

Mending fences after Brown

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covered with tarpaper and were often referred to as "tar-paper-shacks." To further ease overcrowding, some students were taught in an old school bus.

In addition, such courses as world history, Latin, advanced typing and stenography, wood, metal and machine shop work, and drawing were offered only at the White schools.

To spare black adults of physical and economic repercussions, Johns, the niece of Vernon Johns, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s predecessor at Dexter Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala., led a two-week student protest. Days later, she and another student leader, Carrie Stokes, wrote to the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, asking for help.

The next month, Spottswood Robinson III, a future federal judge, and Oliver Hill, a well-respected lawyer, filed suit to overturn Virginia state law requiring segregated schools. When their suit failed before the Virginia state courts, LDF attorneys Thurgood Marshall, James Nabrit, Jr. and Robert Carter urged local residents to become part of a group of cases that would become known collectively as 'Brown.'

Hoping to circumvent an adverse ruling, the Board of Supervisors authorized funds in 1953 to build a new high school for blacks. The Virginia General Assembly jumped into the act, adopting a policy of "massive resistance" to all school desegregation efforts. Prince Edward County became part of the first Brown ruling in 1954 (striking down separate but equal facilities as being a violation of the Black students; 14th Amendment rights) and Brown II in 1955 ordering schools to desegregate with "all deliberate speed."

Rather than desegregate the public schools, in 1959 the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors voted to close its public schools. They remained closed until 1964 when the Supreme Court, responding to yet another suit, forced it to reopen as a desegregated school system.

Now, 50 years later, the pain of that period still lingers.

"As far as race relations itself, I think we have made tremendous improvements. But, as far as how people were affected when the schools closed, a lot of people are still hurt, angry and bitter," says Rita Moseley, a secretary at Prince Edward County High School. "The pain, even within myself, is so deep-rooted. And the scars are there for a lifetime and will never be removed because of the fact that it's a part of our lives. It's something that you just can't heal."

Moseley was in the sixth grade when the school system closed to avoid desegregation. She had hoped that the school would reopen the following year, but it didn't. She held out hope for the next year, but it came and went. Finally, after two idle years, Moseley was sent away to live with strangers while attending school in Blacksburg, Va.

"It was hard being away from my parents, my mother and my family," Moseley recalls. "Our lives were altered. It was devastating. It put us in places and situations where we never would have been and we had to go."

As disrupting as life was for young Rita Moseley, it was worse for some students who didn't start the first grade until they were 12 years old.

A trip to Farmville, Va. today provides no clue that there had been a major uproar here over blacks and whites attending school

together. Prince Edward High School is roughly 51 percent black and 49 percent white. The middle school is 63 percent black, 35 percent white and 2 percent other.

Approximately 59 percent of the elementary school students are African-Americans, 35 percent white and 3 percent others. African-Americans also

serve in leadership positions in education.

The hoopla surrounding the Brown anniversary will be more than just a celebration.

"I think with the commemoration of the 50 years, it brings back so many memories," says Odessa Pride, acting principal of the Prince Edward County Middle School. "They haven't forgotten it, but have sort of tried to move on. But when you have big celebrations, of course, it flashes back to what used to be."

Forums, documentaries mark Brown decision

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whose father sued Clarendon County, S.C. for equal educational opportunities in the 1950s. That case was later consolidated into Brown. Northwest School of the Arts dance classes will perform student-created pieces based on the Clarendon County story and Friendship Missionary Baptist Church Youth Choir will present songs of faith.

Cynthia Pershia, a student at Scott's Branch High School in Clarendon County, will debut a documentary on Brown and its impact today.

The museum has also hosted "Conversations on Courage," a partnership with the Community Building Initiative that brings business, government and civic leaders together over the exhibit, which opened in January. More than 600 community leaders were expected to participate in "Conversations," but response to the exhibit led to the museum expanding the program to the larger community.

"We had a target list of about 600 people when we wrote our grant," museum spokeswoman Ashley Thurmond said. "But based on the response, we're having more people coming in that we originally anticipated, so we opened it up to community groups."

• WTVI will preview the documentary "With all Deliberate Speed: The Legacy of Brown vs. Board" today at 6 p.m. at Levine Museum. A discussion on the film will follow.

"The legal precedent set in this groundbreaking case still serves as a model for the implementation of desegregation and multicultural education in our local school system today," said Beverly Dorn-Steele, director of education at WTVI.

"Brown vs. Board" begins with activists' efforts to establish public education for blacks in the 1800 and continues through the NAACP's efforts to desegregate public schools and the state of public education today.

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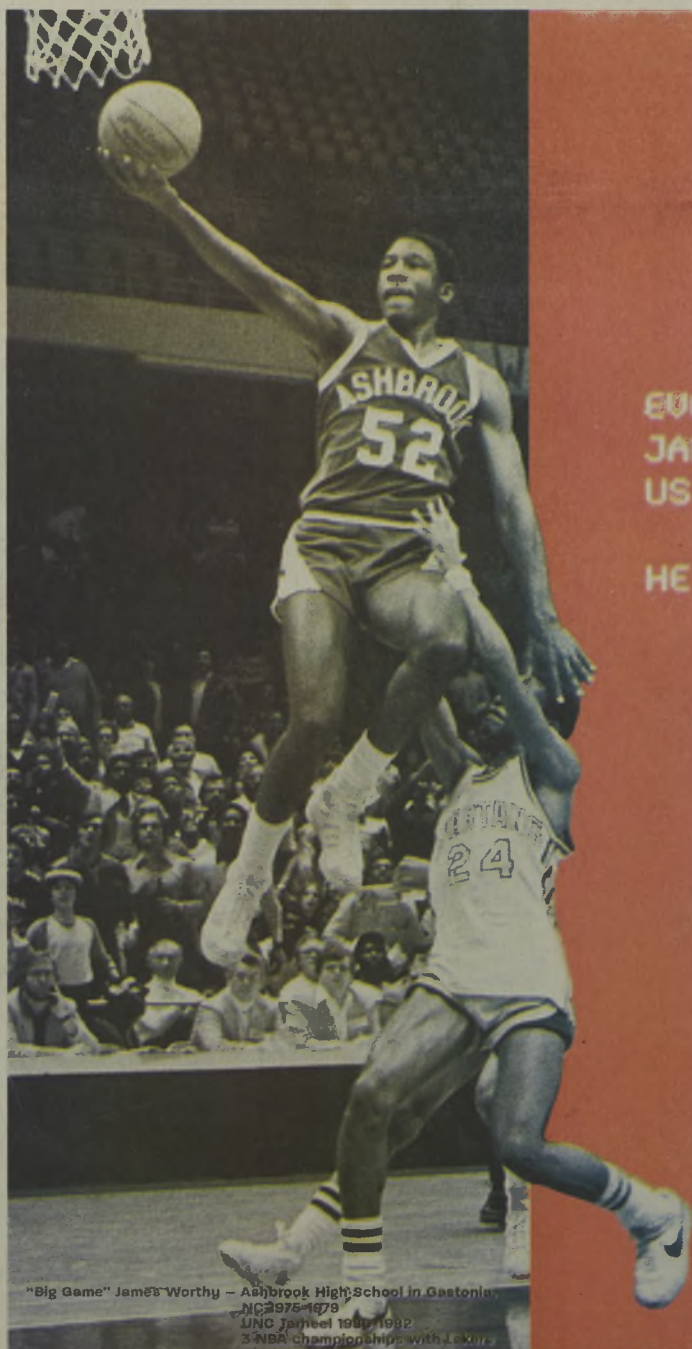
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