to the first demolition was less than six months--on the Atlantic City Project and the transfer of the Robert Gatewood Elementary School to the Black system solved the crises at hand by frustrating the 14 litigants who would most definitely have been assigned to white schools during the 1957-58 school term. With the state pupil placement legislation declared unconstitutional, a local board policy of denying transfer, regardless of the race of the applicant, to a school at a greater geographic proximity was just enough of a legal loophole to delay speedy enactment of Judge Hoffman's order. It was a brilliant ploy, and one that won an additional one year reprieve for the Norfolk Schools.<sup>70</sup> That extra year gave the city time to plan for additional delays by using the powers of redevelopment and the policy of school construction to forestall additional transfer requests based upon geographic proximity; until this was achieved, the School Board was clearly instructed to deny all requests for

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

transfer from a Black to a white school, even if faced with court order to do so.<sup>71</sup>

At its very least the Duckworth program of concerted redevelopment and school construction helped to buy time before the city had to face the eventuality of school desegregation; at its very best, the plan would lessen the impact of school desegregation upon specific areas targeted by the N.A.A.C.P. suit, and thus make it possible for the court to diffuse that impact as thinly as possible among all the schools in the city--a step that was crucial in leading to the eventual compliance with and acceptance of desegregation. In all likelihood, the general public, given the political climate and emotional conditions of the day, would probably have concurred with his program had they been given a chance.

The important thing from the point of view of history, however, is that the public was never given a chance to approve or disapprove the overall program; neither were the people given an opportunity to understand or disregard its consequences. Duckworth's Plan had been carefully hand-crafted in a political vacuum of his own construction. The Duckworth political strategy of pre-session dress rehearsals and "briefing" sessions for the Council, of the "planned incumbency" method of denying voters a reasonable voice in selecting freshmen councilmen, of "mayoral government" that

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<sup>71</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 August 1958.

disregarded the advice of citizen boards and professional authorities alike, of one-party dominance that crushed opposition and stifled constructive dissent, and of "strong-man rule" that promoted one elected official above all others, had produced a dictatorial climate of consent that would permit whatever the ruling powers, benign or otherwise, wished. The public was removed from its far more active role under the People's administration, and can hardly be held culpable for the failures of the Mayor's policy. Redevelopment projects, especially, had to fulfill federal requirements that the affected individuals had been provided a full opportunity to be involved in the planning, design, and implementation of the program.<sup>72</sup> Norfolk, however, was extremely remiss in this regard, and its officials preferred to run the city as much like a company as they could--as if they were the board of directors, major decisions could be made in secrecy, and no one else mattered very much.<sup>73</sup> The people, however, seemed to care very little one way or another about the crucial decisions that faced the city; so long as they were spared the gory details of complicated policy decisions, they would approve by inertia whatever actions, no matter how drastic, were undertaken to preserve the status quo.

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<sup>72</sup>Luther J. Carter, formerly City Hall and schools reporter for the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, interview by author, Tape recording, Washington, D.C., 12 January 1991.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

As for the business community, their consent was assured from the outset. Redevelopment was too good for business in general and too important an economic boost for the Tidewater area as a whole to be opposed. The Mayor was simply enacting their most far-fetched dreams, although with a speed, a scope, and an urgency they may not have understood. Surely there were those among the business community who fathomed the true motivation behind the Duckworth redevelopment proposals, but these same leaders knew how disastrous a school confrontation would be for the city. The state had backed the city against the wall on desegregation: the federal courts would not allow it to continue public education as before, and yet the state would not let it retreat towards token integration. Credit is due Mayor Duckworth because he at least found a way to break out of that corner. Probably no one, not even the Mayor, expected redevelopment to provide a permanent solution to the problem, but it did supply the city with a grant of additional powers that might help him negotiate some sort of settlement short of desegregation with the Black community. At the very least, the Duckworth Plan answered the court directives, bought additional time for the city to work out a more permanent solution, and gave the Mayor flexibility to deal with both the crisis at hand and the rebuilding of the city. No one in the city's business or political leadership really expected that Black children would ever attend white

schools in Norfolk,<sup>74</sup> and so nobody suspected how much the city had traded for what would turn out to be a temporary fix. Ironically, by advancing such a far-reaching program under these less than honorable motivations, the Mayor had finally achieved the promise contained in the moniker of his 1950 Harmony Ticket: the city's business establishment and its political organization were at last joined together in a consensus on municipal directions--more united than they had been at any time since Fred Duckworth had assumed control of its destiny.

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<sup>74</sup>Robert L. Mason.

CHAPTER SIX  
PRELUDE TO CONFRONTATION

In spite of the apparent success of the Mayor's redevelopment program to prevent school desegregation, a number of factors began to appear which would serve to harden Norfolk, and especially its established business and political leadership, into a stronghold of Massive Resistance. In that context, and to everyone's surprise, Mayor W. Fred Duckworth turned out to be a "very Massive Resister,"<sup>1</sup> and did something few would have suspected: he lost all touch with reality.<sup>2</sup> For several years since the Brown decision, the local chapter of the statewide Massive Resistance support group, the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, had labored to establish a respected political force that could be counted on to endorse the Byrd Organization when it advanced ardent segregationists, but also to oppose it when it backed lukewarm or local option resisters. In spite of its penchant for lost causes, such as the T. Coleman Andrews Separatist Party 1956 Presidential bid, the local Defenders had carved for themselves a small

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<sup>1</sup>Pretlow Darden.

<sup>2</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 4 July 1975.

following among the city's retail merchants and small businessmen, the major component of their parent, statewide effort. It had been pushed in the past dangerously close to the fringe of accepted political behavior, but it had always fought its way back to the core of this small constituency: when one of its local members was found to be distributing "hate sheet" literature, the Defenders passed a resolution condemning such actions.<sup>3</sup>

The logic of the Defender's argument was powerfully convincing for most of Norfolk's white citizens: they believed that the U. S. Supreme Court had made an "unconstitutional" decision in the Brown case, thereby substituting "judicial legislation" under pressure from the N.A.A.C.P. for the more legal process of constitutional amendment. This "unconstitutional" decision posed a grave threat, they believed, to the powers of all state governments, the time-honored tradition of state control of public education, and the right of the majority to create the society of their choosing. Since a majority of the people in the country so obviously favored a continuation of segregated schools, they argued, the Brown decision really worked to undermine rule by the majority in favor of the interests of a few. The Defenders backed their claim of an "unconstitutional" court decision with a supporting document signed by three-fourths

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<sup>3</sup>Forrest P. White, M.D., unpublished, untitled, and undated (1959) article, Norfolk Committee for Public Schools files, Old Dominion University Archives.

of the state supreme court justices in the country. A vast majority of Norfolk's white voters apparently agreed with the Defender's unconstitutional-court-order sentiment; it was the second part of their logic they resisted: the Defenders felt that closing the South's public schools in defiance of court orders to integrate was the only proper way to show public opposition against such dangerously political decisions.<sup>4</sup> As long as there was no real threat of either integrating or closing Norfolk's schools, the people of Norfolk were not committed to this course of action; the Virginia Legislature, however, had adopted this stance in choosing the Stanley Plan of Massive Resistance over the Gray Commission's local option proposal of moderation.

Partly as a means to test the depth of Massive Resistance feeling in Norfolk, the Defenders fielded a three-man slate in the June (1957) Democratic Primary to challenge the Organization's more moderate legislative delegation. The race provided a perfect test of conflicting philosophies: the Organization regulars included a strong Young Turk contingent of urban progressives, had been supporters of the more moderate Gray Commission local option plan to comply in part with court-ordered desegregation, and had opposed the Stanley Plan, endorsed by the Defenders, to close desegregated schools. Lieutenant Colonel J. Addison Hagan, Jr.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



(U.S.M.C., Retired), a Byrd Organization irregular who had served a stint in the Virginia House of Delegates following the war, headed the Defender ticket, which included Harvey E. White, Jr., a young attorney, and Frank R. Ford, a downtown jeweler.<sup>5</sup> The incumbents did their best to avoid the Massive Resistance issue, preferring instead to tout a more moderate platform which included poll tax repeal, budgetary reform, and liberalization of the state's archaic liquor laws.<sup>6</sup> In spite of the considerable strength of the Prieur Democratic Organization and the backing of the business community, the Defender's ticket of Hagan-Ford-White waged such a vigorous campaign that the incumbents were afraid. The final outcome of the tally hinged on late returns from a few questionable voting precincts; Colonel Hagan vehemently maintained that Billy Prieur stole the election by stuffing the ballot boxes to insure victory.<sup>7</sup>

The attitude of the Norfolk voters was clearly hardening against moderation, and a position of defiance that included the sacrifice of closed schools was gaining in popularity. When the issue emerged again five months later in the Virginia gubernatorial race, public opinion had come full circle. The Democratic candidate was J. Lindsay

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<sup>5</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 April 1957.

<sup>6</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 29 March 1957.

<sup>7</sup>J. Addison Hagan, interview by Dr. James Sweeney, Transcript, 25 January 1977, Old Dominion University Archives.

Almond, a formidable campaigner fully able to take advantage of this rising tide of defiance: he was universally recognized as having been the legal brains behind the Stanley school-closing Plan of Massive Resistance. Almond had given up a seat in Congress to fill in as the state's Attorney General; he had won re-election twice to that position, and was now impatient to move up to Virginia's highest office. The Organization's nod probably would have gone instead to State Senator Garland Gray, author of the state's more moderate local option plan of compliance. Senator Gray had hardened his own resistance and had backed away from the plan that bore his name, but Almond's full-blown entry into the Democratic Primary forced him to withdraw. The Republicans again nominated Ted Dalton, their most popular and attractive candidate in almost 80 years. Four years earlier Dalton had come within just a few percentage points of defeating Governor Stanley, admittedly a less formidable opponent than Almond. Dalton's platform was a paragon of moderation, calling for repeal of the worst of the Massive Resistance laws and otherwise preventing school closings. Almond, however, campaigned with the full Massive Resistance bombast, calling for hardline defiance all the way to the school house door.

The race was a classic contest of public sentiment on the desegregation question: both candidates were strong campaigners who enjoyed solid party backing. Almond,

however, swept to an easy victory, pulling more than 60% of the vote. Dalton had been swamped by events far beyond his control: when President Eisenhower sent federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to enforce court-ordered desegregation, all hope of a Dalton victory faded forever. Although no one in Virginia really wanted to close public schools, Almond's Stanley Plan did promise a way to prevent integration without having to face a similar threat of armed troops in Virginia.<sup>8</sup>

The intervention of federal troops into the Little Rock school crisis obviously had a profound effect upon local residents. Whereas only a few months earlier most Norfolkians apparently were prepared to accept a minimum of desegregation in order to keep the public schools open, now a number of indicators pointed to the fact that a majority had begun to prefer instead school closings to even token integration. The sight of bayonets, rifles, and uniforms had seemed to underscore the argument of the resisters that the South was at war with the federal courts, and that any tactic which by-passed or postponed a similar confrontation in Norfolk was acceptable. Almond tallied an "impressive majority" in the city by campaigning almost exclusively on his Stanley Plan to circumvent federal court-ordered desegregation. The local legislative delegation, too, began

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<sup>8</sup>Virginius Dabney, Virginia: The New Dominion, op cit., pp. 538-540.

to back away from their own earlier position of moderation in favor of a hardline posture.<sup>9</sup> They were obviously aware that not even ballot box finagling could have saved them if Little Rock had occurred just before their own Democratic primary race against the Defender slate. Just before that primary they had pledged their willingness to go "head-to-head" with the governor to prevent a funds cutoff or school showdown in Norfolk;<sup>10</sup> now, less than a year later, they were promising to let Governor Almond "have a perfectly free hand, even if it means closing our schools."<sup>11</sup> The strength of the Defender's challenge, Almond's impressive showing in the city, the opposition to the events in Little Rock, and an emerging sense of defiance on the part of the citizenry had convinced the Norfolk legislative delegation, among the most moderate in the General Assembly, to support a hard-line stance of Massive Resistance that would obviously have been personally repugnant to every one of them only a year earlier--events were moving rapidly to a showdown in Norfolk. No wonder that, taken in this context of defiance, the Mayor's Plan of immediate and selective redevelopment of vast segments of the city was accepted by all those in a position to guess its true intent.

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<sup>9</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 10 March 1958.

<sup>10</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 July 1956.

<sup>11</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 14 May 1958.

One other factor was cited as contributing to the shift of the local legislators: the unrelenting legal pressure still being applied by the N.A.A.C.P.'s attorneys.<sup>12</sup> Any thought of congratulatory action on the Mayor's part for avoiding a Little Rock in Norfolk in 1957 quickly faded; the N.A.A.C.P. refused to back down. Duckworth's Plan and his obvious willingness to employ the myriad powers of redevelopment against the homes of Black litigants had bought time, but the N.A.A.C.P. was not intimidated into dropping its case. Instead Duckworth's actions forced a rethinking of the strategy, and the N.A.A.C.P. went right ahead with its plans to enlist new plaintiffs, and so continue the earlier challenge. If the N.A.A.C.P. had erred in its initial effort, the mistake was because the first litigants were drawn from only a few isolated neighborhoods; second, it had concentrated its legal attack upon desegregating the city's elementary schools, the one educational institution most closely bound by the geographic confines of a single neighborhood. The Mayor had won the first round because he was willing to demolish the threatened areas and their neighborhood schools. The N.A.A.C.P. was determined to win this round by avoiding the neighborhood schools.

Since the Mayor had not yet shown any inclination to destroy the city's larger and more costly secondary institutions, the N.A.A.C.P. apparently decided to aim its second

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<sup>12</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 10 March 1958.

legal assault at Norfolk's white junior and senior high schools. This tactic seemed appropriate for a number of reasons. First, the assault seemed to block the Mayor's use of the redevelopment weapon: each secondary institution served too many students and too wide a geographic area to make it a target for either closing or urban renewal. Although the city had shown its willingness in the Atlantic City and Broad Creek Projects to attack predominantly white neighborhoods, a new redevelopment effort of any great magnitude was probably out of the question. Second, the wide geographic area encompassed by each secondary institution meant that there were potentially hundreds of litigants for whom the argument of geographic proximity could be made. Third, the Black community had never been entirely happy with the challenge at the elementary level, partly because it involved younger children who would be less prepared for the personal hardships and even dangers inherent in integration, and partly because it involved the destruction of strong neighborhood loyalties and personal ties. The assault on secondary schools would involve older students who could more easily be prepared physically and mentally for the rigors involved. The Black community could solidly support such a move because it involved the impairment of fewer Black neighborhood loyalties. There was only one Black high school and two Black junior highs in the city, and to most segments of the Black community (and even some

in the white) the most insidious form of racial discrimination was evident in the lines of Black youths that were forced to queue up at an early hour for long bus rides across town to these institutions. The decision to participate in litigation was one that the secondary students could make for themselves: many would rather face the personal dangers involved in integration than face the prospect of six years of crosstown busing. Finally, there were elements in the white community that might be more sympathetic to breaking down the doors of segregated secondary institutions than in an assault on the city's primary schools: the white students involved might be more open to new ideas and less tied to the attitudes of their parents than their younger brothers and sisters in the elementary schools; the parents might be less protective of older students because they were better able to handle themselves; and the bastion of the neighborhood school, so important to both the Black and white communities, would be by and large protected by expanding the concept to include racial as well as geographic neighbors.

The N.A.A.C.P. had instituted a brilliant legal maneuver, and one which it sensed would be ultimately successful. Duckworth, however, was not disposed to give up so easily; he could foresee doom if the N.A.A.C.P.'s plans were carried out, and so, with the powers of redevelopment useless against this new and fortified threat, he began to seek new

means of racial intimidation to force the Black community to withdraw from the litigation. By late spring of 1958 the pressure upon him had become so intense that he did something few who knew him would have suspected: he lost his grip on reality,<sup>13</sup> ordinarily an ever-present personal resource, and became embroiled in a prolonged name-calling battle with the Black community. As an elected official whose public credibility was at stake, the Mayor was bound to lose such a battle, even if he won all the skirmishes: his personal invective, whether spoken openly or in the private companionship of cronies, had no place in the local political arena. At the outset, however, his political position and personal power were so entrenched and his dominance so insured that the reaction of the white community was hidden behind a veil of silent assent.

The opening shots in the verbal battle were fired by the Mayor when a group of traditional Black leaders approached the Council in June of 1958 with a request to establish a bi-racial advisory commission to reverse the deterioration in race relations that had taken place in the preceding months. It was a simple request, and one with which the old People's government would have complied forthrightly. Dr. Lyman Brooks, the president of Norfolk's Black state college and a figure of gentility highly regarded by both the Black and white communities, rose to

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<sup>13</sup>Robert Mason.



present the petition.<sup>14</sup> Before he could get through reading the first lines of his request, however, the Mayor felt prompted to utter a prolonged racial slur which included the inference that there were "too d--n many Blacks behind bars and not enough at the tax counters."<sup>15</sup> The Mayor's off-color remark at the usually staid and highly predictable Council session clearly caught the press and spectators off guard. Most, including the news reporters present, pretended not to hear the invective, and Dr. Brooks, much to his credit, refused to argue the point, but the affront came in for some mild criticism at the hands of the Virginian-Pilot editorial writers as "an unwelcome and irrelevant note that is not a politically sound one."<sup>16</sup>

If Mayor Duckworth had hoped to provoke an outburst from the Black leadership and so turn public reaction against them, he was sadly mistaken. Instead, his off-color invective only served to strengthen the resolve of the Blacks to air their grievances before a broader representation of the white citizenry. Newspaper reporters who sought a response from Dr. Brooks, found only this staid response:

The fundamental thing that is disturbing to me is that there really are no relations between the races in Norfolk. I'm not sure Norfolk people know where they stand on this . . . .

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<sup>14</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 June 1958.

<sup>15</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot , 12 June 1958.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

Richmond is considered to be a more conservative city, yet Negroes are on all the important commissions in Richmond . . . . Norfolk has no police officer above the rank of patrolman, and there are no Negroes on any policy-making commission under city government [i.e., the School Board, Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Planning Commission, Port Authority, etc.], except the Recreation Commission, which is purely advisory.<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Brooks, always a powerful force in arranging conciliation between the races, was clearly trying to point the way towards several symbolic shifts that could be made immediately to placate the Black community and help resolve the current racial impasse. Indirectly, by pointing the finger at city hiring and appointment practices, he was laying the blame for nonexistent racial communications at the feet of the Mayor and his political organization. P. B. Young, Sr., who had served on a number of advisory boards and bi-racial special commissions during the People's reign, noted other causes of concern:

The deterioration in race relations--in business, government, welfare agencies, the Community Fund, school administration--has been noticeable since the Supreme Court decisions began banning segregation in public schools and public parks. . . . [other factors which should share the blame are] the current housing shortage, difficulties in obtaining credit for [Black] construction, and the activities of the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

If Duckworth had thought that his hard-line attitude would force the Black community to back away from school desegregation, then he had erred significantly; in fact, the uproar caused by his prejudicial slur only served to unite the Black leadership more closely than ever before behind the goal of attaining desegregated schools. In the absence of other symbolic goals befitting their rank and standing in the community (such as Black elected officials, judges, top city administrators, or appointees to the major boards and commissions), the desegregation of Norfolk's public schools in direct defiance of the wishes of the Mayor and the Prieur Organization that had fought so hard against them, obviously took on new meaning for the city's Black leaders. A group of prominent Black ministers responded to Duckworth's retort by opposing his desire to have Blacks "waive their civil rights" as a condition to restoring racial harmony; other Black leaders joined them in repudiating the Mayor's attempts at bi-racial "bargaining."<sup>19</sup> The N.A.A.C.P., the group targeted by Duckworth as the villains of racial disunity, declined comment in the white press, and, instead, redoubled their efforts to attain Black plaintiffs for their litigation. Before the Mayor's action, they had obtained 44 Black requests for transfer;<sup>20</sup> after the imbroglio, they

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<sup>19</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 June 1958.

<sup>20</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 June 1958.

were able to sign up more than 100 plaintiffs,<sup>21</sup> in spite of the fact that the School Board was releasing the names of all such litigants for publica-tion<sup>22</sup>--an action that clearly subjected them to the dangers of verbal abuse, intimidation, and possible physical assault.

The Duckworth Plan of combining redevelopment demolition with targeted school construction appears to have been undertaken to achieve two ends. The plan had the effect of moving to replace segregation by law (de jure), which was then falling under court attack, with de facto segregation (in fact), by demolishing and otherwise realigning those previously all-white segregated elementary schools threatened by integration from the small Black populations living within their geographic boundaries. The N.A.A.C.P.'s brilliant reversal of strategy in the shift of its legal focus upon the city's white junior and senior high schools had rendered the Mayor's Plan useless towards this end. Each secondary school drew from too large a neighborhood for redevelopment to be successful, and each school was too large and expensive to tear down or relocate; nor could the Mayor realistically consider transferring such schools to the Black community without facing widespread revolt from white school patrons. Even though only six schools were involved in the N.A.A.C.P.'s renewed legal assault, more

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<sup>21</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 August 1958.

<sup>22</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 June 1958.

than 10,000 white students, cutting across every neighborhood and stratum of society, would be effected. Also, the courts would never have permitted the construction of Black mini-high schools, because such schools would clearly have been educationally unsound without the necessary expense of the support facilities required for accreditation.

The second, and more tangential, possible impact of the Duckworth Plan was to discourage future applications for transfer from the Black community to white schools. In this the tactic had clearly failed, but whether this was because of the Mayor's abrasive remark or because the Black community was really united behind its younger, more aggressive leaders remains unknown. At any rate, the effects of racial intimidation, both official and unofficial, had failed to pressure the N.A.A.C.P. into withdrawing its suit from the courts. As a final stab toward such an end, the School Board, under the tutelage of Ben Willis, regarded as the most conservative of the Duckworth appointees,<sup>23</sup> delayed the reappointment of every Black teacher in the school system,<sup>24</sup> but this action, also failed to produce the desired panic.

The Black community had rallied firmly around the N.A.A.C.P. and its efforts to desegregate the city's

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<sup>23</sup>Forrest P. White, M.D., untitled, unpublished, and undated (1959) article, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 June 1958.

secondary schools; the harshness of the Mayor's attitude and the viciousness of such racial intimidation had precluded any hope of an out-of-court appeasement with symbolic gestures--something that might have worked in part at some earlier date. By the summer of 1958, the Black and white communities could be perceived to be locked in a head-to-head struggle over school desegregation from which there could be no retreat. Far from discouraging new litigants, the harshness of the struggle had produced 151 new plaintiffs, all but one of whom fell into the category of living closer to the white secondary school to which they had applied.<sup>25</sup> In the Black community these litigants were treated as though they were crusaders engaged in a holy war. The Journal and Guide hailed the new plaintiffs in a euphoric photo-essay:

Study these faces . . . for they are the faces of the future. These young boys and girls, with their parents' permission of course, are the brave, pioneering, far-seeing, and ambitious types who always figure in progress.

Having read about the trials and tribulations of others attending for the first time previously all-white schools--in Little Rock, Charlotte, Nashville, for instance--they still chose to obtain their constitutional right to a non-segregated education.

They may or may not gain their goal immediately. But they, or others who follow them certainly shall--or democratic government shall have become a mockery, and law and order under a system of court-interpreted law shall

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<sup>25</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot , 30 August 1958.

have ceased to exist effectively in the United States of America."<sup>26</sup>

Now that the integration of at least some of Norfolk's secondary schools seemed assured--the new legal action was certain to be successful and the goal of integrated schools now seemed beyond negotiation for the city's Black leadership--public opinion began to coalesce around three separate philosophical responses. The Defenders firmly believed that closing the public schools in defiance of a court order to integrate was necessary to show united opposition to the Supreme Court's dangerously political decisions. If the South held solid in its efforts to resist the Court's encroachment upon state's rights and individual liberties, then, they argued, the federal government would be forced to back down. There were not enough troops, the Defenders argued, to force integration in every Southern community; they didn't want trouble here in Virginia, and that was why the state's political leaders had endorsed their idea to close the threatened public schools rather than invite conflict. As one of the first communities in the South to be faced with the probability of court-ordered integration, Norfolk stood at the brink of an historic moment. If Massive Resistance worked here, the Defenders argued, every other community across the South would be heartened. In light of the prominence of the city's position, the closing

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<sup>26</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 30 August 1958.

of the school house doors was a "small sacrifice" to pay for the freedoms of the majority.

Maybe the schools will be closed for a time, maybe for a whole year. But it's a mighty small sacrifice to pay to prevent integration and discourage the federal courts from further encroachments on state's rights.

We can teach them [the children] just as well in private schools; maybe better, because we'll have a little more control over what they're going to learn . . . . When we close the schools in September, I say to mothers, don't start squawking.<sup>27</sup>

Thus as a "temporary" substitute for those public schools that might be forced to close in September, the Defenders had formed the Tidewater Education Foundation to operate segregated alternative schools for those students who found themselves locked out of public classrooms. The T.E.F. offered a way for parents to support the concept of segregated public education for a nominal fee without sacrificing the schooling of their children. In addition, the T.E.F. would be free to make its pitch to the community at large, unfettered by the essentially negative political image of the Defender's name. If the "small sacrifice" the public was expected to bear was to grow into more than a year's duration, as most Defenders believed it would, the T.E.F. was prepared to buy up the closed public schools for a nominal fee and reopen them as segregated, private

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<sup>27</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 July 1958.



institutions. To help defray the cost of private schools, the state had enacted legislation to provide substantial "tuition grants" to students forced to attend integrated schools.<sup>28</sup>

The great majority of Norfolk citizens, however, did not yet seem ready to accept the extreme measure of Massive Resistance proposed by the Defenders and the T.E.F. system of surrogate private education. The epitome of the city's moderate opinion even as late as the summer of 1958 was expressed by School Board Chairman Paul Schweitzer who, when he contemplated the possibility of closing all of the city's white public schools, proclaimed: "I just can't imagine 36,000 children out on the streets. It's just impossible to imagine. Let's don't lose our faith yet."<sup>29</sup> There were two scenarios of how a school lockout could be prevented: the first was the rather pollyanna belief that "it couldn't happen here"--that either some event or, as before, some means would be found to further delay or defray the imminence of the legal challenge. Nothing as dramatic as Mayor Duckworth's Plan of selective redevelopment was envisioned in this scenario, but the full appeals process had not yet been exhausted, the court order was not yet absolute, and some legal gimmickry was still possible.

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<sup>28</sup>See Benjamin T. Muse, Virginia's Massive Resistance (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1961).

<sup>29</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 June 1958.

Others believed, as did Joseph Leslie, editor of the Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch,<sup>30</sup> that the public schools would have to be closed, but only for a brief period of time. These people held that the decision to close public schools in defiance of court orders to desegregate was a powerful political weapon that, once wielded with resolve, would force both the courts and the Black community to withdraw and accept some other symbolic victory short of desegregation. This was the essence of the Massive Resistance theory: that once the white community stood solidly against integration, even going so far as to accept private school alternatives, the crisis could not continue, and Congress, the courts, the President and the state authorities would seek to ameliorate a settlement. Local Organization chieftain Billy Prieur, the bulk of the state's Byrd Democratic leadership, and the majority of the Norfolk business community apparently held this belief.<sup>31</sup>

There were others in the city who felt, however, that a school crisis was both more imminent and more long-lasting than most people suspected. They feared that the crisis could not be as easy to resolve as the Organization promised. Foremost among their ranks was Lenoir Chambers and the rest of his editorial staff on the Virginian-Pilot. Once Norfolk closed its schools, they argued, the city faced

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<sup>30</sup>Robert L. Mason.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

a far more difficult confrontation than it might otherwise have experienced: the Black community would not back down, the courts would not relent, and the city would be forced to submit to a greater federal authority over its public schools once they were reopened. The biggest effect of such a school closing effort, they argued, would be the targeting of Norfolk as a national scapegoat for 300 years of Southern culture:

If our schools are closed, not only our children suffer, but the entire city will be severely damaged economically.

Norfolk's black eye on the national scene as a result of closed schools would be one of the most disastrous effects. Norfolk is in the market for industry . . . but industry would not likely come to a city with a closed school reputation . . . .

The closing of any schools, and the disorganization of the school program might have a disastrous effect on the Community Chest . . . naval facilities . . . efforts to attract industry . . . and every aspect of the economic well-being of our city.<sup>32</sup>

The only hope that the anti-resistance forces could offer was that the public schools could survive a minimum amount of integration: accepting a few Black students would neither dilute nor destroy the education program of the white majority. Only in this way, they argued, could the city take its school system out from under the authority of the federal courts and continue its economic growth

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<sup>32</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 20 June 1958.

undeterred. The most important action the people of Norfolk could take, the anti-resisters argued, would be an outpouring of public support for the school system regardless of its racial purity.<sup>33</sup> The School Board had labored for almost four years to achieve this end, but as yet there had been no such showing of public support for the schools, even if desegregated. At the beginning of the summer (June, 1958), a small group had approached the Mayor with the idea of forming a pro-school organization; they envisioned a group of prominent white citizens who would be willing to openly commit themselves to continuing public education at all cost. In general, the Mayor indicated that he favored the formation of such a group--he felt that such a white citizen's organization could prove useful if the schools were really closed at a later date<sup>34</sup>--but he was ardently opposed to those who now sought its establishment, and thus rebuffed their efforts as premature.

Duckworth had good reason to back away from this particular organizing party; most of those who approached him would be unacceptable to the bulk of Norfolk's white citizenry. The founding group of the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools was well aware of the dilemma faced by their organization; many of the organizers had worked prominently

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<sup>33</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 September 1958.

<sup>34</sup>Robert L. Stern, board member, Norfolk Committee for Public Schools, interview by author, Tape recording, Norfolk, 22 April 1978.

in the city's various inter-racial activities, and they knew all too well that they would immediately be accused of trying to force integration on the public schools if they surfaced as the leadership of such a group.<sup>35</sup> If the Committee was to be successful as a pressure group, then it would have to be prepared to abandon its leadership to a more representative assemblage; it would have to actively recruit members who personally favored segregation, but who preferred a continuation of public education even more ardently.

Still the organizers felt that the founding of such a group in June of 1958 was crucial to the fate of the city. Few people had given any real thought as to what their response would be if Norfolk's public schools actually were closed for a prolonged period of time. The court decree ordering desegregation, and therefore forcing a closing under state law, could come at any moment; yet most residents, if they thought about the impending crisis at all, were so unrealistic in their approach to the subject that they were still busy trying to discern new legal tactics to circumvent the court's authority. Even the city's ordinarily savvy and well-informed political and economic leadership clung naively to the belief that somehow a strategy would be found to stall the decision for another year or two. The pro-school advocates saw that in the summer of

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<sup>35</sup>White, op cit.

1958, only the Defenders were seriously making plans to prepare for a prolonged school closing, and the T.E.F.'s concept of private, segregated academies as an alternative to desegregated public education was abhorrent to those who now sought the Mayor's support. They knew that the Massive Resisters had shown themselves to be too powerful in the last elections not to be taken seriously in the event of a school showdown. Unless there was some sort of competing pressure group capable of orchestrating a strong showing of support for keeping the schools open, they reasoned, then Duckworth and the rest of the state's political leaders would be forced to bow to the Defender's push to close schools in defiance of federal authority. The pro-school advocates knew that they themselves could not lead such a movement if it were ever to have a chance of success, but they hoped to establish the framework through which other, more moderate and established elements in the community could respond when the appropriate time arose. In this sense, the secretive founding of the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools was not premature: if the moderates were ever to speak out in time to prevent a dismantling of the city's system of public education, then, the founders believed, they would have to be prodded by Norfolk's liberal elements; otherwise, the natural inertia of the citizenry, the superior political power of the Defenders, and the prevailing belief that the conflict would somehow quickly

resolve itself, would all work instead to prolong the impending crisis.<sup>36</sup>

In the climate of malaise that prevailed, however, it would be difficult for the pro-school advocates to discern a locus of moderate support. The one group that should have been most aware of the approaching confrontation, the School Board, was burdened by conflicting loyalties that rendered its leadership impossible. On the one hand, the Board members were each deeply committed to continuing quality public education, part of the rationale for their appointment; on the other hand, however, they also owed their advancement to a political organization itself actively advocating Massive Resistance defiance. Initially the School Board had adopted a moderate posture that was designed to make compliance with a desegregation order possible for the white community to accept. Right after the Brown decision their response had been: "If we adopt a gradual plan of integration, there would be so little, you wouldn't notice it."<sup>37</sup> But that position of moderation had become increasingly difficult to maintain in the charged racial atmosphere that had emerged in the last few years. Back in 1956 the board had endorsed an old People's concept and formed a bi-racial advisory council to study the

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<sup>36</sup>White, unpublished article.

<sup>37</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 5 January 1956.

integration problem,<sup>38</sup> but by the summer of 1958, that early spirit of racial cooperation had totally vanished. The N.A.A.C.P.'s new legal ploy had shifted the burden of defending white Southern culture more squarely onto the School Board than before, yet its members were becoming increasingly aware that at least some of the 151 Black litigants would slip through whatever screening criteria the Board could legally impose. If even one Black were assigned to a white secondary school, then, under the state's Massive Resistance laws, all such secondary institutions in the city would be closed.<sup>39</sup> School Board Chairman Paul Schweitzer deftly summed up the situation faced by the Board that summer: "It is obvious that this irresistible force of [a] court order is about to collide with this immovable object, the state."<sup>40</sup>

In spite of its earlier willingness to accept a minimum of integration if it became necessary to save the schools, there was every indication now that the School Board intended to follow the policy established by Mayor Duckworth and the city's political leadership and resist court-ordered integration at all cost. Surely the Organization expected the Board to resist; the city's legislative delegation had completely reversed its moderate stand of

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<sup>38</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 6 August 1956.

<sup>39</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 14 May 1956.

<sup>40</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 June 1958.



compliance after examining the appeal of the Defender-backed candidates,<sup>41</sup> and there was every reason to believe that the School Board, a similar assemblage of progressive individuals not noted for their independence, would do likewise. If differences between the School Board and the more conservative City Council existed, they were not made public, and, in general, the school program progressed with the solid backing of the Council. In July, School Board Chairman Paul Schweitzer was cordially reappointed without any indication of differences with the Organization.<sup>42</sup> That the School Board had in the past been overly aggressive in its building proposals seemed to have been generally forgiven by the Organization as the natural error of a volunteer citizen group not charged with overseeing a broader range of municipal responsibilities. In any event, the School Board's more modest scaled down building proposal now seemed to fit closely with the city's overall plan to achieve de facto segregation in the schools, even if the publicly stated intent of the Board's proposal was "to minimize the effect of integration by using a plan for gradual desegregation"<sup>43</sup>--a sentiment that on the surface seemed to vary widely from the Mayor's intent. Even the Board's earlier posture of moderate compliance--a stance that

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<sup>41</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 10 March 1958.

<sup>42</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 January 1959.

<sup>43</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 8 March 1957.

generated quite a favorable response from the local press, some national attention, and more than a little notoriety among the Southside extremists<sup>44</sup>--seemed to have been forgiven as the pronouncements of the Silkstocking holdovers then on the Board; a majority of the School Board had been replaced with Duckworth appointees since that time.

Subsequent statements by the School Board had been issued jointly with the Council and the city's legislative delegation, both of whom had at one time similarly vowed to keep Norfolk's schools open at all cost.<sup>45</sup> To the best of its ability the Board had cooperated in every way with the Council and its efforts to delay, avert, and even sabotage the eventuality of school desegregation during the summer of 1958. It waited until mid-August to render its decision on the N.A.A.C.P.'s transfer applicants, and even then, under pressure from the Federal Court to make a determination, rejected all 151, using both rational logic and subterfuge to do so. It rejected 62 applicants because the individuals had failed to submit to the follow-up interviews or testing program required of all who sought transfers within the school system; another 60 were determined to be unsuited for transfer because of low test scores, poor grades, or a record of "too frequent transfers;" 34 applicants who requested transfer to schools in the Norview area, where

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<sup>44</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 July 1955.

<sup>45</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 January 1959.

racial intimidation and bombings had taken place, were denied because of the district's past history of racial disturbance: "The Board is of the opinion that integration there would renew such conflicts and produce grave administrative problems within the school system--all to the detriment of good education and the public welfare." Four other applicants were denied admission to Maury High, Granby High, or Blair Junior High Schools because the Board believed that: "The isolation which would be caused by such an assignment would be detrimental to educational progress and may well cause emotional instability and even detriment to health."<sup>46</sup> Only one of the potential transfers was rejected because it came from a Black living closer to a Black school than a white one.<sup>47</sup>

The Board's decision did not, however, last very long; in less than two weeks the Court rejected its rationales of "potential racial tension" and "probable isolation" of a Black student in an otherwise all-white school. Thirty-eight applicants fell into these two categories, and their transfer folders were once again turned over to the Board for appropriate assignment. The Board now had one more chance to find new excuses for rejecting these applications. A slight modification in the district lines for the projected Rosemont School, the Black combination elementary,

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<sup>46</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 August 1958.

<sup>47</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 30 August 1958.

junior, and senior high school that was the focus of the Mayor's de facto segregation plan, brought a majority of the 38 applicants within that school's assignment area. Although School Superintendent J. J. Brewbaker was forced to admit to the Court that the district lines for Rosemont were hastily redrawn only "after he had learned the addresses of the applicants involved [in the litigation],"<sup>48</sup> Judge Walter Hoffman allowed the Board to deny the transfer requests of all the petitioners so affected. The Board was thus able to manipulate district lines to accommodate all the remaining litigants challenging the city's elementary schools, but when every possible readjustment was made, 17 Black secondary students still retained an unchallengeable right to legally request a transfer to the white school closer to their homes than the Black school they were presently attending. Finally, acting "against the Board's better judgement, but pursuant to the law as interpreted by the Court,"<sup>49</sup> Norfolk School authorities, under threat of legal duress, were forced to accept these final 17 applicants just days before the 1958-59 school year was scheduled to begin.

Ironically, the most important decision ever made by the Norfolk School Board took place not in a public meeting, but rather in a private home. Because board member Francis

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

Crenshaw had just undergone an emergency appendectomy, the rest of the board gathered around the bedside of his West Ghent home to discuss their options. No one was willing to go to jail, although Ben Willis apparently wanted to explore this possibility. Since City Attorney Leonard Davis had been forced to withdraw from representing the Board (because of the possible conflict in representing the City Council), the Board was also without legal counsel, except for Crenshaw, an attorney who specialized in redevelopment and maritime law. Still, its members all knew that Hoffman's threat to send them away to the nearest federal prison for contempt of court was not an idle one. Gradually they came to the conclusion that in the long run integration would be easier to accept if the assignment of Black pupils to white schools came from fellow Virginians and not an officer of the federal court.<sup>50</sup>

By dragging the decision out over as long a period as possible, the Board was actually preparing one more ploy to delay the implementation of the assignments. A motion was immediately filed asking for a postponement on the grounds that "Norfolk was wholly unprepared at this time for immediate compliance," and that the Board needed additional time to arrange for the security of the transferees and to otherwise "prepare" school officials, patrons, teachers and students for "the sudden shift" in the traditional pattern

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<sup>50</sup>Francis Crenshaw.

of Southern education.<sup>51</sup> Their plea was based on the hope that the violence and uproar precipitated by similar court action in Little Rock would be reason enough to dissuade the local court from imposing its will upon a community still unprepared for implementation. Even though Judge Hoffman felt that he could not accept the argument at this late date, he did assure the Board that if, on appeal, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled favorably or even called for further arguments on the matter, he would entertain a subsequent motion to re-transfer the 17 final applicants back to their original Black schools for one more year. The School Board delayed for two more weeks the scheduled opening of the city's schools while the Supreme Court pondered their appeal.<sup>52</sup>

When seen against this backdrop of legal stall, foot-dragging, and delay, the statewide vilification of the Board is hard to comprehend. Only after every conceivable courtroom maneuver had been exhausted and its members seriously threatened with criminal contempt citations, had the Norfolk School Board voted to assign Black students to a white Virginia school. Even so, the state's political leaders rushed to heap abuse on the Board for making the assignment "voluntarily;" their objection was that the Board, itself--a group of Virginia citizens duly empowered by the state and

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 3 September 1958.

local laws--had accepted the transfers rather than leaving the task to the Court, viewed by most as an illegal usurper of the state's authority. This was a crucial distinction in Virginia's interposition argument: Governor Almond, the Organization's calmest and most reasoned spokesman, stated that the courts had the "power" to make such assignments, but lacked the "constitutional authority" to do so. Local school boards, he continued, were restrained by the state's Massive Resistance statutes from making such assignments.<sup>53</sup> In Almond's scenario, the Organization had every right to curse the Board because, when given the chance to obey one governmental authority and defy the other, Norfolk school authorities chose to follow the dictates of the federal court, and thus ignored sovereignty of the state of Virginia. More than that, the Board's action threatened to undo the Organization's tenuous interposition logic and deflate the rhetoric of Massive Resistance.

That the Board made this very deliberate decision without at least some degree of calculation on the part of at least a few of its best informed members seems improbable. There was one major difference between the Norfolk School Board and the posture of the Byrd Organization, both its statewide leadership and its local affiliate: the appointed members of the Board were willing to operate the city's schools even if integrated, and the elected

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<sup>53</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 5 September 1958.

politicians were adamantly opposed to such a course. To the Board, the assignment of 17 Black students to six previously all-white junior and senior high schools was the type of minimum of integration--"so little you wouldn't notice it"<sup>54</sup>--that both the Council and the city's legislative delegation had once said they could abide.<sup>55</sup> The political climate had changed drastically since the Council had assented to such moderation, and it was no longer willing to support those sentiments now. Norfolk had come to the point where there were only two courses of action open to the city: either to open the public schools on an integrated basis, or close them indefinitely. The Council now agreed with the leaders of the statewide Byrd Organization that closing the public schools in defiance of the court's authority was the only way to teach the federal government a lesson; the School Board felt that such a course would be highly destructive, both to public education and to the Southern culture in general. For this reason, the Board purposely acted in such a way as to undermine the state's intention to interpose its authority in a show of Massive Resistance. The School Board was composed entirely of individuals who personally preferred segregation; they had made every effort to resist assigning Blacks to previously all-white schools in Virginia until forced to do so by the

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<sup>54</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 5 January 1956.

<sup>55</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 January 1959.



federal district judge, but once having done so, they were determined to abide by that ruling in order to preserve the public educational system they held even more dearly than segregation. This was the basis for the underlying disagreement that existed from this point onward between the individual members on the School Board and the Norfolk City Council.

The Norfolk School Board represented an unlikely pairing of individuals destined for such heroics, and considering the climate of casual malaise that then characterized the majority of the population, their action in defense of public education in the city could well be termed "heroic." It was not a blueblood Silkstocking group, although most of its members bordered on the periphery of the city's business and financial establishment. There were no First Citizens, no bank presidents, no major industrialists or corporate entrepreneurs; only one had achieved any renown for his charity work, and only one was even active in the Chamber of Commerce. Just as they had for most of the city's other independent boards and commissions, the People's appointees had long ago been replaced by respectable, but politically unknown, small businessmen and professional people who owed their advancement entirely to Mayor Duckworth and the Organization Council. An examination of its membership revealed a group of prosperous individuals striving for respectability in a city which, in spite of its size, still

carried much of the atmosphere of a small town: Chairman Paul Schweitzer operated an industrial pump manufacturing firm; Benjamin Willis owned a plush carpet and salon furniture establishment founded by his father; W. Farley Powers was a top executive with one of Tidewater's few large industrial concerns; Francis N. Crenshaw practiced maritime and redevelopment law; William P. Ballard managed the family seafood business; and Mildred J. Dallas had retired as an executive with a local automobile agency.<sup>56</sup>

These were just the sort of small business and professional leaders who had the most to lose by provoking an open confrontation with the dominant political forces of both the state and municipal government: they depended too heavily upon government contracts, professional fees, inspections, and regulation to lightly defy such authority. On the integration question in particular, they had the most to lose if they or their business establishments became the target for boycott or vigilante activity. In short, they were not the sort of individuals who ordinarily stand alone against such authority, yet stand alone they did, in defiance of both a well-established political order and a highly passionate vocal minority.

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<sup>56</sup>Biographical information comes from the following sources: Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 16 February 1960; Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 29 May 1961; Norfolk Ledger-Star, 1 September 1964; Norfolk Ledger-Star, 22 December 1972; Richmond Times-Dispatch, 3 February 1963.

The School Board's singular act of courage set in motion a variety of forces which now vied for public acceptance; at the same time, because it held out the hope of yet one more reprieve from the courts, the action made it difficult for any coherent plan of action to win that endorsement. For Mayor Duckworth, the two week delay in the scheduled opening of the schools provided one more opportunity to pressure Norfolk's Black leadership into withdrawing the final 17 litigants. Both publicly and privately, the Council used every resource at its disposal to force some sort of compromise from the Black community,<sup>57</sup> but racial antipathies had progressed too far in the last few months for the city's Black leadership to accept any sort of token remuneration now that victory appeared so close at hand. Although this time the Norfolk newspapers, fearing reprisals against the individuals involved, declined to print the names and addresses of the 17 approved transferees, the Journal and Guide suffered no such qualms: all 17 were featured in a photo-essay that praised their courage and pioneering spirit, although recognizing that, under the realities of Virginia's massive Resistance school closing laws, they "may not gain their goal immediately."<sup>58</sup>

In the weeks leading up to the School Board's defiant action, the organizers of the fledgling Norfolk Committee

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<sup>57</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 19 May 1960.

<sup>58</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 30 August 1958.

for Public Schools had begun to move their group into a more public posture. Quietly they had begun the task of contacting the city's respected and conservative citizens--the cream of the city's business and civic elite--asking them to join, or even form themselves, a pressure group that would work to keep the schools open in the face of court-ordered integration. The two week delay in the scheduled opening of schools gave the Committee the opportunity it sought to organize an out-pouring of public support for keeping the threatened schools open. They hoped that now that a moderate position of court compliance had been adopted by the School Board, it would be easier for the rest of the business community to follow that lead. The Committee organizers were convinced that the Governor would have a hard time closing the schools in any community where he felt strong opposition from the conservative business establishment, and this thought gave new impetus to their push for membership. Most of those approached, however, were sympathetic to the cause advanced by the organizers, but still unwilling to come forward publicly at this time. Typical was the reaction of one well-known civic leader:

I'm with you one-hundred percent; however, you know my position. If I place myself in the forefront of your movement, it might harm my organization. Come back when you get your first hundred business leaders, and I'll be glad to join.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>White, unpublished article, p. 3.

Other community stalwarts found similar reason for refusing to join the Committee: businessmen were worried about possible economic reprisals against their firms; executives did not want to face loss of position or prestige; municipal and state employees feared pressure from the Byrd Organization; doctors, lawyers, realtors, and other professionals worried about losing clients; ministers did not want to face divided congregations; civic workers wanted to avoid pressure from their governing boards; naval officers were concerned about the effect upon their careers; federal workers were specifically instructed by the Health, Education, and Welfare headquarters in Washington that this was a "local affair" and that they should not play a public role; and everybody was concerned about the subtle social pressures and ostracism that might be applied against anyone who deviated from the silent norm and took a vocal stand one way or the other. Many of the community leaders approached by the Committee urged the group to wait longer before making any public move; they might help once the schools were actually closed and the hardships were real, but the time was not yet right, they felt, for going public with such an organization.<sup>60</sup> As long as the Supreme Court had not yet ruled on the School Board's appeal, and as long as there was still some hope of gaining another reprieve, the

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<sup>60</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 September 1958.

risk of public exposure was still too great for the great bulk of Norfolk's citizens to step forward and oppose the closing of the city's schools.

The Committee, however, was in a hurry to expose itself and launch a legitimate pressure group before the schools were actually closed. They saw that, in spite of the atmosphere of acquiescent hesitancy that blocked their movement, the Defender-backed Tidewater Education Foundation was boasting a membership that had passed the 2,500 mark. Although that group as well could not count any members of the city's Silkstocking establishment among their ranks, the T.E.F.'s claim to respectability was enhanced by the leadership of attorneys like James G. Martin, Harvey E. White, and Robert Boyd, by merchants like W. I. McKendree, Frank R. Ford, and by educators like William J. Story, Jr., and Hal J. Bonney, Jr.<sup>61</sup> The organizers of the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools surveyed this roster and decided that the public had to be offered a calm and rational choice that stood in opposition to closed schools and Defender-sponsored private education. It was apparent to them that the city's white secondary schools would be closed by the Governor, and that the students who formerly attended those institutions would be locked out of a public education because of the 17 Black transfer applicants, the minimal

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<sup>61</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 12 September 1955, and other sources.

amount of integration the city's leadership seemed earlier ready to accept. The hardship would not be isolated to a single group or cluster of neighborhoods; it would be universal, cutting across every social and economic line. The city's schools had already been closed voluntarily for two weeks in the slim hope that the courts would prevent a more permanent lockout; the Committee organizers hoped that going public with a pressure group now, even if premature, would snowball enough support to prevent further disruption of the school year.

Most of those business and civic leaders who had earlier indicated support for such a group were invited to attend an organizational meeting at a private residence in the prestigious Larchmont section of the city. The meeting was a dismal failure to all those who had worked to establish the group: the few citizens who had any claim to the city's social and financial elite stood on the front porch of the residence, showing their private sympathy for the cause but also indicating their reluctance to join the proceedings inside that would be made public. There were no bank directors present, no Silkstocking corporate executives, no leading merchants, no elected officials, no member of the naval, federal, or state bureaucracies, no major religious or spiritual leaders, and only a handful of interested professionals or small businessmen were in attendance. By and large it was the same individuals who

had pressed from the outset for the establishment of a pro-school organization who now attended. The enormity of the crisis, the School Board's courageous act of halting compliance, the Virginian-Pilot's stirring editorial endorsements of philosophical support, and the seeming finality of their appeal--less than a week remained before the Governor would be forced to act--had failed to appreciably swell their ranks. The Committee was left with a small group of active and concerned citizens, respectable but carrying no great weight in the community, and who felt that the issue was now so great and the demands so pressing that they must push ahead and expose themselves alone to whatever risks were involved in founding such an organization of public advocacy.<sup>62</sup>

Since the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools was still too liberal, too Jewish, too unsophisticated, and too carpetbagger in nature ever to have any hope of convincing the city's business and financial leadership to go public with their concern, the group wisely set its sights on a lesser appeal. In a statement to the press, the Committee announced instead its intent to form a parent's lobby in support of public education and to finance legal efforts to block the closing of the schools. Still convinced that the formation of even a scaled-down organization was not pre-

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<sup>62</sup>Forrest P. White, M.D., unpublished article, p. 4; Robert L. Stern.



mature, the founders issued a carefully worded statement that detailed its philosophy and reason for existence:

Private schooling cannot replace public schools on a broad scale without serious and lasting disruption of the educational facilities of the community. Private schools cannot be legally maintained with public funds under public direction, nor can they be held accountable to local government or the general public.

We believe that under the Federal Court orders only two courses of action are open to Norfolk: either proceed toward minimum compliance with the Federal Court order or to begin the destruction of the public school system. The Norfolk Committee for Public Schools believes that the first course will be far less destructive than the latter.<sup>63</sup>

The Committee chose as its president Reverend James C. Brewer, minister of the Norfolk Unitarian Church, hoping that having a minister at the head of the organization gave credence to its appeal, even though the Unitarian Church was held in less than orthodox esteem by the staunchly Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Lutheran congregations in the city. The Committee chose one of the few businessmen in attendance that night, Irving F. (Buddy) Truitt, the head of a small real estate and insurance firm, to be first vice-president; Mrs. Eugene D. Kidd, the wife of an independent insurance agent and head of the Stuart Elementary P.-T.A., as second vice-president; Mrs. Robert H. Thrasher, the wife of a local psychiatrist and an active

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<sup>63</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 September 1958.

civic worker, as secretary; and Dr. Forrest P. White, a pediatrician, as treasurer of the Committee. Real estate broker Ellis James, Professor Robert L. Stern, high school government teacher Margaret White, Mrs. Joseph Commander, and "another member who requested that his name not be disclosed"<sup>64</sup> rounded out the executive board. It was not a prestigious assemblage--reporter Luther Carter once referred to the organization as "mostly a grouping of 'little people,'"<sup>65</sup> an assessment that was true even by the Committee's own standards. The un-named board member, Dr. Mason C. Andrews, a prominent gynecologist, the only person with any real standing in the Silkstocking community, felt that he could best serve the Committee in attracting people of equal prominence if his name were not released to the press. The group was so desperate for a link to the city's civic and business leadership that it grudgingly accepted the unusual arrangement, even though it infuriated others on the board who felt that Dr. Andrews had gone behind their backs in removing his name from publication.<sup>66</sup>

The Norfolk Committee for Public Schools, just like the School Board and the editors of the Virginian-Pilot, had vastly overestimated the public's capacity to either compre-

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 October 1959.

<sup>66</sup>Forrest P. White, M. D., unpublished article, pp. 4-5; Robert L. Stern.

hend the gravity of the situation the city faced or resist the scapegoat fate to which Norfolk had been condemned by the state's political leadership. Events proceeded at such a rapid pace that the desperate pleas of all three for support of their efforts to keep the schools open were rendered moot. The final legal hurdles were quickly overcome, the last-ditch appeals for yet one more delay denied, and on September 22, 1958, in accordance with Virginia's Massive Resistance Laws, the doors of the city's six previously all-white junior and senior high schools remained locked while those of its segregated elementary institutions opened for the fall semester. There were no closings in the city's parallel Black school system, and there all twelve grades opened as usual. In all, close to 10,000 white and 17 Black students had been locked out of their classrooms, and neither the Governor nor the President could offer much prospect of an early resumption of classes.<sup>67</sup> The best the Governor could offer was the vague hope that somehow a loophole could be found around the legal obstacles that prevented opening the unaffected grades in the closed schools,<sup>68</sup> but under state law, once a single Black student was assigned to a white classroom, all other grades in that class across the entire city must close as well.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 September 1958.

<sup>68</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 26 September 1958.

<sup>69</sup> Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 March 1957.

Even with the school doors actually padlocked, however, few citizens were willing to discuss the implications or project the consequences of such drastic measures; even fewer seemed willing to gather to talk about what should be done. The majority of Norfolk's leaders apparently still dismissed the idea of a prolonged school closing as "scare talk," and promptly banished such thoughts from polite conversation. Most appeared to cling to the belief that the Byrd Organization had somehow outsmarted the federal authorities by daring to close the schools, and that soon either the courts or the Black community--they did not really care which -- would back down.<sup>70</sup> The realities of the confrontation that had taken place the year before in Little Rock, or the relative success of school integration efforts in such cities as St. Louis, Charlotte, Nashville, and Washington, D.C., remained far from their thoughts. "The best of the Southern leadership" and "the majority of Southerners" that the Virginian-Pilot had promised would rise up to abide by the authority of the courts<sup>71</sup> were nowhere in evidence. The cream of the city's civic and business elite, at one time so vocal in determining the course of their city's direction, remained completely silent, abandoning the stage entirely to the Mayor, the

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<sup>70</sup>Robert L. Mason.

<sup>71</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 18 May 1954.

Organization, and others who shouted encouragement from the periphery. Instead, prejudice--the unreasonable adherence to the conventions, traditions, and mores of the past--reigned supreme, replacing even civic pride and boosterism as the single underlying force behind every phase of municipal policy.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
IN PURSUIT OF A MANDATE

Norfolk's was not the only educational system effected by the state's school closing laws the--schools in Prince Edward County, Charlottesville, and, to a lesser extent, in Arlington and Front Royal were closed as well--but Norfolk was by far the largest scale test of the state's Massive Resistance plan to replace integrated public institutions with a system of private, segregated academies, financed in part by public funds.<sup>1</sup> There was never any question that Prince Edward County, the birthplace of the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, would prove how well Massive Resistance could work on a small scale. There the Defenders were well organized and a respectable segment of the community; when Blacks attempted to desegregate the only public high school in the county, Prince Edward Academy opened its doors to almost all the county's white secondary students. Even when the county high school was finally reopened after years of courtroom litigation (the Prince Edward suit had been a companion case with the Brown v.

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<sup>1</sup>for a more detailed report on Massive Resistance elsewhere in Virginia see Benjamin Muse, Virginia's Massive Resistance, (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1961); Bob Smith, They Closed Their Schools: Prince Edward County, Virginia, (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1965); and Eley, op cit.

Board of Education decision), most of the county's white students continued on at the Academy.

Of all Virginia's small cities, Charlottesville was perhaps the poorest choice from a political perspective for the Organization showdown over school integration: because of the strong influence of the University of Virginia, education was too highly prized and people too independent for Massive Resistance to succeed there. Under ordinary circumstances, Norfolk, too, with all the liberalizing influences provided by its naval, N.A.T.O., shipping and port facilities would have been an equally poor choice for a Massive Resistance showdown. Richmond, with its close ties to the Southside, the Organization, and its capital-of-the-Confederacy heritage, would have provided a much more malleable citizenry. The leadership dynamics in Norfolk, however, gave Massive Resistance a far greater opportunity for success than most would have thought possible: in spite of its size, the city had a generally small and in-bred leadership that was usually united in its aversion to outside authority--a fact that had made Norfolk unpopular with the Byrd Organization and the State Legislature. Duckworth, one of the few outsiders to be truly accepted by all levels of Norfolk's society, had come to occupy a unique place of leadership in the city. First chosen as a compromise candidate to bring harmony between the warring business and political factions of the city, he had

succeeded beyond all expectations in that mission, winning both the respect and the loyalty of the Organization and the Silkstocking crowd in the process. In the years since he had come to power, Duckworth had employed his consummate political, financial, and managerial powers with such success that he had become not just the leader, but the true focal point of the community. In short, Norfolk was far from typical for cities its size: few other municipalities anywhere in the nation were so completely dominated by the personality of a single individual or had dissent so thoroughly silenced by his restraints.

Public education in Virginia was under attack in the Norfolk crisis at its weakest link: the secondary school. Historically, since little more than basic skills was all that was necessary for comfortable survival in the agrarian economy of the Old Dominion, Virginia was among the last states in the nation to support the concept of universal public education, and certainly among the most reluctant to fund any more than an offering of minimum competency. Alongside its impoverished system of public education, however, thrived a highly structured system of private preparatory schools and semi-public universities, such as the College of William and Mary and the University of Virginia, to which the average graduate of the state's public schools could hardly aspire. Thus public schools in Virginia helped to reinforce a sort of social caste system



that allowed the state's leading citizens to follow this parallel education tract in part underwritten by scarce public funds, and often at the expense of the more universal, public school system. The growth of the secondary school movement in the state can be traced back to the appearance of an urban middle class just before the turn of the century, but even as late as 1958, several rural counties still lacked their own public high school--a major reason why the Old Dominion consistently ranked near the bottom of any measurement of education quality in the country. Even in urban areas such as Tidewater, secondary education was not universal, and was still the property of the middle class. Mandatory school attendance laws did not apply beyond the age of 14, and because wartime and Depression era drop-out levels had run unusually high, a noticeable percentage of the urban middle class had been forced to forego secondary schooling. The median education level for adults in Norfolk, with one of the finest public school systems in the South, was still less than tenth-grade, and more than one-fifth of the city's teenage population over the age of fourteen had already dropped out of school.<sup>2</sup>

It is against this backdrop of closed leadership, one-man politics, and spotty support for public education in

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<sup>2</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population, 1950, vol. II, Characteristics of the Population, Part 46, Virginia, chapter B (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government, 1952), p. 46 - 47.

general and secondary schools in particular that the concept of Massive Resistance had its most important test in Norfolk, Virginia. In one sense the Defender's plea for support had a great deal of validity: if Massive Resistance could be made to work here, it would be successful all across the South; Norfolk was not just their first large scale test, the time, the circumstances, and the leadership dynamics of the city offered Massive Resisters at least a reasonable chance to score a major victory for their cause. Since public schools were still open for elementary students, only a small percentage of the city would actually be locked out of public classrooms. Of these, perhaps as many as one-fifth would drop out of high school anyway. Another group could successfully make the shift to one of the city's fine private preparatory schools--including the Norfolk Academy, Carolton Oaks (now Norfolk Collegiate), Garrison-Williams, Country Day, and Norfolk Christian--all of which were then undergoing an unprecedented building boom, prompted in part by the school desegregation crisis.<sup>3</sup> The Navy was concerned enough about the permanency of the closings that it, too, was drawing up plans to expand its own school system to a series of off-base institutions for military dependents.<sup>4</sup> Another group of secondary students could be expected to transfer to other segregated public

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<sup>3</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 5 December 1958.

<sup>4</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 22 January 1959.

schools in nearby communities (estimates put this figure at more than 500 students)<sup>5</sup> or leave the area entirely to live with friends or relatives in other parts of the country.

Thus, although close to 10,000 secondary students would actually be locked out of public classrooms in Norfolk, the maximum load to be carried by the Tidewater Educational Foundation and any other substitute system of private schooling would actually be less than 5,000 pupils once the Navy's off-base schools began operation. The T.E.F. hoped that the traditional lure of the enhanced status of private schooling and the chance to strike a blow at outside intervention would provide a strong incentive to prospective patrons. For the first time many of the city's middle-class residents would be able to afford the luxury of private schooling for their children now that the state provided a \$250 per child per semester tuition grant to such students--one of the hallmarks of the Massive Resistance package of legislation.<sup>6</sup> Armed with this additional attraction, the T.E.F. began to plan ambitiously for the day when Norfolk's schools would be closed. Even before the lockout was final, T.E.F. President James G. Martin announced that the group was prepared to educate as many as 4,500 students, and more if the need arose. The T.E.F. had

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<sup>5</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 October 1958.

<sup>6</sup>Forrest P. White, M.D., "Tuition Grants: Strange Fruit of Southern Integration," South Atlantic Quarterly, Autumn, 1960.

made arrangements to rent the public schools in nearby South Norfolk for less than three dollars a month per student. The T.E.F. had found a powerful ally in William J. Story, Jr., the South Norfolk School Superintendent and a member of the State Board of Education; Story had agreed to start his city's schools one hour earlier so that the buildings could be cleared by 2 P.M. for the T.E.F.'s private schools. The group's major effort, however, focused upon a day school to be operated at Bayview Baptist Church; other buildings across the city would be utilized as the need for more facilities arose.<sup>7</sup>

In spite of its optimism, the T.E.F. faced an enormous logistical problem in its effort to provide private replacements for even half of the city's closed secondary institutions. Norfolk employed a whole staff of school administrators, supervisors, principals, and teachers to struggle with just the sort of transportation, textbook, personnel, guidance, curriculum, accounting, and property maintenance problems that awaited the handful of paid staff members and volunteer committees at the T.E.F. This shortcoming was continually paraded before the public by Lenoir Chambers and the editorial staff of the Virginian-Pilot:

Substitute private schools are by their very nature "inferior education". . . . [They would] be hurriedly makeshift, even if adequate teachers, adequate facilities, or accreditation

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<sup>7</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 12 September 1958.

could be found . . . . providing public education is the duty of the American government.<sup>8</sup>

Even if the public had been willing to overlook the administrative shortcomings of the T.E.F., their ambitious plans to replace the closed, integrated public secondary schools with a private system of segregated academies were crushed by forces that had been up to now only incidental to the struggle.

One of the first such blows came before the schools had even closed: there were early indications that certain religious denominations which could have served potentially as both a power base and alternative source of educational facilities for the forces of Massive Resistance, were instead solidly aligned against school closings. The Catholic Church was among the first to speak on the national level in urging compliance with the dictates of the U. S. Supreme Court; locally, Norfolk Catholic High and its feeder parochial elementary schools had been successfully integrated for a number of years. Six Black graduates were preparing that year to march for the first time in Norfolk Catholic's commencement exercises.

One other religious group, the Jewish community, stood at the forefront of those who acted at every level in opposition to the closings of public schools. The historically strong Jewish belief in the importance of public education

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<sup>8</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 September 1958.

was a sustaining force behind the Committee for Public Schools and other efforts on the part of individuals to oppose Massive Resistance; leaders in the Jewish community, however, feared retaliatory actions taken against them as a minority if they assumed, as a group, any public role in the conflict, and they were effective in quashing any public statement on the part of synagogues or other established Jewish groups.<sup>9</sup>

The big break in the battle against Massive Resistance came when the Protestant denominations began openly to align their forces against those who sought to dismantle public education. The first step came in the summer of 1958, when the Norfolk Presbytery voted nearly unanimously to support the dictates of the federal courts; additionally, the Presbytery cautioned its member churches against allowing their facilities to be used for alternative private school classes, even if the public schools were actually closed.<sup>10</sup> Other Protestant denominations, including the Lutherans and the bishops of the Episcopal Church, quickly followed suit with similar instructions for their congregations. Methodist and Baptist organizations had a more difficult time following through with similar strictures for their own churches; Bayview Baptist and a number of other Southern Baptist facilities figured strongly already in the

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<sup>9</sup>Jane Reif, Crisis In Norfolk, op cit., pp. 1, 9.

<sup>10</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 7 August 1958.

T.E.F.'s game plan of resistance. The Norfolk Ministerial Association, however, a Protestant organization largely in the control of Methodist and Baptist clergymen, acted courageously even when their individual churches were reluctant to act. The day after Norfolk's schools were closed, 66 of the city's 74 Protestant clergymen met to sign a statement requesting that city and state leaders take immediate steps to reopen them.<sup>11</sup> Next, the group sent representatives before Mayor Duckworth and the Council to repeat their request to reopen the schools on a local-option integrated basis.<sup>12</sup> The ministers, however, realized that they spoke as individuals, and not as official representatives of their church boards or their congregations, and many later faced increasing hostility from their churches as a result of their convictions. One Methodist leader, Dr. Edgar A. Potts, chairman of the Ministerial Association, faced immense personal hardship and abuse from the hands of his church board and congregation; others saw their assignments cut short and their careers jeopardized because of their actions.

At any rate, the ministers found themselves aligned with another even more vocal professional group in their effort to reopen the public schools. Although several teachers were active in the formation of the Committee for

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<sup>11</sup>Reif, pp. 9, 10.

<sup>12</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 1 October 1958.

Public Schools, as a group Norfolk educators resisted efforts to take a public stand before schools were actually closed. Attorneys for the School Board successfully persuaded the Norfolk Education Association not to make any statement that might put them in conflict with the city's political leadership; instead, the N.E.A. unanimously passed a resolution which affirmed its full backing of the School Board and its efforts to comply with the federal courts,<sup>13</sup> a statement which only indirectly hinted at its antagonism against Massive Resistance. After the schools were closed, the N.E.A. voted by a better than five-to-one majority to petition the City Council to reopen the closed schools under local authority (i.e., without state funding) on an integrated basis, if necessary.<sup>14</sup> Individual teachers then joined with the more active of the city's ministers to establish private tutoring groups in a number of private homes and churches, not as substitutes for public schools, but rather to prepare students for reopened schools. As many as 3,500 students were eventually involved in these "parlor schools" that included facilities at 23 churches across the city.<sup>15</sup>

School authorities and Education Association officials quickly became concerned that these "parlor schools" could

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<sup>13</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 September 1958.

<sup>14</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 3 October 1958.

<sup>15</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 13 October 1958.



degenerate into replacements for public schools, and thus accomplish the same end as the T.E.F. proposal. Additionally, they feared that support for public school teachers, who were still receiving full pay at state expense,<sup>16</sup> would wane if educators were discovered making money as a result of the school crisis.

A survey by the Virginian-Pilot found that many teachers served the informal tutoring groups without pay and that the maximum salary appeared to be about \$150 a month. The N.E.A. accordingly adopted a resolution that recommended a salary of only \$50 a month for this extra work. The Education Association made sure that the public understood its resolve to close these informal tutoring groups as soon as the public schools opened, regardless of whether or not the schools opened on an integrated basis.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the N.E.A., in an effort to put pressure on the city's elected officials, voted to withdraw from the stopgap schools at the end of the semester, even if schools were not yet open. The N.E.A. feared that its members' efforts to continue teaching even during the school crisis might tend to make parents complacent, and thus less prone to push for quick reopening of the closed schools.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 2 October 1958.

<sup>17</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 6 November 1958.

<sup>18</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 October 1958.

Individually the teachers struck an even more direct blow at the forces of Massive Resistance. Efforts by the Tidewater Education Foundation to informally recruit public school teachers for its private facilities were continually rebuffed by the School Board, the School Administration, and the teachers themselves. Finally, out of desperation, T.E.F. President James G. Martin, IV, went to the Mayor for help. Duckworth intervened and assured the T.E.F. an audience with the teachers;<sup>19</sup> Norfolk's out of work educators listened quietly while Martin made his pitch for their help. Then, one by one, they quietly left the auditorium; only one of the 450 stayed behind to sign up. Governor Almond's pronouncement that teachers could still draw full state pay while teaching private school classes failed to produce converts among the city's professional educators;<sup>20</sup> they were determined in their resolve to resist any effort that might undermine the public school system. The one teacher who stayed behind stated that she was "just curious" to hear the rest of the T.E.F.'s offer; she, too, refused to sign on as a recruit.<sup>21</sup>

The teachers' unanimous rejection of the T.E.F.'s employment proposal was a bitter defeat for that organization, the Defenders, and all those state politicians who

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<sup>19</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 January 1959.

<sup>20</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 12 October 1958.

<sup>21</sup>Reif, p. 6.

avored Massive Resistance. Even Mayor Duckworth, because he had so greatly committed himself by granting the T.E.F. an amicable audience before the teachers, felt personally rebuked by their defiant walkout.<sup>22</sup> The Tidewater Educational Foundation resolved to go forward with its plans anyhow, hoping to start small but pick up teacher support as the crisis continued. A handful of retired school teachers, fundamentalist ministers, and bored housewives were recruited to serve as their temporary educational staff. Late in October, more than a month after the public schools had actually closed, the T.E.F. opened its Tidewater Academy with only six instructors and less than 60 students; plans for expansion of its facilities at Bayview Baptist Church were contingent only upon its ability to find additional qualified teachers.<sup>23</sup> Fewer than 1,000 students accepted the T.E.F.'s invitation to attend night classes in South Norfolk;<sup>24</sup> for the great majority of those students who wished to continue their education in spite of the school closings, the tutoring groups led by their former teachers offered the only acceptable alternative. Norfolk teachers, by unanimously rejecting the financial rewards that would accompany a defection to the T.E.F., had almost single-handedly destroyed any chance that the Defenders, Mayor

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<sup>22</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 January 1959.

<sup>23</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 October 1958.

<sup>24</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 October 1958.

Duckworth, or the Byrd Organization could ever make Massive Resistance work in the city.<sup>25</sup>

With the tutoring groups in full session, Norfolk's secondary students had an appropriate forum through which they could remain permanently in the public eye, constantly reminding the city's leaders that they intended to stick with the concept of public education no matter what might be the political cost in shattered traditions. Most students tried to remain visible in their school clubs and related activities, just as if the schools themselves had never closed: football teams played a full schedule that fall before the usual complement of parents, cheerleaders, students, and onlookers; marching bands continued to play on, even though their uniforms and instruments were still locked inside the school buildings; Granby High wrestlers continued individually to dominate the state competition, even though they were barred from participation as a team. From the very first school leaders all across the city took up the cry of "School At Any Cost" and put it in the form of petitions--"not as segregationists or integrationists, but as students who want an education, we ask you to please keep our schools open"--rallies,<sup>26</sup> banners,<sup>27</sup> and letters to

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<sup>25</sup>Robert H. Mason.

<sup>26</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 September 1958.

<sup>27</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 September 1958.

the Mayor,<sup>28</sup> each time drawing attention to their desire to reject substitute segregationist academies in favor of a continued hope for a return to public education.

The strong outpouring of support shown by parents for the tutoring group concept indicated that the mothers and fathers of those students also preferred to wait for the public schools to reopen, even if integration were present; for them, tutoring at the hands of qualified educators, even without the proper facilities or necessary textbooks available, was much preferable to sending their children to unaccredited private institutions with uncertified personnel. These parents, however, found it difficult to express any form of united expression of their sentiments. Two years earlier, as a part of their program to sap the vitality from the pro-school movement, the Defenders had taken control of the Norfolk City Council of Parent-Teachers Associations,<sup>29</sup> and then successfully defended that takeover from moderates hoping to dilute the P.-T.A.'s "hardline" segregationist stance.<sup>30</sup> W. I. McKendree, president of both the Defenders and the P.-T.A. Council, led a move to disband the individual P.-T.A. units at the closed schools in order to further dilute parental opposition to the Defender's Massive Resistance plans. The wrangling that took place between the

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<sup>28</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 26 September 1958.

<sup>29</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 30 March 1957.

<sup>30</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 16 March 1957.

segregationist officers and the pro-school parents erupted at every school P.-T.A. across the city, and in all but one case, the parents eventually forced some sort of statement in favor of reopening the closed schools,<sup>31</sup> but not before the struggle had taken a heavy toll in terms of both time and energy. On that score at least the Defenders had effectively blocked off any channel of united opposition, successfully stifling both the timing and the mechanism for such a response.

For those who still hoped to mount some sort of citizen lobby in support of keeping the schools open, the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools appeared to be the only logical alternative remaining. Rebuffed in their efforts to attract Silkstocking backing, the Committee had redoubled its efforts to recruit the ministers, the teachers, the student leaders, the parents, and the other school patrons who seemed more willing to speak out. Within a week after its formation was publicly announced, the Committee had been able to announce over 3,000 supporters committed to "non-violent means to insure a peaceable transition to desegregated education."<sup>32</sup> This group, although large enough in size to rival the more established Defender's organization and thereby claim a legitimate position in the public eye, was hardly powerful enough to influence the outcome of the

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<sup>31</sup>Reif, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 September 1958.

crisis through sheer numbers alone. Even after it had opened a downtown headquarters, passed out handbills on street corners, run newspaper advertisements, deluged public officials with correspondence, and politicked in every conceivable fashion,<sup>33</sup> the Committee had only managed to double its size to 6,000 members<sup>34</sup>--hardly enough to dodge its integrationist stereotype, a label that destroyed any effectiveness it might have had as a pressure group.

A similar fate had befallen each of the groups that had attempted to speak out against Massive Resistance. Once Norfolk's schools were actually closed, the impetus for public action seemed to fade in the inertia of the general "wait-and-see" attitude that gripped the people. In this climate of public apathy, any group that broke the silence to speak out must, of necessity, be extremist, and it thereby cut itself off from the citizens it hoped to lead. The ministers had spoken out bravely in favor of compliance with the court and against church support for private academies, but without the power of their congregations behind them, they could no longer speak for the city's religious community. In their unanimous rejection of the T.E.F., Norfolk's teachers had acted courageously, but by establishing their own private tutoring groups they were accomplishing in large measure what the Defenders had sought

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<sup>33</sup>Reif, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 22 October 1958.

to establish: a segregated alternative to integrated public schools. The tutoring groups that had sprung up in private homes, church buildings, and empty store fronts were actually contributing in a large part to the apathy of the parents and the students themselves. The general public tended to overlook the crowded quarters, the shortage of textbooks, the total lack of libraries and supportive materials, audio visuals, laboratories, maps, and the like, and saw instead the makings of an even finer education for their children--they witnessed instead a classroom situation that consisted of only a small number of motivated students, dedicated teachers, and a high degree of individual attention. These were educational commodities that could only be found among the most expensive and exclusive private preparatory schools, and now everywhere across the city they could be found for less than fifty dollars a month.<sup>35</sup>

Parents began to see how much their children were learning in spite of the makeshift quality of such institutions, and a very real danger existed that they would now decide that maybe private schools were better after all. Leaders of student groups and parent organizations who still favored public education at any cost found that they could not be heard as long as the tutoring groups remained in operation; their best efforts to rally support produced only hollow resolutions that lacked the backing of the large body of

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<sup>35</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 17 November 1958.



public school students, parents, and patrons who had the greatest stake in continuing universal public education.

In Norfolk no one had as yet been forced to pay the price for closing the public schools. The Virginian-Pilot continued to hammer away editorially at the long-term economic disaster that awaited the city--loss of industry, naval ship reassignments, rejection by business prospects, forfeiture of major shipyard contracts, and the like--but these were intangible expenses that had not yet hit home for the average citizen. The Pilot went on to estimate that the minimum cost of operating a public school system in the city without state funding and control would mean at least a one-third rise in local real estate taxes and a concomitant drop in federal impact aid funds<sup>36</sup> (which were still channeled through the state government before being routed to the city). As long as tutoring groups continued, however, with their primary form of subsidy coming from the state's obligation to honor the teaching contracts of the instructors in the closed schools, the more direct costs of rising taxes and increased local support for education seemed distant and unreal. As long as no one had to pay directly for Massive Resistance, the great majority of Norfolk's citizens remained silent and aloof from the struggle, preferring instead to allow others to incur the risks inherent in active participation.

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<sup>36</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 16 October 1958.

In this atmosphere of public malaise, the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools saw little hope for success if it operated as just another local pressure group; instead it vowed to seek other means through which to reopen the closed schools. With its effectiveness compromised on the local level, it turned its attention toward convincing state and national leaders. A delegation from the Committee talked with Governor Almond and urged him to return the closed schools to local control. The Committee's audience with the Governor, although unsuccessful in its stated aim, did point the way to an even more effective course of action. The Governor's response that only the courts could reopen the closed schools,<sup>37</sup> strengthened the Committee's resolve to add class action litigation to its rapidly diminishing arsenal. The Committee hoped to obtain a Norfolk attorney for their suit, but quickly discovered that no local lawyer was willing to risk his livelihood in such a venture. With much reluctance, the Committee turned to outside sources, and finally induced Edmund D. Campbell of Arlington to take the case; once the certainty of the suit was assured, local attorney Archie Boswell agreed to associate with Campbell in the Committee's behalf. On October 27 (1958), a class action suit was filed in federal court on behalf of the Committee for Public Schools; the suit named Governor Almond, the School Board, and others as defendants in its

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<sup>37</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 October 1958.

efforts to reopen the schools.<sup>38</sup> The suit was filed on behalf of 33 white parents and their children (a total of 89 plaintiffs),<sup>39</sup> but realtor Ellis James took the biggest risk in lending his name to the proceedings. The state was already testing the legality of the school closing in Harrison v. Day, a "friendly" suit filed in the Virginia Supreme Court,<sup>40</sup> but James v. Almond, the Committee suit, went far beyond this rather limited action. The plaintiffs in James v. Almond claimed in federal court that the closing of Norfolk's six previously all-white secondary schools had deprived them of equal protection of the laws guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>41</sup>

The sudden shift of the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools into the field of litigation obviously caught the N.A.A.C.P. off guard. The N.A.A.C.P. was quick, however, to realize the historic significance of the action: James v. Almond was the first lawsuit of its kind to be filed by white litigants in the South. If the Committee was willing to take the lead with this sort of intensive legal action, the N.A.A.C.P. would trust them enough to withdraw its own

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<sup>38</sup>Reif, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 16 January 1959.

<sup>40</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 October 1958.

<sup>41</sup>Edmund D. Campbell and Archie L. Boswell, Brief for Appellee, United States Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit, No. 7848 (James v. Almond), Norfolk Committee for Public Schools files, Old Dominion University Archives.

litigation to a secondary position. When its own suit was filed a few days later, it was entered only as companion litigation to the Committee's action.<sup>42</sup>

On another score, however, the N.A.A.C.P. was unwilling to back off, even during the height of the crisis: it refused to let up on its quest to enlist new transfer applicants for the 1959-60 school year. The N.A.A.C.P. was thus signaling its intention to keep up the long-term legal pressure to desegregate Norfolk's schools, thereby refusing to negotiate any sort of token settlement short of integration. Duckworth and the Council, however, were redoubling their own efforts to force the Black community to withdraw the 17 pending transfer applicants. At one Council session Duckworth turned to a group requesting the reopening of schools and stated, "If you gentlemen want to help, you could talk to the fifteen families of the seventeen Negro children and try to get them to withdraw . . . . Then we could open these schools tomorrow."<sup>43</sup> Councilman Abbott then stated the Organization's position, "In other words, we've got seventeen Negro children who are keeping 10,000 white children out of school." Duckworth followed by laying most of the blame on the N.A.A.C.P., and said he felt that they:

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<sup>42</sup>Reif, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 1 October 1958.

. . . did not truly represent Norfolk's colored population. The City has demonstrated what Norfolk's colored people mean to it by spending millions on slum clearance and schools, yet Negroes here pay less than five per cent of the taxes and make up seventy-five per cent of the jail population.<sup>44</sup>

The Mayor's unfortunate repetition of these inflammatory sentiments--a similar remark back in June had rallied the Black community behind its more extreme leadership in the N.A.A.C.P.--reveals a lot about both his famed intemperance and the sense of helplessness he felt in the crisis. It also demonstrates a fatal flaw in the Mayor's thinking that tended to view complex issues in their most simplistic terms, especially casting the people behind those issues in the role of either supporters or detractors. For Duckworth there was no middle ground--no way to be both independent on principle but supportive on the issues--and this made it all the more difficult for the School Board and other leaders in the community to take a stand before the Mayor had publicly committed himself one way or another. Duckworth, although he was an excellent leader, was a poor coalition builder, and the fact that he had achieved up to now a broad base of support in the white community was more a result of his forcefulness than any diplomatic bent. For their own part the Black community refused this time to be goaded by his remarks; those who were frustrated by the school closings

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

had not yet found a suitable target for their enmity, and the city's Black leadership did not want to challenge the Mayor in a name-calling contest that might further jeopardize the tenuous racial harmony that still generally prevailed. The Mayor probably would have been delighted to have such sharply defined antagonists, but except for the N.A.A.C.P.'s new litigation, the city's Black leadership seemed perfectly content to pull back from the struggle then going on in the white community. One of their most promising efforts in this regard was an attempt to focus the attention of their own constituency upon efforts to prepare the 17 Black transfer students for the realities of integrated classrooms. The Black community started a separate tutoring group for these "pioneers" and spared no effort in their attempt to prepare them for the challenges of the future. The curriculum, taught by a bi-racial staff, covered more than just the necessary academic subjects: the students were coached in dress, poise, etiquette, psychological preparation, self defense, and a whole host of other skills that would make for a smooth transition to integrated schools.<sup>45</sup> Mrs. W. T. Mason, chairman of the project, told the students, "When you sought entrance to white schools, you left your childhood behind."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Women's Council on Inter-Racial Cooperation, "How Norfolk's Closed Schools Were Reopened," panel discussion, Norfolk, February 25, 1959.

<sup>46</sup>Reif, p. 25.

When Norfolk's public schools were first closed back in late September, each of several groups--the Committee for Public Schools, church and ministerial associations, school teachers, student leaders, and parent organizations--tried valiantly but unsuccessfully to arouse the sort of community reaction required to prompt a speedy reopening. Each group failed, not so much because their own actions were meaningless or by themselves unsuccessful, but because the public refused to budge from the shelter of its complacency. As the weeks of closed schools wore on into late October, even these tiny voices of activism in opposition to Massive Resistance subsided. The public grew more and more restless, yet it lacked a target upon which to focus. As the weeks of closed schools continued, the attention of the public began to shift away from Massive Resistance and the petty competition for popular support among its activist organizations; instead it began to focus on the more subtle clash of values in the political arena. Massive Resistance was not dead in Norfolk, but the decision of the school teachers to open their own tutoring groups had managed to forestall the hard choices the citizens would eventually have to make. Now, however, other groups had decisions thrust upon them that would bring them more and more into the focus of the controversy. Neither the School Board nor the Council had wanted Norfolk's schools closed, and both

had done everything in their power, sometimes even going beyond the authority of their office, to prevent the impasse that had developed. Differences that existed in the methodology of their separate approaches to the problem had earlier revealed some possible obstacles to continued harmony once the city's schools were actually closed, but by and large such differences were kept well hidden from the general public.<sup>47</sup> The School Board's fleeting act of bravery in defiance of the state's political hierarchy had all but gone unnoticed locally in the crush of events that followed. No one but the Southside's most rabid segregationists had really wanted martyrdom for the Board, and such a spirit of wanton self-sacrifice would have been required if its members were to seriously consider defying the federal court, thereby risking a jail term for contempt. The average citizen cared very little from whom the actual integration assignment orders had come, the federal courts, and not the School Board, would forever carry the blame. The Council, too, could have overlooked the Board's defiant initiative had not more public differences surfaced once the certainty of closed schools was assured.

A fundamental ideological disparity existed between the members of the Council and the School Board that made continued harmony between the two groups impossible once the future of the city's public schools was really threatened.

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<sup>47</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 January 1959.



The members of the Norfolk School Board ascribed to the theory that integrated public schools were better than no schools at all, and better even than any substitute system that could be offered in the private realm. To this end the Board proposed almost immediately that the City Council join it in petitioning the Governor to relinquish state control of the city's closed secondary schools. This was the one loop-hole in the state's Massive Resistance plan whereby a closed public school could reopen, albeit on an integrated basis. Local control, however, meant loss of state funding and a considerable increase in the local tax rate.<sup>48</sup> Thus observers were not surprised when the Council rejected the Board's plea,<sup>49</sup> and submitted instead an alternate plan of its own, requesting Governor Almond to reopen the closed schools on a segregated basis--something he obviously could not do without being in direct conflict with the authority of the federal government. Mayor Duckworth next devised a complicated scheme whereby the Governor would have to close only those grades actually under court orders to integrate; students in the unaffected grades could then be reassigned to other public schools in the city. Because Norfolk was then operating on a split-year system, with graduations in both January and May, Duckworth felt that the city could open the second semester (the "H" sections) of the eighth,

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<sup>48</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 16 October 1958.

<sup>49</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 January 1959.

ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades. Since Blacks had not been assigned to the twelfth grade, schools could have opened for seniors and the "H" sections--roughly 40% of the white students locked out of classes. Governor Almond and the state superintendent of schools quickly lined up the neighboring school systems of South Norfolk, Norfolk County, Portsmouth, and Princess Anne County to accommodate the remaining students in the "L" sections of each grade.<sup>50</sup> Although no one knows whether their opposition was based upon operational considerations, conscientious objections, or, as one press report indicated, legal grounds,<sup>51</sup> the Norfolk School Board apparently refused to participate, and the plan died without implementation.<sup>52</sup> Regardless of its reason, the Board's refusal to participate helped to increase the level of the conflict with the Mayor and the Council. The Board had felt all along that the people of Norfolk would not stand for closed schools, and that any proposal, such as this new bypass plan, that sought to either prolong the crisis or else shift the burden of closed

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<sup>50</sup>Mayor W. Fred Duckworth, Letter to Governor J. Lindsay Almond, 6 October 1958, Box 136 (Litigation, Norfolk: School Segregation, 1958), Executive Department papers of Governor J. Lindsay Almond, 1958-1962, Archives, State Library, Richmond.

<sup>51</sup>Such a plan probably would have constituted "separate treatment" of the students involved. Federal Judge John Paul had indicated in the Charlottesville and Warren County cases that "if the state is going to abandon public education, it must abandon it completely."

<sup>52</sup>Christian Science Monitor, 8 October 1958.

schools from a community responsibility to an isolated hardship destroyed their goal of providing quality public education.<sup>53</sup>

Mayor Duckworth found himself torn somewhere between the School Board's desire for segregated public education and the Organization's demand to make Massive Resistance work. He was too pragmatic a politician to think that those 17 Black students would somehow taint the education of the 10,000 whites locked out of their classrooms, but he was also too savvy to attempt to oppose the Organization on its best issue in decades. The School Board, however, represented a very powerful portion of his own personal coalition of businessmen and Byrd Machine backers, and its sentiments in favor of public education very probably accurately expressed the sentiments of the majority of the business community. The School Board and the editorial writers of the Virginian-Pilot probably represented the still private concerns of the Silkstocking community, more than even Duckworth would have cared to admit. Thus the Mayor was faced with the first real conflict within the harmony coalition since its formation eight years earlier. Although he had shown a great deal of racial intolerance in both his remarks and his policies, Mayor Duckworth was above all else a sharp politician, and the Organization had already shown that race-baiting was good politics. He had not overtly

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<sup>53</sup>Francis Crenshaw.

committed himself to promoting the Organization's Massive Resistance plan, only to giving the Defenders a fair hearing in the absence of public schools; to do otherwise, in light of the Defender's past record of electoral appeal, would have been bad politics.

The public was probably unaware of the full ramifications of Duckworth's dilemma, but they were knowledgeable enough to know that the Mayor was the key to any resolution of the current crisis: both the School Board and the Massive Resisters needed his support to prevail. The School Board's request that the Council join it in petitioning the Governor to return the schools to local control brought this behind-the-scenes conflict to the forefront of public attention. Local control meant public schools, but it also meant integration; a denial of the Board's request would prolong the school closing and promote Massive Resistance. The political risks of joining the Board in its petition were enormous: it meant bowing to the N.A.A.C.P., the federal courts, and the Committee for Public Schools; it meant forfeiting forever the support of both the Defenders and the Old Guard of the Organization; if the appeal were successful and schools were reopened without state funding, the Mayor would be personally responsible for a huge increase in local taxes; and finally, such an act would place the Mayor far beyond any course of action that the public had as yet indicated it would approve. To deny the

Board's request, however, would risk provoking the ire of the School Board, the patrons of the public schools, the editors of the Virginian-Pilot, and probably the Silkstocking element of the business community. Seen in this context, the Mayor's attempt to avoid the question by calling upon the Governor to reopen the closed schools on a segregated basis comes as no surprise. The Mayor's bypass plan was just another smoke screen tactic to stall the issue, but the decision would not go away; the School Board and the Virginian-Pilot continued to press the question, firm in their resolve to use every opportunity to witness for public education. The fact remains, however, that the issue was not as clear-cut as the Board made it appear: once the Council joined it in petitioning the Governor to return the schools to local control, nothing guaranteed that the Governor would then honor their request. State law was just vague enough on the point that the Governor was under no obligation to make any response at all. If this were so, then the School Board was urging a course that might potentially isolate the Mayor and the Council from their coalition of support, divide the community, and then make them appear ineffective for attempting such a futile gesture. The simplest solution to their dilemma would be for the Governor to indicate ahead of time that he would refuse any such request for local control, but when a delegation of local officials sought a preliminary indication of his

disposition, the Governor "just grinned."<sup>54</sup> Almond was also too good a politician to commit himself and risk alienating his own coalition of supporters.

Mayor Duckworth, however, had discovered another solution, and one that would not only legitimately stall the issue for at least another month, it would also take him permanently off the hook: he would let the people decide the question in an informational referendum. The Mayor, in announcing the Council's decision to delay action on the School Board's request until after the referendum, explained his rationale:

. . . such a referendum is a prerequisite to any city action on the current school crisis . . . . Governor Almond was elected by an overwhelming majority to do exactly what he has done [i.e., close the schools faced with integration]. I think the only way to impress the Governor is to let the same voters show him what they want done now.<sup>55</sup>

His emphasis on "the same voters" was part of the brilliance of the tactical ploy: since this was an off-year for elections in the state, the referendum would come at a time when only 46,000 individuals--less than a fourth of the city's adult population--had their poll taxes paid up to date; nor was there any time to either register new voters or to allow delinquent accounts to be brought up to date.

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<sup>54</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 October 1958.

<sup>55</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 October 1958.

The question was to be put to the same conservative and established electorate that had given a two-to-one mandate to Governor Almond and Massive Resistance the year before. Secondly, since the referendum "was purely informational in nature, "the vote would not decide anything; the Council would be free at any time to disregard the outcome if it felt so inclined.<sup>56</sup>

The Organization was clearly the beneficiary of the Mayor's decision: their constituency would be the ones who would decide the issue; less than a sixth of the voters would be Black;<sup>57</sup> Navy personnel and others new to the area would be disenfranchised by the poll tax and pre-registration requirements, and the short time frame would not allow the pro-school forces an opportunity to mount much of a campaign of opposition. Further, it put the School Board, the Committee for Public Schools, the editors of the Virginian-Pilot, and the school patrons in the unenviable position of having to oppose both the Mayor and the concept of popular democracy. The School Board, realizing that it had been outflanked by the maneuver, attempted to pull back from a clash with the Organization: it refused to attack either the Council or the referendum, and instead chose only to complain about the additional 30-day delay inherent in the straw vote procedure. In an editorial entitled "In

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<sup>56</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 October 1958.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

Principle, Wrong; In Practice, Confusing" the Virginian-Pilot eloquently expressed the frustrations that the Board chose only to vent in private:

[The referendum tactic] demonstrates an unwillingness to exercise the leadership in city government which Norfolk has learned over the years to expect as the mark of councilmanic duty and obligation. It runs directly counter to the views and formal recommendations of the Norfolk School Board, [and] thereby digs a deep and ominous chasm between these two bodies . . . resort to it is not municipal statesmanship. It is refusal to face unpleasant but unavoidable facts.<sup>58</sup>

Lawyers for the Committee for Public Schools were even more direct in their attempt to expose the ploy: "The referendum is a device to get Council off the hook. I know it's a hot potato . . . They don't want to stand up and be counted."<sup>59</sup> The vote and the closed electorate were, however, only a part of the overall plan: Duckworth and the Norfolk City Council wanted to make sure that the voters--their constituency--would have to face the same tough decision that the School Board demanded. When the final version of the proposition was drafted, the actual question was weighted with the code phrase "Integrated Basis as required by the Federal Court" that would make a clear-cut decision difficult:

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<sup>58</sup>reprinted from Reif, p. 17.

<sup>59</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 12 November 1958.



Shall the Council of the City of Norfolk, pursuant to State Law, petition the Governor to return to the City control of schools, now closed, to be opened by the City on an Integrated Basis as required by the Federal Court?<sup>60</sup>

Voters were to check "For Petitioning the Governor" or "Against Petitioning the Governor," but the decision did not stop there. Also on the ballot was a section labeled "For Information Only, Not To Be Voted On:"

In the event the closed schools are returned to the City of Norfolk, and are re-opened Integrated by the City, it will be necessary, because of the loss of State Funds, for every family having a child or children in Public Schools from which State Funds are withheld, to pay the City a substantial Tuition for each child in or entering such Public Schools.<sup>61</sup>

The pro-school advocates who had hoped to rally voter support in favor of opening the closed schools now found that task impossible: the time frame was too short to mount an effective campaign; the electorate was too closely allied with the Organization; and the question was now both too confusing and too emotionally charged for voters to make a meaningful choice. The loaded ballot meant that the opponents of Massive Resistance would first have to undertake a highly organized and well financed effort to re-educate the populace before they could tackle the issue

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<sup>60</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 6 November 1958.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

in the referendum. The teachers, the ministers, the Committee for Public Schools, the School Board, and even the editorial staff of the Virginian-Pilot were incapable of such a monumental undertaking.

The Committee for Public Schools saw how hopeless its task had become, and turned its efforts instead to legal actions that might block the referendum. Two suits were filed--one challenged the legality of such a purely informational action where no binding decision would be rendered; the other hoped to strike the "For Information Only" portion of the ballot on the grounds that the concept of charging tuition fees for public schools was contrary to state law--but both efforts were expeditiously struck down by the local and State Supreme Court justices.<sup>62</sup> The School Board must have also been frustrated by the Council's decision to weigh the question against their recommendation, for they apparently openly considered campaigning in favor of petitioning the Governor. Mayor Duckworth got word of the Board's intent, and publicly lectured them on the virtues of neutrality in such a heated question:

The Council is maintaining a "hands off" policy on the referendum. We don't have any idea of politicking one way or the other. I would like to suggest that the School Board do the same.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 November 1958.

<sup>63</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 22 October 1958.

School Board Chairman Paul Schweitzer tried to respond that "politics has never entered into the Board's decisions," but both of the city's newspapers picked up the tone of the exchange as an attempt to rebuke the Board and get them back into line.<sup>64</sup> Even though it backed down from its intent to campaign openly on the issue, the School Board still chose a course that was independent from the Mayor: instead it put itself on record as opposed to charging any form of tuition fee. Public schools are an essential community service, members reasoned, the cost of which must necessarily be borne by the entire public, and not just those who benefit directly. To the Mayor's charge that he was "politicking" with even this stance, Schweitzer answered, "I don't intend to be involved in politics. I intend to inform the public of the facts and let them make up their minds."<sup>65</sup> Board member Benjamin Willis, a Duckworth appointee thought to be the most conservative of the group, was even more contemptuous of the Mayor's attempt to silence their collective conscience; "I'll wear no man's muzzle," was his reply, "it is the School Board's duty to inject itself into the controversy."<sup>66</sup>

The referendum issue had left the members of the Norfolk School Board more isolated than ever before: they

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<sup>64</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 October 1958.

<sup>65</sup>Reif, p. 19.

<sup>66</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 30 March 1960.

were not quite at war with the Council and the city's political leaders, but they were certainly further out on the limb of opposition than any other group of successful businessmen had been in almost a decade. They were cut off as well from the rest of the business community: not a single financial or commercial leader of any note had been willing to join them, the teachers, the Ministerial Association, or the Committee in any action which might threaten the Organization's Massive Resistance program. Norfolk under Duckworth had always prided itself on the unanimity of its business and political leaders, and now the School Board threatened to disrupt that hard fought harmony in the middle of the most intense crisis that coalition had faced. The pressure on its members to remain quiet and play a receding role was intense,<sup>67</sup> but unanimously they rejected this course as a matter of conscience. They knew that the referendum would be a disaster for the closed schools; not because the concept of public education would be rejected, but rather because the election would only further delay the inevitable decision to comply. In the meantime the forces of Massive Resistance would have a chance to claim some sort of mandate--a unanimity of popular defiance that the Council obviously hoped would impress the federal courts and hasten their retreat. Instead the Board saw it as a futile gesture: the lesson of Little Rock was clearly that the

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

federal government had no intention of withdrawing. Still the Board hoped that by opposing only the references to tuition payments that they had chosen a moderate position somewhere between the two competing demands: they were not instructing the voters to vote "For" integrated schools, but neither were they advocating a decision "Against" the concept of public education. In reality they were attempting to be true moderates on an issue in which there could be no moderation, and each step they took brought them closer to the moment of choice between further confrontation or compliance. School Board member Benjamin Willis thought that the Board should resign and abandon its collision course--"I feel the School Board has served its usefulness," he said, but Chairman Paul Schweitzer was more philosophic: "You follow the detour, take the bumps, and hope that you'll soon be back on the good road again."<sup>68</sup>

At any rate the six individual members of the Norfolk School Board seemed willing to risk both their political futures and their business ventures over what each must have felt was a matter of conscience. Each had personal reasons for choosing this independent course, but all six were obviously sustained by a common and overriding belief in the merits of public education, and in a way each provided a powerful, living testimony to that ideal. Paul Schweitzer, the chairman and most visible spokesman for the

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<sup>68</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 January 1959.

Board, possessed the least formal, but perhaps the most valuable educational experience. Schweitzer had grown up on a ranch in Arizona, where most of the farmhands in the community were Mexicans; although he never attended college, he had, in his own words, experienced an "integrated" education: "My sister and I were the only gringos in that little one-room schoolhouse . . . it was a lonely experience."<sup>69</sup>

Board member W. Farley Powers was born and raised in a log house in the impoverished coal mining counties of Virginia's Southwest; hard work and a solid devotion to learning had been his only escape from the deprivation that surrounded him.<sup>70</sup> William Ballard had grown up in an equally impoverished Eastern Shore region of the State where he was employed by the family fish and oyster packinghouse. After working his way first through high school and then college, he returned to raise the family business into one of Tidewater's leading employers.<sup>71</sup> Ben Willis, too, had been forced to work his way up from the loading docks of the family business, and although, as the heir to his father's posh furniture salon, his upbringing had been much more typical of the rest of Norfolk's business and social elite, he owed his fortitude and personal philosophy to something his father had taught him: "There are two things you cannot

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<sup>69</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 16 February 1960.

<sup>70</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Star, 22 December 1972.

<sup>71</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Star, 1 September 1964.

compromise--principle and equality."<sup>72</sup> Francis Crenshaw, probably the most worldly of the six, brought an equally important perspective to the Board: growing up as the son of a Navy captain, he had lived in most of the port cities on both the East and West Coasts, and had actually attended integrated schools in New England.<sup>73</sup> Mrs. Mildred Dallas, the only woman on any of the city's major boards and commissions, was also the only educator in the group. Although she had finished a successful career as an executive with one of the downtown automobile agencies, she had retired to establish her own private kindergarten in the fashionable Lochaven section of the city.

Thus, although they shared a common background in the center of the city's civic and business elite, all six members of the Norfolk School Board evidenced a profound commitment to concepts of equality and public education--a conviction strong enough to endure the sense of helplessness and isolation they now faced. Although publicly in favor of petitioning the Governor and privately opposed to even putting the decision to a vote, the School Board nevertheless backed away from openly campaigning on the issue--Mayor Duckworth's scolding had produced at least that much compliance--abandoning instead that cause to the Committee for Public Schools and the other zealots of the pro-school

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<sup>72</sup>Richmond Times-Dispatch, 3 February 1963.

<sup>73</sup>Francis Crenshaw; Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 29 May 1961.

movement. In spite of the fact that the odds were heavily stacked against them, the Committee still nursed vague hopes that Duckworth and the Organization had blundered by putting the issue to a vote: they hoped that the privacy and anonymity of the polling booth might allow for a surprising outpouring of support in favor of reopening the schools. It was a remote possibility, but the Committee nevertheless prepared 50,000 guide ballots, numerous handbills, and a massive newspaper advertising campaign to promote a vote "for" public schools. Even as they pushed legal efforts to block the loaded wording on the ballot, the Committee undertook its own "for information only" campaign, zeroing in on the potential economic disasters that lay ahead if schools remained closed; secondary themes included the warnings that the city's public school system would "be crippled for a generation" and that Norfolk's children were forfeiting "their American birthright of a free education."<sup>74</sup>

The Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties led the forces that urged a vote "against" the resolution--the Council remained true to its pledge to stay out of the contest once it had drawn up the ballot.<sup>75</sup> In one sense it was a classic struggle between the liberal Committee and the ultra-conservative Defenders, but the odds

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<sup>74</sup>From guide ballots, handbills, and newspaper advertisements, undated (November, 1958), Norfolk Committee for Public Schools files, Old Dominion University Archives.

<sup>75</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 November 1958.



were too heavily stacked against the resolution to make it either a meaningful contest or a fair fight. The wording on the ballot, the nature of the electorate, the short duration of the campaign, and the tacit opposition of the Organization all doomed the Committee's efforts to failure before they had even begun. The only surprise in the results was the paucity of the turnout: only 21,000 people--less than half of those eligible, and only a tenth of the city's adult population--showed up to cast a ballot in the most important electoral contest in a decade. The referendum to petition the Governor to reopen the closed schools lost by a healthy 3-to-2 margin, the same figure by which U. S. Senator Harry F. Byrd and Governor J. Lindsay Almond had defeated their recent anti-Organization opponents. Only 3,600 Black voters--still less than half of those eligible--turned out to help the pro-school forces; their presence, however, helped to dilute the harshness of the 2.5-to-1 rout that the Committee suffered in the white precincts.<sup>76</sup> Even so, the vote was much closer in the Silkstocking strongholds on the West Side than in the blue collar neighborhoods in the northern, eastern, and central portions of the city.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 19 November 1958.

<sup>77</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 November 1958.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## A VERY MASSIVE RESISTER

The people had spoken, or so it seemed; the message of their mandate was, however, indistinct. On the one hand, they appeared to endorse a continuation of the school closing strategy as a means to avoid federal pressures to integrate; on the other hand, they gave no indication of just how long they would support such tactics. The message was clouded by the fact that as yet no one had really suffered greatly from the closings: the establishment of tutoring groups and the heightened sense of community involvement and shared emergency had helped to mask the fact that the burden of Massive Resistance fell disproportionately upon the young, the poor, and the transient population not represented in the established electorate. The people had not, as spokesmen for the Defenders claimed, endorsed Massive Resistance: the tutoring groups themselves and the dismal patronage attracted by the T.E.F.'s offering of segregated private academies gave substantial testimony to the fact that Norfolk parents at least wanted the education of their children to continue in the public realm. If there was any significance at all to the election, and any meaning to the events that fall that preceded the contest, it was

that most citizens were still waiting for some sort of dramatic action that would resolve the crisis--the scenarios proposed by both the T.E.F. and the Committee for Public Schools were found unacceptable--and that most were hoping unrealistically for a return to segregated public education --the one option not available. In short, the people of Norfolk had not gone so far as the Governor surmised as to reject forever the idea of racially mixed schools;<sup>1</sup> they just were not prepared to accept them yet.

The one man who bore the heaviest responsibility for reading these auguries was Mayor W. Fred Duckworth, and both time and events were conspiring in such a way as to insure that his judgment of the referendum's relative importance would be clouded by other, largely political, considerations. Far from lessening the pressures upon him to act, however, the referendum had served instead to focus new attention upon his response, thereby helping to underscore his sense of helplessness in the face of outside forces. Governor Almond had already declared that he had "no weapons left" to forestall integration from future court orders,<sup>2</sup> and those around Duckworth saw this as an opportunity to promote his ascendancy. The referendum and the voters' support for the school closing policy was viewed positively by the state's political leaders, and Duckworth was fast

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<sup>1</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 20 November 1958.

<sup>2</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 4 January 1959.

becoming the chief beneficiary of such acclaim. One savvy political commentator summed up Norfolk's newly won respect among the state's conservative camp in this fashion:

A gleam has replaced the old suspicious look when you mention Norfolk in the politically potent domain called the Virginia Southside. It's because of a new feeling that Norfolk is not going to bow easily to school integration. And that gleam shows when the name of Norfolk's frank-talking mayor comes up. The word most often heard in describing his actions is that he has "guts."<sup>3</sup>

Increasingly the eyes of the state's political leaders began to turn away from the staid and passive elegance of the governor's office to the energy and dynamism of Norfolk's mayor; there was no question that they liked what they saw. Almond had won office by portraying himself as the brains behind Massive Resistance, but now it Duckworth who was seen as the guts, and his blunt-spoken "go-getter" image proved a sharp contrast to the rolling rhetorical rodomontade that characterized Almond's style. Almond appeared to be the consummate silver-haired patrician, the type Virginians had always sought for higher office, so it was ironic that now, in crisis, they should turn to Duckworth, the epitome in appearance of the urban political boss with his stocky, even pudgy, five-foot, ten-and-a-half-inch frame, replete with bright, intent eyes and jowly visage.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 January 1959.

<sup>4</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 5 September 1954.

Even his trademark, the ever present cigar and cigar holder, was more big city stoogie than the plantation havana of the gentile; he smoked three a day,<sup>5</sup> but unlit, all three did double duty as the maestro's baton of Duckworth's furious pace of action: "he thinks fast and calls the shots quickly--sometimes with a suddenness that is startling--"is how one reporter described him, going on to add that he "can snap with a voice which is some where (sic) between a bark and a bite." It was this very openness--"he's no diplomat, but he lays his cards on the table face up--"<sup>6</sup>that was now getting him attention from Virginia's most ardent segregationists: they sensed a steely harshness in his opposition to federal authorities that seemed lacking in Almond's calm demeanor. In short, Duckworth, not Almond, appeared now to be the politician who had the potential to emerge as the hero of Massive Resistance, and already his name was being bandied about by political insiders across the state as a possible contender for gubernatorial nomination.<sup>7</sup> Local Organization chieftain Billy Prieur had begun to cart him up to Winchester for regular sessions with Senator Byrd, reportedly both to underscore the importance of Norfolk's continued resistance and to explore the possibilities of advancing the Mayor's political career. For the first time

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<sup>5</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 5 September 1960.

<sup>6</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 5 September 1960.

<sup>7</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 January 1959.

Fred Duckworth himself was entertaining ambitions that stretched beyond municipal service, and he was eager to parlay this potential new statewide following into the Organization's nod for governor.<sup>8</sup>

All of this political speculation--as yet only the talk of insiders who thrive on such badinage--led Duckworth to misinterpret the results of the referendum as both a personal endorsement of his policies and a call to arms for further resistance. For the time being, however, the vote seemed to both solve all his present problems as well as to promote new opportunities: first, it relieved the Council of having to make any decision at all on the School Board's appeal for gubernatorial intervention; secondly, it seemed to mend a potential rift in his business/organization constituency by allowing the people, and not the politicians, to rebuke the School Board for entertaining thoughts of surrender; it had bought him time in which to establish that cool and rational citizen response to the crisis was possible; and finally, and perhaps most importantly, it had convinced the rest of the state of the solidarity of Norfolk's resistance to school integration, relieved the pressure from the Southside to overreact, and bought time in which to effect a purely local decision. Unfortunately personal ambitions and political pressures seemed to blind the Mayor to the beneficial escape-valve qualities of the

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<sup>8</sup>Pretlow Darden, Robert Mason, and others.

referendum, and led him instead to an overreaction in behalf of the cause of Massive Resistance. Mayor Duckworth possessed a marvelously analytical mind that was well suited to the rough and tumble realm of urban politics: he now sized up the situation in terms of potential obstacles, options, and sources of opposition, and then proceeded one by one to clear the obstacles and opposition from the path that blocked his choice of options.

Chief among those obstacles was the threat still posed by actions before the courts. It was not the Harrison v. Day "friendly" suit brought to test the legality of the state's laws, nor even a continuation of the N.A.A.C.P.'s integration litigation, that most observers feared; instead, the Committee For Public Schools' James v. Almond action appeared to be the challenge upon which the fate of Massive Resistance hinged; this entreaty, wholly unexpected by both Duckworth and the Organization, had Governor Almond and the legal experts concerned. Almond knew that the state could not continue to offer public secondary education to Black students in Norfolk, but not to whites, and that this challenge by white parents would ultimately sink the interposition logic of Massive Resistance. Duckworth, however, was not inclined to accept defeat so easily, and instead began to lay the groundwork for a plan that would undermine the Committee's action. At the first Council meeting after the referendum Duckworth proposed a "cut-off

of funds" clause in the School Board budget slated to begin January 1 (1959), thereby reserving for the Council the right to "change or cancel the unexpended portion" of school funds at any time during the year, even prohibiting specific expenditures if it wished. There were several reasons for such a ploy: first, it brought the independent-acting School Board more directly under Council's control by giving the Council the power of month-to-month approval of every facet of the School Board's budget.<sup>9</sup> The message to the Board was clear: Duckworth would not stand for any further rift in his political coalition, and any future independence would be immediately rendered useless by Council's new funding control. Secondly, the measure was in part designed to retaliate against the errant teachers who had undermined the Organization's Massive Resistance strategy. According to reports, Duckworth, who had personally intervened to set up the meeting, was still smarting from the teachers' rude rejection of the T.E.F.'s offer of employment. The funds cutoff move now gave the Council the power to directly jeopardize both the salary and the job security of the upstart teachers still under contract. When School Superintendent J. J. Brewbaker expressed his concern that the measure might hamper both current personnel and future recruitment efforts, "I hope we don't do anything to encourage teachers to look for other jobs--we have good

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<sup>9</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 November 1958.



teachers," Mayor Duckworth snapped, "With what some of them have done . . . I would have to disagree with you."<sup>10</sup>

These two retaliatory aspects of the funds cutoff measure were, however, only secondary to other more pressing considerations. With the added power, Council now directly controlled a potential solution to its legal dilemmas. In the event that the ruling in the Committee For Public Schools' James v. Almond suit went against the city, the Council could close the remaining white junior high as well as the city's Black junior and senior high schools, a move that would put Norfolk's case in uncharted legal waters. No court had yet ruled that a municipality was required to offer secondary education to its citizens; in fact, Virginia Attorney General Albertis S. Harrison had already ruled that the Supreme Court's Brown decision had struck down the entire state constitutional mandate to provide public schools at all, because the establishment of a public educational system was entirely conditional upon the schools being segregated.<sup>11</sup> The legal arguments in the James v. Almond case turned upon the fact that the city was providing public secondary schools for some and not all of its patrons; if the city were to close the remaining secondary institutions, the ploy would at the very least tie up the legal efforts to integrate the schools for several more

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<sup>10</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 January 1959.

<sup>11</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 8 November 1958.

years,<sup>12</sup> perhaps giving the Organization enough time to permanently salvage its Massive Resistance plan to substitute private, segregated academies for integrated public schools.

Closing the city's Black junior and senior high schools was at this time, at least, a last resort and only an ancillary aspect of the proposal. The major purpose of the clause was not to stand as a legal dodge, but rather to serve as the most formidable in a series of power plays designed to pressure the Black community into finally withdrawing their integration efforts. Up to now the School Board had been able to stand effectively as a buffer between the Mayor and the Black community, insulating the Black educational system from political reprisals. Now that the School Board had been short-circuited out of direct control of any portion of the city's school funding, the entire Black educational system was dangerously exposed to reprisals. Councilman Lewis Layton renewed the Mayor's call for a Black withdrawal from integration efforts, and was not above dangling the potent threat of such a fund cut-off as the new cutting edge of that demand. As if to back up that threat with immediate action, Council proceeded to slice \$200,000 from the budget of the Department of Public Welfare, the burden of which would fall disproportionately

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<sup>12</sup>A similar maneuver in Prince Edward County was not definitively broken until 1963. See Bob Smith, They Closed Their Schools, op cit.

upon the city's Black citizens. In spite of the Governor's response that he was opposed to such retaliatory measures, Duckworth wanted the Black community to know that this time he meant business: "The only way schools can reopen now is by getting the cooperation of the colored citizens."<sup>13</sup>

The Black community knew full well that the Mayor's threat was no idle bluff: he had both the inclination and the capacity to carry it out. "We could do nothing less in the light of the school referendum,"<sup>14</sup> was Duckworth's carefully worded analysis of the Council's authority to affect such a cutoff. The threat was real enough: unless the N.A.A.C.P. withdrew all legal efforts to integrate the city's schools, the Black community would be faced with at best a prolonged shutdown and, at worst, a permanent closing of its secondary school system and additional retaliatory encroachments upon its elementary schools. The enormous progress in Black education that had taken place in Norfolk in the twelve years since the People's group first took over the city government would now come to an abrupt halt, and was even in grave danger of retrogressing. Was the Black community willing to trade the future of an entire generation of its young people for the expanded educational opportunities of 17 youths? The Mayor was betting that they would not.

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<sup>13</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 November 1958.

<sup>14</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 14 January 1959.

The Mayor's fund cutoff proposal was a direct result of the lopsided referendum victory, a growing awareness of his own personal political aspirations for higher office, and an increase in the hostile attitudes of a few of the state's most powerful and most ardent segregationists. The referendum had helped to quiet much of the rabid rhetoric emerging from Virginia's Southside, but some overt and highly visible steps to preserve the legal facade of Massive Resistance seemed necessary to appease former Governor Bill Tuck and others who had been roused by the Virginian-Pilot's editorial policy and its continued coverage of the pro-school advocates. Duckworth had come under increasing pressure, in spite of his own growing personal popularity with these resisters, to prove that Norfolk was not a "hotbed of integrationists" as Tuck and his cohorts were charging.<sup>15</sup> The funds cut-off measure was designed in part to appease these sympathies, as well as to buy the city enough time to negotiate some sort of out-of-court settlement of the issue. Tuck and the rest of the Southside's Massive Resisters represented a powerful political force in the Organization--one with which even a Mayor lacking in ambition for advancement would have to deal in order to secure continued state funding for the tunnels, highways, bridges, institutions, and other projects that were so crucial to Duckworth's development desires--and they were

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<sup>15</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 November 1958.

not above threatening to cut off state funds earmarked for any political jurisdiction which bowed to court-ordered school integration: "If Norfolk won't stand with us, I say let them stand alone" was Tuck's philosophy.<sup>16</sup>

Within this context of threatened Southside retribution a minor incident took on even larger proportions in the Mayor's post-referendum posture of defiance. The plight of Norfolk's white secondary school students had begun to attract national media attention, and Duckworth heard that a C.B.S. film crew from Edward R. Murrow's "See It Now" series was in town to film a Committee for Public Schools' rally. Duckworth personally called School Board Chairman Paul Schweitzer to have the Board deny the Committee's rental permit to use public school buildings for its meetings.<sup>17</sup> The prospect of national coverage of a pro-school rally in a Norfolk public building was one that would have strong negative repercussions among the Southside's resisters. When the School Board, apparently caught off guard by the sudden order, asked for clarification, they were told that "the Council did not want the schools used by this or any other group discussing the problem of integration,"<sup>18</sup> and that the Council was merely expressing its "concern for the

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 November 1958.

<sup>18</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 26 November 1958.

safety of persons who might attend such meetings."<sup>19</sup> The Mayor was so determined to establish a new policy that excluded the Committee For Public Schools from the trappings of official sanction that he risked angering the local Defenders chapter which met regularly--in fact met the very week of his order--at Suburban Park Elementary School.<sup>20</sup> Even so, the policy apparently achieved its desired end: the rental fees were refunded, and the Committee was forced to scurry to secure private quarters for its rally, which was eventually held, greatly deflated by the sudden shifting of locations, at the Y.W.C.A.

The Mayor's quick action on both the funds cutoff measure and the pro-school rally so soon after the referendum--both moves were accomplished within a week of the voting--earned him accolades of praise from the Organization hierarchy and the Southside cheering section. Both actions not only point to how futile opposition to the Mayor had become, but also to just how long the crisis might continue. More and more Duckworth, and not Almond, appeared to be the man fully in charge of the situation, and the School Board, the teachers, the Committee For Public Schools, and the others who preached moderation realized just how little influence they had left in that corner: in attempting to convince the Mayor of the rightness of their cause, they had

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<sup>19</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 November 1958.

<sup>20</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 26 November 1958.

become his enemies, outcasts whom he sought every opportunity to harass and harangue. Moreover, no immediate end to the crisis appeared to be in sight: no movement could realistically occur until January, when the Council assumed control of the School Board's funding, the court cases were slated for resolution, the Black community would have to respond, the tutoring groups were scheduled to cease,<sup>21</sup> and the School Board threatened to resign if overruled on its opposition to the Mayor's funds cut-off proposal.<sup>22</sup> Norfolk had reached an interim period: the flurry of activity that followed the first weeks of closed schools had all but died away; closing the schools was no longer a novel approach to preventing integration--the doors had now been locked for more than three months, and the federal government showed no signs of the quick surrender promised by the proponents of Massive Resistance. Onlookers could not agree whether the citizens were really "complacent" or just "frustrated" by their lack of power to influence the outcome of the crisis,<sup>23</sup> but regardless of the true nature of their attitude, Norfolk was remarkably quiet for a city with 10,000 students out on the streets, and the future of both its public educational system and continued racial harmony at stake.

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<sup>21</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 October 1958.

<sup>22</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 January 1959.

<sup>23</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 October 1958.

In the air of official calm that prevailed, Norfolk's rumor mills worked overtime, helping to shift the focus of attention away from the political arena that was now involving a different cast of characters. Increasingly the focus of parents and civic leaders began to turn away from the student leaders towards a different type of student--not the ones who attended the tutoring groups, lead protests, or were active in school clubs and organizations. The citizens became more and more concerned that the effect of the school closings and the Lost Class of 1959 could be measured in terms of greater casualties than just classes missed, athletic competitions canceled, and college plans postponed: they feared that it could be tallied as well in the sudden upsurge of teenage unemployment, hostility, delinquency, crime, pregnancy, forced marriages, dropouts, and the like --the type of effects that have a more lasting impact upon the future of the community. Lenoir Chambers and the editorial staff of the Virginian-Pilot began to hammer away at this theme as well as the long-term economic ruin that lay ahead. Washington continued to sound ominous notes about the crisis' potential impact upon naval contracts, personnel assignments, and billeting arrangements--the Navy was obviously reluctant to make assignments to a community that lacked full public education--but these warnings seemed to go unheeded. Rumors spread about officers who had requested transfer, ships that had been reassigned,



development prospects frightened away, and the growing likelihood of Congressional retaliation.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of these dire warnings that the underpinnings of Norfolk's economy were severely threatened, the full impact of the school crisis had not yet hit the business community as had been predicted. Local business leaders and economic trends were still pointing as late as January of 1959 to a bright outlook and a rapid recovery from the national slump that characterized the later years of the Eisenhower administration.<sup>25</sup> Even so, elements within the business community never gave up their attempt to attract the old elements of the People's group to the pro-school camp. When efforts to add such leaders to its own organization failed, the Norfolk Committee For Public Schools attempted to establish an independent advisory board of community elites, but even this effort proved hopeless: only lawyer Archie Boswell, insurance broker L. Jerome Taylor, industrialist William L. Shepheard, City Park Commissioner Fred Heutte, artist Kenneth Harris, and gynecologist Mason C. Andrews enlisted in the organization. Other notable progressives in the community such as lawyer Henry E. Howell, Jr., and entrepreneur Albert Hofheimer refused to allow their names to be associated with even this

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<sup>24</sup>Reif, pps. 11-12, 21-22.

<sup>25</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 1 January 1959; 4 January 1959; 15 January 1959.

group.<sup>26</sup> In October lawyer Archie Boswell and School Board Chairman Paul Schweitzer joined with psychiatrist William F. Blair and Lewis W. Webb, Jr., provost of the junior college that was the precursor to Old Dominion University, in an effort to get the Norfolk Chamber of Commerce to take a positive stand opposing the school closings. After a stormy session that included discussion of the closings' impact upon the Navy and industrial recruitment efforts, the Chamber's Education Committee passed the resolution by a twelve-to-four vote. Dr. Herman M. Williams, Assistant School Superintendent, expressed the fears of the educators in attendance:

Frankly, I feel that secondary education in Norfolk is doomed. I feel that the leadership in the State of Virginia has never been behind public education; they have primarily supported private schools. That is the reason Virginia ranks 45th in education [out of 48 states].<sup>27</sup>

The Chamber, however, refused to act on the resolution, just as it had when Barfield's Civic Affairs Committee requested a similar response a month later. Barfield pleaded with the Chamber to take a stand "in this unprecedented civic disaster in order to furnish this community with the strong leadership and guidance it so urgently needs."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Reif, p. 5, and other sources.

<sup>27</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 October 1958.

<sup>28</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 17 January 1959.

Over and over again the editorial pages of the Virginian-Pilot echoed the theme that Norfolk's business leaders must put a stop to the school crisis, that it had gone on long enough, and that the city's future as a major naval base was threatened;<sup>29</sup> even so, not a single leader of the old People's group, not a single major corporate executive or civic leader, dared to take up the challenge. The only corporate voices that were heard came from outside the city, although some, like the president of the Norfolk and Western Railroad, former governor and president of the University of Virginia Colgate Darden (brother of Norfolk's former Mayor),<sup>30</sup> political leader Francis Pickens Miller,<sup>31</sup> and other statewide industrialists,<sup>32</sup> had a special relation-ship with the city. Only a young Frank Batten, publisher of the Virginian-Pilot and Ledger-Dispatch newspapers, was willing to travel from Norfolk to join with three dozen business leaders from across the state to meet with Almond and urge him to reopen the closed schools.<sup>33</sup> Most of the rest of Norfolk's business and civic establishment remained quiet on the issue, giving Duckworth

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<sup>29</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 17 January 1959 and 1 January 1959.

<sup>30</sup>Dabney, p. 537.

<sup>31</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 7 December 1959.

<sup>32</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 December 1958.

<sup>33</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 September 1990.

a free hand with which to negotiate with the Black community.

In spite of the fact that almost every element of the white populace stood poised against them--or at least seemed prepared to silently assent to the closing of their schools, too, in retaliation--the Black community refused to back down from their integration efforts: they were prepared to choose desegregated institutions over no schools at all.<sup>34</sup> Thus on January 13, 1959, Mayor Duckworth announced the intention of the Norfolk City Council to close down after February 1, all grades above the sixth--an additional 1,914 white pupils and 5,259 Black students would be locked out. A small band of ardent open-the-schools advocates made an emotional plea at the session for Council to "think it over" before taking this drastic step.<sup>35</sup> The editors of the Virginian-Pilot lamented that this was "the cruelest blow of all to the Norfolk public schools," and the executive board of the Norfolk Committee For Public Schools once again made an ardent plea for a show of support of public education from the Silkstocking community:

Community leaders and organizations should speak out [now] for a reopening of schools. The time has come for the business and civic leaders to take a public stand. So far the "First Citizens," the bank directors, the owners and executives of business and industry,

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<sup>34</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 11 December 1958.

<sup>35</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 14 January 1959.

the Chamber of Commerce, the Civic Clubs, and the great majority of professional men have not [yet] been heard from.<sup>36</sup>

Ironically the first crack in the wall of solidarity came not from any of these sources, but rather from within the Council itself. For the first time in the history of the crisis, a single councilman split from the pack and voted "No" to a Duckworth directive. Councilman Roy B. Martin, Jr., a Duckworth appointee with a six-year tenure, caused a ripple of surprise and then glee to break over the pro-school advocates; their pleas had been heard. Martin, a top executive with Foote Brothers food wholesalers, cited economic concerns as the reason for his opposition:

I sincerely feel we are headed for a definite backward step economically if we do not straighten out our school situation, not further impair it. My strong apprehension about the economic future of Norfolk impels me to vote "No."<sup>37</sup>

Years later Martin would indicate that it was the punitive nature of the measure, as much as the economic considerations, that made it objectionable: "It was stupid from my point of view to enlarge the problem by closing more schools."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 14 January 1959.

<sup>37</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot. 14 January 1959.

<sup>38</sup>Roy B. Martin, Jr.

The unofficial silence had at long last been broken, but there was no flood of Silkstocking sentiment to seize upon this opportunity for expression. The business community remained just as silent as before, failing even in this eleventh hour opportunity to back one of its own in an action of raw courage and seeming political suicide. Instead of serving as the rallying point for a groundswell of business opinion against the Mayor's retaliatory tack and in favor, at long last, of the principles of public education, Roy Martin stood as alone in moderation as the School Board had once found itself. "The middle of the road is a thin yellow line where you get hit from both sides," one political observer later noted,<sup>39</sup> and nobody felt that aphorism more keenly than Roy Martin.

Martin's vote, although a seemingly useless act of defiance that failed to stir an outpouring of Silkstocking support for reopening the schools, was not as suicidal as it may have first appeared. Martin, although at 37 the youngest member of the Council, was fast emerging as the one representative of the Duckworth coalition with his head closest to the ear of the people and his heart closest to the throb of the business community. The editors of the Virginian-Pilot were determined that his action not stand alone as an isolated incident, and therefore promoted the

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<sup>39</sup>Henry E. Howell, Jr., The Wit and Wisdom of Henry Howell (Norfolk: Howell for Governor Campaign, 1973).

apparent split in unprecedented news and editorial coverage for a single council vote. The pro-school advocates--the teachers, ministers, Committee For Public Schools, P.-T.A.'s and their sympathizers--who up to that point had carried the banner of opposition to Massive Resistance alone, took heart. If Martin was willing to risk his political career on a single vote, they figured, then he must have sensed some new surge of sentiment stirring from the populace. For this reason, they planned a flurry of activity, unmatched since the first weeks of the closings, to probe this new development.

The Virginian-Pilot, too, sensed the change, and attempted to crystallize the situation:

At present Norfolk may be likened to a bus coming down a narrow mountain road in the command of drivers who have misread the road map, neglected to read the warning signs, and who are cheered on by a group of front-seat passengers who don't know what they are doing . . . Norfolk's task would be difficult under any leadership . . . but the difficult task is horribly compounded when the leadership acts on vain and dangerous assumptions. There will be hope when--but only when--a lot of silent, unhappy people screw their courage to the sticking point and speak and act.<sup>40</sup>

The first shots in the new barrage were fired at a regular meeting of the Granby High School P.-T.A. Granby had now been closed four months, but suddenly 450 people jammed a standing-room-only meeting to demand a more vocal

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<sup>40</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 16 January 1959.

opposition to the Mayor's school closing plan. The result was the first resolution by a Norfolk group opposing the retaliatory measure against the city's Black schools.<sup>41</sup> The most telling fusillade in the new barrage came not from the closed secondary schools, but rather from an unexpected corner. The Bay View section of the city had been famous known for its strong Massive Resistance sentiment in the past,<sup>42</sup> its Baptist church had served as the initial home of the Tidewater Education Foundation, and the Bay View P.-T.A. had been one of the first strongholds captured by the Defenders in their attempt to seize control of the city's Parent-Teachers Associations.<sup>43</sup> Even though only 26 Bay View seventh-graders would be affected by the cut off, a crowd of angry parents at a packed meeting of the Bay View P.-T.A. shouted down the objections of W. I. McKendree, president of both the T.E.F. and the Bay View P.-T.A., and voted unanimously to pass a resolution opposed to closing any more schools.<sup>44</sup> The editors of the Virginian-Pilot were astounded: "in these dark days, the action of the Bay View P.-T.A. lights a candle of hope." In all, five city P.-T.A.'s voiced "full scale protests" in the next few days against the Council's funds cut-off proposal, but because

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<sup>41</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 January 1959.

<sup>42</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 16 January 1959.

<sup>43</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 18 January 1959.

<sup>44</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 16 January 1959.



Bay View was so widely known as a stronghold of Defender sentiment, the Virginian-Pilot took its action as a cue to ask, "Has The Counter-Revolution Begun?"<sup>45</sup>

The next salvo was fired by the School Board, a group that had been relatively silent since it had been stripped so unceremoniously of its financial power. In an action of silent defiance, the Board served as the Committee For Public School's star witnesses in the James v. Almond suit. In the irony of legal maneuvering, the School Board had been named as a codefendant along with the Mayor; now, under cross-examination by the Committee's lawyer, the Board members backed up each of the Committee's claims of economic and educational hardship. Perhaps even more important, the School Board now took two remarkable actions that brought it almost into a position of direct confrontation with the Council--a conflict which publicly at least it had sought up to now to avoid. First, Board Chairman Paul Schweitzer was authorized to issue a carefully worded statement that skirted on the edge of open defiance by indicating the Board's displeasure with Council's new school closings:

The School Board is interested in educating the children of Norfolk . . . our first obligation to the community is to get our schools back to operation in an orderly manner at the earliest practicable date."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 18 January 1959.

<sup>46</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 20 January 1959.

Next the Board gave every indication that it would like to lose the new suit brought by the Committee For Public Schools to block the funds cut-off measure. Although the Board and the Council had both been named as defendants in the action, City Attorney Leonard Davis, the individual responsible for their joint defense, withdrew from the case, leaving the Council alone to face the courts.<sup>47</sup>

A new harshness in the Mayor's attitude had brought about the situation where the School Board and one of his own Council members were willing to risk open disagreement; for the first time they understood just how far Duckworth was willing to go to make Massive Resistance work in the city, and the prospect frightened them. At the very time most Norfolk residents were beginning to entertain thoughts of reopening the schools, Duckworth was calling selected members of the School Board and the City Council to a secret strategy session at his home. There, Duckworth, Vice-Mayor George Abbott, and Organization head Billy Prieur--Roy Martin was not invited, although presumably he heard about its content from others in attendance, indicated both their willingness and their intention to close every school in the city, if necessary, in order to prevent integration.<sup>48</sup>

This was no idle threat to induce the Black community to recapitulate, this was to be the city's policy in the

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<sup>47</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot. 25 January 1959.

<sup>48</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 27 January 1959.

months, and even years, ahead, and the prospect of even more closed schools and a continuation of hardline resistance frightened the Board members present almost as much as Duckworth's next announcement: he was then holding for Council's consideration an offer by the T.E.F. to buy up the city's closed school facilities and operate them on a private, segregated basis.<sup>49</sup> This was the final step in the total abandonment of public education that anyone with any pretensions of moderation had to oppose: with the schools closed, their buildings sold, teacher salaries cut off, and the low-cost tutoring groups phased out, it would be only a matter of time before enough of both the teachers and the students accepted Massive Resistance, reopening the public schools on a private, segregated basis with the assistance of the State's generous tuition grants. There was no question that Duckworth and the Organization had at their disposal the machinery that would make Massive Resistance work in Norfolk, and the fact that they both had such a capability and were apparently willing to utilize it, was enough to make both the School Board and Councilman Roy Martin revolt in spite of the risks they might incur as a result of their defiance.

Events now began to proceed at such a rapid pace, however, that they quickly outstripped these two hopeful signs of protest. On the same day that the School Board was

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<sup>49</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 28 January 1959.

announcing its opposition to the funds cut-off plan, the entire legal structure of the school-closing tack was being struck down in separate actions before State and Federal Courts. Both the State's "friendly" Harrison v. Day action before the Virginia Supreme Court and the Committee For Public Schools' more far-reaching James v. Almond suit filed in Federal Court proved disastrous for the proponents of Massive Resistance.<sup>50</sup> The court decisions, however, only spoke to the issues presented in the fall, and failed to address the new obstacles presented by the funds cut-off plan. The courts only served, therefore, to cut out all middle ground between an immediate re-opening of the closed schools on a desegregated basis or the more permanent closing that Duckworth now envisioned. Thus, the courts could prevent any type of evasive scheme to keep the desegregated schools closed, but only so long as Norfolk maintained a school system with public funds. Duckworth was thus free to enact the next phase of Massive Resistance.<sup>51</sup>

The fact that both the Federal District Court and the Virginia Supreme Court handed down their decision on exactly the same day was no accident. In early December (1958) U. S. District Judge Walter Hoffman had run across Chief Justice Eggleston of the Virginia Supreme Court on a golfing outing in Princess Anne County. Judge Eggleston drew

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<sup>50</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 20 January 1959.

<sup>51</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 January 1959.

Hoffman aside and inquired as to whether the three-judge federal court then impaneled to hear the James v. Duckworth case had reached a decision. Hoffman replied that it had, and that he was writing the opinion, which was being prepared for release on December 22 (1958). Eggleston indicated that the Virginia Supreme Court was also readying its decision in Harrison v. Day, but that the justices were split, and the dissenters would not be ready with their opinion until January 19 (1959). Hoffman took the hint, and signaled that he would delay his opinion until January 19. Judge Eggleston nodded, and departed with a smile.

We both knew it was better for Virginians to hear it [the death of Massive Resistance] from their own court. Judge Eggleston never said which way his court had decided (and I never indicated which way mine was going), but I knew what he wanted, and which way the [state] court was leaning when he said he was writing the majority opinion.<sup>52</sup>

Now that the courts had finally acted, the issue of more comprehensive school closings came in for a new round of response. In a fiery speech to a statewide radio and television audience, Governor Almond made the Organization's position known. In a flamboyant prelude the Governor referred in lurid terms to the:

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<sup>52</sup>Walter E. Hoffman, U. S. Federal District Judge, interview by author, Tape recording, Norfolk, 8 March 1991.

. . . livid stench of sadism, sex immorality, and juvenile pregnancy infesting . . . mixed schools . . . . Let me make it abundantly clear for the record now and hereafter . . . I will not yield to that which I know to be wrong . . . we have just begun to fight!"<sup>53</sup>

Congratulations poured in from Senator Byrd, legislative leaders, and hardcore resisters in every corner of the Commonwealth, all expressing their desire to lead Norfolk into yet another round of school closings, legal obfuscation, and delay.

Almond's rhetorical resistance, however, failed to convince President Eisenhower to back down now that his courts had spoken. Although he allowed that Norfolk's overall problem was "very difficult," the President stated that he was really more concerned with the plight of the sons and daughters of federal workers, naval personnel, and others more directly in his charge. His staff had researched the issue and thought that the Federal Government could provide government-sponsored schools only for the 500 or so dependents actually living on the base; the rest would be locked out of classrooms just like their civilian counterparts.<sup>54</sup> The editors of the Virginian-Pilot were impressed at how well the President had been briefed on the local dilemma, but they were even more concerned that Congressional leaders might take the opportunity to punish

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<sup>53</sup>Dabney, p. 542.

<sup>54</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 21 January 1959.

the city by cutting off its federal impact aid funds.<sup>55</sup> Although Representative Thomas Ashley of Ohio had introduced a bill to reduce federal establishments in any area where the public school system had been abandoned,<sup>56</sup> this effort was balanced by the fact that other Congressional leaders were considering legislation that would provide additional funds and facilities to educate the off-base Navy dependents in Norfolk.<sup>57</sup>

Public reaction in Norfolk to the fast-breaking chain of events was loud and angry, even if its message was unclear. At a stormy session of the Council following the courts' pronouncements, Mayor Duckworth found for the first time that he was unable to conduct the city's business. In a city inured to years of meaningless Council sessions that served only as a rubber stamp for private agreements from the informal pre-session, a strange event took place: an angry crowd, three-fourths of whom were women, was determined to prevent the Council from enacting its usual show of empty democratic pageantry. The entire meeting was repeatedly interrupted by clapping, catcalls, boos, and laughter from a rowdy crowd of onlookers; finally, after 35 minutes of this verbal assault, Duckworth adjourned the meeting in disgust. Only two people had officially

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<sup>55</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 January 1959.

<sup>56</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 29 January 1959.

<sup>57</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 January 1959.

addressed the Council in the interim: Norfolk artist Kenneth Harris, a Duckworth relative by marriage, and another spokesman for the Stuart Elementary P.-T.A. both of whom spoke against the fund cut-off proposal.<sup>58</sup>

The Norfolk School Crisis had long been the focus of national media attention--the Christian Science Monitor (8 October 1958), Boston Globe (12 October 1958), New York Times (4 January 1959), and other of the country's leading newspapers prominently featured the struggle; Governor Almond's picture adorned the cover of Time magazine (22 September 1958) in an issue that featured the Norfolk crisis as its lead story; and the Friendly World Broadcasting Company of Philadelphia had carried a special half-hour broadcast to its 350 radio affiliates across the country<sup>59</sup>--but now an event took place on prime time national television that helped to crystallize both local attitudes as well as national opinion. At the height of the turmoil and just two days after the court rulings, C.B.S. television ran an Edward R. Morrow/Ed Friendly production entitled "The Lost Class of '59: The Norfolk Story" at eight P.M. Wednesday, January 21. This was the end result of the filming that had taken place in late November, in spite of the difficulties faced by the crew--Mayor Duckworth refused to be interviewed and then blocked filming at public

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<sup>58</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 21 January 1959.

<sup>59</sup>Reif, p. 22.



school locations. Even so, the production was remarkably objective,<sup>60</sup> seeking to portray speakers from both sides of the issue in a town-meeting type of forum. The Norfolk Committee For Public Schools had been asked to provide speakers representing their viewpoint, and had wisely chosen students, teachers, and parents instead of their own organizational leaders. The program also featured a segment that brought the viewers up to date on the recent legal developments, including a telling interview with a resolute Governor Almond. In spite of the factual documentary presentation of the hour-long program, the chief impact, for local residents at least, was emotional. Portions of the program that focused poignantly on the hardships of the locked-out students--how the closing had fragmented the goals and ambitions of the best and the brightest and doomed their less achievement-oriented classmates to the dismal prospects of teenage unemployment and listlessness--were instrumental in shaping half-formed local opinions: for the first time Norfolk really saw its crisis as it was viewed by the rest of the world.<sup>61</sup> For those businessmen who had up to now been relatively unconcerned about the city's loss of national reputation, the prime time exposure, the documentary objectivity, the emotional impact, and Edward R. Murrow's reputation for honesty helped to project an urgency

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<sup>60</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 22 January 1959.

<sup>61</sup>Reif, p. 22.

to the crisis that was not present before: slowly the realization dawned that the Organization had brought the city to the brink of a municipal disaster unlike any it had faced since the postwar People's revolt, and that if the gimmickry of closed schools continued, a decade of municipal reform, national leadership, social concern, and vital fence building with the Navy would be destroyed, along with the city's reputation and its hopes for a secure future.

Events had taken place so rapidly that week of January 19-23, 1959--first, the advancement of the funds cut-off measure; next, the occasion of two simultaneous court orders striking down the legal framework of Massive Resistance; followed by the sight of the Governor vowing further resistance; Congress and the President publicly advocating altered appropriations and possible financial retaliations; and finally, the prime time appeal of the Edward R. Murrow production--that the state's political leaders, including Mayor Duckworth, apparently lost touch with the changing mood of the people. The politicians were still preparing to take their cue from the results of the November referendum and a quiet December of public acquiescence--they assumed that the people still wanted to fight court-ordered integration to the bitter end, even if it meant more school closings along the way.

Something, however, had happened to the public mood, and more and more individuals were apparently now ready to

quit the fight. No one is really sure which event, or even which combination of events, triggered the shift, but for the first time a massive change was evident. To many of the city's business leaders it was the finality of the State Supreme Court's--a Virginia, and not a federal court--decision: "My own court had spoken--I had divorced myself from the U. S. Supreme Court and I had given up any allegiance I had to it--that's when I was willing to lay down the fight."<sup>62</sup> For others it was the spectacle of the Governor in full red-faced harangue in combination with the personal losses portrayed by "The Lost Class of '59" that finally brought home the realization of how Norfolk must appear to the rest of the nation.<sup>63</sup>

In spite of the surface tranquility that had descended upon the city the weekend that followed the furious pace of fast-breaking events, a strange hubbub of activity was taking place in a number of subterranean circles. Mayor Duckworth was plugged into a statewide hookup of frantic political leaders scurrying to help plot the Organization's next step. A bloc of Southside legislators headed by State Senator (and later Governor) Mills Godwin was attempting to devise by telephone a series of desperation measures which would block the reopening of the desegregated schools. Among the plans under consideration was a ten-day school

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<sup>62</sup>Pretlow Darden.

<sup>63</sup>Reif, pp. 21 and 22.

holiday until the Legislature could meet, a proposition to close every school in the state until each could be selectively re-certified by a state safety inspector, a statute that would make it a felony offense for courts to assign pupils to any school without the backing of the state's pupil placement board, a repeal of the state's compulsory attendance laws, and an amendment to the Virginia Constitution that would allow local jurisdictions to close down their own schools. There was even a proposal that paralleled Mayor Duckworth's fund cut-off plan, only reaching out to a statewide application.<sup>64</sup> It was just this sort of frantic activity--the high-level phone calls, the hurried conferences, the official entreaties, and the speculative nature of the various schemes being advanced--that blinded Duckworth and the Byrd Organization leadership to more subtle murmurs in the rest of the community. Another factor seemed particularly to influence the Mayor in his deliberations: Duckworth reported receiving somewhere between 50 and 100 phone calls that weekend threatening violence or to "blow up the schools" if they reopened integrated. Whether the calls were local or were a part of some Southside plot to shore up his continued resistance makes very little difference: by the time the weekend closed, Duckworth had fully committed himself to initiating another round of school closings, racial intimidation, and

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<sup>64</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 30 January 1959.

legal obfuscation. The specter of violence and the fear of a cut off of state funds if Norfolk bowed to integration were the reasons he publicly cited for that commitment.<sup>65</sup>

The rumor mills worked overtime in Norfolk that week-end, but besides reports of political intrigue and speculative legislation, they buzzed with the excitement that something big was going on in the business community. The grapevine had it that a downtown meeting had been held between the Navy's top brass and some gilt-edged Norfolknians, the remnants of the old Silkstocking crowd; in it, supposedly, the Navy issued an ultimatum: either open the schools or lose the fleet. Other rumors had it that two powerful local financial leaders were called to an urgent conference in Richmond with representatives of the state's largest banking and mortgage interests; reportedly they were told that the school situation had to be cleared up before serious economic repercussions were felt.<sup>66</sup> Regardless of the veracity of these rumors, they do express some very real fears that were circulating among the city's civic and financial elite: now that the courts had finally spoken, business leaders were afraid that the Navy and the federal government might take some retaliatory action if the city continued its posture of defiance; others could see that efforts to attract new industry were already falling apart;

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<sup>65</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 27 January 1959.

<sup>66</sup>Reif, pp. 21 and 22.

and financial experts had their eye on the collapse of local bond issues in the Northern mortgage markets. The substance of these realizations lent credence to the rumors and may well have formed the basis for what followed.

The Tuesday editions of the Virginian-Pilot and Ledger-Dispatch carried the most dramatic evidence of the shift in public opinion that had taken place that weekend. There in the front sections of both papers was a full-page advertisement, really an appeal to reopen the schools now and avoid further resistance, that by itself was both a trend-setter and the most important single event in the 141 days of the Norfolk School Crisis. The advertisement carried the following message signed by 100 of the city's most prominent business, financial, industrial, and civic leaders:

While we would strongly prefer to have segregated schools, it is evident from the recent court decisions that our public schools must either be integrated to the extent fully required or must be abandoned. The abandonment of our public schools system is, in our opinion, unthinkable, as it would mean the denial of an adequate education to a majority of our children. Moreover, the consequences would be most damaging to our community. We, therefore, urge the Norfolk City Council to do everything within its power to open all public schools as promptly as possible.<sup>67</sup>

A front page, banner headline and the accompanying story proclaimed the appeal to be "the first time a large segment

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<sup>67</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 27 January 1959.

of the Norfolk business community has taken a public stand in the city's school crisis." The editorial page hailed the event as "a new clear voice . . . a striking and welcome change . . . . a striking new development."

Even though the petition was officially addressed "to the City Council" and a group spokesman protested that:

The petition is not intended in any sense to be critical; [it offers instead] positive support for the opening and preservation of our public schools. We think it is Norfolk's only realistic alternative.

This disclaimer was not enough to prevent the public perception of the document as a personal affront to the Mayor, his power, and the course of action he had chosen. This was the first time in his eight-and-a-half year tenure of office that any concerted group of businessmen had ever tried to publicly influence a Council decision, much less move so forcefully and so openly to oppose its authority. As a further sign of the intended insult, the signers had handed over the petition to attorneys for the Norfolk Committee For Public Schools so that it could be introduced that very day as evidence in the Committee's new James v. Duckworth effort to block the Mayor's plan to implement further closings.<sup>68</sup> Even so, former Mayor Pretlow Darden and a representative group of the signers had gone to see Mayor Duckworth on Monday to soften the blow before the

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

appeal was made public. Their recollection of the conversation only underscores the Mayor's anger and his helplessness at having been double-crossed:

Darden: We're doing something good for the city and good for you . . . it gets you off the hook because these schools have got to be opened.

Duckworth: You've stabbed me in the back!

Darden: Well, you can always say if you want to that a bunch of these--whatever you want to call us--got this thing up without your knowledge. Would you like to see it?

Duckworth: Hell, no! I don't want to see it! I don't want to see it if I can't do anything about it.<sup>69</sup>

Even though the signers referred to themselves innocuously as the Committee of One Hundred, the appeal marked the re-emergence of the People's group, long since buried in the onslaught of Massive Resistance and Organization politics. The petition had all the markings of an old People's production: the inspiration for it came from former People's Mayor Pretlow Darden in collaboration with Frank Batten, the young president of Norfolk Newspapers, Inc., the parent company of the Virginian-Pilot, the Ledger-Dispatch, and WTAR radio and television stations. Darden and Batten had hand-picked the group that would be eligible as signers, and then personally carried it to the chosen, going first to their old allies from the Silkstocking days.

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<sup>69</sup>Pretlow Darden.



Former People's campaign chief Charles Kaufman had polished the wording of the final draft of the statement,<sup>70</sup> exactly as he had done for every major campaign announcement a dozen years before. Besides Darden and Kaufman, the list was spotted with names of those activists and appointees who had helped to lend credence to the People's crusade: John S. Alfriend, Richard D. Cooke, Jr., Charles F. Burroughs, George A. Foote, C. W. Grandy, Henry Clay Hofheimer, John S. Jenkins, Jr., Clarence B. Robertson, Dan M. Thornton, Thomas H. Wilcox, and J. Rives Worsham.<sup>71</sup> More than anything else, however, was the fact that the Committee of One Hundred was the purest representation of the city's blueblooded financial elite that had surfaced in a decade--a veritable roster of the Norfolk banking and business fraternity, highlighted by the realization that at least ten of the signers lived not in Norfolk, but in nearby Virginia Beach.

The statement by the Committee of One Hundred was both an opinion-maker and the most important milestone in marking how far public sentiment had shifted in the past week. Once the city's major business and financial leaders had so openly crossed the power and authority of the Mayor, it was both safe and fashionable for others who had been long silent to breathe a sigh of relief and express their own pro-school sentiments. Typical of the community's gratitude at the

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<sup>70</sup>Darden.

<sup>71</sup>Pretlow Darden.

eleventh-hour conversion of its former Silkstocking leadership was the action of one downtown florist who sent a red rose to each of the signers. Typical, too, was the appeal of 35 of the city's young business and civic leaders--too young to have been a part of the People's regime, and were thus left off the official roster of One Hundred--who ran their own advertisement the next day so that their voice could be counted. This new appeal was the work of Harvey L. Lindsay, Jr., who spiced the text with references to the specific fears of the business community: that further resistance would lead to the loss of valuable educators, the withdrawal of Navy ships and airplane squadrons, and the massive failure to attract new industry and investment to the area.<sup>72</sup>

One example helps to underscore both how committed the Mayor was to the Organization's course of continued resistance and just how opposed he was to the surrender sentiments expressed by the Silkstocking crowd. The same day that Pretlow Darden and the others approached him with their appeal, but well before the existence of their effort was made public, Mayor Duckworth had the perfect opportunity to turn the statements to his own personal and political advantage. The Committee For Public Schools had brought suit against the Mayor and the members of the City Council, seeking to enjoin them in its James v. Duckworth litigation

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<sup>72</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 28 January 1959.

from cutting off the School Board's funds and closing more schools. Armed with the still-secret knowledge of the Committee of One Hundred, Duckworth could have appeared as the initiator of that appeal by withdrawing the city's defense in the suit, thereby conceding the issue and effectively dropping the school closing plan. Instead, he chose not to abandon the suit, but argued all the more forcefully in favor of the funds cut-off authority, specifically detailing his fears about potential racial violence if the schools were allowed to reopen.<sup>73</sup>

The Mayor had badly miscalculated if he had hoped that the usual plodding pace of litigation before the federal courts would give him time to reconsolidate the Organization's political power and position. With unprecedented speed, Federal Judge Walter Hoffman--a local with strong ties to the Silkstocking establishment--ruled against the Council the very next day, the same day that Norfolk citizens were reading in their papers about the Committee of One Hundred. The very existence of the Silkstocking appeal, and the fact that the One Hundred had turned it over to the Committee For Public Schools to strengthen their legal position, may have played an important part in negating, as far as Judge Hoffman was concerned, the Mayor's fears of racial violence; in any event the evidence that a substantial portion of the community now favored a reopening of the

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<sup>73</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 27 January 1959.

schools enabled Hoffman to permanently enjoin the City Council from any action which might withhold funds or otherwise interfere with the School Board's plans to reopen the closed institutions.<sup>74</sup>

The speed and impact of this new ruling was a shocking reversal for the Mayor, doubly so because it increased the perception that the Silkstocking crowd had fought him and won. Even so, the Mayor was not entirely defeated: he still had two courses of action open, either of which would preserve his status as the hero of Massive Resistance and advance his standing with the statewide Byrd Organization. The Defenders were urging him to declare the closed school buildings as surplus and quickly sell them to the T.E.F before they could be reopened by the court.<sup>75</sup> The Organization was apparently urging him to defy Judge Hoffman, continue to withhold the school funds, and appeal the ruling. Such a course would risk a contempt of court citation and possible imprisonment, but this was a prospect that the Organization actually relished, and was even then urging upon Governor Almond as well.<sup>76</sup> The sight of a political leader behind bars to preserve the freedom of choice rights of the majority was just what the Organization wanted to promote its Massive Resistance cause celebre: if

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<sup>74</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 28 January 1959.

<sup>75</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 28 January 1959.

<sup>76</sup>Richmond Times-Dispatch, 10 February 1980.

Duckworth would but risk personal martyrdom, they would treat him to national media attention, public prayer vigils, certain canonization in the Organization's ranks, and an endless stream of little old ladies, housewives, and mothers bearing baked goods and other wares for the jailed hero.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, there was no guarantee that the Mayor could get a majority vote on Council if he chose either route: Roy Martin's opposition a week before had been the purest political gamble--a bet that had paid off already in the flurry of following events, and there was every reason to expect additional resistance in the changed political atmosphere that existed since the Committee of One Hundred went public. Finally, the Mayor's decision may have been clouded by the fact that the School Board had publicly announced its intention to open the schools anyway, even if the Council continued to withhold funds in defiance of the courts: the Board apparently had enough surplus funds, coal and other supplies left over from before to open for a few days even without Council's support.<sup>78</sup>

It was these latter considerations--Duckworth could not risk losing a bitterly split vote on his own Council for a point that would be rendered useless anyway by the School Board--that probably weighed heavily in his decision to at last abandon the struggle. In spite of the dire warnings of

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<sup>77</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 9 June 1964.

<sup>78</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 27 January 1959.

Senator Harry F. Byrd that his Organization would be "wiped out" if Virginia gave in to integration,<sup>79</sup> Massive Resistance was over, at least in Norfolk. The Mayor bitterly refused to discuss the matter further, flatly telling all comers to an historic Council session that marked the end of his own resistance: We [the Council] have been taken out of the school business [by the courts]. Anyone who came here to talk about schools can go to the School Board."<sup>80</sup> Thus, there was no obstacle to the schools reopening immediately that Monday, February 2 (1959), as the Board had hopefully proclaimed earlier in court. Mayor Duckworth, in admitting defeat, was doing his best to retain whatever was left of his old businessman's/Organization coalition in spite of the setback.

If Duckworth's fall from the heights of municipal and political power was dizzying, it was no less dramatic than Governor Almond's sudden about-face on Massive Resistance. Almond, usually possessed of a calm and rational demeanor punctuated by both a thorough knowledge and deep appreciation of the law, was also on occasion given to stentorian bombast on the order of what one observer labeled "Orange County [Virginia] Courthouse, circa 1910 (when William Jennings Bryan's influence was running high)."<sup>81</sup> These two

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<sup>79</sup>Richmond Times-Dispatch, 4 August 1974.

<sup>80</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 30 January 1959.

<sup>81</sup>Dabney, p. 539.

facets of his personality--his keen legal sense and his equally cutting rhetorical style--had collided. Almond had been the studious legal brains behind Governor Stanley's legislative efforts to block integration, and had been marvelously effective at creating a solid legal facade for the state's circumvention efforts. Almond, knowing full well that this house of cards he had helped construct would one day come tumbling down, had also counseled a delegation from the Norfolk Committee For Public Schools that only the courts could reopen the city's closed schools. Almond, of all people, should not have been surprised to find that the state's legislative barriers to integration had collapsed so suddenly. On the other hand, Almond was such a maestro of segregationist oratory that he had buried the more moderate but never-the-less potent challenge of Republican Ted Dalton under the verbal fusillades of his stirring rhetoric. The Governor's fiery bombast following the double court orders to reopen the schools--"We have just begun to fight"--may have also been partly responsible for Mayor Duckworth's overly repressive reaction. Almond explained in later years that he was tired, distraught, and just not thinking clearly when he made "that damn speech" in defiance of the court orders. He had meant to assure Virginians that he would do everything possible to preserve segregation, even though he knew a few schools would have to integrate, but the rumble

of his rhetoric got the best of him.<sup>82</sup> In the unfortunate opening remarks in which he hoped to express his own personal repugnance of integration, he got carried away; by the time he got to the conclusion in which he called upon the people of Virginia to stand with him in the struggle-- "be not dismayed by recent judicial deliverances,"<sup>83</sup> he told them--he had falsely fueled the fires of their expectations. There was every reason to think, as many leaders in the Commonwealth did, that the Governor was still saving one more, as yet unrevealed, legal gambit for the present circumstances.<sup>84</sup>

It was a much quieter and rational Governor who now stood before a special session of the Virginia General Assembly--only eight days after his rabble rousing rotomontade, and just two days after Judge Hoffman canceled Duckworth's funds cut-off plan--to inform them that he could not stop the integration of a few of the state's schools:<sup>85</sup> the best he could do was to try and minimize the racial mixing in those schools. The Massive Resisters were thunderstruck, and a few even referred to him as "Benedict" Almond,<sup>86</sup> especially after he threatened the next day to

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<sup>82</sup>Dabney, p. 542.

<sup>83</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 21 January 1959.

<sup>84</sup>Dabney, pp. 542-543.

<sup>85</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 29 January 1959.

<sup>86</sup>Dabney, p. 543.



veto any of the last-ditch circumventions proposed by Mills Godwin and his coterie of Southside legislators.<sup>87</sup> Instead of legal obfuscation, he pressed forward with a more moderate program to modify the state's tuition grant program, strengthen the prohibitions against violence, repeal the compulsory attendance legislation, and establish a commission to recommend further proposals.<sup>88</sup>

With the Mayor's new-found recalcitrance and the Governor's solid opposition, Massive Resistance in Virginia was finally dead. There was now no legal obstacle to the schools opening on Monday, February 2 (1959), as the School Board planned. The only real stumbling block lay not in the politicians, but in those other individuals who had resisted so massively, and who even now were not prepared to drop the cause. Duckworth's fears of possible racial violence were very real; even in modern, urbanized Tidewater there still existed that element of rabble that would stop at nothing to prevent or disrupt the integration of Norfolk's schools. Fortunately there was also in the city an element that had at least part of the scene firmly in control: local reporters--the Virginian-Pilot, Ledger-Dispatch, and Norfolk's radio and television newscasters--remained faithful to a private understanding not to publish reports of or lend credence to rumors of racial violence or intimidation. Even

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<sup>87</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 30 January 1959.

<sup>88</sup>Dabney, p. 543.

a cross-burning across from all-white Norview High School and within sight of the Black homes in Coronado went unreported. Luckily most local citizens were unaware of these incidents; this conscious omission of any reference to strife or the possibility of conflict on the part of the local press was indicative of the stern and cautious attitude which public officials and responsible citizens generally took in order to avoid the occurrence of "another Little Rock" in Norfolk.<sup>89</sup>

There was at least one other hopeful force moving behind the scenes to insure a peaceful resumption of classes: the national press had picked up the fact now that Norfolk--"distinctive among most Southern cities"--had a "powerful and articulate group of 'moderates'" who helped to balance off the racial hostilities of the Defenders and their followers.<sup>90</sup> The Silkstocking crowd, relishing their re-emergence since the giant splash of their People's days, were not now content to sit back and rest on the laurels of their newspaper advertisement. Besides lending their collective voice quietly to those who were calling for an orderly resumption of classes, Norfolk's business and civic establishment sought a more active role. They turned their efforts to their youthful counterparts in the hierarchy of the school's social and service clubs. The Key

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<sup>89</sup>New York Times, 1 February 1959.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

Clubs (Kiwanis-sponsored) of the closed Granby, Maury, and Norview High Schools jointly took an advertisement in the city's newspapers that pleaded, as their Silkstocking elders had petitioned, with the city's youth and adults alike "that the orderly reopening be completed as smoothly and as quickly as possible so that we may proceed with our immediate objective--to obtain an education."<sup>91</sup> On behalf of their various student bodies, they pledged to try and solve their problems, "In a mature manner and under no condition will rowdiness be condoned." "We believe," they predicted, "that the students of our respective schools will conduct themselves with a dignity that will bring credit to our city."<sup>92</sup> It was not until later that it was revealed that this youthful advertising blitz was secretly financed by a single "civic-minded individual."<sup>93</sup>

Monday morning, February 2, 1959, would prove to be a crucial test of Silkstocking diplomacy when schools reopened integrated after months of Massive Resistance hysteria. Were public pronouncements, unofficial news blackouts, newspaper advertising campaigns, and even the urgent pleadings of student leaders--all evidence of the type of quiet, behind-the-scenes manipulation of the city's civic and financial leadership--enough to turn away racial hostilities

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<sup>91</sup>Reif, p. 15.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 5 February 1959.

that had been building for months? Was the State Legislature's recent ban on bomb threats and schools violence,<sup>94</sup> as well as the Council's last-minute defeatist appeal "to every segment of the community to conduct itself in the same peaceful and law-abiding manner that has been one of the commendable aspects of this trying time,"<sup>95</sup> enough to turn back the last-ditch defiance which both political groups had until recently supported? There was a widespread fear among the city's leadership that in spite of all of these preliminary precautions, more still needed to be done to signal once and for all the end of Massive Resistance. As the representatives of the nation's leading newspapers, magazines, radio, and television networks began to pour into Norfolk that final weekend in January, the city's Silk-stocking business establishment began to realize just how much would be at stake that next Monday morning. One single, isolated racial incident, or worse, one random act of violence, once it had been permanently etched into the headlines of the nation's newspapers, magazines, and nightly news broadcasts, could erase more than a decade of concentrated effort to restore the city's once-fallen reputation. Not since the lusty wartime days of booze, racketeering, prostitution, and the sleazy honky-tonks of Norfolk's notorious East Main Street sailor town--already undergoing

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<sup>94</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 4 February 1959.

<sup>95</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 1 February 1959.

full-scale demolition--would so many eyes be on the city; not since the Staylor Raid of 1946 was Norfolk so at the mercy of its hoodlum elements.

So much was riding upon peaceful resumption of classes on Monday that the city's leadership dared to approach Norfolk's most effective proponent of Massive Resistance for a final symbol of defeat and racial reconciliation. Behind the scenes that weekend there was one final effort to arrange instead a visual image that would ensure both domestic tranquility and the city's good name. Friends, business associates, civic leaders, relatives, and even minor political kingpins descended upon the Mayor, urging him to make the most difficult decision of his political career: he must walk, they argued, with the handful of Black students that were to enroll in the previously all-white Norview Junior and Senior High Schools.<sup>96</sup> If there was to be violence or racial incidents, representatives of the media were betting that they would occur at Norview High School, and indeed the crush of cameramen, reporters, photographers, and media correspondents that would surround that institution on Monday could well encourage potential neighborhood troublemakers--identified in the local vernacular as "suedes" because of their reputed addiction to suede shoes<sup>97</sup>--to show off. There was more

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<sup>96</sup>Pretlow Darden and Robert Mason.

<sup>97</sup>New York Times, 1 February 1959.

than just the reputation of the local toughs, however, that had earmarked Norview as the focal point of Monday morning's news coverage: the area had been one of the most fruitful bastions of Massive Resistance sentiment, evidenced by the recent cross-burning incidents there; the rhetoric of Norview whites was still salted with vague references to the bombings and racial strife that had taken place four years earlier in the nearby Coronado section; as a newly annexed territory, Norview was one of the few areas in the city that owed no allegiance to the calm, deliberative progress of the Silkstocking reign; and finally, as a composition of largely blue collar neighborhoods, the official pronouncements of Norfolk's business and civic elite probably counted for less there than elsewhere in the city.

The course now urged upon the Mayor by the hourly delegations that descended upon his private residence was painted in the most pleasing colors possible: one quiet, dignified walk up the school house steps--in sharp contrast to the grandstanding tirades of Arkansas' Governor Faubus in Little Rock--once it had been carefully immortalized by the electronic eye of the nation's media, would do more to promote the city, the Mayor, and even the Organization than any other step he could take. Business leaders argued that it was the one action that would help to focus positive national attention upon the city's cosmopolitan image, the integrity of its leadership, its spirit of rejuvenation, and

its efforts to attract new industry. Political leaders argued that both the Mayor and the Organization had the most to lose at the hands of the local voters if violence marred the resumption of classes. Further, they implored, that with such a visual event, the Mayor could upstage Governor Almond's split with Senator Byrd, and cut short efforts to unify opponents of Massive Resistance into a threat to the Organization. Finally, they urged, here was a ready-made opportunity for both the Mayor and the city to escape the onus of school closings--a chance for Duckworth to prove his political resilience, re-establish his rapport with the rapidly shifting mood of the people, and solidify his base of support in the business community. Unless he took some such action to insure the tranquility of the reopening ceremonies, the mantle of political leadership in the city would pass from him to the School Board, Roy Martin, and other "moderates" who personally supported segregation but who also had the courage to oppose the final stages of racial retribution associated with Massive Resistance.

No one really knows how close Mayor Duckworth came that weekend to accepting this unusual reversal: on its surface the offer was attractive enough, but, it also involved a good deal of betrayal of principle and admission of guilt. The decision, however, was his and his alone; no other political, civic, or governmental leader could substitute for him and have such impact. Duckworth, however,

other political, civic, or governmental leader could substitute for him and have such impact. Duckworth, however, would have no part of such a gesture, and no one will ever know whether personal pride, prejudicial animosities, devotion to principle, or more mundane political considerations figured most prominently in his decision. An increase in uniformed police, the heightened visibility of school personnel, and the welcoming gestures of the principal would have to suffice; when school opened on Monday morning, the Mayor was no where near the waiting cameras at Norview High.



EPILOGUE  
A SECOND SCHOOL CRISIS

All was calm as Norfolk's closed junior and senior high schools reopened Monday morning, February 2, 1959. In spite of the presence of almost a 100 journalists and television cameras, most of which were amassed outside of Norview High School, there was nothing unusual to report. Local reporters noted that there were "a few instances of name calling," but that the "windy 26-degree weather discouraged parents from lingering." The editors of the Virginian-Pilot praised the "display of sanity and poise and dignity that made a difficult day a notable one." President Eisenhower, who received hourly reports of the progress through a special telephone connection in the federal court house,<sup>1</sup> telegraphed his congratulations to the 63 student leaders who had founded the "Back to School, Keep It Cool," campaign;<sup>2</sup> the New York Times viewed the scene as a "turning point for integration;"<sup>3</sup> and the televised footage of orderly students reporting to class stood in sharp contrast

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Hoffman.

<sup>2</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 3 February 1959.

<sup>3</sup>New York Times, 1 February 1959.

to events in Little Rock, Mobile, and other points across the South.

Thousands of students went back to public education . . . with unmistakable eagerness, seriousness, and determination . . . they want these public schools to remain open and operating . . . There was universal calm and acceptance in Norfolk today . . . This city should be proud of its sons and daughters.<sup>4</sup>

Norfolk's calmness and good sense were everywhere praised across the nation, and at least a small portion of its ugly wartime image had been erased. Ironically the New York Times credited "redevelopment and public housing developments" as being a factor in preserving "comparatively good race relations." The story went on to report that "a number of handsome new Negro schools have been built [here] in the last decade," and then indicated that:

Norfolk is distinctive among Southern cities in that it has a powerful and articulate group of "moderates" who balance off the Defenders and their followers on the school controversy.<sup>5</sup>

Although the Times obviously had the outpouring of public support that emerged after the advertisement of the Silkstocking Committee of One Hundred in mind when it made this assessment, its appraisal came as somewhat of a shock to the Committee for Public Schools and others who had

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<sup>4</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 3 February 1959.

<sup>5</sup>New York Times, 1 February 1959.

labored without much success during the five months of the school closings to provide a counterpoint to the Defenders and rally some modicum of support for public education;<sup>6</sup> nevertheless the Times was only one of many publications to note that Norfolk was unique in that the critical legal action to reopen the closed schools came from white parents, and not Black plaintiffs. The only really "powerful and articulate" opposition to Massive Resistance came from Lenoir Chambers and the editorial staff of the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot; as the clear, calm voice of reason in a state which seemed bent upon sacrificing public education to preserve political principle, he was richly deserving of the Pulitzer Prize he received for his efforts to keep the school open.

Other researchers have perpetuated the myth that "a powerful public school movement organized very quickly" in Norfolk to defeat Massive Resistance.<sup>7</sup> In point of fact, the Committee for Public Schools, the school teachers, and others who hoped to spark a pro-school movement were relatively powerless until after the closed school were reopened, and the Committee of One Hundred, who had played almost no role during the controversy, only meant to signal

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<sup>6</sup>Robert L. Stern; Dr. Forrest P. White, M.D., unpublished article, op cit.

<sup>7</sup>Robert L. Crain, et al., The Politics of School Desegregation: Comparative Case Studies of Community Structure and Policy-Making (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1968), p. 231.

that it was time to surrender in Norfolk, not signal any opposition to either Duckworth or the dominant Byrd Organization.<sup>8</sup> Ironically, Mayor Duckworth, more than any other single individual, was responsible for promoting the ragtag elements of opposition during the school crisis into a full blown resistance movement a few months later when he misread the political auguries that followed the reopening of the schools.

It would have been easy for Mayor Duckworth to have retreated with grace and blame the collapse of Massive Resistance in Norfolk on Governor Almond, as apparently Senator Byrd did.<sup>9</sup> Certainly he had personally done more and gone farther to keep the Massive Resistance movement alive in the city than even the staunchest Defender could have expected. Even though Pretlow Darden and others in the Silkstocking establishment tried repeatedly to counsel him to adopt just such a course,<sup>10</sup> the Mayor refused to retreat from the battle lines he had drawn.

Norfolk, for all its cosmopolitan image, was still a Southern city, and its voters especially still harbored strong segregationist sentiment. Even as late as the week of January 26-31 (1959), the week after the court decisions

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<sup>8</sup>Pretlow Darden.

<sup>9</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 9 June 1964; Eley, op cit.; Benjamin Muse, op cit.

<sup>10</sup>Pretlow Darden.

and just before the schools actually reopened, a team of researchers from the University of North Carolina found that almost 80% of Norfolk's white residents clung to their support for segregated schools: more than a third still denied the legality of the federal courts to order desegregation, and 40% thought the city should resist further. However, only one adult in five thought that continuing segregation was a viable option for the city, and there was almost no sentiment for sacrificing public education to preserve segregated schools.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless it was precisely this sentiment that Mayor Duckworth misread.

In commenting on the reopening of schools in Norfolk, the New York Times indicated that although a major victory for public education had been won in Norfolk with the reopening of the schools, this was a "Gettysburg"--a turning point that signaled a retreat--and not an "Appomattox," or final surrender of the Massive Resistance forces.<sup>12</sup> Mayor Duckworth and the Byrd Organization seemed bent upon continuing the fight, even though the tide of war had clearly turned against them; what may have been smart tactics in support of lost causes proved to be bad politics in Norfolk.

Almost before the national press had departed the city, Mayor Duckworth fired the first salvo in what was to

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<sup>11</sup>Ernest . Campbell, et. al., When a City Closes Its Schools (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina, 1960), pp. 56-61.

<sup>12</sup>New York Times, 8 February 1959.

be a continuing attack against the School Board and its efforts to continue public education in the city. At a meeting with the Board, the Mayor warned that the Council was going to "cut the devil out of the 1960 [school] budget," and as to prospects for any more funds for school construction, "it will take an act of Congress to get it out of us." As part of its strategy to cut the cost of school construction, the City Council disclosed a plan to build six to eight three-room school houses, each accommodating 90 pupils (30 per grade) in grades one through three, in the eastern half of the city. In commenting on the proposal, the Virginian-Pilot editorialized that:

While the plan apparently would slow down desegregation of the first, second, and third grades through the creation of smaller school districts, councilmen stressed it was prompted by the need for inexpensive schools.<sup>13</sup>

Although the educational drawbacks to the plan were clearly evident, the School Board found itself having to give serious scrutiny to the Council's mini-school proposal. Still, it refused to be stampeded into adopting such an obviously flawed approach, especially when it held such long-term adverse consequences for public education in the city. When it appointed a seven-member task force to study the Council's plan, the Board made sure that it included a representative cross-section of both the Black and white

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<sup>13</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 February 1959.

communities.<sup>14</sup> When this group reported back two weeks later, it bot surprsinigly supported instead buildings of 16 to 20 classrooms as the "ideal" size for a three grade primary school.<sup>15</sup> The committee nevertheless approved of the idea of using smaller primary schools "strategically located to relieve crowding" in several areas of the city, and then proceeded to list nine such areas already served by Black schools (Lindenwood, West, Clay, Goode, Jackson, Carey, Titus, Bowling Park, and Young Park).<sup>16</sup> In the end, however, the School Board was forced to bow to the financial pressures of the City Council, and several "vest-pocket" schools were built for whites over the course of the next year: two five-room school houses (Pretty Lake and East Ocean View) were erected on small lots in the Ocean View portion of the city,<sup>17</sup> and another five-room school (Easton) was proposed for the newly annexed area east of Broad Creek.<sup>18</sup> Two other ten-room schools were also

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<sup>14</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 27 February 1959.

<sup>15</sup>W. E. Campbell, "Report of the Committee Relegated By the School Board of the City of Norfolk to Study the Proposal for Construction of Small Primary Community Schools," (undated, 1959), Norfolk Public Schools files.

<sup>16</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 March 1959.

<sup>17</sup>Letter from J. J. Brewbaker, Superintendent of Schools, to Thomas F. Maxwell, Norfolk City Manager, 21 May 1959, Norfolk Public Schools files.

<sup>18</sup>Letter from J. J. Brewbaker, Superintendent of Schools, to Thomas F. Maxwell, Norfolk City Manager, 29 May 1959, Norfolk Public Schools files.

started (Poplar Halls, and Fairlawn) in the Eastern portion of the city.<sup>19</sup> Also included in the School Board's plan was an "emergency ordinance" condemning a 2.5-acre site in the Coronado area, "a predominantly Negro section," for six demountable classroom units. Reporter Luther Carter noted that the hastiness of this action would have an impact upon pupil assignment for the next (1959-60) school year:

The opening of the Coronado school will have the effect of reducing, if not entirely eliminating, the number of potentially qualified Negro applicants in Coronado for Norview Elementary . . . The proximity of the Coronado schools [Rosemont and Coronado] would give the School Board a valid reason to assign Coronado children there even should they meet the academic and other standards for a nearer white school.

The Coronado school will represent a modification of the City Council's "little red school house" [concept]. [Coronado] . . . would not have a cafeteria, auditorium, playgrounds, and certain other facilities which have been incorporated in larger elementary schools.<sup>20</sup>

Black leaders were understandably upset by the proposal, and complained that the new school would be both educationally unsound" and an "obvious attempt to circumvent" the desegregation decisions of the courts. When they went to the City Council, Duckworth told the Black leaders that their complaint "smacked of integration and segregation,"

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<sup>19</sup>Letter from Brewbaker to Maxwell, op cit., 21 May 1959.

<sup>20</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 8 July 1959.



and they "got nowhere."<sup>21</sup> The School Board attempted to reassure the Black leaders that the "same facilities will be lacking at some new white schools now being built." They went on to explain that the Board did not want to build a large, expensive school since it might be in the path of a proposed interstate highway, but that additional classrooms, a cafeteria, and auditorium, and other facilities would be added to the Rosemont combination elementary and junior high school for Blacks in the same area.<sup>22</sup> Black leaders were not impressed by this defense, and promptly filed suit in federal court seeking to enjoin what they determined were "makeshift schools . . . constructed for the purpose of pursuing the policy of racially segregated schools."<sup>23</sup>

While it was fighting this battle over the Council's "little red school house" proposal, the School Board also had to worry that the Mayor would make good on his promise to "cut the devil"<sup>24</sup> out of the rest of Norfolk's public school program. Since school districts in Virginia are dependent upon their municipal government for financial support, the School Board lacked any taxing or funding power of its own. When the City Manager announced his spending priorities for the up-coming fiscal year, he proposed a

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<sup>21</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 21 July 1959.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 20 August 1959.

<sup>24</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 21 February 1959.

reduction of more than five percent of revenues provided by the city. Even a cut of this magnitude was not enough to satisfy the Mayor, and the Council proceeded to remove an additional 2.5% (a 7.5% reduction).<sup>25</sup> When the smoke had finally cleared, the Norfolk School Board found that local funding support for public schools had dropped by a whopping 13.4% from the previous year.<sup>26</sup> The Mayor obviously wanted to eliminate any possibility that the Board might be able to provide a raise to the teachers who had helped to sabotage his Massive Resistance efforts, a theory openly advanced by the Virginian-Pilot.<sup>27</sup>

Although the authority of a City Council to direct school operations in Virginia are relatively limited, Mayor Duckworth was finding that he could skillfully use his powers of the purse to keep the issue of Massive Resistance alive. The effect of any major cutback in local funding support would fall disproportionately upon Blacks, since most whites could afford to either supplement the education of their children or send them to private schools with the support of the state's substantial tuition grants. Moreover, if Mayor Duckworth could keep the white schools in the city either small enough to be immune from integration

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<sup>25</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 13 May 1959.

<sup>26</sup>This figure comes from an analysis of the General Fund Budgets of the Norfolk Public Schools for the 1958-59 and 1959-60 school years, Norfolk Public Schools files.

<sup>27</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 October 1959.

threats or else so overcrowded and unattractive that Blacks would resist further efforts to desegregate, he could still achieve many of the ends of the resisters.

Thus the Board not only had to worry about loss of funding support and the pressure to build small, inadequate, but integration proof (under the court standards of the day) school houses, it also found that the Council was reneging on its promise to build the badly needed secondary schools that had already been promised. Lansdale Junior High, which had been approved by the Council two and a half years earlier, completely designed, and accepted by the State Board of Education,<sup>28</sup> was never built; Lakewood Junior High suffered a similar fate. Although there were problems with the site at both locations (Lansdale was too close to the airport,<sup>29</sup> and Lakewood had foundation problems), both schools had been promised for the 1959-60 school year. The Virginian-Pilot, however, intimated that the delay was linked to other, more political concerns:

The State Board of Education approved the plans in the fall of 1957, but the project failed to move forward. . . . Months went by, and nothing happened. It finally became apparent that the Council was waiting to see the outcome of the impending desegregation crisis.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 6 June 1958.

<sup>29</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 October 1959.

<sup>30</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 8 August 1959.

Additional annexation and the impact of the redevelopment projects closer in town<sup>31</sup> was putting a tremendous burden on the schools in the eastern half of the city. A disastrous annexation decision--Norfolk had sought 33 square miles in the western portion of old Princess Anne County, but instead had ended up with only 13, a large part of which were water system lakes and the airport which it already owned--was exacerbating the problem. Norfolk was stuck with the students, but none of the schools which served them, and this urgent need was in part responsible for the acceptance of the "vest pocket" schools being erected in East Ocean View, River Forest Shores (Easton), and Fairlawn (See Figures 8 and 9 on the following pages).<sup>32</sup> The fact that the School Board would be facing the new school year with reduced funds, badly overcrowded schools,<sup>33</sup> and nothing but inadequate mini-schools in the works was prompting a second Norfolk School Crisis, and one in which the Board again found itself pitted against the Mayor and the City Council.

Public schools, or at least the quality of public education in Norfolk, were again threatened, and once more the pro-school forces vowed to do battle against the Mayor

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<sup>31</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 3 January 1958.

<sup>32</sup>Frank S. Pace, former City Planning official, interview by author, Tape recording, Norfolk, 24 January 1991; Roy B. Martin, Jr..

<sup>33</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 11 November 1959.

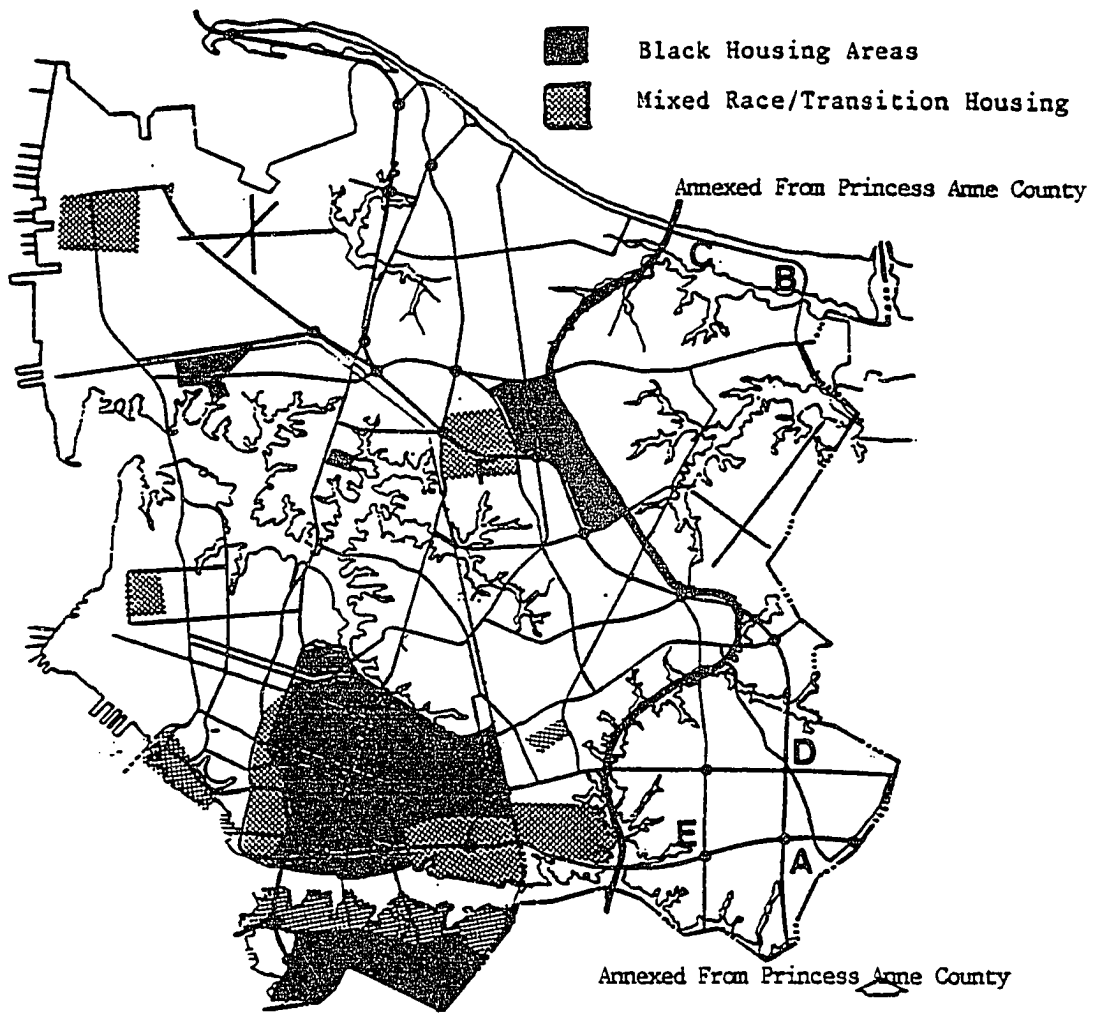


Figure 8. New School Buildings, 1959

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|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>A</b> Easton Elementary          | <b>D</b> Fairlawn Elementary     |
| <b>B</b> East Ocean View Elementary | <b>E</b> Poplar Halls Elementary |
| <b>C</b> Pretty Lake Elementary     | <b>F</b> Coronado Elementary     |

FIGURE 9. SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION STATISTICS, 1952-1959 <sup>1</sup>

Year	School	Square Feet	Acreage	Race
1952	Calcott Elementary	58,254 sq.ft.	12.0	White
1952	Lakewood Elementary	58,254 sq.ft.	12.0	White
1953	Bowling Park Elementary	58,254 sq.ft.	12.3	Black
1953	Lindenwood Elementary	40,635 sq.ft.	9.5	Black
1953	Diggs Park Elementary	44,400 sq.ft.	10.6	Black
1954	Young Park Elementary	50,540 sq.ft.	8.0	Black
1955	Suburban Park Elementary	48,919 sq.ft.	15.0	White
1956	Northside Junior High	114,375 sq.ft.	14.5	White
1956	Oceanair Elementary	57,242 sq.ft.	17.7	White
1957	Lansdale Elementary	53,100 sq.ft.	18.7	White
1957	Sherwood Forest Elementary	53,100 sq.ft.	13.3	White
1958	Rosemont Elementary/Junior	40,000 sq.ft.*	13.0*	Black
1959	Coronado Elementary	7,500 sq.ft.	2.2	Black
1959	East Ocean View Elementary	10,790 sq.ft.*	1.2	White
1959	Pretty Lake Elementary	10,790 sq.ft.*	1.2*	White
1959	Poplar Halls Elementary	22,000 sq.ft.*	17.8	White
1959	Easton Elementary	12,000 sq.ft.*	11.7	White
1959	Fairlawn Elementary	22,000 sq.ft.*	16.4	White

\*estimate of size and area at the time of first construction; does not reflect later additions and expansions.

<sup>1</sup> W. P. Sullivan Director of Buildings and Grounds, "Cost Data, Outline Specifications, and Facilities in the New Schools Constructed in Norfolk, Virginia, Since 1951," February 1956, Norfolk Public Schools Files: Henry S. Rorer, History of Norfolk Public Schools, op cit., p. 346; School Building Planning Task Force Report, January 1985, Norfolk Public Schools Files.

and the Organization Council. Not only were the financing, building program, and pay policies in jeopardy, the City Council had appealed its earlier reverses in federal court, and now indicated it had every intention of continuing the fight to cut off the funds to both black and white secondary schools.<sup>34</sup> The School Board was apparently unwilling to back the council on this and other anti-education measures, because the Mayor and the city's Democratic Organization began to advance a bill in the legislature which would expand the number of positions on the Board from six to seven members, and shorten the terms of service from three to two years. The bill would have the effect of allowing the Council to immediately replace all six of the Board members<sup>35</sup> who had worked so diligently to save public education in the city during the school crisis. School Board member Francis Crenshaw released a statement to the newspaper that summed up the politics of the situation:

At the present time, I believe there is a difference of opinion between members of the school board and the council as to [the] proper handling of the integration problem . . . . The legislation pending in Richmond will . . . bring the board more closely under councilmanic control. I know of no other reason for adding a seventh member . . . nor can I otherwise account for a reduction in the term of office from three to two years.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 2 May 1959.

<sup>35</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 April 1959.

<sup>36</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 April 1959.

Fortunately this new school crisis found a political outlet before public education was damaged irreparably. It was in response to public opposition to the effort to fire the School Board that Mayor Duckworth let his guard slip in public enough to threaten his Massive Resistance coalition. When an officer of the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools (Mrs. Barr Attaway) inquired whether it was the intent of the Council to reappoint the incumbent members of the School Board if the bill passed, Mayor Duckworth grudgingly replied, "I don't think it's any of your business."<sup>37</sup>

Although in retrospect the infraction does not seem that severe, the pro-school forces immediately seized upon the incident as a new cause celebre of municipal reform. A flurry of letters to the editor, as well as the editors themselves, questioned whether the public did have a right to know, and whether such "despotic" behavior was proper for a "public servant." Pro-school advocates launched a massive tactical campaign to isolate the Mayor, his spirited temper, and his legendary disregard for public participation. In the heat of the battle, the point was lost that the Mayor was addressing the Committee for Public Schools, a long-time adversary. Letters to the editor zeroed in on the fact that he had been rude to a Southern (white) woman, conduct thought to be unbecoming of a public official; others noted

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<sup>37</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 April 1959.



that a visiting government class from Granby High School had received a real-life lesson in big city politics.<sup>38</sup> The slogan "none of your business" was just short enough to fit on match book covers, key chains, and other tokens, and soon these code words reverberated all across the city.

The pro-school forces probably could not have made the issue stick had not the timing of the outburst coincided perfectly with the upcoming Democratic Primary for the state legislature. Two seats were open because of the retirement of incumbents; the Organization, the pro-school forces, and the Defenders all had candidates in the race. In addition, an incumbent state senator (Edward L. Breeden) was under attack by a coalition of Defenders and the most conservative elements of the Organization because he had backed away from the last ditch efforts to save Massive Resistance.<sup>39</sup>

The election hinged entirely on the Massive Resistance issue, and all sides posed the question of their election based upon their view of education in the city.<sup>40</sup> On election day, the pro-school forces claimed total victory, winning both the disputed house and senate seats;<sup>41</sup> in doing so, they launched the political career of Henry Howell

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<sup>38</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 24 April 1959; 25 April 1959; 26 April 1959; 27 April 1959.

<sup>39</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 April 1959.

<sup>40</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 July 1959.

<sup>41</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 July 1959.

and a force of progressivism that would be a major player in city and state politics for the next three decades. The force included an alliance between the pro-school forces and the Black voters of the city, who had up to that point had voted solidly Republican.<sup>42</sup> The Defenders, on the other hand were crushed, and never appeared in Norfolk again as a major political force; even the Organization lost, in part because it had failed to properly answer charges that one of its candidates had been affiliated with the Defenders.<sup>43</sup>

With champions in elected office for the first time, the pro-school forces found that their cause quickly took on a more authoritative air. The anti-school policies of the Mayor and the City Council soon came under attack from this new quarter,<sup>44</sup> and it was not long before the Organization was in full retreat before a growing coalition that was emerging between the "little people" of the pro-school forces and the mainstream of its business community.<sup>45</sup> Shortly thereafter, George Abbott, a 17 year veteran of the Council seen as the most political of the group, resigned from office and was replaced by School Board Chairman Paul Schweitzer. Observers saw the move as an attempt to create

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<sup>42</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 30 October 1959.

<sup>43</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 19 July 1959.

<sup>44</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 22 November 1959.

<sup>45</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 29 October 1959, and 8 December 1959.

a new "Harmony Ticket" with the business establishment, or at least an effort to "cut the ground from under" the emerging pro-school forces.<sup>46</sup> In spite of this move, however, the pro-school forces, now under the leadership of Henry Howell,<sup>47</sup> endorsed Schweitzer<sup>48</sup> and advanced two business candidates of their own, both of whom had been active on behalf of the pro-school forces during the School Crisis.<sup>49</sup> Although only the candidacy of Sam Barfield was successful, the victory was seen as a direct rebuff to Mayor Duckworth, his "dictatorial rule," the Council's actions in the desegregation crisis, and the secrecy of the process of city planning and governmental decision-making.<sup>50</sup> Fred Duckworth declined to seek re-election in the next race, and the office of Mayor was turned over to Roy Martin, the one councilman who had dared to break with the Organization during the school crisis in order to support a continuation of public education in the city. Norfolk had thus come full circle, and although the process of government became more contentious as decision-making came more into public view, the primacy of councilmanic support for public education was never again at issue; the bi-racial coalition of pro-school

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<sup>46</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 16 February 1960

<sup>47</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 15 June 1960.

<sup>48</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 10 June 1960.

<sup>49</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 29 March 1960.

<sup>50</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 15 June 1960.

advocates, the Silkstocking business elite, and the city's Black leadership that emerged to promote educational issues following the crisis strengthened and matured into the dominant political force for the next three decades.

## CHAPTER NINE

## CONCLUSION

Bombarded, blockaded, captured, and even plundered, Norfolk had endured much at the hands of its enemies over its more than 300-year history. But it had also suffered just as greatly from enemies within: it had been razed by the patriots, embargoed by the federalists, undercut by intrastate rivalries with the fall-line cities up river, terrorized by armed mobs during Reconstruction, and then very nearly ruined when disarmament followed World War I. In between it had been decimated by contagion and conflagration of all kinds. Through it all, however, the promise of prosperity lingered just close enough that its merchants dreamed of the day when her fine natural harbor would rival the great ports of New York, Boston, Charleston, and Baltimore. It was the pursuit of that dream that brought its citizens the requisite resiliency to bounce back from each of the crushing blows of defeat, only to be leveled again.<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, Norfolk's history during the postwar era was not remarkably different from that of other American

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<sup>1</sup>For a complete history of Norfolk, see Thomas J. Wertenbaker, Norfolk: Historic Southern Port (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1962).

cities. The hustle and bustle of the war years gave way to a momentary respite, and then raged on in the frantic growth of suburbia. The highways zoomed, the skyscrapers loomed, and the babies boomed in the prosperity of America's "Golden Years." A tide of reform that swept all across the Sunbelt touched briefly on Norfolk's shores at the close of World War II,<sup>2</sup> lingering just long enough to bring new leadership and new competence to city hall, and then rolled on by. The civic elite who ruled Floyd Hunter's Atlanta<sup>3</sup> in 1950 had their counterparts who reigned briefly over Norfolk's growth, but then were forced to share power with the established politicians, just like their colleagues in Denver,<sup>4</sup> New Haven,<sup>5</sup> New York, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Baltimore, and Detroit.<sup>6</sup> While in power Norfolk's businessmen elite set in motion a remarkably far-reaching plan of action that put the city at the forefront of almost every municipal endeavor associated with city planning and urban renewal. By the middle of the decade, however, the city's leadership had sorted itself

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<sup>2</sup>Carl Abbott, The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

<sup>3</sup>Floyd W. Hunter, Community Power Structure (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1953).

<sup>4</sup>Carl Abbott, op. cit., p. 136.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Dahl, Who Governs? (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1961).

<sup>6</sup>Carl Abbott, pp. 251-253.

into several distinct camps, each with its own focus on the issues of greatest concern; just as in New Haven, businessmen focused on redevelopment and economic growth, politicians concentrated on the political arena, and education was left largely to the middle class that owed only fleeting allegiance to either the city's big businessmen or its more established political leaders.<sup>7</sup>

Opposition to school desegregation, however, brought unity to the leadership of the city, and one man, Mayor W. Fred Duckworth ruled preeminent, even if only briefly, over almost every sphere of civic endeavor. It is unusual, but not unknown for the mayor in a council-manager city to assume such power, and the concentration of such authority is ordinarily relatively brief and often associated with some popular mandate to clean up city hall, initiate major reform, rejuvenate the downtown business area, or otherwise achieve some long sought public endeavor.<sup>8</sup> In Norfolk's case, the Mayor's political fortunes both rose and fell with the tide of Massive Resistance, and it was in Norfolk that the Byrd Organization's highly touted scheme to circumvent the authority of the federal courts met its match. Barely a year after federal troops had marched into Little Rock, Arkansas, to enforce a court order to desegregate, the public senior and junior high schools in Norfolk were closed

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<sup>7</sup>Robert Dahl, op cit.

<sup>8</sup>Carl Abbott, pp. 251-253.

in defiance of a similar legal mandate. Remarkably nothing happened. For five months the schools remained closed, locking 10,000 white students out of class. Precisely because Norfolk was urban, and just a little cosmopolitan, Massive Resistance finally failed. Although predominantly Southern in nature, subtle variations in its cultural ethos enabled Norfolk to endure its school integration crisis differently than other cities in the South: one of its daily newspapers kept up an unrelenting pressure to reopen the schools; a white citizens group formed to initiate successful legal action; and, under threat of economic ruin, the city's business elite finally emerged to close the curtain on Massive Resistance, at the same time reopening the political system to the type of competitive environment that is more typical of major urban centers.

Thus, two events alone make the history of Norfolk during the 1950s remarkable--the intensity of its attack on urban blight and the ferocity of the resistance to school desegregation--that they are inexorably linked should come as no surprise. The rate at which federally funded bulldozers gobbled up slums to make way for urban renewal earned Norfolk All-American City honors and a lasting place in the record books of municipal achievement; at the same time the bitter confrontation between the opponents of school segregation and the proponents of Massive Resistance won it barely a footnote in the history books, and only fleeting



dishonor on the national scene. The city's reaction to these two issues, and, indeed, their very emergence as historical turning points, may be traced to the rise and fall of two very distinct foci of power--the one economic, and the other political--irrevocably tied together in a tale of pride and prejudice--the story of how municipal power came to serve two very different political ends.

Because, for the most part, Norfolk's history is so very ordinary during this period, it may be seen as representative of the forces and concerns that faced other areas in the Urban South. It is only the scale of its redevelopment activity and the desperation of its school closing controversy that make it exemplary as a case study of the inter-relationship between the two. Although the story of school desegregation and urban renewal in Norfolk may be more compelling than in most communities, it is not thought to be unique. There is good reason to believe that what existed in Norfolk on such a grand scale, could also be found in more subtle forms in hundreds of other cities across the nation. Norfolk's reaction to school desegregation in the 1950s was not unique, and, in fact was so typical that it may well serve as the model of what occurred in other communities. Neither is it unusual that its powers of urban renewal came to be employed during this era to achieve more political than purely economic ends--that, too,

is a pattern that has been well documented elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> Only the scope, and not the direction, of Norfolk's response is larger and more dramatic than elsewhere. Indeed, the very magnitude of this reaction is what makes the story in Norfolk so exemplary of the three distinct stages hypothesized at the outset of this work:

1. An Attempt to Make Separate "Equal," 1950-1955.

Like their counterparts across most of the nation, Norfolk's leaders were well aware that the system of "separate but equal" schools for Blacks and whites, at least as it existed in many parts of the rural South, could not long endure a withering legal challenge in the postwar era. Partly because of the overwhelming presence of the military, which had been integrated since 1948, its citizens were also aware that the old barriers of segregation were falling. As part of a larger mandate to reform every phase of city administration, the People's Movement of 1946 deliberately set about the task to equalize both the facilities and the operation of its dual public school system. Writing in February of 1957, U. S. District Court Judge Walter Hoffman commented on the success of this effort:

The sum and substance of the School Superintendent's evidence is that the City of Norfolk has substantially complied with the "separate

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<sup>9</sup>Martin Anderson, The Federal Bulldozer (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1964); Jewell Bellush and Murry Hausknecht, eds., Urban Renewal: People, Politics, and Planning (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

but equal" doctrine, which was applicable prior to the decision in Brown v. Board of Education. The City of Norfolk is to be commended for its rapid strides in bringing about an equalization in physical equipment, curriculum, teacher load, and teachers' salaries. If the "separate but equal" doctrine were now in existence, there would be no grounds for relief to be afforded these plaintiffs.<sup>10</sup>

The progress in Norfolk caught the attention of other Southern leaders as well. Writing in Look magazine, U. S. Senator Sam Ervin (D-N.C.), later of Watergate fame, commented that new schools for Blacks, like Norfolk's Young Park Elementary, gave testimony to the South's effort to resolve the disparities of segregation "in its own way."<sup>11</sup> Between 1950 and 1955 Norfolk completed four new elementary schools for Blacks (Young Park, Bowling Park, Lindenwood, and Diggs Park), three of which were built with federal redevelopment funds, and transferred a newly constructed junior high (Jacox) to the Black school system. In addition, it initiated a major building program to modernize the other aging Black facilities with new classroom wings, cafeterias, libraries, auditoriums, and other badly needed improvements. Teacher salaries had been equalized in 1941

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<sup>10</sup>Leola Pearl Beckett, et al. v. School Board of the City of Norfolk, Va., et al., Civil Case No. 2244, U. S. General District Court, Eastern District of Virginia, as reprinted in Race Relations Law Reporter 2: 2, (April, 1957), p. 338.

<sup>11</sup>Sam J. Ervin, Jr., "The Case for Segregation," Look, 3 April 1956, pp. 32-33.

as a result of a lawsuit,<sup>12</sup> and by 1951, Norfolk was reporting that it spent more to educate a Black child than a white, due largely to the fact that Black teachers, because they had more seniority and degrees, were higher on the scale than their white counterparts.

Thus, the local record of attention to the fiscal and physical aspects of making separate race schools more equal is in full keeping with efforts all across the South to maintain segregation in a more equitable setting. While the Brown cases were under deliberation, most of the states where schools were segregated by law (de jure) began a deliberate effort to upgrade Black schools, provide additional funding resources, equalize teacher salaries, and otherwise preserve segregation "on a voluntary basis."<sup>13</sup> Just as it was in the forefront of other municipal planning endeavors, the fact that Norfolk constructed four new Black public schools during this era, helped to continue its reputation of progressive achievement.

2. A Transition Period, 1955-1956: from Calmness to Hostility. A dramatic confrontation over school desegregation in the South was not necessarily inevitable; most Southern leaders reacted calmly to the initial announcement

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<sup>12</sup>Henry S. Rorer, History of Norfolk Public Schools, 1681-1968 (Norfolk: by author), p. 69.

<sup>13</sup>W. D. Workman, Jr., "The Deep South," chap. in Don Shoemaker, ed., "With All Deliberate Speed" (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 92.

of the Supreme Court's decision outlawing separate race schools. Indeed, they had expected some such determination. Only the reversal of the long standing legal tradition under attack in the title case, Brown v. Board of Education, really caused much consternation. If federal courts were truly to follow the letter the decision in Brown, as it became increasingly obvious that they would, then it meant that school attendance patterns in the South would have to be drastically revised so that each child would have to enroll in the school closest to his or her home. In deciding Brown, the Court left intact the type of segregation, even though not absolute, that was found most often in the cities of the North, West, and Midwest, where separation of the races was due to the individual's choice of neighborhood or place of residence, i.e. de facto segregation. Thus, substantially equal schools that served separate race neighborhoods were still permitted by the Court; it was only the peculiar circumstance presented by Linda Brown, a Black living closer to a white school than a Black one, that was actually found unconstitutional.

The doctrine of proximity enunciated in Brown represented a much greater threat to segregated schools in the South than elsewhere, for it meant that, not only would Blacks be admitted in fairly large numbers to formerly white schools--a situation that was rare enough elsewhere--in many Southern communities, because of the high percentage of

Black population, whites might have to attend nearby Black schools, a situation that was not found anywhere else in the world.<sup>14</sup> Part of the reason for the calm initial reaction from Southern leaders to the early pronouncements of the Court was the feeling that their efforts to achieve equal school facilities had been successful, and that segregation could continue on a "voluntary" basis. It was only when litigation was initiated in their own community and they realized the particular problems posed by the doctrine of proximity that first panic, and then wholesale opposition to the Court, set in.

Norfolk in 1950 was like Orlando and a number of other Southern cities in that, in addition to a large central slum, Blacks occupied a half dozen or so housing areas scattered around town.<sup>15</sup> In their research on housing integration in the 1950s, Karl and Alma Taueber found that this pattern was typical of older, more established Southern cities, like Charlestown (South Carolina), Washington, Baltimore, and New Orleans; newer Southern cities, those that boomed after the Civil War (i.e., Atlanta, Birmingham, Memphis, and Augusta) were more like their Northern counterparts in that Blacks were concentrated almost exclusively in single downtown "ghetto." The newer cities could thus adopt

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<sup>14</sup>Robin M. Williams and Margaret W. Ryan, eds., Schools in Transition: Community Experiences in Desegregation (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1954).

<sup>15</sup>Abbott, p. 93.

the Northern model of de facto segregation without undue hardship; it was only in the older Southern cities, where the Black population was more dispersed, that the doctrine of proximity meant that large scale integration would be required. The Taueber's explained that the "backyard" or "alley-dwelling" type of housing arrangement found in the older Southern cities, like Norfolk, was due to the fact that each major white middle-class neighborhood had its own nearby Black residential area from which it could pull domestic laborers.<sup>16</sup> Residential integration in Norfolk may have been even more pronounced than elsewhere, since Navy housing, desegregated since 1948, presented additional pockets of Black population living in mostly white areas of the city. Moreover, the fact that Blacks were spread across the city meant that there were transition areas, blocks where housing was shifting from white to Black, in a number of neighborhoods. It was these areas that posed the greatest threat to efforts to preserve segregated schools on a "voluntary" basis.

The calm reaction of the Norfolk School Board to the U. S. Supreme Court's ruling in the Brown v. Board of Education cases was held up as a model for the rest of the South. There was little concern on the part of the Board that schools could be desegregated in the city with a "minimum of

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<sup>16</sup>Karl E. and Alma Taueber, Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1965), pp. 23, 48.

integration"--"so little you'd hardly notice it"--without major disruption or problem. The city's Catholic school system, including Norfolk Catholic High School, had been desegregated without incident at the start of the 1954-55 school year,<sup>17</sup> and the Board had little doubt that the same results could be achieved in the public schools. Not until the city actually faced litigation to desegregate did the city's leaders realize the explosive potential of the situation they would face.

Politics and events quickly overtook the official calm expressed by the School Board. Virginia's governor (Stanley) and many of the state's urban political leaders at first expressed sentiments that paralleled those of the Norfolk School Board, but the ferocity of the resistance building in the rural Southside counties, the Black belt that formed the core of the Byrd Organization's voting strength, soon forced a retreat from such moderation. Hostility to the prospect of school segregation was fed by the fact that locally the city's bus system, its state park, and other recreation facilities had either desegregated voluntarily under the threat of litigation or else under force by a mandate from the federal court. The change is most apparent in the sentiments of Norfolk's legislative delegation, which at first supported the Board's sentiments, later wavered, and by 1956 was in full retreat as the

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<sup>17</sup>Southern School News, 1 October 1954.



delegates faced fierce opposition from the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberty, Virginia's well organized, and for the most part, well-heeled, staunchly pro-segregation, pressure group.

The School Board's calm, "Wait and See" attitude soon gave way to a quiet reappraisal of its own building effort. A few additions that were scheduled for Black schools were delayed, and the Board began to evaluate the location of a number of proposed schools in light of the critical issue of residential proximity. A proposal to build a replacement for the aging Lafayette School was scrapped, as were at least four prospective sites for a badly needed (white) junior high school. It seems that some of these sites were rejected in part because they were too close to Black residential areas to avoid desegregation under the Brown precedent (see Figure 1, page 148), but the issue was clouded by the fact that Norfolk had also just annexed new areas where similar facilities were also badly needed.

Increasingly the School Board in Norfolk found itself isolated in both spirit and approach from the rest of the city's political leadership. Public reaction to the possibility of school desegregation was stiffening, partly because the city was finding that it would not be given much of a transition period to shift from a segregated to a desegregated school system. Any thought that local Blacks would be content with separate facilities under the new

efforts to equalize Black and white education was quickly dashed: the N.A.A.C.P. filed a petition with the School Board seeking desegregated schools shortly after the Brown decision was finalized, and once its administrative remedies were exhausted, proceeded directly to federal court. U. S. District Judge Walter Hoffman was also not inclined to grant the kind of delay that seemed customary elsewhere in the South, and was preparing to order a couple of elementary schools desegregated in the fall of 1957, an event that would have put Norfolk on the same collision course as Little Rock.

Leaders in Norfolk were much like their colleagues in other parts of the South,<sup>18</sup> and indeed much of the rest of the nation:<sup>19</sup> when they saw that legal challenges to segregation were emerging in their own community, they tended to blame this "interference" on the work of "outsiders," and failed to see it as a legitimate expression of local Black hostility to the institution of segregation. At first the N.A.A.C.P. bore the brunt of this attack, and the state legislatures especially focused their wrath through anti-N.A.A.C.P. laws designed to threaten or intimidate its membership. The reaction of the white community to the N.A.A.C.P. spilled over into other community activities, and Norfolkkians, just like others across the South in areas

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<sup>18</sup>Southern School News, 6 January 1955.

<sup>19</sup>Williams and Ryan, op cit., p. 237

thought to be racially moderate, had their own experience with hate mail, racist literature, and racial turmoil. Events were particularly intense in Coronado, a formerly white section of the city where the color line had been successfully breached. There, Blacks who were attempting to break the color line in an established white neighborhood, had to face the threat of firebombs, vandalism, hostile mobs, and racial taunts. The crisis of housing in the Black community, which was in part exacerbated by redevelopment activity, was forcing racial change in a few other neighborhoods as well. Coronado was but one symptom of the problem; similar hostilities were evident in the Brambleton and Berkley sections of the city, both of which by the mid-1950s had nearly completed their transition to predominately Black housing areas, and in the Atlantic City, Lamberts Point, and Broad Creek areas on the fringe of the downtown, which were just beginning to tip. Just as in Coronado, efforts by the Black community to develop new homes in the Broad Creek Shores subdivision were met with strong opposition from whites in the surrounding areas. In fact, the pattern of housing in older Southern cities, like Norfolk, where whites and Blacks lived in greater proximity to one another, may have been in part responsible for some of the growing animosity between the races.

By 1956 race relations in the city, which had been at their highest peak a few years earlier, had deteriorated

badly. No longer were Blacks consulted on major planning or development initiatives, and even when controversies arose, such as the Broad Creek Shores development, Black leaders had so few contacts in city government that they had to turn to leaders in the banking and financial community for mediation. One Black leader characterized the situation as, "in Norfolk, there are no relations between the races."<sup>20</sup> The School Board, too, found itself just as isolated. In spite of the strong personal commitment of its members to continue public education in Norfolk at all cost, it was obvious that political leaders in both the state and the city were more than willing to let public schools evolve into some sort of state sponsored private educational system in order to remain segregated. Increasingly the School Board was being called upon to help hold the line against desegregation. It had been willing to do its part in carefully planning the location of new facilities, but soon it would be asked to play an even larger role. As members of the middle class, all of whom had benefitted enormously from public education, the Norfolk School Board, like hundreds of others across the South, was not willing to participate in the demise of public education in the city. Partly because they recognized this difference, political leaders in Virginia and half a dozen other Southern states moved to take away from the local boards certain of the administrative powers

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<sup>20</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 June 1958.

necessary to maintain public schools. Instead they created a melange of state pupil placement boards and commissions, all designed to "interpose" the authority of the states between the Black litigants and the boards.<sup>21</sup>

Thus the School Board and political leaders in Norfolk had, by 1956, found themselves in the midst of a firestorm of public unrest. The community seemed headed on the fast track towards a court-ordered desegregation of its public schools, yet the state's political leaders were indicating that they would not permit even the most minimal form of integration. Also by 1956, public opposition to the courts had reached a fever pitch. Neither situation was unique to Norfolk, although the particular circumstance of its dispersed Black population may have leant an extra air of urgency to deliberations there. Since the established political order cannot long endure such a heightened level of public unrest, the leadership in Norfolk, and indeed much of the rest of the South, felt obligated to take every legal step at its disposal to delay as long as possible the eventuality of desegregated schools. One logical assumption is that local leaders in Norfolk and hundreds of other Southern communities followed the lead of their counterparts in the U. S. Congress and the state legislatures, and began to prepare to move beyond rhetoric towards action.

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<sup>21</sup>Southern School News, February, 1957.

3. Overt Attempts to Move from De Jure to De Facto Segregation, 1956-1960. The doctrine of "interposition" that began to emerge in the rhetoric of the politicians found its outlet in a host of special state laws designed to interpose the authority of the state between the federal courts and the local school officials. Most of these laws dealt with pupil placement, student transfer policies, attendance,<sup>22</sup> and financial control of the schools, but it is just as logical to assume that local officials followed these same legislative trends in their own enactments. Gradually the realization began to dawn on municipal officials all across the South that, because public education was much more a community than even a state responsibility, the powers of the local school boards and city councils to administer public schools were even greater than those of the state. Thus, a logical extension of interposition logic already being advanced by numerous state leaders enabled local officials to discover that their own inherent powers to assign pupils, rule on transfer applications, build schools, utilize space, draw attendance zones, and otherwise administer the day to day operations of the public schools could be judiciously applied to preventing or at least delaying the eventuality of court ordered desegregation that would prove so disruptive.

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<sup>22</sup>Patrick E. McCauley, "Be It Enacted," chap. in Don Shoemaker, ed., "With All Deliberate Speed," op cit., p. 132.

Norfolk officials, as well as others across the South, quickly seized on these powers and began to take the steps that would be necessary to delay segregation. Even though data on the attendance zones in Norfolk in the 1950s no longer exists, the application of the interposition philosophy at the local level may still be tracked by following the fate of the school buildings most directly threatened by court-ordered integration. Since the first round of litigation followed almost exactly the proximity precedent established in the Brown v. Board of Education case, by the winter of 1956-1957 Norfolk faced the certainty of court ordered integration of several of its elementary schools the following (i.e., 1957-58) school year. In discussing the particulars of the situation, U. S. Federal District Judge Walter E. Hoffman noted that the problem of integration would be particularly acute at two elementary schools:

According to the testimony of the Division Superintendent, there are some localities in the City of Norfolk which will create individual problems in the elementary school system, particularly at the Patrick Henry School and the Gatewood School where the percentage of white to colored students would be approximately four to one in Patrick Henry and eight to one in Gatewood, with the preponderance of the student body being white, which allocation is based upon the assumption that the school children are assigned only in accordance with normal geographical consideration.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Leola Pearl Beckett, et al. v. School Board of the City of Norfolk, Va., et al., op cit., reprinted in Race Relations Law Reporter 2: 2, (April, 1957), p. 338.

Before the 1957-1958 school year ever began, however, the Norfolk School Board began its first real experimentation with applying its inherent powers of school administration to block the court order. As Judge Hoffman had indicated, the two elementary schools most threatened by court-ordered integration were both in transition areas of the city. Patrick Henry Elementary was in the Atlantic City area, a once proud working-class neighborhood that had always maintained some Black housing near the cotton mill and seafood packing houses. In recent years, however, Blacks had begun to move into other portions of the neighborhood. By 1957 50 Black students would have been eligible to attend Patrick Henry Elementary under the doctrine of proximity<sup>24</sup> Even though white students would have outnumbered Blacks by better than four-to-one, the school was closed, and the building converted to administrative offices. Although the School Board had been pressuring for several years for additional administrative office space, it had sought sites closer to the center of the city.<sup>25</sup>

Gatewood Elementary was situated in Berkley, another working class neighborhood that was somewhat isolated by the Elizabeth River from the rest of the city. The Black

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<sup>24</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 March 1957; Norfolk Virginian-Pilot 13 February 1957.

<sup>25</sup>Letter from School Superintendent J. J. Brewbaker to H. H. George, Norfolk City Manager, 2 July 1955; and letter to Sherwood Reeder, Norfolk City Manager, 8 August 1955, Norfolk Public Schools files.



population, which had once been confined to areas around the shipyards, had begun in the previous decade to expand into other parts of the Berkley community. Gatewood Elementary remained the last white school in the area, but it, too, was threatened by desegregation, although Judge Hoffman indicated that the ratio of whites to Blacks would have been only eight-to-one. Just as it had with Patrick Henry, the School Board closed the school to its white clientele, transferring it instead to the Black school system. Whites in Berkley would have to commute to some other school across the river. In addition to Gatewood, the School Board also transferred John Marshall Elementary on the edge of the downtown area from the white to Black school systems, since it, too, was too close to nearby Black housing to withstand a legal challenge. Since Judge Hoffman had already approved a similar shift two years earlier when Blacks sought to enroll in Thomas Jefferson Elementary in Newport News,<sup>26</sup> the Norfolk School Board had every reason to feel he would approve the same tactic in the current instance. Indeed, Judge Hoffman all but suggested a repeat of the strategy to the Newport News Board in an opinion written at the same time that the fate of Patrick Henry and Gatewood Elementary schools in Norfolk was being decided:

[The Walter Reed Elementary School] has heretofore been reserved for white children, but

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<sup>26</sup>Southern School News, October, 1955.

its location [is] on the fringe of a rapidly changing population area wherein the population will soon become all colored . . . . This may well resolve itself in the Walter Reed Elementary School becoming substantially for colored children. I do not know of any particular law that prevents the so-called gerrymandering of the school areas.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the power to determine the attendance zone and the actual use of buildings, the Norfolk School Board found that it also had discretionary authority over the size, location, and grade composition of new schools as well. The most telling evidence that these powers were used to forestall school segregation may be found in the creation of the Rosemont and Coronado schools in the newly annexed Norview area. Rosemont, which was designed to serve as a combination elementary/junior high school, the only such combination school in the city, was hastily erected to serve the Black population threatening to integrate Norview Elementary and Junior High Schools. Not only did newspaper accounts of the era clearly discern that the purpose of the school was to forestall school desegregation,<sup>28</sup> the Black community fiercely resisted both the project and fact that the hastily constructed building would lack many of the essential support facilities present in all of the "white" schools recently constructed.<sup>29</sup> A school in the Coronado

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<sup>27</sup>Southern School News, March, 1957.

<sup>28</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 8 July 1959.

<sup>29</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 21 July 1959.

section was not planned until after the School Board had been given the names and addresses of the Black litigants seeking to integrate Norview Elementary. After examining the documents, the Board discovered that, in spite of the Rosemont school, which was then under construction, the color lines in the Norview section had continued to change, and some of the litigants still lived closer to a white school. When first conceived, Coronado was nothing more than six mobile classrooms pushed off the back of a truck onto a vacant lot,<sup>30</sup> that like, Rosemont, was designed almost entirely to place a Black school in closer proximity to Black litigants than the white school they sought to attend. Again, Blacks complained bitterly that this "vest pocket" school lacked appropriate facilities, and was only being built to counter their litigation.<sup>31</sup> Although Judge Hoffman discussed the situation at length in his review of the progress of desegregation suit in Norfolk, he nevertheless felt powerless to intervene as long as the School Board could point to a sound pedagogical reason (overcrowding) for creating the schools.<sup>32</sup> Two other schools, Benmoreell and Broad Creek Village Elementary, both of which served

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, 20 August 1959.

<sup>32</sup>"District Judge's [Walter E. Hoffman] Statement of August 25, 1958," in the case of Leola Pearl Beckett, et al., versus the School Board of the City of Norfolk, et al., reprinted in Race Relations Law Reporter 3: 5 (October, 1958), pp. 953-954.

integrated Navy housing projects, were similarly closed, even though both schools were little more than a decade old. One other school, Pineridge Elementary, also served the Broad Creek Village project, and it also closed for a few years.

The strategy was even further defined, with the help of the more political Mayor and City Council, in the spring of 1959, just after the city's previously closed schools had reopened. At that time Mayor Duckworth proposed building three-room school houses all across the city so that they could better serve "the neighborhoods" in question. Almost all parties to the affair, including the newspapers,<sup>33</sup> the School Board,<sup>34</sup> and the City Council,<sup>35</sup> knew that the ploy was simply to build and maintain single race schools. Even though the School Board had strong pedagogical reasons to oppose these mini-schools as impractical,<sup>36</sup> it nevertheless bowed to the dictates of the Mayor, and erected five buildings that met his specifications (Easton, Fairlawn, Poplar Halls, East Ocean View, and Pretty Lake) in the newly annexed Eastern section of the city.

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<sup>33</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 22 February 1959.

<sup>34</sup>Francis Crenshaw.

<sup>35</sup>Roy B. Martin, Jr.

<sup>36</sup>W. E. Campbell, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, "Report of the Committee Relegated By the School Board of the City of Norfolk to Study the Proposal for Construction of Small Primary Schools," undated (1959), Norfolk Public Schools files.

We had to build them. . . it was the only way we could get any schools at all . . . they weren't quite as small as the ones Fred [Duckworth] wanted to build.<sup>37</sup>

Years later School Board member Francis Crenshaw commented that these schools were in part responsible for the fact that the Eastern portion of the city felt "under served" for decades, a grievance that he sensed underlies much of the pressure from that area for the current shift to a ward system of elections.<sup>38</sup>

One other reasonable assumption is that city councils and other local officials, just like their colleagues on the school boards, state legislatures, and the Congress, used the powers at their disposal to frustrate and delay court ordered integration. The mini-school controversy in the spring of 1959 serves as a good introduction to the application of municipal powers to dictate school policies. The school system in Norfolk, like all of those in Virginia and most of the systems in large cities elsewhere, was a dependent school district which relied upon the city government for a portion of its taxing and spending powers. Financing new construction is but one small element of that financial power. Although normally unwilling to risk the political outcry of involving itself in school affairs, a city council nevertheless has the power to appropriate

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<sup>37</sup>Francis Crenshaw.

<sup>38</sup>Francis Crenshaw.

funds, and thus dictate many of the spending policies of the school district. Because it feared independent action by the more educationally--as opposed to politically--oriented school boards, the state of Virginia passed special legislation that allowed municipal governments to cut off funds to operate the schools on a 30-day notice. Several school boards, especially those in the rural areas of the state, availed themselves of this power.<sup>39</sup> The Norfolk City Council applied the leverage of this tactic when it voted to appropriate school funds on a 30-day basis in the midst of the school closing crisis.<sup>40</sup>

Another aspect of financial control may be found in the size of the local appropriation: after the school closing controversy, the City Council intimated that it would cut off local funding for schools because of the way it had been opposed by the School Board and the teachers during the crisis.<sup>41</sup> Later the Council made good on at least a portion of its threat by substantially reducing the School Board's budget, thereby denying it the ability to provide a raise to the teachers who had opposed Massive Resistance.<sup>42</sup> Finally, the Council sought permission from the legislature to replace the incumbent Board members in a

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<sup>39</sup>Southern School News, August 1955.

<sup>40</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 November 1958.

<sup>41</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 21 February 1959.

<sup>42</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 25 October 1959.

thinly veiled move to enlarge the membership and reduce the term of office.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the ability to directly influence the operation of the schools through their powers of appointment, financial control, and capital funding, local governments also have considerable heretofore unrecognized authority to dictate the shape and size of school districts and attendance zones through their powers of urban renewal. The Broad Creek Shores controversy provides an interesting case in point: by the time the area had been annexed into the city (January 1, 1955), a group of Black developers had already platted the Broad Creek Shores subdivision and had a number of houses under construction. Although faced with a fait accompli, the city of Norfolk nevertheless moved through its powers of eminent domain to seize a large tract on the northern edge of the property, thereby isolating the Black development from nearby white neighborhoods. Although the stated purpose of the purchase was to buy up land for a park and possible school expansion, neither was ever built on the site; the land was eventually used for the National Guard armory and an industrial park. Much later Councilman (and later Mayor) Roy B. Martin, Jr. would indicate that the armory was placed there "in order to block the Black development,"<sup>44</sup> a theory that confirms reports in the

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<sup>43</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 April 1959.

<sup>44</sup>Roy B. Martin, Jr.

Black press of the era.<sup>45</sup> Even though there is no other direct testimony to the fact, appearances at least suggest that the city similarly used the placement of Old Dominion University, Interstate 64 and 264, and other park, recreational, and industrial parks as both a buffer zones between racially diverse neighborhoods and as a natural barrier to maintain separate race school districts. Although confirmation of such a theory must be left to other researchers, use of the powers of city planning and eminent domain to block desegregation has long been hypothesized.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps the most damning indictment of the use of municipal powers to achieve de facto segregation comes from the former head of Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) in the 1950s, who accused Southern cities of using their powers of urban renewal to break up integrated low-income neighborhoods in order to more clearly draw the color lines:

Where, in a few Southern cities, there had been a protest against this, a compromise was sometimes reached involving proposed re-use [of the land] for other than residential purposes. Thus a slum formerly housing both Negro and white families was proposed as the location for industry or a public institution. Urban renewal too often seemed to be an instrument for wiping out racially integrated living.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Norfolk Journal and Guide, 6 August 1955.

<sup>46</sup>Willie and Greenblatt, op cit., p. 189.

<sup>47</sup>Robert C. Weaver, "The Urban Complex," chap. in Jewel Bellush and Murry Hausknecht, eds., Urban Renewal: People, Politics, and Planning (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), p. 94.



Although he did not mention any city by name, Mr. Weaver could well have any number of projects undertaken in Norfolk during its second phase of redevelopment. Just as N.R.H.A. Project One was carefully conceived, thoroughly planned, and meticulously implemented, Norfolk's second phase of redevelopment, begun after 1956, was rushed, haphazard, and poorly planned. Humanitarian concerns were foremost in the minds of the planners of N.R.H.A. Project One: public housing in the form of modern garden apartments in well designed neighborhoods replaced some of the worst slums in the nation, and development was implemented in carefully conceived stages so that residents were moved first to public housing units away from the site during demolition, and then moved back to their old neighborhood, once it was reconstructed. In spite of the size and scope of the endeavor, the entire took project took only about five years to complete from the time the bulldozers first began to roll.

The Atlantic City, Downtown, Broad Creek, and Old Dominion Projects stand in sharp contrast to the careful planning and precision of N.R.H.A. Project One. Under either a remarkable coincidence, or as part of a much larger deliberate plan of action, at almost exactly the same time that federal Judge Walter Hoffman was ordering the desegregation of Patrick Henry Elementary School in the Atlantic City portion of the city, the Norfolk Redevelopment and

Housing Authority was announcing that it planned to demolish the entire neighborhood. The coincidence theory is hard to swallow, especially since closing Patrick Henry Elementary, an action already taken by the School Board, did not remove the threat to segregated schools posed by the mixed-race neighborhood: 13 of the 24 Black plaintiffs in the school desegregation suit lived in Atlantic City.<sup>48</sup> Even though Patrick Henry Elementary was removed from the challenge, these plaintiffs as well as other Blacks in the area still lived closer to the white schools in the Ghent portion of the city than to the Black institutions further downtown. Although the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority indicated that it had been planning the project since 1954, formal announcements of the demolition did not come until December 7, 1956,<sup>49</sup> and the bulldozers began to roll seven months later. Former Mayor and Redevelopment and Housing Commissioner Pretlow Darden indicated that the Atlantic City project was initiated in part to "rid Ghent of the cancerous growth approximate to it,"<sup>50</sup> although there is little evidence that the blighted housing conditions would have spread beyond the natural geographic barriers that isolated most of Atlantic City from the rest of Norfolk.

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<sup>48</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 March 1957.

<sup>49</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 8 December 1956.

<sup>50</sup>Pretlow Darden.

At least in the eyes of those who had the most professional knowledge of deterioration in the neighborhood, Atlantic City was not a slum, in spite of the efforts of the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority to characterize it as such. The 1950 Census revealed that more than half of the houses had central heat and indoor plumbing --both still rarities in many parts of town--were in adequate repair, and commanded moderate rents twice those of the areas demolished in N.R.H.A. Project One and the Downtown Project.<sup>51</sup> In spite of the fact that some residents complained that persistent rumors of redevelopment had driven down real estate values and hastened the neighborhood's decline,<sup>52</sup> the new Black families moving in were apparently willing to pay even higher rents than the white residents because of the crisis in adequate housing for the Black community.<sup>53</sup> The Health Department's housing inspection division had just completed a major code enforcement initiative in the area, one of the first major attempts in the country to salvage a neighborhood by concentrating enforcement efforts. Federal law required cities to rehabilitate one unit of housing for each unit torn down under redevelopment. The Health Department chose Atlantic City precisely because it was

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<sup>51</sup>U. S. Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of Population, 1950, v. III, Census Tract Studies, Chapter 38 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government, 1952), p. 22.

<sup>52</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 1 July 1957.

<sup>53</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 March 1957.

salvageable: it was "not so good that we couldn't rehabilitate it, and not so bad that we were wasting our time."<sup>54</sup>

Because of the necessary link between the rehabilitation project and redevelopment, there was close cooperation between the Health Department and the Housing Authority. When queried about future plans for the area, N.R.H.A. executive director Larry Cox reportedly indicated that it would be at least "five to ten years" before the Housing Authority would initiate a project in Atlantic City. That was why it was such a surprise for the Health Department officials to read in the paper the sudden announcement of the Atlantic City project; they had been present for months at the cabinet meetings of the N.R.H.A., and there had been no mention of such a project. The Health Department was doubly upset when it found that its own surveys were being used by the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority to declare the area a slum.

The code enforcement project had been a major success, and almost every residential unit in the area had been brought up to the standard of the city's minimum housing code. Although there was a two-block wide area of dilapidated buildings in a mixed-use area of commercial, residential, and light industrial structures that ran along the

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<sup>54</sup>G. D. Monola, former director of Environmental Health, interview by author, Norfolk, 3 April 1991.

present site of Brambleton Avenue, these structures could have been demolished in the highway project, and the rest of the neighborhood saved. This is precisely the course urged by the Health Department; Atlantic City was not a slum in the eyes of the individuals who had the most intimate professional working knowledge of the area. According to the director of the code enforcement project, Atlantic City, even in 1956, had a "surprisingly large number of owner occupied dwellings" that should have never been included in the redevelopment project. Although a structure could pass the city's minimum housing code and still have major structural defects under federal redevelopment standards, a number of blocks in Atlantic City had only one or two defects. These blocks could only have been included for demolition by carefully designing the project boundaries so that the overall project area could meet the federal requirement of an average of five defects per dwelling. This accounts for the odd shape of the project, and why it zigged around some blocks and then zagged to pick up others (see Figure 2, page 227).

The Health Department was so upset at how its services and its surveys had been used to declare Atlantic City a slum, that a major rift developed between it and the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, a division that can be seen even today in the overlapping of housing inspection and enforcement authorities between the city and the N.R.H.A.

The perception that the Health Department was really trying to help the Housing Authority find new slums dealt a severe blow to the city's code enforcement efforts. In spite of its arguments and its expertise, the Health Department was powerless to help the residents of Atlantic City, many of whom were doubly bitter after realizing that the prices being paid for the acquisition of their homes was less than they had spent in bringing them up to the Health Department's code.<sup>55</sup>

In short, there was much that was worth saving in the Atlantic City area: many of the brownstones, row houses, and turn-of-the-century dwellings were clearly salvageable, and would have commanded a premium price when urban pioneers rediscovered in-town neighborhoods a little more than a decade later. Although the parts of the area along the present site of Brambleton Avenue were dilapidated, many of the blocks closer to the downtown had a distinctively "Greenwich Village flavor" and a "Bohemian and cosmopolitan character."<sup>56</sup>

Neither was Broad Creek Village a slum. Built during World War II, all of the units were free-standing dwellings with modern plumbing, electrical, and central heating systems. The 2,598 units each had two to three bedrooms, hardwood floors, deep sash windows, and sturdy interior

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 31 January 1959.

constructions; many, in fact were moved by their owners before they could be torn down, and still survive in other parts of the city. Moreover, residents were proud of the community, and especially pointed to its warmth, friendship, compassion, lack of crime, and sense of positive spirit, hardly signs of deterioration.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority could not wait to take possession of the property from the federal government so that it could be torn down. Since the Authority owned the housing as a result of the federal government's gift, demolition of the project did not have to meet redevelopment standards. Although there was some discussion of maintaining the area as residential, the City Council, especially realtor Robert Ripley, was adamantly opposed to having a low rent project in that area of the city. Mayor Fred Duckworth suggested using the land, which had rail service as well as a prime location between Virginia Beach Boulevard and Princess Anne Road, the two major thoroughfares into the downtown, as an industrial park, and its fate was sealed.<sup>58</sup> Once the Housing Authority took over (November 1954), the area was doomed; the N.R.H.A. never maintained the structures properly and had no interest in renting the vacant units, so it was not long before neglect and vandalism took their toll on both the structures and the

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<sup>57</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 15 July 1979.

<sup>58</sup>Roy B. Martin, Jr.

Broad Creek community. By the time the bulldozers started to roll, the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority had been successful in creating a bona fide slum out of a once proud and even modern, low-rent housing development.<sup>59</sup>

These two major redevelopment projects share another common element: both were rushed into the demolition phase so quickly that portions of the cleared land sat vacant for close to three decades. The Atlantic City Project area, especially, was poorly conceived as an industrial park: although it encompassed just more than a 140 acres, it was long and narrow, and badly cut up by Brambleton Avenue, the new superhighway that crossed its spine. Why would an industry choose to be in this somewhat isolated spot on the edge of the downtown when the city was also developing almost 500 acres in the Broad Creek Project closer to major thoroughfares and the population heart of the area? Not until the 1980s, when the Red Cross moved into the industrial park and the hospital complex eventually expanded to fill the western corner, did the project look like anything more than an urban desert. Even today most of the land in the project is dedicated to government use, either by the U. S. Commerce Department, transportation facilities, a largely unused waterfront park, the city health department, medical school, and hospital authority.

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<sup>59</sup>G. D. Monola.



If the project had been designed with more care, the city would have seized the last two blocks to the waterfront as well, and the area could have blossomed with highrise housing developments, a use it is just now discovering somewhat tenuously. In fact, the area has much that would recommend it to upscale apartment buildings, condos, and highrise residences: partly because it is cut off from the rest of the city by both natural geographic barriers and major transportation facilities, it is much more conducive to residential than industrial uses. The fact that it is bounded on very nearly all four sides by waterfront makes for spectacular vistas for an in-town neighborhood. Still, the planners seemed to do everything possible to destroy its future use as a residential area. Brambleton Avenue cuts across it in such a way that only the two corner pieces of property on Smith Creek (the Hague), one of the city's premiere real estate assets, could be used for highrise apartment houses; the small commercial area, with its quaint shops and artsy flavor, was demolished; and the failure to seize its rotting wharves and crumbling factory district has made it difficult for all but the most persistent developer to realize any of the great potential of the site.

In 1957, when the two projects were planned and executed, the city appeared to be violently opposed to residential use of either site. There was no talk of demolition in phases, as had been done in N.R.H.A. Project One, to mini-

mize hardships or plan for orderly expansion. In spite of the fact that Norfolk was also clearing almost 200 more acres in the downtown business district and starting another project near the present site of Old Dominion University, it was just more than a year between the time the projects were announced and most of the demolition had been completed. In just 16 months Norfolk appears to have torn down the homes of almost 20,000 people--roughly ten percent of its population--and these were not the substandard dwellings of its poorest residents. Instead these were the homes of working-class white families and a few Black residents attracted to decent housing in safe neighborhoods. It was these latter residents, because of the threat they posed to school segregation, that the city wanted to remove, but in the process, it embarked upon a terribly destructive course.

The Black families in Atlantic City and Broad Creek Village posed more than just an academic threat to school segregation. Because they represented the upwardly mobile portion of the Black middle-class, they held high aspirations for their children. For this reason, many had taken the lead in initiating the lawsuit (i.e., Leola Pearl Beckett, et al., v. the School Board of the City of Norfolk, et al., op cit.) that challenged the status of de jure segregation in the city. Because the N.A.A.C.P. had wished to follow the Brown precedent as closely as possible, the original 24 plaintiffs, and other like them, were probably

sought out precisely because they lived closer to white schools than the Black institutions to which their children were assigned. Nevertheless, they were willing to enlist and take a very prominent and somewhat risky role in the effort. Thirteen of the original plaintiffs lived in Atlantic City; another five lived in Berkley section of the city and had petitioned to go to the all-white Gatewood Elementary. This is one of the institutions that the School Board transferred to the Black school system, thereby leaving the remaining whites in Berkley without a school of their own. Although the other six plaintiffs lived closer to a Black school than a white, all lived in the Lamberts Point section of Norfolk,<sup>60</sup> on the edge of the city's prestigious Edgewater and Larchmont neighborhoods. The 1950 Census shows that the Black section of Lamberts Point was just then in the process of expanding further towards Edgewater and Larchmont. Redevelopment activity and the crisis in the Black housing market helped to push the transition area a little more each year. Even though Smallwood Elementary (Black) stood in the center of the area (the Old Dominion University Library now stands on the site), the city initiated a small redevelopment project in this area to provide land for expansion of the then two-year Norfolk Division of the College of William and Mary and Virginia Polytechnical Institute, now Old Dominion

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<sup>60</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 March 1957.

University. The project had the effect of bulldozing some of the transition neighborhoods, stabilizing racial lines in the area, and interposing a large barrier of public land, i. e., Old Dominion University, between the Black Lamberts Point section and the white neighborhoods of Larchmont and Edgewater, an effect that is still obvious today.

Moreover, Atlantic City, Broad Creek, and Lambert's Point were all integrating fairly peacefully,<sup>61</sup> and experienced none of the marches, bombings, threats, or intimidation found in the Brambleton of Coronado neighborhoods when the color lines were first crossed there. Instead, all three of these redevelopment areas had supported a few Blacks families for a number of years. Because of the critical housing shortage in the Black community, in part created by the redevelopment activity in N.R.H.A Project One, landlords could command higher rents from Blacks than from whites, and this fact helped smooth the transition of Black residents into additional parts of these communities.

Thus, just as school boards could tear down or close schools directly threatened by court ordered integration, cities had the power, through redevelopment, to tear down mixed race or transition areas where the racial composition of the neighborhood schools would have been equally mixed. Parallel to the power to size the school to the capacity of the neighborhood in order to maintain its single race

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<sup>61</sup>G. D. Monola.

identity, is the authority, through redevelopment, to adjust the size of the neighborhood to meet the racial designation of the school. School boards could change attendance zones, but cities could achieve the same effect by seizing land, demolishing the housing, or erecting barriers between neighborhoods that would force resizing of the attendance zones.

The evidence that Norfolk at least took this route and directly intervened with its powers of school administration and urban renewal to move the status of its segregated school system from de jure to de facto is overwhelming: one of the two elementary schools most directly threatened by court ordered integration, Patrick Henry, was closed and the neighborhood around it demolished because Blacks still threatened other nearby white schools; the other, Gatewood Elementary in Berkley, was transferred from the white to the Black school system. These two actions removed the direct threat posed by 18 of the original 24 plaintiffs in the school desegregation suit. The other 6 plaintiffs lived in the Lamberts Point section of the city close to the prestigious white neighborhoods of Larchmont and Edgewater; although they posed no direct threat to the nearby Larchmont Elementary School because Smallwood Elementary, a Black school, was closer, nevertheless Norfolk initiated a redevelopment project that had the effect of providing land for the expansion of Old Dominion University, then a

two-year junior college, shoring up the color lines in the area, and posing a formidable barrier of public land between the Black and white school districts. The John Marshall School on the Eastern edge of East Ghent was transferred from the white to the Black school system; two elementary schools serving integrated Navy housing projects, Benmoreell and Broad Creek Village, were torn down and a third, Pineridge Elementary, was closed for a few years; two white schools (Norview Elementary and Norview Junior High) in the newly annexed portion of the city were spared by the quick construction, first of the Rosemont combination elementary and junior high school, and later by six portable classrooms dumped on a 2.5 acre lot and dubbed Coronado Elementary; and four other white schools (W. H. Taylor Elementary, Blair Junior High, Maury High, and James Madison Elementary) were partially rescued by the Atlantic City and Old Dominion redevelopment projects (see Figure 6, page 265).

In spite of the monumental effort of its political leaders to preserve segregation, the ploy worked for only a single year. The schools that would have been integrated in the fall of 1957 were either torn down or removed from service, and in many cases, the neighborhoods, too, were demolished. But for the quick use of urban renewal powers, Norfolk may have joined Little Rock as the first major battleground of court ordered school integration. Judge Hoffman was obviously cognizant that the city was working to

counter his authority. Writing before either the fate of the school or the full boundaries of the Atlantic City Project were known, he indicated that:

Additionally, as to the Patrick Henry School, there is a redevelopment and housing plan now in its early stages which, if carried to completion, will substantially reduce the number of children who would ordinarily be assigned to Patrick Henry School.<sup>62</sup>

Norfolk had both the motive and the opportunity to use its powers of urban renewal to forestall school desegregation. That it did so, and with a vengeance, seems patently obvious. Even so, any such assessment of motive and municipal power would be incomplete without at least some discussion of possible rival hypotheses for the observed events. Although several alternate explanations are offered by other authors, the research supporting their conclusions comes from the 1960s or even the 1970s, and not the era under consideration.

Karl and Alma Taueber, in their major study of residential segregation and neighborhood change, noted that in Southern cities, in sharp contrast to most of the rest of the country, residential segregation generally increased between 1950 and 1960. In their general comments on this trend, they attribute this difference more to a number of market forces than to deliberate government policy. Before

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<sup>62</sup>Leola Pearl Beckett, et al., op cit., Race Relations Law Reporter 2: 2 (April, 1957), p. 339.

World War II, they noted, Blacks and whites in the South lived in much closer proximity to one another because Blacks needed access to white residential areas in order to serve as domestic workers; thus there was much less segregation in Southern cities than in the North or Midwest. After the war, however, this was less a factor, other job opportunities developed outside of domestic service, and Blacks were freer to choose their neighborhoods in closer association with each other. Although the Tauebers indicate that the racial exclusivity of new construction in the suburbs and other factors associated with white population changes were major reasons that the level of segregation increased between 1940 and 1950, they did not appear significant in the decade of the 1950s. Instead more than half of the variance in segregation measures of cities was attributed by the Tauebers to non-white occupational and population changes, that is, Blacks choosing to move into Black areas. Partly because the supply of housing appears by the 1950s to have caught up with the demand, they indicate that the choice of housing was broad enough to permit such voluntary segregation of the races, especially in the South, where Blacks occupied a much higher percentage of new housing than elsewhere. In Northern cities Blacks tended to take over



established neighborhoods, while whites moved in much larger numbers to new housing on the suburban fringe.<sup>63</sup>

In their more detailed study of several selected cities, however, the Tauebers note that governmental action may have been a factor in maintaining segregated neighborhoods. Charleston, South Carolina, for instance, deliberately used separate race public housing projects to maintain segregated neighborhoods. Also in that city, the pattern of back yard residences for Black domestics in white neighborhoods that was evident before World War II, was almost non-existent by 1960, but whether this was caused by voluntary housing changes or by official zoning and housing code enforcement initiatives is not indicated. The Tauebers do note that in Memphis, the City Planning Commission blocked expansion of Black housing into several white areas, a pattern that they felt was quite prevalent:

In some Southern cities informal political agreements permitting "zoning" portions of the city for white or black occupancy may have played a part in making available the requisite land for building new housing for blacks.

Finally, they indicate that Southern cities were much more aggressive in their annexation efforts in order to "capture new areas of white population." Although Norfolk was not one of the cities selected for in-depth study, the

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<sup>63</sup>Karl E. and Alma F. Taueber, Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1965), pp. 3-96.

Taueber's index of racial segregation indicates that Norfolk had one of the highest indexes of residential segregation in the country in both 1950 and 1960. By 1960 only Richmond, two cities in Alabama (Monroe and Shreveport), and six cities in Florida (Daytona Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Jacksonville, Miami, St. Petersburg, West Palm Beach), out of more than 200 studied, had a higher index.<sup>64</sup>

In his major work on the history of urban America, Kenneth T. Jackson notes many of the same trends as the Tauebers, but he points to deliberate government action as one of the primary cause of the increasing segregation of America's cities. The government he blames, however, is not municipal, but rather federal. In a chapter entitled "Federal Subsidy and the American Dream: How Washington Changed the American Housing Market," Professor Jackson provides a stunning indictment of how the federal Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) of the 1930s invented red-lining of urban, Black, and racially mixed neighborhoods--a practice that was later followed by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Veterans Administration (VA). According to Jackson, the professional real estate community knew that with these red-lining practices in effect, the sale of homes in a white community to Black buyers meant that the area would be red-lined and essentially placed off-limits to future sales, and thus worked to steer buyers

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp. 49, 191, 124, 240, 33-41.

into single race neighborhoods and away from transition areas. In addition, since the loan standards of these various federal agencies specified minimum lot sizes, setbacks, widths, and other standards, they favored newer suburban housing over older in-town neighborhoods. Because of these rigid standards, it became difficult to sell inner city housing, thereby hastening the decline of the central cities. Potential new property owners could not get federally-backed loans in mixed race or declining neighborhoods, and this factor increased absentee ownership, property abandonment, and the development of slums. By the time the federal government finally reversed its red-lining practices (1966), the switch only helped the remaining white homeowners escape to the suburbs, thereby furthering the segregation of America's housing.<sup>65</sup>

The federal government's role in forcing housing segregation was more, however, than just strict adherence to discriminatory lending practices. Professor Jackson also documents how federal public housing policies pushed public housing units into existing slum areas, thereby reinforcing segregated housing patterns and leading to the further decline of the surrounding neighborhoods. Although public housing had originally been intended for the "working poor" and the "deserving poor," by 1960 the federal government's

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<sup>65</sup>Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 190-218.

policies had forced it into the role as housing of last resort for welfare clients, thereby relegating it to ghetto status--a permanent home for the nation's underclass. Although the role of local governments is not entirely blameless in the design and location of public housing, nevertheless it appears that a whole host of national policies, from subsidized highways, mortgage investment, and expansion of military and government facilities also helped to isolate Blacks in the cities, while their former white neighbors moved to the suburbs. The only direct role attributed to municipalities is the use of zoning powers by Southern cities to enforce racial segregation of neighborhoods.<sup>66</sup>

Although Professor Jackson's treatment does not deal directly with the issue at hand, his thesis lends some support to the premise that Norfolk's post-Brown redevelopment activity was prompted by racial as well as economic considerations. Atlantic City and Broad Creek Village were not slums, but the fact that they were integrated communities on the edge of the downtown meant that, according to Jackson's research, they were red-lined and in great danger of tipping rapidly into slums. Thus, even though the structures themselves were sound, the fact that they could not be sold with government backed loans in a Navy town like Norfolk was a fatal flaw that doomed them to continued decline. At the time of its demise, the Norfolk Redevelop-

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 227, 216, 242.

ment and Housing Authority labored mightily to prove to the skeptics that Atlantic City was in danger of becoming a slum because of its increasing incidence of tuberculosis, venereal disease, juvenile delinquency, dilapidated housing, racial unrest, crime, fires, rat infestation, and the like.<sup>67</sup> Later, the Authority would make the argument that the project was initiated to give the medical center space to grow.<sup>68</sup> This justification is a little hard to accept, especially since the entire medical complex even today occupies only a corner of the sprawling project. The idea of a medical school in the project was not advanced until well after the entire 145-acre area had been swept bare,<sup>69</sup> and much of the land used for this and other medical purposes could have been acquired by eminent domain by the various governmental agencies and authorities involved without tearing down the rest of the community. Redevelopment and Housing Commissioner Pretlow Darden, who was also on the board of Norfolk General Hospital, indicated that Atlantic City was torn down as much to protect Ghent as it was to help the hospital;<sup>70</sup> his response is cryptic enough to accommodate either an economic interpretation (i.e., that

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<sup>67</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 23 June 1957.

<sup>68</sup>Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Report (Norfolk: N.R.H.A., 1957), op cit.; Francis Crenshaw.

<sup>69</sup>Roy B. Martin.

<sup>70</sup>Pretlow Darden.

slums, if left standing, spread to surrounding areas) or a more political explanation related to efforts to save the white schools in Ghent from court ordered integration.

The "white flight" theory advanced by James Coleman<sup>71</sup> and David Armour<sup>72</sup> is equally inadequate as an explanation of events in Norfolk, especially when the facts show that whites were pushed out of transition areas like Atlantic City and Broad Creek Village by deliberate municipal redevelopment activity. Moreover, most of the research on "white flight" was developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and shows that whites left areas when school integration efforts were at their maximum, and most urban communities faced extensive crosstown busing of whites and Blacks to achieve fully integrated schools. These same concepts do not appear appropriate to an era in which schools were not yet desegregated, unless one thinks in terms of the economic theories already discussed. "White flight" may be an adequate description of the final stages of decline of transition or mixed race neighborhoods, one that has been red-lined by the mortgage industry so that it is quickly becoming a dumping ground for the city's under-

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<sup>71</sup>James S. Coleman, Sara P. Kelly, and John A. Moore, Trends in School Segregation, 1968-1973 (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 1975).

<sup>72</sup>David J. Armour, "White Flight and the Future of School Desegregation," chap. in Walter G. Stephan and Joe R. Feagin, eds., School Desegregation: Past, Present, and Future (New York: Plenum Press, 1980), pp. 187-225.

class. Although there were some preliminary indicators that "white flight" may have started to some small degree in Atlantic City,<sup>73</sup> Norfolk's redevelopment projects appear to have been initiated more to prevent "white flight" by keeping the schools segregated, than because of it.

Similarly, the "tipping theory" advanced by Charles V. Willie and Susan L. Greenblatt deals with events once large scale integration had begun under federal court orders. In their study of ten school systems, only four of which were in the South (Richmond, Corpus Christi, Dallas, and Mobile), they found that if the percentage of white students in a given school was much less than 50%, then the school and neighborhood it served "tipped" precipitously from mixed race to all Black. Although their work parallels the research of David Armour and James Coleman in both the era studied and the effects determined, they did, however, discern several instances where direct municipal actions had an impact on efforts to preserve desegregated schools. They report that the federal courts found that the Boston School Committee manipulated school district boundaries and utilized student attendance patterns to reinforce patterns of residential segregation in that city. Similarly, the federal district court in Wilmington, Delaware, found that discriminatory actions by both the state government and the real estate community contributed to residential segregation

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<sup>73</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 March 1957.

there. In their examination of school desegregation in Mobile, Alabama, the authors describe how that city appeared to place its interstate highway so that it would serve as a dividing line between the races, allowing it to zone the school districts accordingly. In Richmond, Virginia, which faced some of the same harsh political restraints as Norfolk, they discovered that the city entered into a racially motivated merger with its surrounding counties in order to redraw attendance zones for white schools. There was also in that city evidence of "block-busting" by the local real estate community, especially in areas on the north side of town. The Richmond School Board also appears to have established two distinct feeder system of schools with different grade organizations in order to minimize transfers between the majority Black and white schools: white schools operated on a grades 1-5, 6-8, and 9-12 organization, while Black schools had grades 1-6, 7-9, and 10-12.<sup>74</sup> Another researcher found that the Richmond School Board, under the leadership of its chairman, Lewis F. Powell, later a U. S. Supreme Court Justice, spearheaded efforts to build new schools primarily to forestall school desegregation. Their building plan was apparently in response to the advice of James J. Kilpatrick, editor of the

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<sup>74</sup>Charles V. Willie and Susan L. Greenblatt, Community Politics and Educational Change: Ten School Systems Under Court Order (New York: Longman, Inc., 1981), pp. 33, 101, 189, 220-231.



Richmond News-Leader, that a great part of the desegregation problem, "especially in the cities, could be handled by the relocation of school buildings and the gerrymandering of enrollment lines."<sup>75</sup>

One slight variation of the white flight and tipping approaches is offered by the avoidance theory of Cataldo, Giles, and Gatlan. According to their research, the resegregation of cities was based on more passive avoidance choices than the overt actions described by white flight or tipping. Thus, when property became vacant in mixed race or transition areas, potential white buyers merely avoided such housing in favor of surer investments in more established neighborhoods; their theory, which is based upon a 1962 study, is more contemporaneous to events in Norfolk, and blends well with Professor Jackson's thesis that one reason mixed race areas were shunned was that whites could not get the same financing available in the suburbs.<sup>76</sup>

Gary Orfield, perhaps the premier researcher in the field, offers an amalgam of all of these alternate explanations under the broader heading of the economics of segregation. His research, which was conducted mostly in the late

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<sup>75</sup>James W. Ely, Jr., The Crisis of Conservative Virginia: The Byrd Organization and the Politics of Massive Resistance, Twentieth Century America Series (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1976), pp. 134, 36.

<sup>76</sup>Everett F. Cataldo, Michael W. Giles, and Douglas S. Gatlan, School Desegregation: Compliance, Avoidance, and the Metropolitan Remedy (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Company, 1978).

1960s and early 1970s and focused more on Chicago and other Northern cities, documents both the advent of "white flight" and the rise of private and parochial schools in mixed race neighborhoods as alternatives to extensive court-ordered integration efforts. He, too, lays much of the blame for the failure of mixed race neighborhoods on the federal government and its discriminatory lending practices. His indictment goes even farther than Professor Jackson's, however, and accuses federal officials of permitting pervasive segregation of residents in buildings constructed with federal funds on segregated sites and employing discriminatory assignment policies. He also blames federal urban renewal policies, but feels that cities share some of the responsibility for their own demise. Unlike Norfolk, Northern cities apparently used their redevelopment powers to clear away vast tracks of Black housing from the downtown area. Also unlike Norfolk, very few public housing units were built for the residents cleared out the redeveloped areas. Of the more than 400,000 units cleared in the cities under study, less than three percent were actually replaced with public housing units. Orfield feels that this failure to build replacement housing tended to accelerate the ghettoization of the neighborhoods adjoining the renewal areas.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Gary Orfield, Must We Bus? Segregated Schools and National Policy (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1978), pp. 80-81.

His thesis is particularly applicable when a city like Norfolk, where there was both extensive urban renewal activity and a large scale commitment to public housing, is examined. Unfortunately, the two developments were not always coordinated. In Norfolk's first phase of redevelopment, 1950 to 1955, begun under the leadership of the People's reformers, urban renewal and public housing were marvelously woven together as integral parts of the same plan. The city's business leaders worked closely with Washington to convert many of its wartime housing projects into public housing in the postwar period. N.R.H.A. Project One, which was the first redevelopment project in the nation, was so carefully planned that residents of the renewal area were relocated to offsite public housing units, their neighborhood demolished, and new public housing units built in the project area, so that the former residents could be moved back before the next area was demolished. Since Black areas were torn town and new public housing for Blacks rebuilt on the same site, the action had little impact upon the segregation of the city.

Norfolk's second phase of redevelopment, 1956 to 1959, initiated under the leadership of Mayor Duckworth, stood in sharp contrast to N.R.H.A. Project One. First, the scope of the projects was enormous: the city proposed to bulldoze more than 800 acres, destroying the homes of almost 20,000 people--approximately a tenth of its population and one

eighth of its housing--in less than a year and a half. Not only were no new public housing units planned, none of the areas being redeveloped would return to residential use. Moreover, except for the tiny (44 acres) project around what would eventually become Old Dominion University and a portion of the Downtown Project, which was more commercial and industrial than residential, most of the housing torn down belonged to white working-class residents who would not have been eligible for relocation to public housing. This second phase of redevelopment confirms part of Orfield's theory on the expansion of slums, but with a twist. Since the private real estate market could not absorb this enormous movement of people with any combination of new construction or existing units, the sudden, mass migration of residents out of the project areas put tremendous pressure on the existing housing stock. Private homes and apartment buildings on the fringe of the downtown were badly cut up and expanded to accommodate some of this influx. The end result was that the enormous scope of the four projects (Atlantic City, Broad Creek Village, Downtown East, and Old Dominion) and the speed of their demolition led to rapid deterioration of East Ghent, Park Place, Colonial Place, Riverview, Lafayette, Winona, Ballentine, and the other street car suburbs that ringed the downtown area. Because the projects had also displaced Black residents and equally burdened the Black real estate market, it was not long

before many of these same neighborhoods, once they became overcrowded, began to decline, integrate, and then "tip" as whites sought housing choices in the suburbs. This type of "chain reaction effect," whereby destruction of one slum only creates new slums, is more fully explained by other critics of redevelopment;<sup>78</sup> the difference in Norfolk is the realization that redevelopment, because it tore down housing and neighborhoods that were still salvageable, only created slums where pleasant neighborhoods once stood.

Although Orfield's work deals with a later era, well after federal courts had ordered school desegregation in the cities under study, he reports that federal courts in a number of school desegregation cases found that the combination of federal and municipal housing policies increased school segregation in Charlotte, Wilmington, Cleveland, New York and other cities, although the focus of these findings was more on racially segregated public housing than other redevelopment and planning activities of the cities.<sup>79</sup> This finding is echoed by the research of Karl Taueber, who similarly reports that federal courts all across the South found that, once they were ordered to integrate schools,

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<sup>78</sup>Bernard J. Frieden and Robert Morris, Urban Planning and Social Policy (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p. 130; Scott Greer, Urban Renewal and American Cities: The Dilemma of Democratic Intervention (New York: Bobbs-Merritt Co., 1965), p. 56; Jerome Rothenberg, Economic Evaluation of Urban Renewal: Conceptual Foundation of Benefit-Cost Analysis (Washington, D. C.: Brookings Institution, 1967), pp. 68-69.

<sup>79</sup>Gary Orfield, op cit., p. 84.

Southern school boards used their powers to delay the impact of the orders by closing school buildings directly threatened by integration, building new "vest pocket" schools to minimize integration, redrawing attendance zones, and establishing liberal transfer policies.<sup>80</sup> Although both researchers deal with events that occurred in the 1960s, nevertheless they form an important part of the framework for the thesis of this work, namely that cities took similar action in the 1950s, well before they actually faced the threat of large scale school integration, to defer or delay court-ordered desegregation. The only twist in the current work is the inference that in addition to relying upon school administrative and housing policies to achieve de facto segregation, cities may also have used their extensive powers of redevelopment and urban renewal to block the encroachment of Blacks into white housing areas and to remove mixed race neighborhoods that posed a threat to the continuation of segregated schools. The efforts of the Norfolk School Board to close schools, redesignate their racial composition, redraw attendance zones, and even demolish buildings in an era in which enrollment was expanding so rapidly that many schools were operating on double shifts,<sup>81</sup> seems to have had little to do with rapid

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<sup>80</sup>Karl Taueber, "Desegregation of Public School Districts: Resistance and Change," Phi Delta Kappa 21: 1 (September, 1990), pp. 18-24.

<sup>81</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 10 February 1956.

changes in the white population explained by these approaches. Thus, even though the "white flight," avoidance, or tipping theories are difficult to accept, especially as they relate to school desegregation before schools were actually integrated, they may be useful in understanding the process of neighborhood change that precipitated such dramatic redevelopment activity.

Even though the advocates of redevelopment enterprises have always claimed a purely economic motive for their initiatives,<sup>82</sup> the critics, and there have been many that disapproved of the way urban renewal was handled by cities in the 1950s, have indicated that the economies of redevelopment have been false and even counterproductive.<sup>83</sup> In essence, the argument of the critics is that redevelopment has been a concerted attack upon the poor, those least able to cope with the hardship of relocation and loss of neighborhood ties; that many of the areas torn down were still salvageable and served a useful purpose by providing

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<sup>82</sup>Paul Kantor, The Dependent City: The Changing Political Economy of Urban America (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman and Company, 1988); L. Alfeld and D. Meadows, "A Systems Approach to Urban Renewal, chap. in Mihajlo D. Mesarovic and Arnold Reisman, eds., Systems Approach and the City (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 43-67.

<sup>83</sup>James Q. Wilson, Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1966); Herbert J. Gans, "The Failure of Urban Renewal," chap. in James Q. Wilson, Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy, op cit., pp. 540-545; Bryton and Ella Barron, The Inhumanity of Urban Renewal (Arlington, Va.: Crestwood Books, 1965).

housing for the poor that was never replaced; and that much of the land actually developed was put to uses that could have been accomplished anyway without the wholesale destruction of neighborhoods and massive clearance efforts.

Norfolk provides both a fascinating counter and overwhelming confirmation of these critical approaches: N.R.H.A. Project One, because it tore down vast tracks of what was generally recognized as some of the worst slum housing in the country<sup>84</sup> and replaced it with both well designed public housing developments and badly needed industrial space, represents a triumph of the planners' art, especially since the entire 127-acre area was cleared and rebuilt in about five years. On the other hand, the Atlantic City, Broad Creek Village, and Old Dominion Projects initiated suddenly in Norfolk's second phase of redevelopment, provide confirmation of the worst nightmares of the critics. Not only did they clear away vast acres of decent, even modern, homes, they left the city's working-class poor without recourse in the housing market, thereby creating the slums of the future by overburdening the surrounding neighborhoods. In their rebuilding phases, the projects provided a rich subsidy to governmental agencies, industries, and corporate developers who required no such assistance. Most of the uses for which the cleared land was eventually developed--public universities, medical schools,

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<sup>84</sup>Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 26 July 1961.



hospitals, government buildings, highrise apartments, highways, and industrial expansion--could have been achieved gradually and without the awesome destruction of redevelopment and its attendant hardships.

Part of the tragedy of Norfolk's second phase of redevelopment is that most of the land, once cleared, sat vacant for so very long: it took 20 to 30 years before portions of Atlantic City and Broad Creek Village were developed, and Norfolk's downtown still has 17 acres of prime real estate for which, even now, well more than three decades after it was cleared, there are no real prospects for development. Norfolk's second phase of redevelopment provided the acid test of the "land bank" concept, whereby vast tracts of urban land were cleared and "saved" in their vacant state, ready for the day when a prospective developer was ready to make a withdrawal. Indeed, Larry Cox, Director of the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority and later Under-Secretary of the U. S. Housing and Urban Development (H.U.D.) Department, was one of the nation's greatest proponents of the land bank concept:

Delays and land lying idle are inevitable if urban renewal is going to do what it should do in downtown areas. Projects involving great investments do not spring full-blown upon the scene in the average-size American community. Delay counseled by realistic appraisal of land potential is worthwhile delay. So my thesis is

have worthwhile delay introduced into urban renewal, particularly in central city areas.<sup>85</sup>

Unfortunately, Norfolk's experience provides a stunning rebuttal to Mr. Cox's thesis: except for a strip shopping center on the edge of the downtown area, a few high-rise bank buildings and office towers that would have been built anyway, and several small residential developments that are still underway in the Freemason Harbor area, almost all of the "full-blown" or major developments in downtown Norfolk--the SCOPE arena and concert complex, the municipal center, Waterside marina and urban marketplace, Town Point Park, NAUTICUS maritime center, and the new convention hotel center--have all been public, not private, developments that could have been built without redevelopment. Similarly, there was no need to "bank" away vast tracts of land in the Atlantic City, Broad Creek Village, and Old Dominion project areas; all of the public and private investments there could have been achieved by timely destruction and phased development of the project areas. Except for the unstated purpose of achieving de facto school segregation, the vast scope and destruction of these areas was both unnecessary and ill-advised. According to one contemporary of Cox:

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<sup>85</sup>Lawrence M. Cox, address before the American Society of Planning Officials, National Planning Conference, Miami Beach, May 22-26, 1960, reprinted as "The Disposition Problem in Urban Renewal," Journal of Law and Contemporary Problems XXV: 4 (Autumn, 1960), p. 738.

Technical skills relating to land use design have today [1960] reached the point where it matters little whether the land has been cleared in advance of planning, so that existing improvements need not be demolished before replacement can proceed . . . . usually in the central city areas, even those structures bad enough to be the subject of a clearance project contribute significantly to the local tax revenues. The demolition of these structures not only takes the value off of the tax roll, but also burdens the tax structure with payment of the city's share of the clearance cost, together with interest on money borrowed in order to accomplish this . . . . Analyzed in terms of planning future land use, the prudent course of action for the city is to plan first and undertake the execution of urban renewal projects only when it is apparent that the land can be advantageously put to use immediately upon completion of the clearance. Therefore, the only situation which would justify creation of a "land bank" would be the one in which the project area was so bad that the city would be better off without it, even if nothing arose in its place.<sup>86</sup>

All four of the projects initiated in Norfolk's second phase of redevelopment have unquestionably contributed handsomely to Norfolk's tax base. The Medical Tower complex, for instance, which occupies 2.5 acres of the 106-acre Atlantic City Project returns more property taxes than previously paid by the entire area.<sup>87</sup> Also, prior to redevelopment, the annual taxes paid on properties in the 200-acre Downtown East Project were only \$165,650 per year, less than that paid by any one of the highrise bank or

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<sup>86</sup>Lyman Brownfield, Ibid., p. 761.

<sup>87</sup>George M. Raymond, "Urban Renewal: Controversy," chap. in Jewel Bellush and Murry Hausknecht, op cit., p. 488.

office buildings which now occupy the area.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, the industrial park development built on the site of the former Broad Creek Village Navy Housing Project has provided innumerable jobs and a major economic boost to both the city and the entire surrounding area. The economic assessment of redevelopment is not whether it has been profitable and even moderately successful in its stated aim of providing vacant land for development, it is rather whether these successes, most of which could have been achieved without the massive scale of destruction, the disruption of human lives, and the adverse impact on the rest of the city's housing stock, were worth the trauma and the social cost. In spite of the fact that downtown Norfolk is undergoing a tremendous renaissance (largely at public expense), the economic argument for major portions of the other redevelopment projects pales, especially when one considers that the second, unspoken motive of preserving segregated schools was the prime reason for the rush to demolish housing and "bank" the vacant land.

In spite of the pros and cons of the economic argument, however, there has always been an undercurrent that redevelopment activities have been guided more by political

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<sup>88</sup>William L. Slayton, Commissioner of the Urban Renewal Administration of the U. S. Housing and Home Finance Agency, "The Operation and Achievements of the Urban Renewal Program," reprinted in James Q. Wilson, Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy, op cit., p. 233.

than developmental considerations.<sup>89</sup> Martin Anderson coined the phrase "black removal" to characterize what he saw as municipal efforts across the country to rid cities of unwanted elements of the community; by "black," however, he meant not a racial designation, but rather areas of blight, crime infestation, and unprofitable business uses.<sup>90</sup> It is easy to show how Norfolk used its redevelopment powers to remove some of the "black" spots of the community. N.R.H.A. Project One provides a prime example of black removal at its best: a horribly blighted section of housing, with its massive attendant problems of crime, infestation, juvenile delinquency, disease, and public health menace, was removed and then replaced with modern public housing, designed in the garden apartment fashion and arranged to provide a continued sense of community. Demolition of the city's notorious East Main Street sin district, that brought such ill repute to Norfolk during the war years, also represents another element of black removal. Cities may be able to make a strong case for using redevelopment to clear such extensive areas of blight, but there can be little

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<sup>89</sup>Scott Greer and David W. Miner, "The Political Side of Urban Development and Redevelopment," chap. in Jewel Bellush and Murray Hausknecht, eds., Urban Renewal: People, Politics, and Planning, op cit., pp. 152-163.

<sup>90</sup>Martin Anderson, The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949-1962 (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1964).

justification for demolishing the "gray areas"<sup>91</sup>--neighborhoods like Atlantic City and Broad Creek Village--which were still viable and salvageable. If Anderson's thesis of black removal can be applied to these projects, and perhaps to other similar redevelopment initiatives undertaken in the South at the same time, one explanation is that the unwanted elements in these projects were neighborhoods where Blacks and whites lived too close together to be served by separate race schools.

This is precisely what the plaintiffs in a number of school desegregation suits have claimed, i.e. that cities deliberately used their urban renewal powers to create segregated neighborhoods, strictly enforce well defined color barriers, isolate Black populations, relocate integrated schools, and otherwise frustrate efforts to desegregate the public school system.<sup>92</sup> Although this claim has been in part supported by demographic researchers<sup>93</sup> and other social scientists,<sup>94</sup> they have

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<sup>91</sup>Bernard Frieden, "Policies for Rebuilding," chap. in James Q. Wilson, ed., Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1966), pp. 585-623.

<sup>92</sup>Karl Taueber, "Desegregation of Public School Districts: Resistance and Change," Phi Delta Kappan 21: 1 (September, 1990), pp. 18-24.

<sup>93</sup>Gary Orfield, "Ghettoization and Its Alternatives," chap. in Paul E. Peterson, ed., The New Urban Reality (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985), pp. 161-196.

chosen to blame school boards, rather than redevelopment authorities, planning commissions, or city councils, for efforts to replace de jure with de facto segregation.

Although Norfolk provides the perfect case history of all of these charges, far from being the villain, the School Board in Norfolk played only a bit part in the effort to divide the city into racially distinct school districts. In fact, it is only through the somewhat heroic actions of its School Board that Norfolk still had some semblance of an operational public school system left after its municipal leadership had finally given up their fight to preserve segregated schools.

In Norfolk, at least, the fight to preserve segregated education clearly went much farther than the School Board's efforts to close effected schools, select racially "safe" sites, redraw attendance zones, and manipulate the other factors of school plant planning and student attendance, transfer, and grade organization. In several instances (Atlantic City and Broad Creek Village), the School Board's action to close a threatened school came after the city had committed to the far more precipitate act of demolishing the entire school zone. In other cases (Easton, Fairlawn, Poplar Halls, Pretty Lake, and East Ocean View), the School

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<sup>94</sup>Karl E. Taueber, "Residence and Race: 1619 to 2019," chap. in Winston A. Van Horne, ed. Race: Twentieth Century Dilemmas--Twenty-First Century Prognoses (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 1989).

Board went along with the Council's desire to build tiny "vest pocket" schools, even though it had opposed the structures; the financial control of the City Council, especially over school capital expenditures, was such that, because the city was desperately short of classroom space, the School Board had to take whatever it could get. In several other areas of the city interstate highways (Brambleton, Broad Creek Shores, Ingleside, Coronado), parks (Titustown and Benmoreell), and other major public facilities (Old Dominion University and the National Guard Armory) were used, appear to have been used, along with natural geographic barriers, to provide both a clear-cut color line between school districts and a logical limitation to the size of the attendance zone. These same barriers would make it even more difficult to provide racially balanced neighborhood schools once the effort to preserve segregation was finally abandoned.

Even though the actions in Norfolk to preserve segregated schools were dramatic, they do not appear to be unique. Norfolk as well as many other communities in the South had a strong motive to preserve segregation: public reaction to the dictates of the U. S. Supreme Court were overwhelmingly negative, and large portions of the populace indicated that they may have been prepared to engage in disruptive, even illegal, activity to block court-ordered integration. State political leaders all across the South



were attempting to interpose the authority of the state governments between the courts and the local schools in a legal jurgid of hastily enacted legislation controlling pupil assignment, transfer, and attendance policies.

Southern senators and congressmen had banded together to urge their constituencies to use every legal means at their disposal to oppose integration. In addition to this element of motive, which may actually have been tempered in Norfolk by the leadership of the School Board, the editorial writers of the Virginian-Pilot, and the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools, an urgency of the situation also existed, caused in part by the fact that so many areas of the city appeared to run afoul of the Supreme Court's doctrine of proximity in assigning school attendance zones.

Because it had extensive areas of Navy housing, which were integrated, a few mixed-race neighborhoods in various stages of transition, and several communities where there were pockets of Black population too small to be served by their own school, Norfolk faced the prospect that it would be among the first cities in the South to face widespread school integration. In Virginia that meant political death, and the fear of being cut off from funding or state resources was very real; for two decades after it had finally peacefully integrated its schools, local residents referred to the Norfolk area as "Tollwater," an ironic allusion to the fact that the state seemed to be punishing

the city for killing Massive Resistance through it's unwillingness to provide highway funds for the badly needed bridge, tunnel, and highways so necessary for economic growth.

Norfolk, as well as other communities all across the South, had ample opportunity to bend the powers of school administration, school plant planning, and urban renewal to serve the cause of preserving segregation as well as economic development. Southern cities faced a rapid period of growth in population, school enrollment, industry, land area, and economic development. This meant that they could use the opportunity already available through building new schools or changing school zones because of newly annexed territories to make sure that new school districts would be segregated, and therefore acceptable to the public. This at least was the course urged by James J. Kilpatrick, editor of the Richmond News Leader and chief publicist for the doctrine of interposition.<sup>95</sup> They could go a step farther and use the opportunity to close schools, redesignate their use, or reallocate their grade composition as another way to defer or delay integration in a couple of areas of the city. Or they could go the final step proposed by this work and make sure that the schools in threatened areas of the city remained segregated by using their urban renewal and

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<sup>95</sup>James W. Eley, The Crisis of Conservative Virginia: The Byrd Organization and the Politics of Massive Resistance, op cit., p. 36.

municipal planning powers to carefully position parks, highways, or other public facilities so that they posed a barrier to Blacks living near a white school; municipalities could control land use policies so that Black housing could move no closer to white schools; and cities could use their powers of redevelopment to tear down mixed-race neighborhoods or other areas that proved threatening under the court's doctrine of proximity. Norfolk was not alone in taking these extra steps; there is strong evidence to suggest that Richmond, Mobile, Charleston (South Carolina), Memphis, Boston, Wilmington (Delaware) and other cities used at least some of these techniques. Only in Norfolk is the record so far complete enough to project an extensive and concerted use of the powers to urban renewal to preserve segregated schools.

This interpretation does not, however, entirely discredit the economic argument made for annexation, industrial development, urban renewal and city planning. For most of these cities, growth in both land area and tax base was absolutely essential for survival, and every element of municipal government was concerned with the effort to plan for and sustain that growth. The suggestion that the effort to preserve school segregation was also involved in these planning, development, and redevelopment decisions is not meant to denigrate the purely economic considerations of such activities; it is only meant to infer that the

municipal powers of urban renewal in many cities in the 1950s was meant to serve two masters, the public avowed one of growth, and the privately held determination to stay the same, at least as far as segregated schools were concerned.

Finally, some larger historical context is necessary to fully understand the events and actions herein described. Other contemporaneous researchers<sup>96</sup> found that appointed school boards were far more adept at handling the controversies surrounding school desegregation than their elected counterparts. This definitely seems to be the case in Norfolk. All seven members of the Norfolk School Board responded to the crisis in admirable, even heroic, fashion, and their calm and deliberate approach, coupled with their overriding devotion to the concept of free public education, was largely responsible for the peaceful resumption of classes, the sense of continuity and control, and the fact that quality schools continued in Norfolk once the legal issues were settled. Their courage and devotion to duty brought them into constant conflict with the elected leaders of their day. None of its members had sought appointment to the Board,<sup>97</sup> and, for the most part, they were not the sort of individuals who seek election to office. All had been chosen because of their record of involvement in volunteer, not political, community service, and it was this

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<sup>96</sup>Robert L. Crain, et al., op cit.

<sup>97</sup>Francis Crenshaw.

experience that served them well when the clamor of the constituency of the day demanded short-term approaches. There was unanimity on the Board, the kind of calm consensus that rarely is seen in elected bodies in times of such violent social upheaval and conflicting values. The Norfolk School Board had the long-term interest of public education in mind throughout the controversy; their judgement was not clouded by political expediency or the need to seek re-election. Their calm reaction to crisis and their devotion to the future of quality public education in the city should give pause to all those who think that urban school systems, especially those beset with major problems and diverse clientele, would be better served by elected, rather than appointed, boards.

Although school boards all across the South were vilified for their efforts to delay or defer court-ordered desegregation efforts, in Norfolk, at least, the School Board was clearly but one actor in a larger cast of characters that included the Mayor, the Council, the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, and other municipal officials responsible for the planning and development of the city. While this larger relationship has been the source of some speculation, it is the major contribution of this work that the interplay between school desegregation and urban renewal in one community has been more completely analyzed. The response to court-ordered school

desegregation did not begin with the first local court case, the traditional starting date of other histories of the process; instead it began with a realization in the South that predates even the Brown decision, that is, that in order to pass court review, "separate" school facilities for the two races must be made more nearly equal; later, when it became clear that the courts would not accept separate facilities as equal when the pupils lived in close geographic proximity to one another, a much larger cast of characters than just Southern school boards followed the dictates of their state and national political leaders, as well as their voting constituencies, to do everything in their power to prevent school integration. The powers of urban renewal, school plant planning, redevelopment, and school administration appear to have been used liberally to create separate race neighborhoods and school attendance zones, thereby replacing segregation by law (de jure) with the type of de facto separation of races already approved by the courts in Northern and Midwestern cities.

Even though a temptation exists to affix blame or criticism for actions that turn out now by modern standards to be misdirected, judging the motives of the 1950s by the mores of the 1990s is just as unfair as requiring the citizens of the 1950s to share the same advantage of our own more modern perspective in order to receive fair treatment in any account of their own era. Enough time has passed to

gain both the advantage of historical hindsight and a passionless examination of the events and issues, few cities could withstand the judgement of a serious local history viewed from the high ground of both hindsight and moral certainty. Norfolk is no better or no worse than other cities; if it is proud of its accomplishments, and the city has every right to boast, then it should not be afraid to learn lessons from its failures.

There are no villains to this piece. Not only is judgement not intended by this critical examination of the era, one has to marvel at both the competence and the devotion to principle exemplified here. Mayor Duckworth and the other members of the City Council, the School Board, Redevelopment and Housing Authority, and other public officials were responding to a tremendous public mandate to do everything legally possible to preserve what was considered by the city's voters to be a sacrosanct way of life. Not only did they respond to this mandate with vigor and ingenuity, they received close counsel and guidance from others in the state and national government who shared their sentiment. That all of these officials enjoyed the overwhelming support of their constituencies is evident in the voting patterns of the era. In a democratic society we must be prepared to accept the fact that powerful and principled elected leaders will do everything in their power to respond

to such a mandate without condemning in any way their actions or criticizing their motives.

Partly because Norfolk encountered its school desegregation crisis early and faced it so precipitously, the city has been able to achieve and maintain a level of racial and political harmony that exists in few other areas of the country. Norfolk emerged from the school closing crisis with an intensity of support for public education that has never diminished. Even when it was faced with the prospect of court-ordered crosstown busing that was more extensive than almost anywhere else in the country, community support remained strong. Partly because of this support and because it continued to offer quality inter-racial education, Norfolk did not experience the level of white flight found in a number of other central cities. Almost two decades ago the federal courts declared that Norfolk operated a truly "unitary" school system, a step that paved the way for it to be among the first major school systems in the country to leave the phase of court-ordered busing behind and return to neighborhood schools at the elementary level. Today the Norfolk Public Schools continue to win accolades as one the nation's few truly effective urban school systems: test scores are up, white enrollment stable, dropout rates down, and community support remains high.

The Norfolk story is not that of a deviant case; instead the history of its school desegregation crisis



exemplifies the level of the struggle that took place in cities all across the South in the 1950s and then moved to the Northern, Midwest, and Border States in the 1960s when they, too, were faced with the prospect of massive court-ordered school integration initiatives. Although perhaps more compelling than events in other cities, partly because of the collapsed time frame and the fact that Norfolk was among the first cities in the South to desegregate, the actions of the public officials to preserve racially identifiable schools were not unique. Only the scale of the battle in Norfolk was larger than elsewhere, but that is why the story of this struggle is so instructive.

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## FORREST R. (HAP) WHITE

Forrest R. (Hap) White, a life-long resident of Norfolk, was born in Longbeach (Calif.) on December 20, 1947. He holds a B. A. degree in English from Bucknell University (1966) and a Masters in Public Administration from Old Dominion University (1987). He is co-editor of A Multi-disciplinary Approach To Land Use Study Planning (Norfolk: National Science Foundation/O.D.U. Research Foundation, 1981). He has served as the Director of Budget for the Norfolk Public Schools for the past five years; previously, he served for seven years with the City of Norfolk as a budget analyst and bureau chief in the division of consumer protection, as a government teacher with Chesapeake Schools (three years), copy and production director for a local advertising agency (one year), and political campaign consultant (three years). In 1990 he completed the Virginia Education Policy Fellowship Program, a school leadership training fellowship jointly sponsored by the state and the Institute for Educational Leadership. He was recognized in 1985 as the outstanding Norfolk City employee by the Norfolk Federation of Civic Leagues, and is a member of Phi Kappa Phi (scholastic) Beta Gamma Sigma (business administration), and Pi Alpha Alpha (public administration) national honor societies.