Lead: The reaction of the Virginia’s leaders to desegregation orders in the 1950s was massive resistance. Surprisingly, the most effective opposition to this course came from white moderates seeking to save the public schools.

Intro. : *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In the aftermath of the 1954 Brown v. the Board of Education decision declaring segregated schools unconstitutional, Virginia political leaders led by
Senator Harry Byrd and Governor Thomas B. Stanley, following the principal of massive resistance, passed the Stanley laws in the General Assembly of 1956. They denied state funding to integrated schools and gave the Governor power to close schools that attempted integration. When the NAACP secured Federal Court orders integrating schools in Norfolk, Charlottesville and Warrenton in 1958, then Governor Lindsay Almond closed those schools. Only then did Virginia’s moderates react.

Further court orders would invalidate the Stanley laws, but by that time moderate Virginians had begun to change the political
equation. Led by Blair Buck, former Virginia Education official, the Virginia Committee for Public Schools soon had 25,000 members. They organized classes in districts the state had closed. They began a state-wide petition drive hammering the Governor and the General Assembly. They focused their campaign, not on the broad question of black civil rights, but just on keeping schools open. In January, representatives of the state’s business community warned the Governor that further resistance would destroy what was left of the commonwealth’s reputation nationally. The governor, acknowledging the inevitable, recommended the re-opening of the schools. On February 2, 1959 Negro
children entered formerly all-white schools is Arlington and Norfolk; thus, the end of massive resistance, at least, in most of parts of Virginia. Next time: the agony of Prince Edward County.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.
Resources


