Emerging from Resistance: Origins of the Virginia Community College System

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Course objectives

• To examine the social, political, economic, and educational forces in Virginia during the late 1950’s and early 1960’s that led to the establishment of the Virginia Community College System

• To explain the concept of a “comprehensive community college” within the context of Virginia’s other higher education institutions

• To provide an understanding of the educational and socioeconomic impact of the Virginia Community College System
Caveats

• Virginia in the 1950’s and 1960’s were different times and people held different values than the present
• We all tend to view historical events through a subjective lens
• It is easy to judge political shortcomings in retrospect, not so easy to anticipate the judgement of history as real events are unfolding
• Our examination of the topic presented is necessarily limited in scope and detail

Instructor backgrounds: Scott Langhorst

• 4 years at Trident Technical College (SC) 1973-77 as Director of Admissions
• 12 years at Blue Ridge Community College (VA) 1977-1989 as Coordinator of Admissions & Records
• 12 years at the VCCS System Office (1990-2002) as Director of Educational Planning and Instructional Technology Systems Planner
• 4 years at Tidewater Community College (VA) 2002-06 as Associate Vice President for Distance Learning
Instructor backgrounds: Richard Hodges

- Bachelor of Music - Wichita State University
- Master of Music - University of Mississippi
- Master of Library & Information Science - Louisiana State University
- Doctor of Education - William & Mary
- Currently Director of Learning Resources for Thomas Nelson Community College - Hampton & Williamsburg
- Worked at community colleges in Mississippi, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Virginia.

Course calendar

- Three, 2-hour sessions (9:30 AM - 11:30 AM) on Tuesday mornings, April 9, 16, 23 at Thomas Nelson Community College - Historic Triangle Campus, in the Library Resource Room, 100 M
- Session One = overview, Virginia politics, massive resistance,
- Session Two = creation of Virginia Technical College System and transition to the Virginia Community College System
- Session Three = “Comprehensive” community college, the VCCS in context of Virginia’s higher education, VCCS impacts
VCCS colleges map

VCCS quick facts

- 23 Colleges with 40 campuses
- (2017-18) 234,369 students, 101,570 annual FTEs
- 48% of Virginia undergraduates are enrolled in a community college
- 32,555 degrees, diplomas, certificates awarded last year
- $4,507 VCCS tuition versus $12,702 for 4-year public tuition
- 25 public & private 4-yr schools have guaranteed admission agreements with the VCCS (i.e., automatic transfer)
A story of convergence

• How does a State with very traditional and elite higher education institutions come to democratize higher education for all its citizens?
• What forces caused an evolutionary change in the notion of “who” should go to college in Virginia?

Social forces:
- demographics, urbanization, civil rights movement

Economic forces:
- agrarian to industrial economy, “pay-as-you-go,” 1% sales tax

Political forces:
- Byrd machine, Jim Crow laws, massive resistance, federal legislation

Educational forces:
- community college movement, vocational education, research/reports
Segregation and Jim Crow

- Social and cultural norms of the old South from the time of the Civil War (and earlier)
- State and local laws to enforce segregation
- Constitutionally upheld in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) “separate but equal”
- Segregation of schools, public facilities, transportation, etc.
- Effectively disenfranchised (socially, educationally, economically, and politically) an entire class of citizens on the basis of race
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Virginia in the 1940’s and 1950’s

- A reflection of other southern states embracing Jim Crow laws
- Harry F. Byrd, Sr.: a strong political leader who controlled Virginia state politics for decades
- A series of Byrd-supported Governors and legislators who endorsed racial segregation and fiscal conservatism
- A rural/agricultural economy shifting toward an urban/industrial economy
- A poorly trained & ill-educated workforce
Harry F. Byrd, Sr. (1887-1966)

- Governor (1926-1930) and U.S. Senator (1933-1965) from Virginia
- Head of the Virginia democratic party and the “Byrd Organization” or “Byrd Machine”
- Controlled Virginia politics by vetting and endorsing most candidates for office
- “Pay as you go” fiscal policies
- Deeply opposed to racial desegregation of public schools

Brown v. Board of Education (I)

- Landmark Supreme Court decision (1954) overturning precedent set in Plessy v. Ferguson
- “Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal”
- Segregated schools violate the 14th amendment of “equal protection of the laws”
- 9-0 unanimous decision engineered by Chief Justice Earl Warren
- Consolidated 5 school desegregation cases from various geographic regions, including Prince Edward County, Virginia
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Brown v. Board of Education (II)

- 1955 continuation of oral arguments determining the implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education*
- Southern states sought gradual implementation with no hard deadlines or timetables for desegregation
- NAACP argued for rapid desegregation
- Court holds for a more gradual approach and for states “to act in good faith” and “…with all deliberate speed”
- Rejects the notion that desegregation plans should accommodate public attitudes

Thomas B. Stanley

- Governor of Virginia 1954 - 1958
- Created a commission to craft a response to *Brown v. Board* decision
- Resulting “Gray Commission” report recommends 11 actions to avoid forced integration of public schools in Virginia
- Report provided for a “local option” for school boards to desegregate (or not)
Stirring a controversy

• “Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties” (1955)
  “...integration will begin in Virginia, and once begun, it, like every other vile pestilence, will spread to the point where it has covered the whole body politic. Whether it come in our day, our children will see the death of our Anglo-Saxon civilization.”
• Calls for a special session of the General Assembly to enact new laws
• Influence of James J. Kilpatrick, editor of Richmond News-Leader, suggesting the use of “Interposition” as a legal argument

Adopting massive resistance

• Political reaction to Brown v. Board of Education advocated by Harry F. Byrd, Sr. and other southern politicians
• Rather than integrate public schools --- close them!
• Byrd helps develop the “Stanley Plan” (1956)
• Governor Stanley proposes and passes (based on “Gray Commission” recommendations) 13 new Virginia statutes to ensure segregation
• A Virginia declaration of “Interposition” (i.e., States rights may supersede some federal laws), e.g., Brown v. Board of Education
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Southern manifesto

- In concert with Virginia and Harry F. Byrd, Sr., other southern states protest *Brown v. Board of Education*
- Strom Thurmond (SC) and Richard Russell (GA) lead 82 representatives and 19 senators from southern states to resist *Brown v. Board of Education*
- The “Southern Manifesto” claims *Brown v. Board of Education* is a clear abuse of judicial power and calls for all lawful means to bring about a reversal of the decision
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Little Rock Central High School

- Arkansas' governor Orval Faubus blocks desegregation of Little Rock Central High School (1957)
- President Eisenhower sends federal troops (101st Airborne) to escort students safely to class
- Eisenhower also federalized the entire Arkansas National Guard to deny Governor Faubus control of the troops
- Served notice that the federal government was willing to use troops to enforce *Brown v. Board* --- to the alarm of Virginia and other southern governors
Massive resistance maneuvers

- Components of Virginia’s “Stanley Plan” included:
- Forbade any integrated school from receiving state funds
- Changed Virginia statutes to create a 3-member, statewide “Pupil Placement Board” to assign students to schools
- Changed the 1902 Virginia Constitution (1956) to allow for public monies to be transferred to private schools
- Provided vouchers for white students to attend private schools, also known as “segregation academies”

J. Lindsay Almond, Jr.

- Governor of Virginia 1958 - 1962
- Former Attorney General of Virginia
- Successor to implementing Stanley Plan, closing schools in Charlottesville, Front Royal, and Norfolk
- School closings overturned by Virginia Supreme Court and U. S. District Court
- Gov. Almond modifies his stance on desegregation to “passive resistance”
Massive resistance consequences

- School closings in Alexandria, Warren County, Charlottesville, Norfolk, and Prince Edward County
- Rise of private academies for white students
- Prince Edward County public schools closed from 1959 - 1964
- Federal courts must intervene to support desegregation
- Virginia’s business community reacts unfavorably --- who will come to Virginia to do business without schools or an educated workforce?
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Passive resistance

- Federal courts declared Virginia’s massive resistance statutes [i.e., Stanley Plan] unconstitutional (1959)
- Virginia politicians seek a less confrontational way of insuring segregation
- Pace of desegregation activities is greatly slowed
- Adoption of Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County ruling (1964) effectively ends passive resistance efforts in Virginia
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Thanks for coming!

Next week: Virginia’s educational response to Massive Resistance

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