

10-10-2019

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### Recommended Citation

Hodges, R. A. (2019). Massive Resistance and the Origins of the Virginia Technical College System. *Inquiry: The Journal of the Virginia Community Colleges*, 22 (2). Retrieved from <https://commons.vccs.edu/inquiry/vol22/iss2/6>

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# MASSIVE RESISTANCE AND THE ORIGINS OF THE VIRGINIA TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM

RICHARD A. HODGES

## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1964, Dr. Dana B. Hamel, Director of the Roanoke Technical Institute in Roanoke, Virginia received a phone call that would change the course of Virginia higher education. The call was from Virginia Governor Albertis Harrison requesting Hamel serve as the Director of the soon to be established Department of Technical Education. The department, along with its governing board, would quickly establish a system of technical colleges located regionally throughout Virginia, with the first of those colleges opening their doors for classes in the fall of 1965. Governor Harrison's call to Dr. Hamel did more than establish opportunities for training and education, it created an avenue out of the contested environment of *massive resistance*. During the years 1954 to 1959, Virginia established and enforced a set of laws known as massive resistance laws. The creation of these laws served as Virginia's response to the *Brown v Board of Education* rulings handed down by the United States Supreme Court in 1954 and 1955. *Brown* made clear that segregation of students based on race did not ensure equal access to education and could no longer stand. Historically, since the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v Ferguson*, the concept of separate but equal had been the accepted practice throughout the United States. *Brown* completely overturned *Plessy*. The *Brown* rulings represented change on a large scale not only in Virginia, but for the entire nation. *Brown* required American's

reevaluate the way they viewed one another as citizens. The effects were especially felt in the Southern states where acceptance of *Jim Crow* laws were deeply embedded in the social fabric. In Virginia, where tradition remained paramount, state leaders were willing to go to extremes to prevent desegregation from ever taking place, including altering the state's Constitution and, if necessary, the closing of public schools. The intransigent behavior demonstrated by Virginia's leadership in opposition to the *Brown* rulings helped construct a contested environment that encompassed the social, political, and economic lives of everyday Virginians.

In an effort to devise an appropriate response to *Brown*, Governor of Virginia, Thomas B. Stanley (1954-1958) appointed Senator Garland Gray to chair a commission whose task was simple, study the situation and devise a suitable response to the *Brown* rulings (Mays & Sweeney, 2008). The Gray Commission's findings suggested each school district be given the ability to make a local choice as to whether schools would be desegregated. Stanley, at first in favor of the Gray Commission's recommendations, was quickly overruled by Virginia's political kingmaker, U.S. Senator Harry F. Byrd, Sr. Born in 1887, only a decade after the end of Civil War Reconstruction, Harry F. Byrd, Sr. ruled Virginia Democratic Party politics from the 1920s until his death in 1966. Byrd served as a state senator (1915-1925), governor (1926-1930) and United States Senator (1933-1965) (Heinemann, 2017). Byrd was a fiscal conservative and staunch advocate for state's rights and segregation. Senator Byrd made it clear to Stanley that desegregation would not be permitted in Virginia, and Byrd expected unyielding loyalty from his followers.

Ultimately, in 1957, Lindsay Almond was elected Governor of Virginia. For the 1954 Governor's race, Byrd chose Thomas Stanley over Almond as the Democratic candidate (Eskridge, 2014). Realizing he was never Byrd's top choice as a gubernatorial candidate for the

1957 race, Almond began campaigning early, leaving nothing to chance. For Byrd, Almond was independent, unpredictable and not easily controlled. Almond's charismatic style made him popular among voters, making Byrd unable to deny Almond his chance at the governorship.

As Governor, Almond continued Byrd's hardline stance against desegregation promoted by his predecessor, Thomas Stanley (1954-1958). Almond proved to be a staunch advocate for massive resistance and is remembered most for his closing of public schools in various areas of the Commonwealth. As Virginia's Attorney General in 1954, Almond represented Virginia in the case of *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia* (Library of Virginia, 2015). The *Davis* case was one of the five cases that made up *Brown v. Board of Education* argued before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954 (Library of Virginia, 2015). Because of this, it could be said, that Almond had a more intimate understanding of the *Brown* rulings and the argument over segregation than any other elected official in Virginia. Even so, Almond's previous experience did not guarantee his appreciation of the magnitude of the *Brown* rulings. Almond was beholden, as were many of Virginia's elected officials, to the Byrd Machine. Harry F. Byrd had led the charge for massive resistance in Virginia and at the nation's capital and expected his followers to take up the banner. As expected, Almond had supported massive resistance throughout his governorship, but in early 1959, this all changed. On January 19, 1959, in separate rulings, the U.S. District Court in Norfolk, and the Virginia Supreme Court ruled massive resistance laws unconstitutional (Library of Virginia, 2015). This ruling, coupled with the outcry by Virginia's business community, placed Almond at a crossroads. Should he continue to preach the gospel of massive resistance, he could find himself in prison for defying the rulings of not only the federal courts, but also the Virginia Supreme Court. To go against massive resistance meant he would commit political suicide by opposing Virginia's kingmaker,

Harry F. Byrd, Sr. Almond chose to defy the kingmaker. As a lawyer and former Attorney General, Almond knew the law, and knew that as Governor he was not above the law. In early February 1959, Almond stepped in front of the General Assembly of Virginia to speak. Absent was his familiar firebrand oratory as Almond logically and calmly presented his case for withdrawing support for massive resistance. As a result, Almond was politically vilified throughout Virginia as a traitor to the cause (Lechner, 1998).

In an oral history interview conducted by the John F. Kennedy Library in 1968, Almond discussed those days and how he came to his decision to break with Harry F. Byrd, Sr. Soon after the courts ruled in January of 1959, Almond met with Byrd to discuss the matter. Almond had come to the realization that Byrd's massive resistance cause was unsustainable; Byrd would have none of it. According to Almond (as cited in Hackman, 1968):

I could not get him [Byrd] to reason. He just said, "We can't do it. We've got to stand our ground no matter what comes and we cannot have any integration in Virginia." And I finally said to him, "Well, Senator, I have gone to the end of the road. I have done everything I can with the exception of violating the federal law. I can't do that as governor." So from that conference our relations became more or less strained. (sec. 4)

From that point forward, Byrd politically opposed Almond in practically every way possible, even going so far as refusing to support the nomination of John F. Kennedy at the 1960 Democratic Convention in Los Angeles. Byrd had campaigned for Lyndon B. Johnson while Almond supported Kennedy (Hackman, 1968). In 1962, without the support of Senator Byrd, Lindsay Almond was appointed to the U.S. Court of Patents and Appeals where he remained until his death in April 1986 (Library of Virginia, 2015).

## THE INFLUENCE OF BUSINESS

Massive resistance legislation had a profound effect on public education in Virginia. It is from this contested environment the Virginia Technical, and subsequent, Community College System was founded. Funding for technical education had been available federally since the passing of the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act. It was the damage to the state's business community, brought on by massive resistance, that caused lawmakers to finally take steps toward improving access to post-secondary education.

Concerns of the business community in Virginia were highlighted in a report issued by the Commission to Study Industrial Development (1957), chaired by Charles Abbott of Charlottesville. The commission stressed the importance of education and the need for a healthy business climate: "Of all the normal functions of state and local governments that may affect and influence industrial development favorably, or unfavorably, none is more important than education at both the secondary school and college levels" (Commission to study industrial development in Virginia, 1957, p. 59). The report discussed how the uncertainty of a stable public school system would undermine industrial development in Virginia (Commission to study industrial development in Virginia, 1957).

With the closing of schools, and the threat of continued school closings, it was feared that industry would choose other states to locate (Commission to study industrial development in Virginia, 1957). The report specifically identified problems in Prince Edward County. Prince Edward County was the scene of a landmark civil rights case, *Davis v County School Board*, involving Moton High School. Davis was one of the cases that made up the 1954 *Brown v*

*Board of Education* cases. In spite of its notoriety, in 1959, the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors chose to close the county's public schools rather than desegregate. Prince Edward County schools would remain closed for five years. The enforcement of massive resistance laws had created one of the most serious problems facing Virginia (Commission to study industrial development in Virginia, 1957). The closing of schools was having a profound effect on preparing students for the workplace and signaled, for potential investors, that the business climate in Virginia did not encourage the development of an educated workforce (Commission to study industrial development in Virginia, 1957). Many in the business community throughout the South agreed that actions such as massive resistance were detrimental to the attraction of new industry and the development of existing industry (Miller, 1960). The environment had become so contested that in 1958 even the U.S. Navy voiced their concerns at the closure of schools in Norfolk ("What 'massive resistance' costs Norfolk and its businessmen," 1958). The Navy did not state that it would leave Norfolk but was concerned Naval personnel may not be able to enroll their children in public schools ("What 'massive resistance' costs Norfolk and its businessmen," 1958). Supporters of massive resistance had created an unworkable situation. From this polarized climate emerged an extraordinary group of Virginia businessmen.

### **VIRGINIA INDUSTRIALIZATION GROUP**

In 1958, four of Virginia's most influential business executives came together to form what would become the Virginia Industrialization Group. Four men – Stuart Saunders, President of the Norfolk and Western Railway in Roanoke, Harvie Wilkinson, President of the State Planters Bank of Commerce & Trusts in Richmond, Frank Batten, Publisher of the Norfolk-Portsmouth News, in Norfolk, and Richmond Attorney Lewis Powell, who in 1972 would

become a U.S. Supreme Court Justice – were gravely concerned about the effects Massive Resistance was having on Virginia’s business community. The purpose of the Virginia Industrialization Group was to bring an end to Massive Resistance (Saunders, 1980). Originally, according to Saunders (1980), *The Group* intended to “operate in the background” (p. 1). The Group’s inaugural meeting took place in December 1958 at the Rotunda Club of the Jefferson Hotel in Richmond. Exact attendance is unclear as the Group kept no minutes (Saunders, 1980). The guest of honor for the evening was Governor J. Lindsay Almond. Following the Governor’s speech, a discussion ensued between Almond and those present. The Group’s membership pointed out the negative effects massive resistance was having on Virginia business and the futility of continuing such draconian measures. The exchange between the membership and Governor Almond became contentious as Governor Almond would not yield and vowed to continue his support of massive resistance as a means of continuing the long-held tradition of segregated education.

On January 19, 1959, both state and federal courts declared massive resistance unconstitutional. Because of these rulings, Almond withdrew his support for a continuation of massive resistance (Massive Resistance, 2015). Regardless of his personal beliefs or political loyalties, as Governor, Almond could not ignore rulings. It was believed by Stuart Saunders (1980) that Almond’s December 1958 meeting with the Virginia Industrialization Group had an impact on the 1959 decision to abandon massive resistance (Saunders, 1980).

With massive resistance in retreat, the Virginia Industrialization Group set out to establish and carry out an agenda designed to promote their collective interests toward improving the business climate in Virginia. Letters written between 1959 and 1964, and held at the Powell Archive at Washington and Lee University, show the Group worked steadily to influence state

policy pertaining to business and industry. In February 1959, Frank Batten wrote a report outlining areas the Group should direct its lobbying efforts (Batten, 1959). The report was produced by a Virginia Industrialization Group workgroup headed by Batten and State Senator Eugene Sydnor (Batten, 1959). The areas outlined included development of the port of Hampton Roads, elimination of “unfavorable elements” in the state’s tax laws, strengthening of the Department of Conservation and Economic Development, and the strengthening of the state’s Chamber of Commerce (Batten, 1959, p. 3).

Richard Holmquist, a former General Electric executive, was chosen in September 1961 as an industrial development consultant to Governor Almond. Holmquist’s prior experience as consultant in government relations for the General Electric Corporation meant he was well suited for the position (“Holmquist Named Consultant to The Governor,” 1961). Holmquist served as consultant to both Governor Almond (1958-1962) and Governor Harrison (1962-1966). Holmquist’s \$25,000 a year salary was paid in full by the Virginia Industrialization Group (Saunders, 1980). Holmquist’s salary continued to be paid by the Virginia Industrialization Group “for three years and four months” (Saunders, 1980, p. 9). In 1962, became Director of the Virginia Division of Industrial Development (Saunders, 1980). As Director, Holmquist recognized that for Virginia to be competitive, it would need a trained workforce (Robertson & Clarke, 2008). Training a large number of Virginians in a brief amount of time would require the establishment of a statewide system of technical education (“Farm Community of past Rapidly Disappearing,” 1962, para. 6).

## **WAKING THE SLEEPING GIANT**

Richard Holmquist described the Virginia economy of the early 1960s as a “sleeping giant” (Robertson & Clarke, 2008, para. 1). Awakening this *giant* and putting Virginia business and its people back on the road to economic prosperity would require a coming together of business, industry, and government. The focal point of Holmquist’s work was to build up interest in the creation of new industry in the state. Making Holmquist’s job difficult was the damage caused by massive resistance. To achieve his objective, Holmquist spoke to community groups about the characteristics that would make their towns and cities attractive to industry (“Industrial Growth Called Community Task,” 1962). Holmquist told listeners the qualities necessary to attract businesses to Virginia included “good government, a progressive attitude, and a well-trained labor force” (“Virginia Needs to Create 400,000 Jobs in Decade,” 1962, para. 7)). In November of 1962, Holmquist, speaking to an audience at the Kiwanis Club in Winchester, Virginia said that he could see a day not too far in the future when a “statewide system of technical education would exist” (“Farm Community of past Rapidly Disappearing,” 1962, para. 6). Just a few months later, in January of 1963, Holmquist told a meeting of the Richmond Chapter of the Society of Professional Engineers the state needed excellent vocational schools and not the kind for “second-class citizens” (“Va. Technical Education System Urged,” 1963). Holmquist promoted the idea that high quality vocational-technical education was for the good of Virginia as a whole. He argued,

To bury our heads in the sands of selfish status quo on the educational front would not only be terribly costly in the long run, but even more seriously, it would be a blot on our responsibilities to our youngsters. (“Va. Technical Education System Urged,” 1963)

In June of 1962, a headline in the Danville Register told readers *Virginia needs to create 400,000 jobs in decade* ("Virginia Needs to Create 400,000 Jobs in Decade," 1962). According to Holmquist, one of the key pieces to the puzzle to help fill these jobs was the need for a "properly educated labor supply supporting services and good plant sites" (para. 6) because "education continues to constitute a major problem for Virginia" ("Virginia Needs to Create 400,000 Jobs in Decade," 1962, para. 7). Holmquist made this plea reportedly in Franklin, Virginia as he continued to promote industrialization; he again emphasized the need for "a good and properly educated labor supply" ("Needs Cited," *The Bee*, Nov. 1962, p.5, para. 3)

Throughout 1963, Holmquist continued to travel and speak of the need to bring industry to Virginia. His message was consistent and clear; Virginia needed to expand its industrial base, but could not do this without community support and an educated workforce. On February 20, 1964, Holmquist was joined at a presentation for members of the Appomattox Basin Industrial Development Corporation (ABIDC) by Dr. Dana B. Hamel, then Director of the Roanoke Technical Institute ("ABIDC Meets in Hopewell," 1964).

This meeting was not the first time Holmquist was joined by members of industry and higher education. A few days earlier, on February 13, 1964, Holmquist was joined by members of the ABIDC and Dr. Hamel at a speaking engagement in Hopewell ("Allied's Prossen Will Speak at Conference," 1964). These meetings gave Holmquist the opportunity to speak on industrialization. His guests who were experts in their respective fields, added weight to his message. During a telephone conversation, Dr. Hamel said he was there to explain the meaning of technical education (personal communication, March 15, 2016).

In June of 1962, Joseph Hamrick resigned his post as Executive Vice President of the South Carolina firm, Kahn-Southern, to head the Virginia Division of Industrial Development

(“S.C. Man Heads VA Industrialization”, 1962). It did not take Hamrick long to find his footing. He began traveling the state telling audiences and newspaper reporters about the connections between good jobs and vocational-technical education. In an interview with the *Danville Register* newspaper, Hamrick said, “One of the state’s major liabilities is insufficient vocational and technical training” pointing out that new personnel hired for a Waynesboro General Electric plant had to be “imported from outside the state” (“Virginia’s Basic Industry Growth Slow Says Official,” 1962, para. 8). Both Holmquist and Hamrick were preaching the same message; vocational-technical education equated to more jobs in the state for residents and an improved economy over all.

For the next two years, even after the Department of Technical Education was established, Hamrick and Holmquist continued to travel talking about the critical need for Virginia to industrialize, and they were clear on the fact that the state could not do this without an educated workforce. According to Hamrick and Holmquist, obtaining an educated workforce was of the utmost urgency and a direct means to obtain this goal was through the establishment of a system of technical colleges throughout the Commonwealth.

### THE WATCHMAKER’S SON

Dr. Dana B. Hamel arrived in Virginia in 1962 when he was hired by the Virginia Polytechnic Institute (today known as Virginia Tech) as Director of its newest branch campus in Roanoke, the Roanoke Technical Institute. Born in Maine in 1923, Hamel grew up as the son of a watchmaker in the heart of coal country in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Prior to moving to Virginia, Hamel held a variety of academic positions in Ohio at the Ohio Mechanics Institute (Strother, 1964). Positions held ranged from Instructor to Acting President (Strother, 1964).

As Director of the Roanoke Technical Institute, Dr. Hamel was in an excellent position to meet and get to know many in Virginia's industrial arena. In a follow-up conversation to our original interviews, Dr. Hamel said he had met several of the area's industrialists through his association with members of the Advisory Board for the Roanoke Technical Institute (personal communication, March 15, 2016).

As Holmquist, Hamrick, and Hamel traveled the state touting industry and technical education, legislation was making its way through the Virginia Assembly. The legislation, H. 205, had broad support, with its chief sponsor being Delegate French Slaughter (Commonwealth of Virginia, 1964). A stagnant industrial climate, coupled with the lack of access to post-secondary education for much of Virginia's population led those who sponsored the legislation to include in the language of the bill "an emergency exists, and this act is in force from its passing" (Virginia House of Delegates, 1964, p. 3).

On April 7, 1964, a memorandum was sent from Joseph Hamrick to Governor Harrison stating, "Bill McFarlane and I have suggested the name of Dr. Dana B. Hamel for consideration as Director, State Board of Technical Education" (Hamrick, 1964, para. 1). William McFarlane was the head of the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) at the time. In July, Governor Harrison placed a telephone call to Dana Hamel offering him the position of Director of the State's newly formed Department of Technical Education.

In August 1964, shortly after the announcement of his hiring, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* newspaper interviewed Dr. Hamel. Hamel spoke of his vision that someday the technical institutes would become a series of "comprehensive community colleges" (Strother, 1964, para. 13). Leaders in Virginia, including Governor Harrison, viewed the current series of branch colleges affiliated with the universities as a *system* of community colleges (Williams, 1976).

Hamel felt having two systems of two-year colleges, one technical and the other for college transfer existing side by side, was wasteful and unnecessary (Strother, 1964). Hamel had a vision of Virginia creating a system of comprehensive community colleges that would offer students a chance to learn trade and industry skills, prepare to transfer to a four-year university, receive training in medical areas, and provide continuing education opportunities to adult learners (Strother, 1964). Providing access, especially to rural areas, was crucial to the realization of Hamel's vision.

Virginia has always been a predominantly rural state with most of its inhabitants living in either the Northern Virginia area located just south of Washington, D.C., or the Virginia Peninsula area stretching from Richmond to Virginia Beach. In a 1944 report by the Virginia Education Commission, the need for increased access to vocational/technical education was addressed (Virginia Education Commission, 1944). The 1944 report stated:

At the present time, such facilities are available to only about 25 percent of our school population and a much smaller percent of our adult citizens. The committee feels that opportunities for this training should be placed within reach of all prospective students who may be benefited by it. (p. 109)

To allow for increased access to vocational education, the report recommended the creation of vocational schools throughout the state (Virginia Education Commission, 1944). Reflecting the social climate of the times, one recommendation of the 1944 report pointed out that any new facilities would be segregated by stipulating schools for "white students" and those for "Negro students" (Virginia Education Commission, 1944, p. 109).

The inaugural 1959 SCHEV report (Martorana, Hollis, Brunner, and Morrison, 1959) made recommendations that would be adopted by the Board for Technical Education. One had

to do with the placement of the colleges. The SCHEV report displayed maps of Virginia outlining a multilayered approach for deciding two-year college locations. Additionally, the SCHEV report focused extensively on identifying graduation rates, actual and projected, of high schools located within proposed *regions*. Access was important, and the report suggested the colleges be within a 30-mile driving distance for students (Martorana et al., 1959). In 1964, the Board for Technical Education adopted two recommendations from the 1959 SCHEV report: 1) Locate the college so they provide regional coverage for all parts of the state, and 2) the colleges should be within a reasonable commuting distance.

In designing the VTCS, the Board studied how junior and community colleges had been organized in other states. In California, each two-year college was established with a local board guided by the State Board of Education (State Board of Education & Regents of the University of California, 1960). Instead of serving a single county, California divided the state into regional service districts ("The California Community Colleges," 2015). The regional college model eventually adopted in 1964 by the State Board for Technical Education allowed for each college in Virginia to have a local advisory board overseen by the State Board for Technical Education.

In 1965, the Virginia Technical College System opened. Virginia Western Technical College, previously Roanoke Technical Institute, along with Northern Virginia Technical College were the first colleges to open in the fall of 1965 (Hamel, 1972). Northern Virginia Technical College began in a rented facility at Bailey's Crossroads, just north of what is now the Alexandria campus (Northern Virginia Community College, 2014). These colleges were joined in the System by five area vocational-technical schools (Hamel, 1972). The vocational-technical schools were Danville Technical Institute, Peninsula Vocational-Technical Education Center (Hampton), New River Vocational-Technical School (Radford), Valley Vocational-Technical

School (Waynesboro), and Washington County Vocational-Technical School at Abingdon (Hamel, 1972). The original design of the VTCS called for the creation of 23 Colleges regionally located throughout the State (State Board for Technical Education, 1965, p. 4) When the VTCS became the VCCS in 1966, this plan was continued and developed into the current 23-college system.

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Prior to this research, the role played by massive resistance on the creation of these colleges had never been explored. The opening of the technical colleges was a long time coming. The founding of the VTCS and subsequent VCCS revolutionized higher education in Virginia and continues to have an impact today. The contested environment of massive resistance set the stage for the founding of the VTCS. Federal funding to support the creation of the system was available through vocational-technical legislation and through the Higher Education Act of 1963 and the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963. It took the oppressive climate of massive resistance to bring to light the urgent need for a two-year college system making post-secondary education available in every corner of Virginia.

These colleges were born in a time of great social change and upheaval. America was a segregated place, if not by race, then by class. The VTCS/VCCS opened its doors to everyone regardless of race or class and continues this tradition today. This open-door policy, while extremely democratic, creates a challenge for teachers and administrators. Not all students are ready for college level course work. This situation is not unique to the VCCS. Community colleges throughout the country face similar issues. College readiness continues to be an issue for both two-year and four-year colleges. Research on the effectiveness of diagnostic tools used

to measure college readiness should be conducted, as should research on the effectiveness of developmental courses.

The VTCS began out of a need for a well-trained workforce. The VCCS continues this tradition today. State lawmakers look to the VCCS to prepare the workforce of tomorrow, shining new light on the value and significance of Virginia's community colleges. The VCCS accounts for half Virginia's total undergraduate enrollment (SCHEV, 2017). In 2015, VCCS Chancellor Glenn Dubois mandated the tripling of all credentials awarded, transfer and workforce, by 2021. The tripling of credentials is a bold a challenge accepted by all 23 of Virginia's community colleges. Just as in the 1960s, the VCCS will shape the future of Virginia's workforce.

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