

School Desegregation: A Community's Response Lesson Plan

Target Audience: 12th grade government students
Length: 1 day (90-minute class)

Objectives

The students will:

1. Examine primary sources and distinguish between relevant and irrelevant facts.
2. Compare and contrast the reaction of members of a community to desegregation.
3. Explain how individuals, interests groups, and the media influence public policy.

1. Overview

In this lesson, teachers lead students in analyzing three Southwest Virginia newspaper articles published in 1959. Each article examines the issue of whether Floyd County would integrate its public high school following a time when the state of Virginia had declared a policy of Massive Resistance to compliance with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The activities and group discussions in this lesson will provide students insight into the challenge of protecting civil rights in a democracy, the intersection between state and local government, the activity of citizens in their local school board and administration, and the role of the media in addressing controversial issues.

2. Activities

Activity 1

- To provide students with historical background about the events leading up to the Floyd County struggle over desegregation and to put the remaining activities in context, have students review the U.S. National Archives website <http://www.archives.gov/midatlantic/education/desegregation/pulaski.html>. The website provides information regarding a 1947 NAACP lawsuit in Pulaski County called *Mahatma Corbin v. County School Board of Pulaski County*.
- While students are reviewing the website, have them complete Handout #1: *School Desegregation in Pulaski County, Virginia*. If time constraints exist, reviewing the website and completing the handout, can be assigned the class period before as homework.
- As a class, discuss student responses to Handout #1. During the class discussion, the teacher should emphasize the following:
 - The central complaint of the appellant was the lack of equal facilities and the distance African American students in Southwest Virginia were required to travel to attend Christiansburg Institute.
 - The Corbin case was one of the last “equalization” lawsuits, after that the NAACP focused on desegregation itself as the only way to guarantee complete protection of 14th Amendment rights to full citizenship.
 - The significance of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision requiring the desegregation of public schools across the country and Virginia’s Massive Resistance program.
- To help teachers prepare to facilitate the class discussion, the Virginia Center for Digital History website, Television News and the Civil Rights Era 1950-1970

<http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/civilrightstv/>, is an excellent resource of glossary terms and the historical background on this period of time in Virginia.

Activity 2

- After introducing the topic of school desegregation, teachers should distribute Handout #2: *What Were the Newspapers Saying?* Along with the handout, give students two different color highlighters. Working in pairs, students will highlight important facts, participants, and write two unanswered questions for each article.

3. Group Discussion

To organize and conduct a group discussion, complete the following steps:

Write three columns on the board labeled Facts, Participants, and Questions.

Ask students what they believe are the five most important facts presented in the first article and record their responses on the board.

Ask the class to decide which five facts are the most important. Asking students to negotiate a shorter list from the longer one generated in discussion, will allow a second, more critical examination of the article.

Next, ask students to identify participants in the article and record their responses on the board.

As part of the discussion, ask students about the role of each participant in the events described in the article.

Finally, ask students what questions they had about each article and record the questions on the board for discussion.

Repeat the above steps for the remaining two articles.

Handout #3: *Group Discussion Sample Responses* provides sample charts for the teacher that identifies possible responses from students and results from the group discussion.

4. Background

Present this historical information to enhance group knowledge and discussion.

Southwest Virginia did not have the same racial composition as the eastern part of the state. The region was known as the “white belt” with only a 10 percent African American population. On May 19, 1954, two days after the Brown decision a Roanoke Times article noted that Buchanan County was the “only county in Virginia unaffected by the Supreme Court” because it had “no Negroes among its 36,000 residents.” In the same article, the staff writer boasted that Buchanan’s school superintendent was “in an enviable position when compared to the problems other school administrators face in the future.” Believing the region was an exception to other parts of the state, a 1954 Southwest Times editorial reported, “In Pulaski, with excellent race relations and with our citizens of all nationalities and creeds working and living together in harmony we see no major problem.” The idea that Floyd County was “vulnerable” to a NAACP petition to desegregate its schools illustrates the region’s continued perception of itself as exceptional in its race relations.

Southwest Virginia was home to one of the premier African American schools in the country, Christiansburg Institute. Located in Montgomery County, Christiansburg Institute was established in 1866 after the Civil War by Friends’ Freedmen’s Association to help educate newly freed slaves. In 1895, Booker T. Washington became the school’s superintendent and modeled Christiansburg Institute after his own industrial trade school, Tuskegee Normal

and Industrial Institute now known as Tuskegee University. Following the 1947 lawsuit, *Corbin v. County School Board of Pulaski County*, cited inequalities in the education of black and white students in the region. Christiansburg Institute received funding from the surrounding counties that opted to support the African American school in their region rather than desegregate or build their own separate school. In 1959, a Roanoke Times article noted that “the usual academic and vocational courses found in any high school are taught at the institute. There are also courses in cosmetology and barbering, rarities in other Southwest Virginia high schools.” Southwest Virginians believed they were upholding their obligation to black students by providing a fine education at Christiansburg Institute.

The goals and course that Massive Resistance in Virginia hoped to pursue depended on the ability of the media to successfully present its arguments to a diverse audience across the state, and outside the state. This challenge of reaching a wide audience should not have posed a significant problem because the state’s Democratic political machine was dominated by its senior senator, Harry Byrd, and he controlled the media. Southwest Virginia, however, presented a challenge because it was less culturally or politically loyal to the Byrd machine. The newspapers in Southwest Virginia did not uniformly support Byrd and were independent in criticizing policies handed down from the state capital in Richmond. The Floyd County articles again illustrate the independence of reporting in what was considered by many strictly a “local issue.”

5. Conclusion

Following analysis of the three articles and group discussion, students should conclude that the issue of desegregation in Floyd County in 1959 is a case study on the challenge of civil rights in a democracy. While the question of desegregation involved only 14 African American students, those students were guaranteed the right to a free and public education by law. Christiansburg Institute was a good school, but it did not provide an equal opportunity for African American children in Southwest Virginia and the distance the school was located from many homes made it a detrimental burden to students.

The question of public education hits at the heart of what democratic institutions rely on to ensure an educated electorate. Public schools rely on state funding and therefore must to some degree abide by state policies, but they are also important to local administrations such as the Board of Supervisors, School Board, and PTA. The media also plays an important role in reporting matters of local and state concern to their readers. In the second article, students will learn that reporters took great journalistic pride in digging deeper into the issues for more information about the source of the petitions.

In total, the three articles reveal that in the matter of public school policy there are many participants. It intersects state and local administrations, involves parents and students, and even relies on the media to present views and comments from public and private citizens.

6. Differentiation

To adapt this lesson for both advanced and remedial students, teachers should use the link to the Virginia Center for Digital History website Television News and the Civil Rights Era 1950-1970 <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/civilrightstv/>. Click on Films and Summaries, then click on 1959, and play the following three movie clips from Roanoke based WDBJ 7 television.

- Clip 1: NAACP Attorney Lawson Comments on Plans to Integrate SW VA Counties
- Clip 2: Delegate Joseph Poff Comments on Segregation Suit
- Clip 3: Teacher and student Floyd County comments on integration

Remedial students should be asked to comment on what they hear and see in the video clips and use the group chart to organize their discussion about the role of both state and local officials in deciding the question of desegregation in Floyd County.

Advanced students should use their knowledge from the newspaper articles to compare to what they see and hear in the television interviews. Teachers should ask students to question which form of media is more effective to the functions of a democracy. Which form of journalism is more democratic, print or television? To supplement a discussion of the role of the media in the Civil Rights Movement have advanced students read an online article entitled, Television News and the Civil Rights Struggle, by William G. Thomas III—<http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/civilrightstv/essays.html>. This article is linked from the Television News and the Civil Rights Era website under Essays and Interpretations.

7. SOL Skills

The student will demonstrate mastery of the social studies skills citizenship requires, including the ability to

- analyze primary and secondary source documents (GOVT.1a);
- analyze political cartoons, political advertisements, pictures, and other graphic media (GOVT.1c);
- distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information (GOVT.1d);
- select and defend positions in writing, discussion, and debate (GOVT.1g).

8. SOL Content

The student will demonstrate knowledge of the organization and powers of the state and local governments described in the Constitution of Virginia by

- evaluating the effectiveness of citizen efforts to influence decisions of state and local governments by examining historical or contemporary events (GOVT.8e).

The student will demonstrate knowledge of the process by which public policy is made by

- describing how the state and local governments influence the public agenda and shape public policy (GOVT.9c);
- describing how individuals, interest groups, and the media influence public policy (GOVT.9e).

The student will demonstrate knowledge of civil liberties and civil rights by explaining every citizen's right to be treated equally under the law (GOVT.11e).

9. Materials

- Handout #1: *School Desegregation in Pulaski County, Virginia*
- Handout #2: *What Were the Newspapers Saying?*
- Handout #3: *Group Discussion Sample Responses*

Name _____
Period _____ Date _____

School Desegregation in Pulaski County, Virginia

In 1947, the NAACP brought a lawsuit against Pulaski County, Virginia called *Mahatma Corbin v. County School Board of Pulaski County*. The goal of the lawsuit was to equalize public education. When presenting the case before the federal court many pictures and documents were used by the plaintiff. Fortunately, the pictures and documents are available through the U.S. National Archives online for viewers today to draw their own conclusions about education in Pulaski, Virginia in 1947.

Directions: Review the pictures and documents available through the U.S. National Archives at <http://www.archives.gov/midatlantic/education/desegregation/pulaski.html>. After you have reviewed the website, answer the questions.

1. What was the essential complaint in the Corbin lawsuit?
2. What evidence did the plaintiffs use to support their case?
3. What was the result of the case?

Name _____
Period _____ Date _____

What Were the Newspapers Saying?

Floyd County, Virginia was the first in the region to be petitioned by the NAACP following the decision by the courts that Massive Resistance was unconstitutional. The county was in violation of the state's own constitution which allowed each child a public education and it was in clear violation of the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. As you can imagine, this was a controversial topic in Floyd County and did not avoid the attention of Southwest Virginia newspapers.

Directions: Working in pairs, read the content of each article. While you are reading, do the following:

- Highlight the five most important facts presented in the article.
- Using a second color highlighter, identify the participants in each article.
- On the lines below, write two questions per article that you have that were left unanswered.

Article 1

Article 2

Article 3

Name _____
 Period _____ Date _____

Article 1

Roanoke Times, May 12, 1959—"Integration Effort Slated in Floyd: 14 Negro Pupils Will Seek Transfer"

14 Negro Pupils Will Seek Transfer

By MELVILLE CARICO
 Times Staff Writer

Parents of 14 Negroes will seek their transfer to two white high schools in Floyd County next September, an NAACP attorney in Roanoke announced yesterday.

Floyd County, which has no Negro high school, sends 28 Negroes to Christiansburg Institute in neighboring Montgomery County.

"IT MEANS a 70-mile round-trip a day by bus for some of them," said Reuben E. Lawson, a member of the NAACP's legal staff in Virginia.

Lawson said a petition for admission of some of the students to the high school at Floyd and another at Check will be filed with the Floyd County School Board "probably this month."

He said if the transfers are denied a suit may be filed in U.S. District Court in Roanoke.

"We are hoping that the superintendent and school board of Floyd County will see fit to honor our applications for transfers and will see fit to uphold the laws of the land . . . Lawson declared in a prepared statement.

If this is done, Lawson said, it will not be necessary to file a suit in the federal court "to enforce the law."

THE STUDENTS range in age from 14 to 18. One student, Lawson said, is now attending school in Ohio and the other 13 go to Christiansburg Institute.

Lawson declined to disclose the names of the students and their parents until the petition is filed with county school authorities.

Lawson's announcement came about an hour after the May meeting of the school board.

Supt. of Schools James H. Combs said the board does not meet again until June 9.

He said Lawson's announcement came as a surprise.

"We haven't had an opportunity to talk to anyone about it," Combs said.

The Floyd County Board of Supervisors meeting yesterday voted to make its future school appropriations on a month-to-month basis.

A member said there was no discussion of possible integration at the meeting and it was not known at the time Lawson was going to announce Negroes would seek admission to the

two white high schools this fall.

A hearing on the school budget will be held, probably at the supervisors' June 8 meeting.

Lawson said parents of seven of the 14 sought transfers last September by filling out State Pupil Placement Board forms.

"I have no knowledge of any such applications," Combs said.

The State Pupil Placement Board, now involved in integration suits in Richmond and Newport News, has never assigned a Negro to a white school.

COMBS SAID the board has not discussed possible integration of its two high schools and he could not comment on what action the board likely will take on the petitions.

Under Virginia's new school laws, all enrollments must be made through the state board until next March 1. After that a locality can adopt the Perrow Commission's local pupil assignment plan.

Lawson said he was retained by the students' parents through the PTA at Harris Hart Elementary School, the only Negro school in the county. It has about 100 students.

There are about 350 students in the white high school at Floyd and 225 in the white high school at Check, located at the opposite end of the county.

Lawson said Negroes being hauled by bus to Christiansburg Institute pass a white high school.

He said some have to get up at 5 a.m. in order to catch the school bus and they do not get back home until after dark.

LAWSON SAID he is not planning to file a petition for transfers for any of the Negroes in Harris Hart, which has classes through the ninth grade.

The law of the land as pronounced by the Supreme Court of the United States and affirmed by the Supreme Court

(Continued on Page 4 Col. 7)

Try Slated At Integration In Floyd

(Continued from Page One)

of Appeals of Virginia" states "that no longer should we deny children the right to attend school nearest their homes purely on account of race . . . Lawson's statement said.

Lawson said the applicants "were not solicited by the NAACP."

If the suit materializes it will be the first in Western Virginia where the ratio of Negroes to whites is small. The nearest has been Charlottesville which is scheduled to integrate its high school and an elementary school next September.

Floyd County has about 100 Negroes in Harris Hart and 28 enrolled in Christiansburg Institute.

Name _____
 Period _____ Date _____

Article 2

Southwest Times, May 13, 1959—"Times Traces Names Linked To Petitions: Floyd County Reaction Mixed"

**Times Traces
 Names Linked
 To Petitions
 Floyd County
 Reaction Mixed**

A fifteen year-old Floyd County Negro says he is looking forward to going to the all-white Check High School in Floyd County this September.

James David Walker, son of Mr. and Mrs. James Lesley Walker of near Check, is one of the three Negro students who will seek entry to the Check school.

The youth spoke confidently of being well received in the white high school. The Sophomore at Christiansburg Institute explained that he "has a number of white friends in the community" and doesn't think there will be any trouble.

Mrs. Walker, whose husband reportedly circulated the integration petition among Floyd County Negro parents, says she isn't worried because she feels that her son is prepared to meet any "ugliness" which may arise over the mixing of the races.

Mrs. Walker identified Mr. and Mrs. James Claytor of Check as a second Negro family planning to petition the School Board for the admittance of their two sons.

In Floyd, Mrs. Kyle Taylor, whose son is presently attending school in Ohio, refused to comment on the petition. However, Mrs. Walker also identified this family as one of the petitioners.

All Negro families contacted by The Southwest Times yesterday afternoon pointed to the distance their children travel to Christiansburg Institute in Montgomery County as the compelling reason for their action.

Walter Campbell, principal of the only Negro school in Floyd, said that his PTA forewarned the county school board of a possible integration move in March. He said a petition signed by Walker, who is president of the PTA, requested enlargement of present Negro school facilities, warning of an integration move in the face of a denial. Campbell said the school board refused the petition.

School Superintendent James H. Combs acknowledged receiving this petition. He said he returned the petition to the PTA because it was

(Continued On Page 6, Column 5)

Times Traces

(Continued From Page One)

unsigned.

Combs, commenting on the promised petition, simply stated that his school board has no reaction since it has received no request. He said the county will continue to bring in the enrollments through the State Pupil Placement Board.

Various members of the school board differ on their reaction on the integration move. J. H. Sumpster, board member, said, "I don't like it." He claimed no knowledge on what action the school board might take. "If any plans have been made," he said, "I know nothing of it."

The School Board met Monday and concluded shortly before Roanoke attorney Reuben E. Lawson announced that the county in question for several weeks is Floyd County.

Lawson this morning denied that he said he will present the petition within the next two weeks saying he does not know when it will be laid before the board. "I hope it will be prior to the next School Board meeting on June 9th," he said.

Contradicting Campbell, Lawson reported that the petition came through the Harris Hart Elementary PTA. "I received a letter from the president of the organization," he said, "and met with a group of parents on March 1 at the Mt. Zion Christian Church in New Town in Floyd." Lawson verified the fact that he received an invitation from the PTA group. He said that he would not have called the meeting himself.

Previously, reports were that the Floyd and Check high schools will be the only schools involved. The NAACP attorney said that there is a possibility of at least one white elementary school being petitioned for integration.

The Negro attorney praised the words of Joseph H. Poff, the county's member of the House of Delegates, who said it would be better to admit the 14 Negroes than to become involved in a law suit. Lawson said Poff's statement is typical of Floyd County's "well-thinking" people.

Other counties in Southwest Virginia are discussing possible integration in white schools he said.

Name _____
 Period _____ Date _____

Article 3

Roanoke Times, May 13, 1959—"Floyd Case May Set Pattern In Western Virginia Mixing"

Floyd Case May Set Pattern In Western Virginia Mixing

By MELVILLE CARICO
 Times Staff Writer

FLOYD, May 12—This rural mountaintop county of 11,500 may set the pattern for school integration in Western Virginia counties which have few Negroes.

Mixed reaction greeted Monday's announcement by an NAACP attorney that 14 teen-aged Negroes will seek admission to two white high schools in Floyd County next September.

But, significantly Joseph H. Poff, county's member of the House of Delegates, said it would be better to admit the 14 than to become involved in a law suit.

"We have a high type Negro here and I don't think we would have one bit of trouble," said Poff, a leading political figure in this Republican county.

THE COUNTY has no Negro high school and sends 28 Negro high school students to Christiansburg Institute in Montgomery County. Their tuition costs the county \$7,000 a year.

But the board of supervisors,



Carico

using new Perrow Commission proposals, has put the county in a position to close down its public school system if it wishes.

The board in a meeting Monday a few hours before the NAACP attorney's announcement voted to make appropriations for next year's schools on a month-to-month basis.

"We can now cut off money to a school if we see fit," said C. E. Hollandsworth, chairman of the board of supervisors.

He said Christiansburg Institute for Negroes is a better high school than the white high school children have at Floyd, Willis and Check.

"I have two boys in high school and I wouldn't mind them having to take a bus ride if the school was as good as the Negroes have," Hollandsworth added.

The school board is in the final stages of negotiations for a tract of land adjoining the high school here for a new consolidated high school. School officials hope to borrow \$900,000 from the State Literary Fund to erect the building.

THE COUNTY, which has only 128 Negroes in its school system, found itself projected into Virginia's school integration controversy with an announcement Monday by Reuben E. Lawson, Roanoke attorney, that he will present the petitions on behalf of the 14 Negroes.

Superintendent of Schools James H. Combs said the county must continue to make its enrollments through the State Pupil Placement Board.

Combs said he has never seen Lawson and knows nothing about the plans of the 14 except what he read in the newspapers and heard on television Monday night.

He said none of the parents of the 28 students now going to Christiansburg Institute has discussed with him any transfers to white high schools in Floyd and Check.

"It appears to me that Mr. Lawson is more interested in publicity and getting his picture in the paper and being seen on television than he is

in solving educational problems or representing his own clients," Combs said.

Poff, a Republican who supported most of the Perrow Commission bills in the recent special session of the General Assembly, advocated in effect that the county school board admit the Negroes and bypass the State Pupil Placement Board.

The legislator said admission of the Negroes would be resented by many people—both white and Negro.

"But," asked Poff, "why keep building your brains against a brick wall?"

FLOYD COUNTY is in a position similar to Warren County which has no Negro high schools. Federal Judge John Paul entered an order last September barring school authorities from refusing to admit the Negroes to the county's white high school in Front Royal.

"We are not surprised. We feel rather vulnerable because we do not have a senior high school for colored students," Poff said.

R. O. Slusher, chairman of the school board, could not be reached for comment.

Rex Nixon, a board member, agreed with Poff—but cautiously.

He agreed it might be better to admit the Negroes but said he wants to talk with other board members before making up his mind.

J. H. Sumpter, also a board member, said he does not want to admit any Negroes to the white schools if there is any way of preventing it.

The school board met Monday and another meeting is not scheduled until June 9.

Combs, the superintendent of schools, said no earlier meeting has been called because no applications have been filed on behalf of the Negroes.

"We are in the dark on this thing—completely," Combs said.

COMBS, through the school board, has presented the board of supervisors with a proposed school budget of \$580,480 for the 1959-60 school year—\$348,000 of which would come from the state.

He also has presented the supervisors an alternate budget for "educational purposes" in the same amount.

Floyd County had a per pupil cost of \$212 for this school year—the sum which parents would be eligible to receive in "tuition grants" for next year if they do not want to send their children to public schools.

Good Morning
Paint Bank
Fish Hatchery
Opens in Fall
 Page 13

Billy Graham	3
Business	17
Classified Ads	21-23
Comics	25
Editorials	8
Health	16
Jim Bishop	10
Local	11, 13, 20
Movies	26
News Around World	2
Obituaries	4
Radio-TV	24, 25
Sports	18-20
State	13, 24
Women	14-16
Your Money's Worth	17



Group Discussion Sample Responses

	Facts	Participants	Questions
Article 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floyd County has two white high schools and sends its African American children to Christiansburg Institute • Primary concern was the distance that African American students were required to travel to Christiansburg Institute • NAACP petitions for enrollment were received through the PTA from parents • Failure to accept petitions for enrollment would result in a violation of federal law • A desegregation suit in Floyd County would be the first of its kind in an area where the white to black ratio was small 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NAACP • Attorney, Rueben Lawson • Floyd School Board • Floyd Board of Supervisors • Students • Parents • PTA, Parent Teacher Association • U.S. District Court in Roanoke • Supreme Court of the United States • Supreme Court of Appeals for Virginia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did Reuben Lawson wait until after the School Board meeting to make the announcement of petitions? • Why was the Floyd School Board surprised to hear that the NAACP would be filing petitions?
Article 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American student was looking forward to attending white high school in Check and did not anticipate trouble • Parent of student seeking enrollment in all white high school believed their child was ready to face any trouble that might come • African American families cited the distance as the reason for the petition • Principal of black 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southwest Times staff writers • Students • Parents • Principal of African American school • School Superintendent • State Pupil Placement Board • House of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did Southwest Times reporters seek to find out who had petitioned for enrollment in the fall? Why was this information not freely given by NAACP attorney Reuben Lawson? • Why does Reuben Lawson seem reluctant to reveal to the press information about when the petition will be filed?

	<p>elementary school in Floyd had requested increased funding from the school board and was refused</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School board members differed in their reaction to the petition 	<p>Delegates member</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PTA • NAACP 	
<p>Article 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House of Delegates member Joseph Poff said it would be better to admit fourteen students to white high schools than face a lawsuit • One school board member does not want to admit any African American children to white schools if there is a way to prevent it • The Floyd County School Board voted to make appropriations for schools on a month to month basis and can cut off funding for its schools as it sees fit • Superintendent of Floyd County Schools stated that he believed that the NAACP attorney was more interested in publicity than education • Floyd County parents may use tuition grants to send their students to private schools if they do not wish to enroll their children in public schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House of Delegates member • NAACP attorney Reuben Lawson • Board of Supervisors • School Board members • Superintendent of Floyd County Schools • State Pupil Placement Board • Perrow Commission • Students • Parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the Perrow Commission? • Why was desegregation considered an important issue when it only concerned the admission of 14 African American students?