

## Timeline of the End of Massive Resistance

Prepared by Dr. Lydia Bean

1. **April 1831**—After the Nat Turner Rebellion, the Virginia General Assembly prohibits enslaved people and “free negroes or mulattoes” from assembling for the purpose of education. Teaching and learning continue in secret.<sup>1</sup>
2. **1858**—Norfolk creates a public school system for its white children.<sup>2</sup>
3. **1861**—Norfolk native Mary S. Peake begins teaching “contrabands” in Hampton who cross Union lines to escape slavery.<sup>3</sup> A free Black woman, Peake is the first teacher hired by the American Missionary Association.
4. **May 10, 1862**—Norfolk Mayor William Lamb surrenders city to Union troops during the Civil War. The city’s Black leaders help build schools for local Black children and adults, and for refugees fleeing slavery.<sup>4</sup>
5. **1863**—The American Missionary Association, an interracial abolitionist society, establishes the Coan School for Black children in Norfolk.<sup>5</sup>
6. **April 1867**—American Missionary Association of New York sets up and sustains first public school system for Norfolk’s Black children, in collaboration with the Freedmen’s Bureau.<sup>6</sup>
7. **April 17, 1868**—Black and White Virginians write a new state Constitution that requires universal public education for the first time.<sup>7</sup>
8. **October 8, 1869**—Virginia returns to the Union by ratifying the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, granting equal citizenship to Black people, and the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, giving Black men the right to vote.<sup>8</sup>
9. **1871**—Norfolk brings Black schools into the Norfolk Public Schools system.<sup>9</sup>
10. **1886**—Norfolk opens the first new public school building for Black students, the Cumberland Street School, later renamed the Samuel Armstrong School. The city misappropriates funds raised for the project and stocks the building with hand-me-down books and desks from white schools.<sup>10</sup>
11. **May 18, 1896**—In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the U.S. Supreme Court upholds racial segregation under the doctrine of “separate but equal.”<sup>11</sup>
12. **1902**—Virginia adopts new Constitution that states, “White and colored children shall not be taught in the same school.” Black and poor White Virginians lose voting rights through poll taxes and other devices.<sup>12</sup>
13. **1910**—P.B. Young purchases the struggling press of a Black fraternal order where he works, the Supreme Lodge Knights of Gideons. He founds the Norfolk Journal and Guide, which becomes one of the nation’s leading Black newspapers.<sup>13</sup>
14. **June 25, 1939**—1,200 Black schoolchildren hold a demonstration protesting the discriminatory pay scale in Norfolk Public Schools. Black teachers in Norfolk make significantly less than their White counterparts.<sup>14</sup>
15. **June 18, 1940**—The U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rules that the Norfolk School Board has violated the Equal Protection Clauses of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment by paying Black teachers less. A team of NAACP lawyers, headed by Thurgood Marshall, represent Melvin O. Alston, a Black teacher at Booker T. Washington High School.<sup>15</sup>

16. **April 23, 1951**—Black students in Prince Edward County strike to protest unequal education there, and then sue to desegregate Virginia schools. Their case becomes part of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.<sup>16</sup>
17. **May 17, 1954**—In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that school segregation is unconstitutional. In 1955, the court rules that schools must be desegregated with "all deliberate speed."<sup>17</sup>
18. **February 1955**—The Women's Council for Interracial Cooperation holds a meeting of over 400 people to educate Norfolk citizens about desegregation. Led by Vivian Carter Mason, the interracial group works for education, health, and housing for Black Virginians.<sup>18</sup>
19. **Feb. 25, 1956**—U.S. Sen. Harry F. Byrd Sr., the most powerful man in Virginia politics, calls for a strategy of "massive resistance" to oppose the integration of public schools.<sup>19</sup>
20. **April 21, 1956**—The Norfolk Journal and Guide reports that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is preparing a lawsuit, since the Norfolk School Board has ignored their request to indicate how it plans to end school segregation and comply with *Brown*.<sup>20</sup>
21. **May 10, 1956**—Leola Pearl Beckett and 96 Black Norfolk citizens sue the Norfolk school board to be admitted to White public schools without discrimination on the basis of race.<sup>21</sup>
22. **May-August, 1956**—The Norfolk Journal and Guide publishes a series of editorial cartoons by Jack Mimms that supports school desegregation and debunks white supremacy with science and religious truth.<sup>22</sup>
23. **Aug. 27, 1956**—Virginia Gov. Thomas B. Stanley announces a package of Massive Resistance legislation that gives the governor the power to close schools that desegregate.<sup>23</sup>
24. **Aug. 28, 1956**—The Norfolk Virginian-Pilot publishes an editorial denouncing Massive Resistance. Most of Virginia's major newspapers support Massive Resistance to integration.<sup>24</sup>
25. **Feb. 26, 1957**—U.S. District Court Judge Walter E. Hoffman rules that Norfolk schools must desegregate that fall, but an appeal of his ruling delays implementation.<sup>25</sup>
26. **Nov. 5, 1957** - J. Lindsay Almond Jr. is elected governor of Virginia on a platform of Massive Resistance to integration.<sup>26</sup>
27. **Aug. 18, 1958**—151 Black students in Norfolk apply to the city's all-White schools. The School Board denies all transfer requests, claiming that applicants are unqualified or would suffer "isolation" and cause "racial conflicts."<sup>27</sup>
28. **Aug. 29, 1958**—After meeting with Judge Hoffman, Norfolk School Board admits 17 applicants to six all-White secondary schools. These students will become known as "the Norfolk 17."<sup>28</sup>
29. **Sept. 29, 1958**—Governor Almond orders six of Norfolk's all-White schools to close, displacing over 9,950 students. Most of the "Lost Class of 1959" go without schooling.<sup>29</sup>
30. **September 1958**—More than 200 White high school juniors and seniors sign a petition asking the governor and school board officials to reopen the schools even if they are desegregated.<sup>30</sup>

31. **Sept. 24th, 1958**—One hundred prominent Norfolk business and civic leaders place a full-page advertisement in the The Virginian-Pilot supporting the peaceful desegregation of Norfolk Public Schools.<sup>31</sup>
32. **Oct. 13, 1958**—A thousand people hold a Rally for Open Schools in Norfolk Arena. White residents organize the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools.<sup>32</sup>
33. **Nov. 18, 1958**—Norfolk voters pass an advisory referendum in support of keeping the schools closed: 12,340 in favor, 8,712 opposed.<sup>33</sup>
34. **September 1958-February 1959**—The “Norfolk 17” study at Bute Street First Baptist Church, under Vivian Carter Mason. Black school supervisor Hortense Wells develops a curriculum to train them to desegregate all-White schools.<sup>34</sup>
35. **Jan. 19, 1959**—Both the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals and the U.S. District Court overturn the governor’s decision to close Norfolk schools.<sup>35</sup>
36. **Jan. 21, 1959**—Edward R. Murrow airs a national television report on “The Lost Class of ’59” on CBS.<sup>36</sup>
37. **Jan. 29, 1959**—The Norfolk City Council directs Superintendent J.J. Brewbaker to reopen the six closed schools. Norfolk’s Black community and pro-school leaders celebrate the vote.<sup>37</sup>
38. **Feb. 2, 1959**—Seventeen Black students in Norfolk enroll in the previously all-White schools. White and Black media report a peaceful, uneventful first day of school.<sup>38</sup>
39. **Spring 1959**—The Norfolk 17 attend school and excel academically. They endure harassment, isolation and threats, but keep their experiences private to protect the desegregation effort.<sup>39</sup>
40. **1960**—Lenoir Chambers, editor of the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, wins the Pulitzer Prize for Distinguished Editorial Writing for his 1959 campaign against Massive Resistance.<sup>40</sup>
41. **September 19, 1963**—Inspired by the March on Washington, over 2,000 students march to protest inferior conditions at the all-Black Booker T. Washington High School.<sup>41</sup>
42. **November 29, 1963**—Seamstress and grassroots leader Evelyn Butts files a lawsuit to end Virginia’s poll tax for local elections, winning in the Supreme Court in 1966.<sup>42</sup>
43. **June 1968**—Civil rights lawyer Joseph A. Jordan Jr. is elected to the Norfolk City Council, the first Black member since Reconstruction.<sup>43</sup>
44. **Feb. 2, 2009**—On behalf of the city and state, Norfolk Mayor Paul Fraim and Governor Tim Kaine apologize to the Norfolk 17 and the Black community of Norfolk for Massive Resistance.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Newby-Alexander, 82-84.

<sup>6</sup> Rorer, *History of Norfolk Public Schools*, p. 15-17.

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