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Prince Edward County: 1951-1963

An Oral History

by

W. Glenn Merten

Senior Project

Jepson School of Leadership Studies

University of Richmond

Richmond, VA

April 1994

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**PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY: 1951 - 1963
AN ORAL HISTORY**

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April 20, 1994
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PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY: 1951 - 1963 AN ORAL HISTORY

The Civil Rights movement is a field ripe for the study of leadership. In it, and many other social movements, there are evident many of the facets which we touch upon in the Jepson School. The contexts of formal organizations, many political systems, and countless community organizations can be seen in the Civil Rights movement. The fields of ethics and leading groups are also evident, and knowledge critical thinking and the theories of leadership are essential in any leadership circumstance. It would also be helpful if leaders in the Civil Rights movement were skilled in conflict resolution, motivation, leading individuals, the proper way to implement policy, decision making and effecting change, all subjects which are taught at the Jepson School. For this reason, the study of the Civil Rights movement and the events in Prince Edward County are extremely applicable.

In May of 1951, the students at R. R. Moton High school in Farmville, VA took a strong stand on the issue of segregation. Led by a Planning Committee, the students closed the school by going out on strike. This event played a small part in the civil rights movement, but is significant because it began as purely a student movement. Before it was over, the strike and the subsequent school closing would affect every person in Prince Edward County.

Edna Allen Bledsoe is a professor in the social work program at Longwood College. In 1951, she was twelve years old, in the seventh grade. The Moton High School started in the eighth grade, so she was just preparing to enter it. Her sister, in the eighth grade, was on the planning committee for the student strike.

GLENN - Do you remember a little bit about the condition of the school at the time?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - Oh, heavens yes. Because the conditions were the same when I went the following year. The main building which still stands up here at the apex was surrounded by two, that I can remember, two tar paper shacks. They were basically probably five to six classrooms that had pot-bellied stoves in them. They never even completed them, they just put the buildings up and put tar paper on them with the strips to hold the tar paper in place. That's why we called them tar paper shacks. And when it rained they usually leaked. Whoever got there in the morning was responsible for getting the fire started, and whoever sat closest to the stove had to keep the fire going during the class. We had to be careful because often times coals popped out of the stove, and would burn the person sitting nearest to them, and/or your papers. But the same thing happened when it rained, because if you didn't have an umbrella to put up over your desk, then the papers

got wet and the ink ran over everything. They were supposed to be temporary buildings, and well, they were there when I went to college, they were at least there six to seven years, because I remember working, working at the recreation center one summer when I came home from college, and they were still using the buildings then.

GLENN - Your sister was on the planning committee, correct? Do you remember what she was going through at home?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - I don't really think that any of us knew what was going on. When the students put this together, nobody knew what was going on except the students. We did not know until the students actually walked out, and that was the way it was arranged, so there was no discussion of it prior to the actual walkout of the students. I think the original building was built to house five hundred students, maybe five to six hundred students. By that time I think the enrollment was like eight hundred. To answer your original question, no, there wasn't really any talk. The community was concerned, you know, that the buildings were in such bad condition, and the county kept saying it didn't have any money. So, other than being dissatisfied, and being concerned, and wondering when the community or the school board was going to do something, life went on.

GLENN - So the conditions hadn't changed at all by the time you got to high school? Even after the strike?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - They walked out in May, and I went to high school in September. And I remember standing there, 'cause the word had gotten out that they were walking out. I was in the seventh grade and our room was right up near the principal's office, and there was a lot of scuttlebutt about what these children were doing. They were going to create all of these problems, so we actually went to the window and saw them walking. At the time we were getting ready to go to high school, so we really felt a part of what was going on.

GLENN - What was your parents' reaction? What was the general feeling around your house?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - Well, I think they were basically shocked that somebody was doing something. Both of my parents were fired as a result of my sister's involvement in the activities. They worked in Cumberland County. My mother was a supervisor and she was fired. My daddy worked for Veterans Administration, he taught veterans who had returned, (he was an agriculture major, so he was teaching in the county), he was also fired. I guess they were fired within a week or so after all of this happened, and of course that presented a whole different slant on the family, because my mother had to move to North Carolina. She was blackballed in the state of Virginia, she could not find work, so she had to move to

Goldsborough to work. My dad basically decided that he was never going to place himself in a position where white folks could fire him again, so he became independent. He had started a funeral business, with some gentlemen several years earlier, and he just put more effort into that. He was also an electrician, and he just basically made it the best way he could. What also happened was that all of the teachers, the people who had credit in town like my parents, who had credit at different stores, demands were made on them to pay their accounts in full. So there were a lot of financial hardships on the families, mine included. And it really separated, because my mother ended up being away at a very critical developmental time for us, because we were in high school, and she was only home on weekends. And she was not able to get a job back in the state until years later, when she came back and worked in Caroline County. Then when Kennedy and some others re-opened the schools she was invited back to be a principal.

GLENN - What happened in the two weeks after the students initially walked out?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - Oh, boy, there were all kinds of community meetings, and mobilization of families to support the students. A lot of the meetings were held at First Baptist Church, and there was a lot of support from Rev. Griffen, who was the pastor there at the time. The NAACP also got involved because without us really knowing it, they were already involved in building cases to go to the Supreme Court, cases that represented separate but equal controversy. They became involved, and ultimately we were swept up in the process. That was really not the intention of the students. That's a message that needs to be reiterated. What had happened was that one day, a couple students - see, what used to happen here is that when the white students finished using the books and audio visual materials, they would give them to the black schools. On a particular day, Barbara Johns and Philip Brown and a couple other students went over to the white high school to pick up some materials, their first time going there. They just were struck at the difference in the quality of the physical plant and the way everything looked, and became very concerned with what we were having to endure as students versus what our fellow white students were involved in, and the kind of building they had. And when they came back was when the planning actually started, that they were going to take some action to force the county to give us a better facility.

GLENN - And this was how long before the actual walkout?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - A couple of months. A group of students got together and did all the planning. In fact I just met with one of the faculty members, and I asked her if she was aware that in the planning they had representatives from all the grades (my sister was in the eighth grade, so she was the eighth grade representative) the eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth

grade representatives, and these students were meeting and planning how they were going to do this whole thing. What they did was to go downtown and make a phone call back to the school to tell the principal that a student had been arrested and he needed to come down and check on it. When he left the school, they then had these runners that went to each of the classrooms and got the students out, telling them that there was a special assembly being called. And nobody had any reason to question that, because we didn't have a PA system, so that was perfectly normal. Once the students got in the auditorium, and the curtains opened, there was a student standing there, and all of the teachers were asked to leave. Most of them left willingly; there were some, of course, that were not willing to leave, they were encouraged. I mean, there was no physical kind of encounter, but it became very, very clear, from what I understand, that the students meant business.

GLENN - Do you think that the teachers had any idea what was going on?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - No, nobody knew what was going on. It was probably one of the best well kept secrets in this area. The students recognized that they had key people in the system who were supportive, but they also knew that if anything went down that these were the people, like my parents, who were going to be looked at. The School Board basically felt that black people were incapable of doing anything this intelligent, and therefore it had to come from somewhere else. Certainly children could not put this together, they had to have leadership. The truth is, it was truly a student movement. Now that's not to say that once everything happened, and the fallout started, people were being terminated and people were being harassed, that the more concerned persons didn't indicate their willingness to support whatever was going on. Petitions were circulated, and parents and families of students were encouraged to sign them, to show the totality of the support. There are still people who believe that the communists probably came in and did it, or the liberals from the north, but no, it purely was a local movement.

GLENN - I had heard that after the students had gotten the strike off of the ground the principal of the school at least tacitly supported it, if he didn't actively encourage it, and made it possible for the strike to continue.

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - I don't think that's a fair assessment. I don't think anyone who was committed to education could have clearly said in good conscience that they had no right to do this or there was no reason to do this. You know, there was no biology lab, there was no chemistry lab, there were no supplies, there was no lunchroom, there was no real athletic field, there were no uniforms. I mean we were like stepchildren, step-stepchildren. And anybody who had any degree of intelligence knew that in fact although we were separated we were not in equal

circumstances. Quite the contrary, Mr. Jones had just gotten married, they had a baby on the way; that was not a good time to be unemployed. They had just bought a new car; that was not the time to be unemployed. In fact, he was not comfortable with the whole thing. That's different from saying that he did not support it. He didn't want to lose his job, the students did not want him to lose his job. One of the stories I've heard is that there was a meeting with the committee where there were a lot of tears shed about what it meant if they proceeded and who was going to get hurt. The ultimate outcome of that meeting was "we have to move ahead." So, the story that you've heard is not quite accurate. I'm sure that Mr. Jones (now Dr. Jones) and his wife, educators from the word go, they realized that their lives were going to be jeopardized. They had to leave here under some very, very shaky circumstances, because he did not know where they were going or exactly what they were going to do, or how life was going to be. Life had gotten pretty comfortable here.

GLENN - So they did end up moving away.

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - Oh, yes, they had to leave, he was fired.

GLENN - I understand that he came back while the meeting was in progress and went in and spoke to the students...

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - Oh, they tried to stop the students, yes. Because by that time - well, you have to understand that in every system there are folks who are going to go and tell what's going on, so as we said the flunkies for the system had already called the Superintendent and told him what was going on, and word had gone out that, "you all had better stop them from doing what they were doing." So yes, there was an effort to squelch the whole thing, but I think initially it was with the clear understanding of all who had gone into the planning that this was not something they had decided to do the day before during lunch hour, and what they did not realize was that by the time it happened, the solidifying forces were already in place. The students had done a lot of work on this. It had been a couple of months that they had been planning the whole thing. They had worked very, very hard on this whole project.

GLENN - What was the reaction of the black members of the community?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - Once the strike had occurred, and there was some fallout, and some people were fired, there was the whole question of survival. So people got very involved, I know certainly with my own family we had one daughter in high school, another going in to high school, we knew we were going to college, how we were going to finance college, so my parents were very busy in trying to make sure our lives were not going to be interrupted. When the schools closed, those families that had roots here were

suddenly uprooted, survival became the key issue to them. When the schools reopened, you had a whole new crew in here, with the free schools, and I'm not sure there was too much collaboration, or sharing of stories because people were just too busy living and trying to survive.

GLENN - What was the white reaction, the faculty at the school, the parents of the students, and the school board?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - Oh I don't know, there wasn't much communication. The school board was pissed. The superintendent - you know, the natives had gotten out of control. In the '50's it was important to keep the natives under control. Macilwaine (the Superintendent) was not the most powerful person in the world, but he definitely had his orders. There was a lot of anger. I don't really remember who was on the school board at the time. I think they were concerned, they didn't want all the publicity. They basically felt that they were doing well by the black folk in the area. White folks have always felt they have done well by the black folk, particularly in the '50's. There was a lot of anger and hatred, and I think it intensified once the NAACP got in the situation. Once it became obvious it was going to the Supreme Court. The Klan kind of surfaced a little bit, and threats were made against people's lives. But interestingly enough, Prince Edward was probably one of the few counties, in America, where there was really no violence. There'd been some things that had happened, for which nobody had any answers, but I'm not even sure they were related to this incident. You know, they found a black guy floating in the pool here at Longwood with his feet and his hands tied, dead, who'd been dating a white girl, but I don't think that had anything to do with this. I think that came later. So that's what you had.

GLENN - Why do you think that was?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - Why nobody was hurt, no violence? I don't know, I don't know that I really thought about that over the years. I've got a lot of theories about people who do things at night, and in the dark are basically cowards. I think the economic pressures which were placed on the families who lost their jobs, were put out of work was one form of punishment. I'm wondering that whether or not once they realized that the case was going to the Supreme Court and there was a possibility they were going to have to integrate the schools if the energies didn't go into thinking about how they were going to circumvent that process as opposed to the immediate process. Because once the students walked out and they had the community meetings and Martin Luther King was even here one time, and of course Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson were the lawyers out of Richmond. I can remember going to the meeting and the church was jam packed, and there was wall to wall folk, and there was a lot of discussion, and some of it was very angry, because there were still those forces in the community that were expected

by the whites in the community to keep everything in line. It was like we reached a point in time when nobody was listening to the Toms and to the people who were trying to stop the movement. So you had those kinds of debates going on, and I can remember a couple of those where it got a little loud and nasty. But then there was this tremendous sense of camaraderie and community, and I remember we would always sing the Negro national anthem, and at that time prayer was still in school, so we did a lot of praying and a lot of singing. I think there was a real sense of hope. They walked out in '51, and I can remember the day the Supreme Court decision came down, because I was in the 10th grade, 1954, and I remember when it came down. By that time we had a new building, and that was the other interesting part, that in the middle of all of this process, suddenly the county got some money, and we got a new high school. And we had moved into it, cafeteria, lockers, auditorium, gymnasium, we were a very, very happy bunch of kids. There is a theory among some folk in the south that in communities in which blacks and white folk live very closely together, they tend to be much more comfortable with each other. That might have been a reason for why there wasn't any violence. There weren't any large gaps with black folks five fields down from the white folk, there had been a lot of interaction.

GLENN - To try and shut you up?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - Oh, I don't know if it was so much to shut us up, but, well, I guess that was part of it, but it was like, "see what we do if we just work together?" But there wasn't any working together, it came as the result of a very strong and definitive action. But anyway, the day that they announced it on the PA system, and I remember asking one of my instructors, Mr. Parker, "What did it all mean?" and he said that we had to start working on integrating the school system. And I said, "Oh. Does that mean we have to leave this school and go somewhere else?" Because it was like it took all of this to get this new building, and you mean that we might not even be able to stay here, that other people will be going here and we'll be going somewhere else? He said that's what the county really had to work out. This was in '54, and I guess everybody had time in which to implement the decision, and I graduated in '56, the schools closed in '59, somewhere between all of that time I guess the planning and strategizing was done to figure out how they were going to circumvent the Supreme Court decision.

GLENN - That "all deliberate speed" thing.

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - Yes, Yes. That all deliberate speed thing. They took their time, and for me, personally, I was very happy, except for the fact that my mother was not here. But I basically was doing well in high school, we were having a great time, and I thought it would last forever. I was in college when the schools closed, and I remember the day that they opened the Prince Edward

Academy, because that met in the state theater, which fell down a few weeks ago. My girlfriend and I were kind of walking around, and we had gone downtown and bought the Prince Edward Academy t-shirts, which did not go over very well with the sales lady, or the fact that we were standing outside the theater when all of the students came out of their classes, cause we were standing out there with our Prince Edward Academy t-shirts on. That didn't go over well, because when my dad came in that evening, he said, "Baby Sis, what you do today?" I said, "Nothing." He said, "You must have done something, because the Sheriff met me downtown and wanted to know when you were going back to college and was I going to have any trouble sending you back?" So I told him what happened, I said, "We're probably going to be on the news tonight because we were down there with the students when they went off to class." And he just shook his head. My parents, particularly my father, was probably one of the best of people during this whole thing. He was very supportive of that had happened, he was very angry about what had happened to Momma more so than what had happened to him. He was angry about what had happened to the family, but he was basically a pretty upbeat person, and his attitude was, "I want you to go ahead and get an education and get out of here, and find someplace where you can be yourself and don't have all of these things to worry about. I remember when I was a little girl, our backyard bordered on several white families' backyards and we had little swings and sliding boards and all that stuff in our yard, and a lot of the kids would climb over the fence and come play with us. Among them were three white kids whose father was a business person in town, and they were very pleasant and very nice because they weren't from Farmville. When we got to the first or second grade they announced that they couldn't play with us anymore because we were colored and they were white. And I don't know if prior to then anyone had ever said, "Edna, you are colored." I think I knew who I was, I knew who the bulk of my friends were, but so were Kathleen and Johnny and Steven, they were also our friends. I remember asking my father, "What did that mean? What did it mean that we were colored?" Daddy said that he was sorry that had happened, I'm not sure he ever explained what it was, but he said basically, "I was hoping that you all could grow up in a world where that didn't make a lot of difference, but if that's how they feel, that's okay, because you have other friends you can play with." And we all kind of cried. Kathleen and I cried a lot because we really liked each other. Even through elementary school, (I think they moved somewhere while we were in high school,) we would see each other, and you could almost feel the pain that we could not talk to each other. We acknowledged each other, but we really grew up together. My sister and I were really very, very protected from the bad things in life, which is probably why we don't have sense enough to recognize them now.

GLENN - That must be one of the hardest things for a parent, to see that happen for the first time to their children.

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - They spent a lot of time protecting us, Lord knows they did. We had a lot of black literature in our house, and they spent a lot of time telling us what was happening to people in general. It was always with an attitude that this is very, very bad, and I'm sorry this has happened, and hopefully when you grow up and have your own families they won't have to go through this. I really don't remember to being exposed to the vivid awarenesses of racism that my friends were. When we traveled, we went to the bathroom before we left, and you didn't go to the bathroom until you got where you were going. We always had food in the car so we didn't have to stop and eat. Once, going north, we knew where we could stop, and we were never really exposed to the "For White Only" sign, and "Colored Here," and that stuff. I'd seen them, in fact the house I'd bought when I was living in Richmond, they had obviously had black help, because the basement had a door with "Colored Bathroom" on it. It wasn't something we had a lot of exposure to. A lot of the time when we were driving we were reading, and I guess we didn't see a lot of the evidence. And you're right, it probably was very difficult for them to let us know how different we were, and to deal with that whole color thing.

GLENN - Just to backtrack one second, the sense that I'm getting from you is that the students were happy with the new high school..

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - Oh, Heavens yes, that's what we really wanted, you see.

GLENN - ...and it was the NAACP which really pushed the integration issue. Is that a fair assessment?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - No, that's not a fair assessment. When the NAACP were contacted to provide us with legal and technical assistance, in the event that nobody listened to us, we contacted them thinking that they could be our legal representatives with the local school board. They were already involved in several other cases, which this was a perfect example of. They had to do a lot of selling to sell the community on that idea because basically what we wanted was a school, and I think it really had to do with our naivete. It also had to do with perhaps lack of awareness of what could be, if you just pushed the law a little bit. So I'm not comfortable with the explanation that they pushed us, we had to be in agreement with it. I think some of the leaders in the community saw this as the way to go, and certainly those people who had been exposed to integrated or non-segregated kinds of environments were more comfortable with this idea than those of us who knew no other life style. And when it became apparent, in fact it became almost a trade-off that we will help you with the local situation, but you must understand that you must help us with the national situation. And actually, the person they actually named, Dorothy Davis, had nothing to do with any of this, in fact, she didn't even want to participate. There were some families who were split right down

the middle as to whether the children should go back to school or not, and even now when I talk to some of my peers, we laugh about how Mom and Dad got to arguing, "They're going to school the next day," or "They're not going to school the next day." So they did a petition to evidence support, and they pulled a page, and her name was kind of picked at random, but it wasn't because of anything special that she did as an individual.

GLENN - What do you remember about Barbara Johns?

PROFESSOR BLEDSOE - Barbara probably was one of the most articulate of the students. And she was articulate for the simple fact that she loved to read, and she read at a level that was far surpassing most of the other students. She had done some reading on political movements, and she had an Uncle, Vernon Johns, who by the way was not very supportive of her, he had an unbelievable library. Barbara read a lot of his books, and she actually did some reading on political movements, came up with the idea, and presented it to some friends, who became the core of the committee.

There are several leadership aspects which become evident in this interview. One was the fact that a determined group of people, even young, inexperienced people can in fact have an impact on history. The student planning committee was one of the most effective groups that I can ever remember studying. They made an effort to appeal to a broad base of students, as evidenced by the representatives of each grade on the committee. Equally as remarkable was that the planned strike was kept a secret until it actually took place. As effective leaders should, the planning committee identified the aspects that needed attention, and made sure they were addressed.

Another interesting aspect of the student strike was the mobilizing effect that an idea can have over the entire population. Although the students, and Barbara Johns in particular were very persuasive, they could not have hoped to convince the NAACP and their parents to back them if they did not have a just cause. The idea of racial equality was a powerful motivator, which could not be denied. The parents backed the students even though many of them lost their jobs and many other possessions as a result of the strike. I believe that the student strike was an important catalyst for racial activism in Prince Edward County, and that the student leaders were very effective, but there were also larger forces at work which motivated the population of Prince Edward County.

The day the students went on strike, they called the NAACP chapter in Richmond and asked for advice and legal counsel. Spottswood Robinson and Oliver Hill were two young attorneys with at the Richmond chapter who answered the call. Oliver Hill, of the

firm Hill, Tucker and Marsh shared some of his thoughts on the strike.

GLENN - Do you remember your impressions the first time you went down to Farmville and met with the students and their parents?

MR. HILL - Oh, see, I'd been to Farmville a number of times before that. It just so happened that a day or two after the schools opened in '39 we came through Farmville from Washington to see a history professor down at what was then known as Norfolk Union, or Virginia Union University. We were talking about the school just opening, the new school, this is 1939, and it was overcrowded. No later than 1941, the citizens down there started calling me, to come down and represent them before the school board. Back in those days, particularly in rural counties, negroes would go in, the school board or board of supervisors would say, "Well, what do you want? What do you want? Well, we'll look into it." That kind of attitude. They had been protesting from the beginning, the overcrowding. This was before they started putting shacks up. I went down, and met with the school board, and told them the parents point of view, and wanted them to do something about it. They said, "We don't have the money right now, but we're going to get to it." This is the early part of the War. Of course, that went on and on. Then conditions worsened, and they started putting these shacks up. So what I'm trying to say is that we were familiar with the situation. When the children went on strike, we were in the office down the street, and we were working on a motion for further relief in a case called Corbin vs. Pulaski County. The district court had ruled against us, it had been reversed, and we were preparing a motion for further relief. So we had decided to go back down there and review the school, with our expert witnesses so that they could see the school and be prepared for the hearings. This was a Monday that they called, late Monday afternoon. In the meantime, we'd also filed, when I say we I'm talking about the NAACP, a suit in Clarendon County challenging segregation per se. So the kids called, about five o'clock in the evening it was, and Spottswood Robinson, Ed Martin and I were in the library working on this thing, and I answered the telephone, and they told how they had gone out on strike, and what their objections were, and I said, "That's great, but you don't need to stay out of school now, you made your point. Because we've already filed a suit to raise the issue of segregation per se, and we don't need but one suit." This little child, Barbara Johns she pleaded so strongly that she wanted to talk to us, so I said, "All right, we'll be coming through Farmville on Wednesday morning, going to Pulaski, or Christiansburg, and we'll leave a little earlier and stop in Farmville and talk with you." We went there on Wednesday morning to tell them to go back to school. But when we got there, the kids were in the basement of Rev. Griffen's church, or maybe another church. They were so orderly, and so glad that we were there, and showed how responsibly they'd acted, that we didn't have the heart

to break their spirit. So we told them that - all they were after was in improved school - that we had established a new policy, and if their parents were willing to back them, in challenging segregation per se, we would take the case. And that we would be going to Christiansburg for the night and would be back Thursday evening, and that's what we did. We came back, the parents were there, we explained the situation to the parents, the parents said they were perfectly willing to back the children, so we accepted the case. I think what we did then is we had a big mass meeting in the church, with the whole community. The whole issue was put before the community, and there were one or two people who opposed, because the school board had promised them this, that and the other. One of them was the principal of the school, in an adjoining county and as I remember, the superintendent of Prince Edward County was also the Superintendent of the adjoining county. We had this public meeting, and the citizens also voted to support the parents and the children. We filed a petition, they didn't do anything about it, so we filed suit.

GLENN - So the children really didn't have any intention of challenging segregation per se?

MR. HILL - Oh, they were making a statement, about the condition of the school. It was a horrible situation. They had a small brick building, and the county had put up these tar paper shacks, they had seven of them, and they had tin pipes running from one shack to the other, and of course there was no pavement. To get from one to the other, you had to walk through slush and rain, particularly in inclement weather. And there were no actual chemistry facilities, or physics or this other stuff, and it was just a terrible situation. So they were trying to do something to get a new school. And Barbara Johns was a very fiery young lady. She was a niece of a Baptist preacher called Vernon Johns, and he was a little eccentric.

GLENN - Do you remember the first time you met the children, what did Barbara Johns say to you?

MR. HILL - Well, we walked in, and they started clapping their hands, and rejoicing. They were talking about what they objected to, and what they wanted to do. I don't know how they motivated each other, but they certainly were motivated, and Barbara Johns was a real genuine leader, and she insisted on discipline and everything, so when we walked in, they were sitting there just as orderly as if they were being supervised by an adult.

Mr. Hill's comments illustrate several things about leadership. First, the students realized that they could not hope to triumph over the School Board without assistance. They immediately called upon that help, in the form of the NAACP. The NAACP, in turn, realized that they could do nothing for the students without the support of their parents. This illustrates

how important unity in the population is to effective leadership.. It is much easier for a leader to be effective if he or she does not have to deal with a great deal of internal dissension. Leaders should be equipped to deal with internal strife, but if they can eliminate it, they will be able to concentrate on the outside responsibilities of leadership.

Oliver Hill's conversation also illustrates the fact that there are many different levels of leadership that were present in Prince Edward County. Barbara Johns led the planning committee, the planning committee led the students to strike, the NAACP led the parents to support the students, and also the entire community to challenge segregation per se. There was not one leader of the movement, but a different individual or group leading each different aspect of the strike. Leadership in the Civil Rights movement often took on this multi-faceted appearance.

It is possible that the effects of the student strike in Prince Edward County had some very far-reaching effects. When Barbara Johns had to move from Farmville because of threats on her life, she went to live with her Uncle Vernon Johns, the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Church in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1955, Rosa Parks was the catalyst for one of the most famous events in the Civil Rights Movement, the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This was not a spontaneous act, as so many people believe, but a carefully planned boycott which was waiting for the right moment to launch it. There is much speculation that it was Barbara Johns' actions in Prince Edward County that inspired the Montgomery Bus Boycott. I found no hard evidence to back up this claim, but this topic was a bit out of my scope.

After the students returned from the strike, life went on in Prince Edward County. The schools re-opened, and in time the black students got the new building that they wanted. Even so, the NAACP lawyers continued to fight segregation per se. In 1953, a Federal District Court ruled against the students, and the cases went to the Supreme Court. There, the Prince Edward case was consolidated under the Brown case, along with several others. In 1954, the Brown decision was handed down, and segregation was ruled unconstitutional.

The Board of Education in Prince Edward County took full advantage of the "all deliberate speed" clause in the Brown decision. For five years, the Board put off integrating the schools. When at last they could put it off no longer, they closed the public schools down rather than integrate them. Carl Eggelston, now the director of a funeral home in Farmville, was one of the students affected by the school closing.

GLENN - So you were in school when it was closed, in 1959.

MR. EGCELSTON - Yes.

GLENN - Could you tell me a little about that?

MR. EGCELSTON - Well, I was eight years old, at the time, when the schools closed in 1958, '59. For two years I didn't go to school at all. I did attend some meetings down at the church, the church of Rev. Griffen, called the First Baptist Church. They had some courses and classes down there, but mostly to keep us off the street. So two years I didn't go to school at all, then the second two years, my parents rented a home over in Cumberland County, which is adjacent to Prince Edward, and I went to school two years over in Cumberland. Then I came back in 1963, into the free school system (public school.) During the free school system, they would take and test some students, and you could maybe skip a grade or two if you had mastered some skills. So I was able to pretty much graduate on time, because I had caught up a bit.

GLENN - What were the classes like at the First Baptist Church?

MR. EGCELSTON - Well, they weren't formal classes. They had some adults taking time to help the students write, some reading, and some arithmetic, as they called it during that time. It was pretty much real basic, and of course at this time I was eight years old. They had community people come to read short stories, and those things, and talk about current events. It wasn't anything formal, it wasn't anything credited, or anything like that, it was basically to keep us from losing a whole lot of the time, so we would have some of the basics, like reading, writing, and arithmetic. There weren't any formal classes, that is they didn't have any guidelines to go by. It was mostly retired teachers, somebody like that, somebody who had an interest in education.

GLENN - Was there any formal program set up for the older children, those who were in high school at the time?

MR. EGCELSTON - No, not to my knowledge. Most of those individuals went to other counties they went to live with their grandfather or grandmother aunt or uncle in other places in VA, and some even out of state. They went to live with those people, those that really wanted to. There was a lot of them who didn't do anything at all.

Mr. Egcelston illustrates the need for leadership to prepare the population to adapt and deal with difficult circumstances. It also shows that in a social movement, each and every person involved must be prepared to exercise some sort of leadership. The adults who taught the children in the basement of the First Baptist Church probably did not think of themselves as leaders, but they certainly were. They were looking out for the welfare of the members of their constituency who were the most disadvantaged by the movement. These classes were instrumental in allowing many

children, including Carl Egelston to complete their education on schedule of close to schedule

Mr. Egelston was one of the lucky children, in that the break in his education does not seem to have many adverse affects on his later life. Doug Vaughn was not so lucky. His life and future was greatly disrupted by the school closing. Mr. Vaughn in now a corrections officer at Nottoway Correctional Center.

GLENN - First, could you tell me a little bit about yourself? How old were you when all this happened?

MR. VAUGHN - When the schools closed I was in the eighth grade, let's go back to that point. As far as any of the activities that went on pertaining to the strike, I did not participate. You see, I was one of the guys who lived on a dead-end street across the tracks, and I wasn't informed of a lot of the activities that were going on. That side of the track was like a no-no. When the schools closed I got in contact with an uncle of mine who lived in Philadelphia, and I asked him if I could come and stay with him and go to school. He wrote me back and told me, "Sure, come on during the summer." So that summer I went up there and they went to try and get me registered for school and they found out that I was from Prince Edward County and they advised him that I would have to pay a tuition in order to go to school there. We couldn't afford to pay a tuition, so they gave me 30 days to get out of Philadelphia. So within that time frame I was put back on a bus and came back to Farmville. I got me a job at the Hamden-Sydney college, as I guess a utility person, a little bit of everything. I guess I worked there maybe less than a year, and my brother had gone to the city, and I got in touch with him and decided to live with him. That was in NY. And during the time that I arrived in NY they had gone on vacation, being with a group of young fellahs his age, (I guess he was about sixteen or seventeen, with no responsibilities.) They had gotten a couple of weeks of vacation, and instead of saving for their vacation to end they went and bought clothes and spent and I guess they were out of money by the first week. So now there was no money left to eat or live. So I got caught in that part, and we hung out at this pool room, for a couple of weeks we had to shoot pool. The guy who ran the pool room took a liking to me and he set me up in a couple of games there and I would win enough money to eat on. The popular food then was lima beans, so we ate lima beans for a couple of weeks until after their vacation and then, I finally got a job with them. I stayed in NY for a couple of years.

GLENN - And what did you do up there?

MR. VAUGHN - I worked in a vacuum cleaner place, making vacuum cleaners. That was in Tuckahoe, NY. After a couple of years there, my sister called me and told me that a couple of her kids had died, so I came back home. I stayed here, and, well, I had met

my wife prior to leaving. I got back with her and in '63 we got married. Being more or less illiterate at that time I could hardly read and spell, and things were just kind of rough. My jobs were kind of minimal. I had a job making \$29 every two weeks, and I couldn't afford to take care of her. She was in school when we got married, and I had declared that she would finish. I had told her momma before we married that she would finish school, so I quit that job and got me a job that was more or less... it was John Equipments at that time, handling irrigation pipes. I worked there making a dollar an hour, megabucks then, and I worked there for a year or so. Then we moved to NJ.

GLENN - Where in NJ?

MR. VAUGHN - Newark, Newark, NJ. There I got a job in the garmenting district, and I worked there for the duration of time I was there. The guy who owned this, well, he started off with a company by the name of Max Seigal, and they went out of business making children's dresses. The guy that headed that department up, he bought that department out and made me supervisor of the whole business. He went out soliciting and I ran the factory for him. I worked there until I left to go back to VA, but during the course of that time I went to night school and tried to get a lot of the grammar that I missed and also I was working toward a GED but I couldn't pass a GED test because there was a lot I had missed and I just didn't know.

GLENN - When did you come back to Prince Edward County?

MR. VAUGHN - When I was in NJ I lived in the ghettos and once we had acquired a little bit we moved to the suburban area. And that's when my troubles started, people started to break in on us and rob us of the things we had. We were robbed six times in one year and it got so bad that when I'd go home I'd ring the doorbell, in case someone was in the house, I gave them the opportunity to get out. The last time they broke in on us we just couldn't take it any more so I just put everything in the vehicle and moved back to VA. Had no place to go, no job, and I moved in with my mother. There she had no running water, no bath, so we fixed the house up and put running water and bath in. We lived there for a couple of years, then I decided to build my own house. I went to the bank and they told me that I didn't have enough money to build the house I wanted to build, and they tried to get me to build a smaller house. I told them that wasn't what I wanted, that I preferred what I had made up my mind to get, and I was going to get it if I had to go and build it myself. So I got me a job in construction as a laborer. There, I worked as a laborer, and as I worked I observed the guys laying and breaking the blocks, and at every opportunity I would ask them if I could spread mortar on the wall for them. I learned to spread the mortar pretty good. One day I went to work and no one showed up but two laborers and one bricklayer. He was laying twelve inch blocks, and he couldn't lay

them by himself and the foreman asked me if I could lay and I told him I could try, I had been doing pretty good with it. I got on the wall with that bricklayer and laid block all that day and that evening he (the foreman) came back and saw what we had done and was impressed. He told me he was going to start me off as an apprentice, and gave me a year and a half off my apprenticeship. After that I had two years of apprenticeship to serve as a bricklayer and I served my time and became a master mason. During that time I also observed the construction of the carpenters, and how they were building. I hooked up with another guy and him and I started doing carpentry work on the side, started building. I thought I was doing pretty good, I decided to build my house. This is the house I built. I built more than what I wanted, I started off with a house half this side, but after I had become pretty good with building I built twice as much as I planned. And this house my wife and our two little girls built by ourselves. In 1980, the market fell out of construction. I had gone into business, and I had been in business about five years, building houses and doing renovations, and in '80 the bottom fell out, so I got a job in corrections. When I applied the guy told me he really didn't want to hire me because of my trade, that I was only looking for work during the winter, and I told him no, I was looking for a career then, that this work was just seasonal, and it was hard to support a family in the wintertime. So he hired me, and I started off as an officer, and worked my way up to a corporal. Then the institution where I was working, it was going to close, because it was a trailer court, inmates were housed in trailers, and they were going to rebuild. So Nottoway Correction Center was opened, and we were all transferred down there. There I went up for a promotion as a Sergeant, then the place where I had worked opened back up, and I went up for a promotion there as a lieutenant, and I got it. Five of us went up for five jobs, and I got one. After I became a lieutenant I put in a transfer to go back to Nottoway, and that's where I am now, and I made captain. During that time I took some courses, well, prior to that I had to get a GED to get into corrections, and then I enrolled in Longwood, and I took courses at night. I worked between Keysville and Longwood going to school at night because sometimes I would have to go to Longwood, sometimes I would have to go to Keysville because of the shifts I was working. I had gone to school approximately three years at night, taking courses in Law Enforcement. Right now I'm striving to be the next major at a major institution.

GLENN - You sure have done a lot in a few years.

MR. VAUGHN - Yes. I have a lot to contribute to my wife, because it was her inspiration that kept me going. I was a right bitter fellow when I got away and realized how important education was. I couldn't get any real good jobs because I didn't have it. She used to read to me a lot, and tried to encourage me to read. A lot of times I would get the book, and she would tell me to read to her, and I would blunder and stumble and she helped me. I got to

be pretty good. I got a lot to contribute to her for that. I have two children, both of them went to college. One is in accounting, and the other owns a business in town.

GLENN - Do you remember a lot about what the school conditions were when you left? What was it like when you were going to school then, in and before eighth grade?

MR. VAUGHN - Well, I think they were more or less - they had groups of children in school and I think it was like an ABC class and like I said, we were a bunch of guys from across the track. I wouldn't call it the slower group, but I was in the C group. A and B, of course, were for the smarter children. The schools were, well, they had some pretty good teachers. Matter of fact there's one who encouraged me to get my lesson, and stayed on me right hard. Matter of fact, she was trying to adopt me, which created a conflict with my mother. You see, I come from a single family, and my mother was an alcoholic, so it was difficult for me as far as getting the necessities. And she could see that, and she was trying to help me, but that created some problems with my mother. The only other thing I remember well was the principal, L. L. Hall. I took him to be a right hard guy, but could see the devilish guys we were, that I hung out with then, and he gave us special routes to go home. He wouldn't allow us to go down the main street. We had to go the back way home, and then he'd follow us, to make sure that we weren't getting into trouble. I don't know, it's kind of hard to remember a lot of what happened, as far as the classrooms and all of that. I would just basically say that it was a difficult time for me, and I had all of the equipment I needed, but I didn't have the persons pushing me to do good and stay out of trouble. I realized that later on in life, when I met my wife, the opportunities I had let fall behind. After I left the middle school and went to the high school, I'd say that was a good year for me. I just enjoyed riding the bus, all the other years we had to walk - I had about a mile and a quarter to walk to school every day. I never got the opportunity to ride the bus, they were for a lot more mature people. I think that's what made a change, when you start to meet people, and you see how smart and intelligent they were and you want to be like that, but when they closed it, it was like just casting me out in the street and saying, "you just think about it." And I didn't have the contacts a lot of people had. A lot of people had contacts where two or three people would meet and get in contact with a group to accept these children in different areas. I didn't have that. What I did, I had to do on my own.

GLENN - Do you ever think about what might have happened if the school hadn't closed?

MR. VAUGHN - Yeah, that's what made me kinda bitter. I figure I was deprived of a lot by not being able to go to school. Because, as I said, when I got to high school, I was more encouraged by what

I saw from the older children and I wanted to be like them. I think I was about to get in that groove of learning. I wasn't orientated that the schools were going to close. You just went to school and heard a little here and a little there and Bam!, the doors shut. I was deprived of a heck of a lot. I got real bitter about that, after I got away and into life and found out what I think I could've been. Because I have excelled in every job or every thing I've ever attempted. Sometimes I wonder where could I have been if I had the opportunity to have finished school and gone to college. I think I could have excelled. Then again, you could look at it from another perspective, maybe this is all in God's plan that I get it from the rough side and appreciate it more. Things sometimes happen for the best. Maybe because of the lifestyle I had it made me the person I am today.

Above all else, the testimony of Mr. Vaughn brings to light the responsibilities which leadership brings, both in the Civil Rights movement and in other areas. The student strike of 1951 was not the sole instigator of the school closing, but it was a contributing factor. When working for change in any society, leaders are morally bound to accept unexpected consequences, just as they take credit for successes. It seems that Mr. Vaughn slipped through the cracks of ethical leadership. Children from the "right side of the tracks," like Carl Eggelston seemed to be taken care of. They were invited to attend the classes at the church, or could afford to move to another county, and at most were inconvenienced. Doug Vaughn, however, had his entire world turned upside down, and not only for his high school years. The effects of the school closing on him were far-reaching and still haunt him. He has every right to be bitter.

It is difficult to know if the NAACP was aware of the negative impact their fight had on people like Doug Vaughn. It is unfathomable that they did not implement any plans for the education of students across the south who no longer had access to public schools. Prince Edward County was not the only school system which closed after the Brown decision. There were people like Doug Vaughn all over the south, intelligent children deprived of education via racism. I find it incredible that the NAACP had no organized programs for the education of these children. It seems that a basic tenet in the "Advancement of Colored People" would be making sure each and every one received an education. I am not suggesting that the NAACP was wrong in challenging segregation or that the consequences of the closed schools outweighed the benefits of integration. I am saying that there is an ethical responsibility in leadership to provide for your followers and accept the consequences of your actions, and that the NAACP could have done a better job in this regard.

The student strike in 1951 and the school closing of 1959 in Prince Edward County had a profound effect on the residents of the

county and the entire civil rights movement. They are also fascinating mediums in which to study leadership. The different facets and types of leadership which we so often view as separate entities all come together and interrelate in Farmville in the 1950's. As the narratives of these four participants show, the leadership of everyone in the county combined to make the Civil Rights movement extremely successful in Prince Edward County.