Brown v. Board of Education, a Half-Century Later

BY DAVID BEARINGER

The Supreme Court’s 1954 ruling in five consolidated cases known collectively as Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas may be the most important legal decision of the 20th century. In this ruling, Chief Justice Earl Warren spoke for a unanimous Court in declaring that segregation by race in public schools violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and that “in the field of public education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.”

The Brown decision opened the gates, not just to desegregation of the nation’s schools, but also to the repeal of local, state, and federal laws that supported the structures of a segregated society. It fueled the Civil Rights Movement and led to landmark Civil and Voting Rights legislation in the 1960s. It also encouraged others to use the legal system—and the Brown precedent—to challenge a host of discriminatory laws and practices. These challenges continue; the revolution that began with Brown is still underway.

The doctrine of “separate but equal” was established by the Court in the 1896 case of Plessy v. Ferguson. The Plessy case dealt with transportation, not education, but its conclusion—that separate but substantially equal facilities for whites and blacks could satisfy the Constitution’s equal protection requirements—became the cornerstone of segregationist laws, policies, customs, and institutions that prevailed throughout the first half of the 20th century, especially in the South.

The five Brown cases came from Kansas, South Carolina, Delaware, the District of Columbia, and Virginia. The Virginia case of Davis v. Prince Edward County clearly represented not just the problems...
Avoiding the “Catastrophe” of Success

Three years after the opening of his play “The Glass Menagerie,” Tennessee Williams wrote an essay excoriating the popular American mythology of success. The play had brought him critical acclaim, financial security, sudden prominence, a flood of new opportunities, and access to a much wider audience.

And yet he called the aftermath of this success a “catastrophe,” in which he found himself becoming cynical, self-satisfied, numbed, and cut off from the springs of his own creative energy. Alarmed by this, he began looking for a reconnection to the ideals and essential questions that had inspired his work in the first place. His essay describes that search.

When I joined the VFH in 1984, a few weeks before our 10th Anniversary, the Foundation was already influential and respected, with an excellent statewide reputation and an impressive list of well-established programs. It could easily have become stagnant, a casualty of its own good fortune, not so much freed by success as confined and diminished by it. Williams relished—and feared—the irony of success snuffing out its own creative spark.

So for me, one of the Foundation’s greatest achievements is that, 20 years later, and after 30 years of building success upon success, it has not become complacent, lost its sense of purpose, or disconnected from its sources of meaning and inspiration—in books, ideas, free and open discussion, and the stories of Virginia and its people.

On the surface, the VFH is a much different organization now than it was in 1984, when the Virginia Festival of the Book, the Virginia Folklife Program, the African American Heritage Program, the Institute for Violence and Survival, With Good Reason, the Fellowship Program, and The South Atlantic Humanities Center were all still years in the future.

But after 30 years of growth, the Foundation’s link to its basic values, its essential nature—a link that could easily have been broken by change and success—remains strong. Ironically, a group of young and extremely creative new staff members has been instrumental in helping to preserve this connection.

Openness—to new ideas, new partnerships, new technologies, and new and broader definitions of the humanities and our mission—has been and remains one of the defining characteristics of this organization. The VFH continues to reach beyond the familiar, but our most important measures of success are still the quality of our programs and the difference they make in people’s lives.

I’m proud of the fact that the VFH exists for reasons other than its own advancement. We have avoided the “catastrophe” Tennessee Williams described because with each new success we have asked ourselves, again, why we do what we do and for whom.

David Bearinger
Director of Grants and Public Programs
the Court addressed in Brown, but also the racial divisions that led, subsequently, to “massive resistance” in Virginia and to one of the most shameful chapters in the state’s history.

The first black high school in Prince Edward County, the Robert R. Moton School in Farmville, was not built until the late 1930s. This school soon became overcrowded, and a number of poorly constructed temporary buildings were added. In April 1951, after several years of fruitless requests for better facilities, a group of Moton students organized a strike to protest conditions at the school.

Initially, this protest was aimed at achieving equal facilities for Prince Edward’s African American students. But the lawsuit filed later that spring in Richmond’s U.S. District Court as Davis v. Prince Edward County was actually part of a larger, coordinated assault on the legal foundations of “separate but equal.”

In May of 1952, the District Court ruled against the plaintiffs, the students, who were being represented by NAACP attorneys Spottswood Robinson and Oliver Hill, basing its decision on the well-established Plessy doctrine. This decision was immediately appealed to the Supreme Court and overturned in Brown v. Board of Education two years later.

In the meantime, the state of Virginia had granted emergency funds to Prince Edward County to build a new Black high school. But in the aftermath of the Brown decision, the Supreme Court remanded the individual cases back to the trial courts with instructions that the states and localities develop plans to end segregation in the public schools “with all deliberate speed.”

In response to this federal desegregation mandate, U.S. Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia wrote in 1956, “If we can organize the Southern states for massive resistance to this order I think that in time the rest of the country will realize that racial integration is not going to be accepted in the South.” Thus the term massive resistance was coined, and adherents to the principles of segregation began to organize in opposition to the changes required in Brown.

In September 1958, the public schools in Warren County, Charlottesville, and Norfolk all closed briefly. In Prince Edward County, the closing of the public schools lasted for five years, from 1959–1964. During this time, a private academy was created for the education of white children, with scholarship aid available. Black students had to leave home (if they could) to continue their education, living with relatives or with Quaker families in other states. Many of those who remained in the county for those five years received no education at all.

Eventually, opposition to the full implementation of Brown v. Board also included a variety of so-called “freedom of choice” plans, devised and implemented at the local level, which placed the burden of desegregation on black students and their families. This approach was also struck down by the Supreme Court in 1968, in a Virginia case known as Green v. New Kent County.

The student strike in Farmville, the Davis case, massive resistance, the closing of the public schools, and the struggle to achieve full implementation of the Supreme Court’s ruling in Brown v. Board are some of the most significant and compelling stories in the 400-year history of Virginia. They deserve much broader recognition and discussion as 2007 approaches. The 50th anniversary of the Brown decision in 2004 is an occasion to reconsider and to deepen public understanding of this part of our collective history, and also to examine the changes that have come about as a result of these events.

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Another Banner Year Expected for

Since the launch of the Virginia Festival of the Book in 1995, readers across Virginia, the nation, and the world have come to recognize Charlottesville’s special allure each March. It is almost a rite of spring that anticipating crowds gather to celebrate the life of the written word with the more than 300 authors who convene for readings, panel discussions, and book-related programs. A testament to the year-round efforts at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, for a decade now a large and diverse schedule of festival events has remained free and open to the public.

Three programs commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education decision will be a part of the 2004 Virginia Festival of the Book:

A panel discussion focusing on the Prince Edward County story. Participants will include Drs. Gerald and Vonita White Foster, authors of Silent Trumpets of Justice: Integration’s Failure in Prince Edward County, and John Stokes, one of the leaders of the 1951 student strike and a plaintiff in the Davis case.

A screening of the VFH-funded film, The Road to Brown. After the screening, John Ritchie, former Executive Assistant to Governor Linwood Holton during massive resistance, and Elaine Carter, Executive Director of Christiansburg Institute Inc., will offer commentary based on their personal experiences.

A panel discussion devoted to exploring the “Legacies of Brown v. Board of Education”—in race relations, education, and the law. Participants include Valerie Mahomes, professor of Child Psychiatry at Yale and Director of Policy for School Development Programs in New Haven, Ct.; Rodney Smolla, Dean of the University of Richmond School of Law; and M. Rick Turner, Dean of African American Affairs at the University of Virginia.

The Impetus

The festival was founded in 1994 when Cal Otto, Paul Collinge, and Tom Dowd presented Rob Vaughan with the idea for the “first annual” Virginia Festival of the Book. Vaughan, who had wanted to organize a book festival for years in Charlottesville, was enthusiastic to make the VFH the annual producer of the event. Pictured here is the cover of the first 1995 program.
In 2004, acclaimed author and writer-host of Public Radio’s “Prairie Home Companion,” Garrison Keillor, will read from his work on March 24 at 8 p.m. at the Charlottesville Performing Arts Center. Keillor is the author of Lake Wobegon Days, The Book of Gumps, The Old Man Who Loved Cheese, and his most recent novel Love Me.

Booker Prize-winning author Michael Ondaatje (The English Patient, Anil’s Ghost) will read from his work on Saturday, March 27, at 4 p.m. at the Newcomb Hall Ballroom on the Grounds of the University of Virginia. Later that evening, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Michael Chabon (The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay) will read at Newcomb Hall Ballroom at 8 p.m.

As with most festival events—receptions and luncheon excluded—admission is free but seating is limited. Tickets for these headline events will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis beginning one hour before each event. There is no pre-registered seating.

Other features of the festival include an evening with the Fellowship of Southern Writers (featuring Clyde Edgerton and Kaye Gibbons) on Thursday, March 25; an evening with literary writers of the American West (featuring Joy Harjo, Dan O’Brien, and Judy Blunt) on Friday, March 26; and three panels commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education decision. (see page 4)

Go online now to www.vabook.org for more information on programs featuring authors Arturo Arias, David Baldacci, Richard Bausch, Robert Bausch, Lawrence Block, Fred Chappell, Alev Lytle Croutier, Amitai Etzioni, Edward P. Jones, Thomas Mallon, Alexander McCall-Smith, Mary Lee Settle, and hundreds of others.

Tickets are still available for the gala Authors Reception at Carr’s Hill at the home of the President of the University of Virginia on March 27, from 6–8 p.m. This year, two author-couples, Carrie Brown and John Gregory Brown, and Henry Wiencek and Donna Lucey, will greet guests and VABook! participants over wine and hors d’oeuvres. Tickets are $25 per person; call 434-924-3296 to reserve by credit card.
VFH Fellows in VABook! 2004 Programs

In *Buried Secrets*, a chronicle of the journey of Maya massacre survivors seeking truth, justice, and healing in the aftermath of genocide in Guatemala, **Victoria Sanford** provides an insider’s view to the workings of the Commission for Historical Clarification (truth commission) and the complex process of truth-gathering. Based on exhaustive research, the work builds the legal case for charges of genocide against former dictators, and includes more than 400 testimonies from massacre survivors, interviews with members of the forensic team, human rights leaders, guerilla combatants, government officials, and high-ranking military officers, including those implicated in the genocide. *Buried Secrets* is a book of witness to war and to suffering, but also to the love, sorrow, and hope from which survivors find the courage to challenge those who would have erased their very existence.

Sanford has worked in Maya communities since 1993. She is also the author of *Violencia y Genocidio en Guatemala* (F&G Editores, 2003) and is currently working on *Markings: The Moral Imagination of Survival*, a book about displacement and child soldiers in Guatemala and Colombia. She is a VFH Research Fellow.

In *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America*, **Henry Wiencek** presents original research documenting the Founding Father’s private conflict over the morally repugnant institution of slavery in the new republic. As a VFH Fellow, Wiencek undertook a meticulous examination of Washington’s private letters and his will, which set forth a careful plan to free his slaves and provide land for their livelihood. As one critic commented, “Readers can only imagine along with Wiencek the national tragedy that could have been averted had Washington provided the great example of emancipation while in office.”

An historian, lecturer, and author of several books, Wiencek won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1999 for *The Hairstons: An American Family in Black and White*. He resides in Charlottesville with his family.

The Germans, Scots-Irish, and English who settled the Shenandoah Valley in Rockingham County strove to practice their religious freedom and carve out a life on the frontier. The bulkhead of the Blue Ridge mountains isolated these settlers from the rest of the Anglican colony and gave them range to refuse involvement in military service or the repression of slavery. This history of religious faith in Rockingham County, *Where the River Flows, Finding Faith in Rockingham County, Virginia 1726–1876*, is the story of George Rimel, a big-fisted preacher who challenges bullies disrupting church services; Samuel Huber, who broke Virginia law by giving African Americans their own camp meetings; Ursula Lang, who made her life for herself and her daughter after her preacher-husband abandoned them; and the stories of many more remarkable people of every age and station. Published for the Margaret Grattan Weaver Foundation by the VFH, *Where the River Flows* was written by former VFH Fellow Rob Hewitt, who enjoys tracking old roads and discovering 18th century churches while enjoying the Blue Ridge Mountains with his family.

**VABook! Appearance:**
A program on “The History of Christianity in Virginia” (March 25th, 10 AM at Jefferson-Madison Regional Library, Central Branch).

**VABook! Appearances:**
- “Buried Secrets,” a program provided by Amnesty International (March 26th, 6 PM at UVa Bookstore) and also a program with Michael Ondaatje, who based the protagonist of his novel *Anil’s Ghost* on Sanford (March 27th, 4 PM at Newcomb Hall Ballroom).
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Pulitzer Prize-winning author Frank McCourt will narrate *Re-Imagining Ireland*, a challenging and entertaining one-hour documentary on global Ireland being developed as a co-production of the VFH, Paul Wagner Productions, and Radio Telefis Éireann (RTÉ), Irish national television.

Based on 37 interviews and a variety of performance events filmed at the 2003 conference of the same title, *Re-Imagining Ireland* engages an extraordinary group of personalities in a wide-ranging exploration of personal, cultural, and political issues dramatized by recent changes in Ireland. The show focuses on these changes from the perspective of the Irish themselves, encouraging Americans to reflect on what is happening overseas as a means of assessing our own culture.

RTÉ expects to broadcast *Re-Imagining Ireland* on March 17, St. Patrick’s Day, and several PBS stations have expressed interest in presenting its American debut. Support for the film comes from the Anne Lee Ultschi Foundation, the Office of the President at the University of Virginia, the American Ireland Fund, Fact Charitable Trust, the NEH, and the Blanka Rosenstiel Foundation.

For more information, please visit www.re-imagining-ireland.org

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**Re-Imagining Ireland: Coming to a Screen Near You!**

**Story as History** Excerpts from the *Re-Imagining Ireland* documentary

When I was fourteen years of age, all hell broke lose when the tensions of human rights, equality, and justice exploded, to be followed by very structured, organized terrorism…And at the age of nineteen, I became involved in that. Was subsequently arrested for possession of explosives with intent to endanger life. And went to a prison camp in Northern Ireland, where I served five and a half years…I’m now, of course, a Member of Parliament, which tells you that our abnormal society must now do abnormal things, if we’re ever to reach any form of normality, or what at least passes for normality.

**David Ervine, Northern Ireland Assembly member**

Upon my grandmother’s death, a set of photographs were given to us that confirmed that the white gentleman who I had to take care of as a child was in fact my great grandfather…One out of every two blacks below the Mason-Dixon line and one out of every three blacks above the Mason-Dixon line have at least one Irish ancestor.

**Lenwood Sloan, choreographer and arts activist**

I served mass once for John Charles McQuaid, who was the great regal Archbishop of Dublin, one of the architects of the Irish Constitution…It was very much like being in the presence of royalty…So, you know, we bowed down and kissed his hand. And I remember the first time it struck me that there was something extraordinary, I was actually going up to serve that mass. I was only seven or eight years old. And walking up – I lived in a working-class housing estate, very unglamorous place – there was this absolutely beautiful Rolls Royce outside the priest’s house. And sticking out of the side of the Rolls Royce were those two very elegant little feet in beautiful black shoes. And kneeling on the pavement was the chauffeur, polishing the Archbishop’s shoes. And, you know, you really saw, even as a child – something kind of struck you, saying, “This is not quite right.” You know, there is a power here which doesn’t quite match with all the stuff about us poor oppressed Catholics, and charity and equality…

**Fintan O’Toole, Irish Times journalist**

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VFH 30th Anniversary Celebration in Norfolk

The VFH recently kicked off its 30th Anniversary Celebration with two events in Norfolk: a reception at the Norfolk Southern Tower and a workshop for middle and high school teachers on the Tidewater Gospel tradition. The Paschall Brothers, Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program Master Artists, headlined both events.

On November 18, the Norfolk Southern Tower provided a spectacular venue for the kickoff of our anniversary year. With its walls of windows, the 20th floor reception area overlooks the entire city of Norfolk with stunning views. Former VFH board members Susan Bland and Susan Goode, and her husband David Goode (CEO of Norfolk Southern), were our hosts for the evening event. Approximately 50 VFH friends from the Tidewater area were in attendance, including current board members Elizabeth L. Young and Edythe C. Harrison; former board members Lee C. Kitchin, Page R. Laws, Robert C. Nusbaum and Vincent Thomas, Sr; General Assembly member Yvonne B. Miller; Mayor of Norfolk Paul Fraim; several fellowship and grant recipients and current staff members. The Paschall Brothers, a Chesapeake-based a cappella gospel quartet, launched the celebration with an exuberant performance.

The teachers’ workshop on November 22, funded by a grant from the Alison J. and Ella W. Parsons Foundation, provided historical background on the Tidewater Gospel tradition and its significant contributions to African American culture in Hampton Roads. The workshop was led by Gregg Kimball, Ph.D., cultural historian from the Library of Virginia in Richmond, and Diana Covington-Greer, lead instructor for the Music, Arts and Humanities Center, Richmond Public Schools. Both instructors are experienced in leading teacher-education workshops on African American history and culture, traditional music in America, and the American South.

During the workshop the teachers were given an historical overview of the history of African American gospel and other expressive arts forms in the Hampton Roads area, and were introduced to historical recordings. Covington-Greer had all of the teachers up and singing, while Dr. Kimball provided historical context. The Paschall Brothers joined in, singing along with the teachers, and answering their questions. The teachers were each given a resource guide with suggested humanities-based lessons to accompany both an historical compilation CD and the new Paschall Brothers CD, Songs for Our Father, produced by the Virginia Folklife Program at the VFH.

After the workshop, the Paschall Brothers performed a free concert for the public in the Granby High School auditorium. The Paschalls stand firmly in the great tradition of unaccompanied religious singing in Tidewater Virginia. Though scarcely a handful of African American a cappella quartets sing in Virginia today, black four-part harmony groups were singing in Virginia at least as early as the mid-1800s, and the Tidewater region alone produced over 200 such groups in the century following the Civil War. The Paschall Brothers are the current torchbearers of this traditional singing style. For more information on the Paschall Brothers music and CD, e-mail folklife@virginia.edu.

Cassandra Newby-Alexander, grant recipient, Norfolk State University and Vincent Thomas, former member of the VFH board (right).

Sheryl Hayes, Director of Development, and Bob Nusbaum, Former Board Member (bottom).
A Charitable Gift Annuity is a simple concept: you make a gift of cash, property, or stock to the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities (VFH), and in turn, we provide you with a guaranteed lifelong income. The gift annuity provides a means for assisting the VFH in a very important way, and also brings you many happy returns for the rest of your life.

Here are six ways you benefit.

1. Increase your income.
2. Receive an immediate charitable income tax deduction.
3. Save future taxes.
4. You may avoid some capital gains taxes.
5. You can avoid probate cost and estate taxes.
6. You can choose who is to receive the future income.

Why not give us a call to find out if this option for giving is right for you? We can answer your questions and provide you with specific information about your situation.

New VFH Fellow and Longwood University historian Larissa M. Smith maintains that the 1930s and 1940s were a formative period for the struggle for civil rights in Virginia. She is recovering a “lost” generation of activists from this period who laid the groundwork for the Civil Rights movement in the state post-Brown. The Great Depression, the New Deal, and World War II galvanized community activists who formed statewide organizations and forged coalitions with liberal and labor groups at the regional and national levels, according to Smith, whose topic is “Where the South Begins: Black Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Virginia, 1930–1956.”

Derek C. Catsam, assistant professor of history at Minnesota State University, is completing a narrative history entitled A Brave and Wonderful Thing: The Freedom Rides and the Integration of Interstate Transport, 1941–1965, the first full treatment of the Freedom Rides and the desegregation of interstate transportation in the postwar era. He examines the protests against segregated buses and facilities from the 1940s on, exploring the meaning of the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation (a challenge to Jim Crow and forebearer to the Freedom rides), other “Freedom Rides,” and their legacies in American and world history.

Fellow Herbert Tico Braun is an associate professor of history at the University of Virginia and a widely acknowledged author and senior scholar in Latin American cultural, social, and political history. While in residence at the VFH, Braun is writing Humiliation, Solitude, and Violence in Colombia, 1949–1965, an investigation of the cultural, psychological, and behavioral forces that led to the enduring rural armed conflict in Colombia during the second half of the 20th century. Braun argues that the break between the political elites and their rural clienteles, the loss of patron-client ties, was experienced by both sides as a “loss.” In what he calls a “revisionist study,” Braun argues that cultural sensibilities (e.g., rather than class and political antagonisms) have divided the contestants in Colombia and undermined negotiations for decades.

Senior Fellow Jerome S. Handler is expanding the website “The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record.” The Emilia Galli Struppa Fellow William W. Frechling is continuing his residency at the VFH while he completes Road to Disunion, Volume II: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854–1861. J. Gordon Hylton, professor of law and adjunct professor of history at Marquette University, is analyzing the growth of the African American bar in Virginia in the final decades of the 19th century. (See the VFH Fall 2003 newsletter for coverage of these projects.)
The South Atlantic Humanities Center (SAHC), a partnership of the VFH, Virginia Tech, and the University of Virginia, was a strong presence at “Regionalism and the Humanities,” the first national conference of regional humanities centers, hosted by the Plains Humanities Alliance in Lincoln, Nebraska this past November 20-22.

SAHC is one of eight regional humanities centers established by the National Endowment for the Humanities in 2001, and its 10-person delegation to the conference demonstrated strong thematic, geographic, and disciplinary diversity, with presenters from five of the region’s seven states and territories, drawn from music and art history, architecture, library science, documentary photography, humanities education, history, and literature.

Conference fellows included Sally Johnston of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Tech; she explored the potential of the regional approach for revitalizing liberal education. Gail McMillan, who directs digital libraries at Virginia Tech, presented a sampling of fascinating, mostly unsung South Atlantic women architects, drawn from her innovative, online International Archive of Women in Architecture. Opal Moore of Spelman College read from her poetic project evoking the experience of children in the Middle Passage; most dramatically, she imagined the testimony, lost to history, of those who did not survive that horrific Atlantic crossing. Linda Rodriguez Guglielmoni of the University of Puerto Rico – Mayagüez reflected on growing up multilingual and on the differing pleasures and perils of delving into that experience through her poetry and translations.

Michael Saffle of Virginia Tech (Interdisciplinary Studies) explored the musical life of the region, typically overshadowed by such southern places as Memphis, Nashville, and New Orleans; he noted the distinctively private realms—soirées, societies, private clubs—where South Atlantic musical life has unfolded. Kathleen Wilson of the University of Ulster analyzed woven bedcovers as material embodiments of the otherwise unheard voices of Appalachian women; she called into question the patronizing views of Appalachia, as well as the assumption that “folk art” represents simple transplanting from Old World sources. And Duke University historian Peter Wood presented Winslow Homer’s shattering, moving painting Gulf Stream in the context of the South Atlantic region’s historic links to Africa, the slave trade, and the plantation system.

The panel “Islands and Southlands: The Power of Place in the South Atlantic” included Florida architect Maricé Chael’s presentation on “New Urbanism.” This rising architectural/planning movement, strongly represented in the South Atlantic, works to re-imagine and refashion our built environment by reconnecting to place and region in ways that help create walkable, human-scale cities and foster community. Tom Rankin, director of Duke’s Center for Documentary Studies, explored how documentary photography captures regional identity, not just preserving vanishing lifeways but also witnessing cultural change in an evolving region. Finally, SAHC program director Pablo Davis examined Puerto Rican and Southern Black migrations as parallel South Atlantic phenomena, considering salsa and soul music as analogous, regional expressions of identity for people in movement.
The Virginia Foundation has an extensive record of programs on the general theme of rights and responsibilities, on legal issues—especially as they pertain to the history of Virginia, and on the legacy of the Brown v. Board case in particular. For example, in the mid-1980s we supported the creation of a documentary film entitled *The Road to Brown*, which examines the legal strategy that preceded the Brown v. Board case—and of which Brown was, in some respects, the fulfillment.

The principal architect of this strategy was Charles Hamilton Houston, who trained a talented and committed group of black lawyers (including Thurgood Marshall) at Howard University Law School, and who later served as chief legal counsel with the NAACP. Houston’s role in mapping and leading the assault on the “separate but equal” doctrine is the focus of this film.

In observance of the 40th anniversary of the Brown decision in 1994, the VFH awarded grant funds to support two national conferences, sponsored by the College of William and Mary and Virginia Commonwealth University. Subsequent grants supported the creation of a Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail in Southside Virginia (Old Dominion Resource Conservation and Development Corporation); a film on the legacy of the student strike that led to *Davis v. Prince Edward County* (Catticus Corporation); a conference on the 40th anniversary of the school closings (Hamden-Sydney College); and an exhibit, a lecture series, and other activities commemorating the 50th anniversary of the student strike (Robert R. Moton Museum).

In 2004, VFH contributions to the Brown v. Board anniversary include three programs to be presented as part of the Virginia Festival of the Book (see article, page 4) and a special series of grants to support community discussion programs that explore the history and long-term impact of the Brown decision with a focus on local issues and concerns. At this writing, the list of grantees includes two of the state’s historically black colleges, Hampton University and Norfolk State University, which is presenting a panel discussion featuring members of the “Norfolk 17”—the black students who were the first to integrate Norfolk’s public schools.

The legacy of Brown v. Board of Education is complex, in Virginia and nationwide. Strong arguments have been made recently that progress as a result of Brown has been negligible; that schools in some parts of the country are nearly as segregated today as they were in 1954. The impact of school desegregation on African American neighborhoods, institutions, and community life is also the subject of wide ranging debate, reflected in several of the programs the VFH has sponsored or supported. We believe that the history of the Brown case, its roots and its impact in Virginia, should be universally understood, and that discussions of the legacy of this landmark case are not only appropriate, but necessary as we approach another historic anniversary in 2007. We are proud of the contributions we have made to these efforts, and we will continue looking for ways to advance understanding of Brown v. Board of Education in partnership with organizations and scholars statewide.

More recent grants that demonstrate the Foundation’s continuing commitment to exploring this history include:

- Development of a “Teaching With Historic Places” curriculum on the case of Green v. New Kent County, Virginia. This little-known 1968 Supreme Court decision advanced desegregation of public schools throughout the South by overturning a local “freedom of choice” policy in New Kent (The College of William and Mary in cooperation with the National Park Service).

- A series of grants supporting research, oral histories, and script development for a documentary film on the history of the Green case (The College of William and Mary).

- An oral history project to capture the recollections of key figures in the Civil Rights Movement in Virginia (Virginia Civil Rights Movement Video Initiative Oversight Committee).

- Development of an oral history component based on these interviews, to be included in an exhibit on the history of the Civil Rights Movement in Virginia (Virginia Historical Society).

- Two exhibits on the history of the Brown v. Board decision and its impact (Black History Museum and Cultural Center).

- Two grants supporting research, script development, and oral histories to be included in a two-hour documentary film on the closing of the public schools in Prince Edward County (Central Virginia Educational Television; and Film Arts Foundation).

- An exhibit on the history of Thyne Institute, one of several private schools that provided education for African American children in Southside Virginia during the years of segregation (MacCallum More Museum).

- A conference, including five Virginia scholars, leading to the publication of a book on the legacies of Brown v. Board (University of South Carolina Institute for Southern Studies).
50 Years after Brown v. Board of Education

To mark the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board, With Good Reason is airing radio shows on school desegregation:

Race and Admissions (desegregation of higher ed and the first African American to apply to the University of Virginia)

Julian Bond on Race in America (speaks candidly about race in America 50 years after Brown v. Board)

School Desegregation: A Tale of Two Counties (Prince Edward County and the Green v. New Kent County ruling that had national impact)

For more information, visit withgoodreasonradio.org

High-school students protest the closing of public schools in Prince Edward County, Virginia (above). Photo courtesy of Richmond Times-Dispatch

Julian Bond appeared on With Good Reason in January to discuss race and desegregation (left).