

Resistance on the Border: *School Desegregation in Western Kentucky, 1954-1964*

DAVID L. WOLFFORD

After the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional *separate but equal* schools in 1954, segregated communities required a transitional period before their schools could reach a fully integrated status. Some southern city and county school districts complied with the spirit of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, integrating rapidly and with little friction. In other locales, segregationists and school officials prevented African Americans from entering the traditionally white schools. Of states in the segregated South, Kentucky integrated successfully and served as a model for the desegregation process. State administrators promised to follow the Court's *with all deliberate speed* order while encouraging citizens and school officials to do the same. By October 1956, ninety-two of the state's 160 school districts with biracial populations had mixed enrollments and the state's largest district, Louisville, received national attention for being one of the first southern cities to integrate.¹

To paint the Commonwealth's transition as entirely peaceful and local school officials as compliant, however, would be an overgeneralization. Conflicts arose, especially in the state's western region where segregationists publicly protested, instilled fear in the black community, and consciously resisted the new order of things. Public schools integrated at a more gradual rate than the state at large. Lackadaisical school boards ignored the spirit of *Brown* and played to the will of their constituencies, making necessary lawsuits and extra law enforcement. A close investigation of school desegregation in western Kentucky² reveals how a unique region, in a predominately compliant state, reluctantly integrated its public schools. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) faced conflicts early in the Civil Rights era, shaping the organization's post-*Brown* legal strategy. This investigation also reveals how compliance and defiance co-existed. Some communities integrated quickly and quietly while others compromised.

The western Kentucky region differs in terms of its history, culture, and race relations from the rest of the state. Before emancipation, significant numbers of slaves were found in southwestern Kentucky and along the Tennessee border. The area's hint of plantation culture and its cotton production, itself a major symbol of plantation life in the Old South, increased the reverence for slavery. In addition to laboring on farms, bondpeople were put to work in mines. As

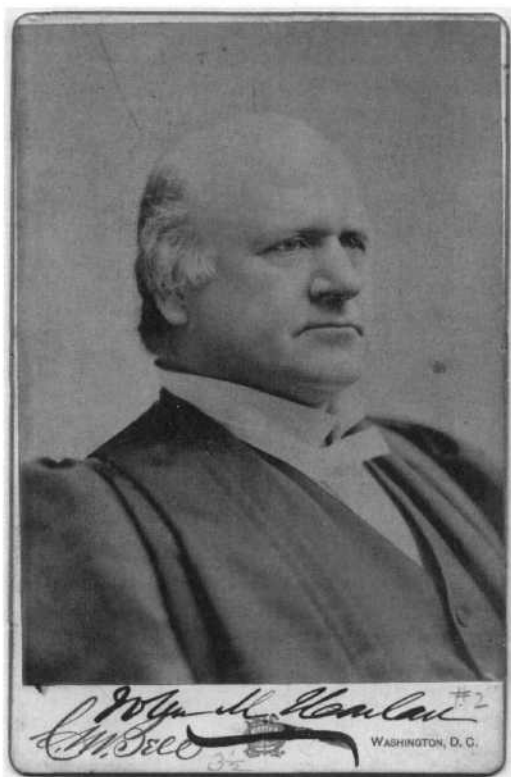
George C. Wright states, “the white residents of [the Jackson Purchase and Western Kentucky] have long prided themselves as southerners, pointing to their Confederate ties,” making the region not only southern culturally but a Confederate area politically. The 1860 federal elections revealed where residents in western Kentucky stood. Citizens of the Jackson Purchase (the state’s eight westernmost counties) cast their votes for Southern Democrat John Breckenridge in the presidential election; indeed, only one “Southern Rightist”

won election to a congressional seat from Kentucky and the seat represented the westernmost district of the state. Secessionists held a convention in Logan County, named Bowling Green as Kentucky’s new Confederate capital, and in a May 1861 meeting in Mayfield “advocated joining west Tennessee to form a new Confederate state.” As states began to take sides, Kentucky remained in the Union, but the Purchase supplied more than five-thousand troops as Confederate volunteers, while only about five hundred from the same area joined the Union army. During Reconstruction, the region despised the Radical Republicans of Congress, feared federal power, and further aligned itself with southern Democrats.³

During the early years of the twentieth century, the Black Patch Wars united inhabitants from northwestern Tennessee and southwestern Kentucky. The conflict over tobacco prices pitted hastily organized labor against the American Tobacco Company, forcing the company to seek laborers from the African American community. Black Kentuckians who accepted such contracts only heightened the racial tensions already in place. Night

Riders terrorized and whipped those who went against organized labor, but especially punished African Americans who benefited the company. Further into the twentieth century, lynching and public hangings plagued the region. A French newspaper reported the 1911 hanging of a black man in Livermore, where the culprits strung the victim up in a theater and charged local white residents admission to take target practice. Perhaps less violent but equally appalling was the nation’s final public hanging held in Owensboro in 1928, where a black convict met his fate on the gallows with over ten thousand onlookers assembled.⁴

In terms of establishing education for its first and second generation of freedmen, the region paralleled the South, firmly establishing segregated education after the Civil War, and breathing a sigh of relief when the Supreme Court sanctioned *separate but equal* with its *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896. Segregated public schools were required in Kentucky before *Plessy*, and



Justice John Marshall Harlan, a Kentucky native, was an early proponent of desegregation. The only dissenter in the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, he declared, “The Constitution is colorblind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens.” *The Filson Historical Society*

in 1904 the state legislature passed a bill that prevented “persons to operate any college, school or institution where persons of the white and Negro races are both received as pupils for instruction” and proposed that private institutions educating both races must do so in facilities “not less than twenty-five miles” apart.⁵

Over the next fifty years, the efforts of black educators and philanthropists as well as the eventual changes in law allowed for gradual improvements in African American education. Teachers from more liberal, northern universities, such as Indiana, Purdue, and Notre Dame, moved southward to teach in these schools. These teachers established quality programs and attended closely to black students, hoping to empower the next generation to press for social equality. Northern philanthropists contributed large sums to provide buildings for these teachers. Julius Rosenwald, a rags-to-riches entrepreneur and high-ranking Sears and Roebuck official, financed the building and repair of schools throughout the South, especially in its most impoverished regions, between 1917 and 1932. By the time the Rosenwald Fund ceased to operate, one-third of southern black students attended one of his schools; fifty-two existed in western Kentucky.⁶

Lyman Johnson, pictured with his wife Juanita, his son, Lyman Morrell, and daughter Yvonne. Johnson was a black Louisville teacher and University of Michigan alumnus who was denied admission to the University of Kentucky's graduate school because of his race. He was admitted to the school in 1949 after he won a lawsuit against the university. The Filson Historical Society

By mid century, the NAACP succeeded in opening the doors of white colleges and universities. By 1950, Louisville Central High teacher Lyman Johnson secured his right to attend the University of Kentucky and Paducah NAACP branch president Curlee Brown won a suit against Paducah Junior College on behalf of two black Lincoln High School graduates. In that year, the Supreme Court invalidated segregated graduate and law schools.⁷ The Kentucky legislature responded to these court decisions by amending the Day Law to allow “institutions of higher education” to accept African Americans if “an equal, complete, and accredited course is not available at the Kentucky State College for Negroes.” The change passed quite easily: twenty-three to three in the Senate and fifty to sixteen in the House. The few dissenters represented counties across the state, but more opponents came from western Kentucky than anywhere else. A total of nine representatives from thirteen counties in the Pennyroyal, Western Coal Field, and Jackson Purchase regions voted against amending the Day Law.⁸

A previous statute requiring school districts to educate black students beyond the eighth grade had not had a profound effect, largely because it



neither required African American students to attend high school nor did it mandate that districts operate black high school programs. Thus, many school boards sent their black students to high schools in neighboring areas. As late as the 1954-55 school year, only eighteen of forty-three western Kentucky school districts operated black high schools, forcing many black students to travel great distances to attend black high schools in urban centers.⁹ Though the black community and black educators advocated quality education, the fact that most African Americans resided in rural areas and the region's dire economic straits combined to limit the number of black students who earned high school diplomas and college degrees. In 1950, 13.2% of Kentucky's white residents twenty-five years of age and over had finished four years of high school as compared to only 7.7% of the state's black residents. Four of the twenty-seven western counties had no black residents with high school diplomas and in those counties only 475 African Americans had completed four years of college. Many of them were teaching in the Jim Crow schools. In the urban areas the percentage of white residents who had completed high school typically doubled that of black residents in the same cities.¹⁰

**Percentage of Twenty-five Years and Older Completing
Four Years of High School, 1950**

	Bowling Green	Henderson	Hopkinsville	Madisonville	Owensboro	Paducah
Non-white	2.2	7.7	6	5.3	10.8	6.2
White	17.2	20	22.3	17	21	19

Source: *Seventeenth U.S. Census, 1950, Population Schedule, NARA.*

The physical conditions of Jim Crow school buildings varied from innovative to dilapidated. At times, black schools outclassed the older white schools, with the Rosenwald Fund, New Deal programs, and changes in state laws having led to newly constructed buildings. In addition, Supreme Court decisions and NAACP pressures convinced many school districts, hoping to avoid a potential integration mandate, to upgrade their facilities in order to meet the *separate but equal* standard. By the 1950s, many districts operated new, black high schools. Bowling Green's State Street School "for the times, was a modern school" with home economics labs and indoor plumbing before High Street High School replaced it in the mid-1950s and Paducah's Lincoln High School was "one of the most outstanding schools of the state . . . [comparable] to the white school."¹¹ As schools began to desegregate legally, many all-black buildings were housing their first or second generation of students.

Despite these isolated instances, black and white schools varied drastically. In 1954, the Kentucky Department of Education ranked nearly thirty percent of black secondary schools in the western counties as "emergency or low and inferior."¹² Rosenwald buildings had few amenities, offered fewer classes, and

received less in terms of per-pupil funding. Invariably, black schools received used textbooks, outdated science equipment, and second-rate athletic gear. This phenomenon was commonplace across districts and often resulted in black students following a curriculum two years behind their white peers. Degrading conditions included black football teams “scrap[ing] the manure off the playing field before football games.”¹³

Although the efforts of eager black teachers, donations from established philanthropists, and changes in policy moderately improved black education in the area during the first half of the century, funding remained inadequate. State-mandated black high school programs and acceptance of African Americans into higher education were not enough to equalize educational standards. A federal court order was necessary before schools in western Kentucky would fully integrate. That order came in May 1954 when the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that state-sponsored school segregation violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court relied heavily on the sociological findings of Kenneth Clark, an African American, Columbia University graduate, and New York City College professor, who claimed segregated education caused psychological and emotional damage to black children. A year later, the Court heard arguments from both the NAACP and southern states in order to clarify its stance and to define the method and time frame for reasonable integration. In the subsequent *Brown* ruling, the Court mandated that southern schools desegregate “with all deliberate speed.”

Most of Kentucky’s federal and state officials respected the Court’s opinions and anticipated a smooth transition. Only one Kentucky congressman disapproved the ruling and none signed the resulting Southern Manifesto. Officials in Frankfort—including the governor, attorney general, and state superintendent—complied with the Supreme Court and directed subordinates to follow their lead. After hearing the Court’s respective *Brown* rulings, Governor Lawrence Wetherby claimed “[w]e will try to adjust our system to comply with the law” and “will exert every effort” to do so rapidly. He established a state committee on integration, which met three times between the *Brown* decisions. Wetherby’s successor, A.B. “Happy” Chandler, who had served as commissioner of baseball when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947, followed his infant policy. Token integration took place statewide during 1955 when a handful of districts integrated about two hundred black students.¹⁴



Kentucky Governor A. B. “Happy” Chandler’s second term (1955-1959) saw turmoil in Kentucky resulting from integration. At one point he called the National Guard to ensure that African American students could enroll in Hopkins County schools. The Filson Historical Society

In western Kentucky, a different attitude prevailed. Assured that integration would not take place overnight, local public officials downplayed the disparity between black and white schools and pointed to recently increased funding for black schools to rationalize separate but equal. After the Court required state universities to admit black students at the graduate school level, southern politicians and administrators feared their second rate K-12 black schools would bring the same type of ruling. According to the historian Manning Marable, “[i]n the segregated states expenditures soared 800 percent between 1939 and 1952 in the futile effort” to bring black schools up to par. After the *Brown* ruling, administrators in Madisonville and Bowling Green pointed to recent upgrades for black schools to rationalize separate but equal and to maintain the dual system. Hopkins County Superintendent Sam Pollock claimed “we are badly crowded in all facilities” and, when threatened with legal action, emphasized the district had spent \$45,000 to renovate the all-black Branch Street and Rosenwald schools. Likewise, Bowling Green Superintendent L.C. Curry stated that his district had spent \$450,000 to replace the reasonably adequate State Street School building.¹⁵

Attitudes of the press ranged from satisfaction with the status quo to ruthless condemnation of the institutions that supported desegregation. The *Sturgis News* claimed “[c]ustom dies slowly, and both races are satisfied with their schools.” In Henderson, citizens simply expressed “[w]e don’t approve of Negroes and whites mixing” and “[t]he hearts of the South will never accept integration even when it is forced upon us.” The *Madisonville Messenger* accused the Court, the “big town press,” and the NAACP of “hacking away for years at the character of the Anglo Saxon race . . . break[ing] down . . . undisputed leadership among the races of mankind.” The Supreme Court expected such opposition and accurately predicted the necessity of a “generation of litigation” before schools integrated to a large-scale, thus keeping the NAACP busy filing lawsuits against noncompliant school boards for the next decade.¹⁶

Community resistance quickly surfaced in western Kentucky when black students attempted to attend the otherwise white schools in the fall of 1956. Clearly, white communities in the Western Coal Field strongly opposed integrated education and reluctantly permitted black students into their schools only after receiving court mandates and state-level reprimands. Consistent with the “massive resistance” experienced in other southern states, western Kentucky segregationists blocked school fronts, boycotted newly desegregated schools, formed white supremacy organizations, and petitioned school boards to deny what the Court had ordered. These tactics prevented any large-scale integration until 1964. Seven school districts in four counties, Union, Webster, Henderson, and Hopkins, enrolled a total of 2,061 African Americans in their all-black schools during the 1954-55 school year. By the fall of 1960 and after three court orders only four of the seven districts had any

schools with mixed enrollments, with about ten percent of the black student population attending school with whites.¹⁷

In some of the most notorious events in Kentucky's civil rights history, white segregationists blocked school-fronts in Sturgis (Union County) and Clay (Webster County), and gathered to protest in Henderson (Henderson County) and Madisonville (Hopkins County). With the help of the NAACP, nine black students enrolled at Sturgis High School in early September 1956. The first day passed without incident because these students, who normally attended Dunbar School in Morganfield, arrived unannounced at the all-white school. The following day, "a crowd of 500 blocked the way," the unruly mob carrying shovels and pitchforks and calling out "go home nigger."¹⁸ A smaller crowd of about seventy-five gathered at nearby Morganfield High School to prevent black students from enrolling there. When James and Theresa Gordon, two black children living in Wheatcroft in adjacent Webster County, enrolled in the Clay School days later, a crowd exceeding one hundred rocked their car, temporarily blocked their way, and convinced white students to depart the school. Two years later similar protests occurred in Madisonville, a year after initial integration in the Hopkins district, when over two hundred gathered in front of Pride Elementary to protest newly-enrolled black students.¹⁹

When these intimidating school-front protests did not prevent integration, extremists boycotted integrated schools. Uncooperative whites refused to attend Sturgis High after black students temporarily entered the school in 1956. Only about fifty of the 275 registered white students actually attended classes in early September. The boycotting effort waned daily and lacked effectiveness after a federal court a year later forced the district to accept black students. Still, large numbers remained at home or enrolled in a hastily-created private school. In neighboring Clay, Mayor Herman Clark sanctioned a white boycott, stating, "I'll not rest until James and Teresa Gordon return to a school where they belong. We will follow a policy of passive resistance by keeping our children out of the school until the Gordons leave." Only about twelve of five hundred white students attended the Clay School immediately after the Gordons were admitted. In addition, ten teachers, "moral compromisers . . . in rapport with the Negro-haters," joined the boycott.²⁰ The most drastic boycott took place in Henderson in 1956, where over 650 students refused to attend the county's Weaverton Elementary after its first five African American students enrolled. The protest spread into two desegregated Henderson city schools; Seventh and Central Elementary Schools lost about twenty and fifteen percent of their respective enrollments during the conflict.²¹

The Ku Klux Klan had terrorized the region for decades and resurfaced when white supremacy was threatened. George Wright states that the Klan was responsible for the murder of ten African Americans in Butler County in



Henderson Francis Jones

Hence Jones, a native of Henderson, Kentucky, and graduate of Howard University in Washington, D.C., was an educational pioneer of black schools in Henderson. Henderson Gleaner, July 4, 1976. The Filson Historical Society

1915 and that, in the mid-1920s, the Klan was determined to “clean up” the Madisonville-Earlinton area. The Court’s ruling and NAACP action perhaps renewed the group’s activity in Adairville, in adjacent Allen County, causing frightening experiences because “many of the people in law-enforcement were just as supportive of the Klan as anyone else.” James Howard, one of the black students who enrolled at Sturgis High, recalls protestors wearing “sheets with the Klan insignias” and who carried rifles and issued threats “if we continued to attend Sturgis High School.”²²

The White Citizens Council began in Mississippi during the summer of 1954 and expanded to almost every southern city that opposed school integration. The Citizens Council, also known as the “white collar Klan,” was made up of middle-to-upper income whites in business, white-collar professions, and the clergy. The Council relied less on terror and instead rallied public support and petitioned governing institutions to maintain segregation. Wright “Jerry” Waller, a Sturgis Citizen Council leader and farm implement dealer, labeled the NAACP a “Communist-infiltrated, hate-spreading group.” In reality, black leaders attempted to divorce themselves from communists in order to stay afloat. During the fall of 1956, Waller and other Council leaders brought in U.S. senators, the Council’s state president, and State’s Rights Party candidates to speak at anti-integration rallies in Sturgis, Morganfield, Henderson, and Owensboro,

with audiences ranging from 125 in local auditoriums to over four thousand in public fields. These speakers publicly bashed pro-integration officials, revived Confederate rhetoric by labeling the Supreme Court justices “Scalawags and Carpetbaggers,” and initiated petitions to impeach state officials who supported integration. As far as their national targets, neither Republican nor Democrat was safe from insult; Council leaders called President Dwight D. Eisenhower a “race-mixer” and Democratic hopeful Adlai Stevenson “a race-mixing socialist.” The organization placed advertisements in local newspapers in order to advance the private school movement and to press school boards to stall or reverse integration plans. The group, confident in its numbers, warned local officials that they “can not afford to go against us because at election time we will not forget.” And when these methods failed, the group invoked what Francis Wilhoit calls a “perverted Christianity,” claiming, “God didn’t want it that way.”²³

More subtly, local boards of education employed delaying tactics by creating “bi-racial” committees to study the integration process over long periods of

time; others passed ridiculously gradual and ineffective desegregation plans. Often, such boards appointed token black committee members to these committees but never informed them of their appointments, or the black committee members were “reminded of their jobs by white members on every opportunity” in order to discourage any pro-integration input. Under court pressure, some districts integrated only on paper. For example, Hopkins County created the most ludicrous desegregation policy—a twelve-year freedom-of-choice plan—allowing a restricted number of black students to attend integrated schools, even as low as one-grade-at-a-time starting with first grade. School boards adopted such policies to stall full-scale integration; the Supreme Court would ultimately rule them to be unsatisfactory responses to *Brown*.²⁴

To combat structured segregationist pressures and administrators’ refusal to admit black students, the NAACP filed lawsuits in federal district court, hoping to achieve what the Supreme Court intended. Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP, expected Kentucky to “move off in good fashion.” After celebrating the Court’s landmark decision, regional and state offices worked diligently to insure that school boards would desegregate. Soon after the second *Brown* ruling, the organization’s state conference in Louisville warned, “[w]e will not compromise or permit delaying tactics on the part of officials or individuals” and urged school districts to desegregate by September 1955. Regional Secretary Donald Jones of Cincinnati visited chapters throughout the state during summer 1955 to assist local desegregation efforts.²⁵

Louisville attorney and Kentucky NAACP President James Crumlin spearheaded legal efforts in the Commonwealth. Characterized by NAACP lawyer Jack Greenberg as a “soft-spoken, jowly, black country lawyer, not at all a firebrand,” Crumlin was born in South Carolina, graduated from Terrell Law School in Washington, D.C., and moved to Louisville determined to improve conditions for black Kentuckians by legal means. With legendary bravery and patience, Crumlin traveled to remote locations to examine Jim Crow schools and to gather plaintiffs for victorious lawsuits. African Americans recalled in later interviews that Crumlin instilled fear in everyone, regardless of race. White obstructionists “would panic” when he came to town, “they were scared of that name, James Crumlin,” fearing his skill and perseverance would break down barriers unchallenged until he arrived. Meanwhile, local black residents who might have appreciated his efforts on their behalf routinely feared being seen in company with the agitator.²⁶

Crumlin’s legal strategy was simple; he intended to determine if school boards would willingly allow black students to enter all-white schools and, if not, he would gather plaintiffs to file suit in U.S. district court. Such litigation was especially necessary in western Kentucky. During the 1956-57 academic year, only twelve of forty-two school districts had mixed enrollments, meaning that twenty-six buildings housed students of both races and a total

of 196 black students attended school with whites (the area's 1954-55 black enrollment was 9,502).²⁷

Although the NAACP was quite willing to fight segregation in court, black parents hesitated from signing onto lawsuits to accomplish the association's goal. By the mid-1950s black Kentuckians had witnessed mild improvements, including an integrated military and partially-integrated education, encouraging African Americans' acceptance of slow progress toward equality. Donald Jones discovered this less-than-aggressive attitude when he visited branches, reporting that Henderson was "not a community we can count on," Hopkinsville "has been a weak branch," and "action in [Madisonville is] remote at best."²⁸ Black apathy resulted both from a conditioned satisfaction with *separate but equal* and from a fear of the white power structure. Rank and file African Americans did not desire integrated schools on legal principle nor had Dr. Kenneth Clark convinced them, as he had the Supreme Court, that segregated settings caused emotional damage to black children's psyche. Black parents willing to enroll their children in white schools likely sought equal tangibles like textbooks, desks, and decent buildings. Therefore, when modern black schools appeared and employed quality teachers, these parents had even less incentive to seek integration, thus frustrating the NAACP.

Yet when the black community in Columbia, in Adair County, aggressively challenged the denial of equal protection, Crumlin had the nation's first post-*Brown* test case, and it served as an example for potential litigants in later suits. Columbia's all-black Jackman School had burned in the spring of 1953, and by 1955 the Adair County administration had failed to replace it and refused to admit black students into the new Adair County High School under the guise of the Day Law.²⁹ This refusal to remedy the problem caused Earl Willis, an influential black parent and professional truck driver, to discuss Columbia's plight with Crumlin. Although speculation surrounded this case, a three-judge federal court ruled for the plaintiffs and Judge Mac Swinford wrote the court's opinion on November 30, 1955, requiring Adair to admit its black students no later than February 1956.³⁰ This suit was necessary before the Adair board would follow the new law of the land, but integration in Columbia went smoothly, largely because potential opponents relented after the loss of the Jackman School and because of the existence of amicable race relations. Adair's African Americans suggest that race relations were not turbulent at the time and, generally, whites treated blacks with respect, claiming even white support for the action.³¹

Unfortunately, the civility that allowed a relatively smooth transition after the Columbia suit was the exception rather than the rule in western Kentucky. Too often, white segregationists in counties west of Adair resisted court orders. During summer and early fall 1956, Crumlin and Jack Greenberg filed additional suits, culminating in Judge Henry Brooks' three-case decision in

February 1957. The September 1956 school-front protests in Sturgis and Clay (“two little towns [that gave] Kentucky a black eye”) and Hopkins County’s refusal to accept African American students led to a series of events that involved Crumlin, Governor Chandler, the National Guard, and the state attorney general before the courts became involved. Chandler activated the National Guard and the state police to guarantee peace and to allow black students to enroll in Sturgis High and Clay Elementary.³² The Webster County board asked Kentucky Attorney General Jo Ferguson if the district had to accept these students given that it had adopted no formal desegregation plan. Ferguson opined that this board had satisfied the “gradual adjustment” allowed for in the second *Brown* ruling when it created a committee to study desegregation, allowing that “[s]chool authorities have the primary responsibility for elucidating, assessing, and solving these problems.” Until a school board adopted a policy of integration, “an individual parent [had] no right to enroll his child in a school without some sort of action having been taken by the school board.” This opinion allowed Webster and Union County boards quickly to bar black students from their white schools and caused Chandler to remove the troops.³³

Ferguson temporarily satisfied administrators and local segregationists, but he warned that claims against good faith compliance might result in court-mandated integration. His prediction held true. Crumlin filed three separate lawsuits against Union, Webster, and Hopkins County in U.S. District Court in Owensboro under Judge Henry Brooks. Brooks, “a lanky laconic federal judge,” demanded that the defendant districts submit desegregation plans before any hearings. Union County adopted a four-year freedom-of-choice plan that would integrate only the high school one year at a time. Webster voted to accept black students the following year on a voluntary basis and Hopkins County filed its twelve-year choice plan. All three districts kept their black schools open. These plans did not satisfy Judge Brooks, who enjoined all three systems to immediately allow black students into the otherwise-white schools despite their administrations’ contentions that integrating contradicted community desires and resulted in community danger. Brooks explained this was “not an element for this court to consider” and that the Sixth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals had already refuted this argument. The judge mandated that all three systems admit African Americans into white schools at the beginning of the 1957-58 academic year.³⁴

Later that same year, Crumlin and plaintiffs sued the Fulton Independent School District hoping to gain admittance for black students into the city’s high school. The board did not operate a black high school, forcing black teenagers to travel to either Riverview High in Hickman or to Weakley County Training Center across the state line in Martin, Tennessee. Crumlin attempted to enroll a handful of black students into Fulton High School in September

1955, only to see the principal turn them away. Joseph Freeland, the white Paducah attorney who argued Curlee Brown's case against Paducah Junior College, filed suit, charging that the administration "alleged that a committee had been appointed to recommend a plan of integration" but "ignored the order of the Court and failed to file any plan for integration." Nor did any school representative even show in court for the hearings. The plaintiffs moved for a default judgment and Judge Roy Shelbourne awarded it in October 1957, thus integrating Fulton High the following fall.³⁵

As late as 1963, Judge Mac Swinford declared the Bowling Green school district "would never have had a plan for integration had it not been sued." The board refused to enroll black students into previously all-white schools as late as 1963, causing legal action against the city system for operating "on a compulsory racially segregated basis." The need to bring this action to court at this late date underscores Bowling Green's reluctance to integrate. A close look at the defense's answer and argument in court shows even greater "subterfuge." The defense declared that separate schools were "voluntarily acquiesced in and approved by the people both white and colored within the Bowling Green district" and warned that "order and decorum in the schools, necessary to the educational process, cannot be maintained if there is sudden and total integration." Board attorney Marshall Funk begged Judge Swinford for more time so the district's biracial committee could put forth a plan and "to see the integration occur without friction."³⁶

Judge Swinford's pro-civil rights reputation was rapidly developing to the point where Crumlin waived his opportunity to speak at trial. Displeased with the district's delays and irritated by their attorney, Swinford scolded the school's administration: "This business of opposing the idea of equal citizenship of Negroes has gone out of style." In truth, so had most of the defense's tactics. For example, Judge Brooks and the appeals courts had disallowed potential public danger as a defense. Swinford acknowledged that High Street School, State Street's replacement, was in better than average condition, but also expressed, "I don't care if they have a Negro school in a palace and a white school in a tent, that's not the question. They are separating [students] because of their color and their race, and that is contrary to American Justice." Swinford threatened to bring in troops if necessary and during the fall of 1963 the city schools integrated quietly.³⁷

Swinford and the other federal judges in Kentucky followed the Supreme Court's precedent and invariably forced reluctant administrators to accept black students into the historically white schools. Judges H. Church Ford and Roy Shelbourne both ruled for black litigants seeking entrance into all-white colleges prior to *Brown*. Swinford and Brooks followed suit and Shelbourne revisited the issue. Appointed by presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower and educated in southern segregated schools and various universities,

North and South, these jurists, whether Democratic or Republican, generally issued similar decisions upholding desegregation.³⁸

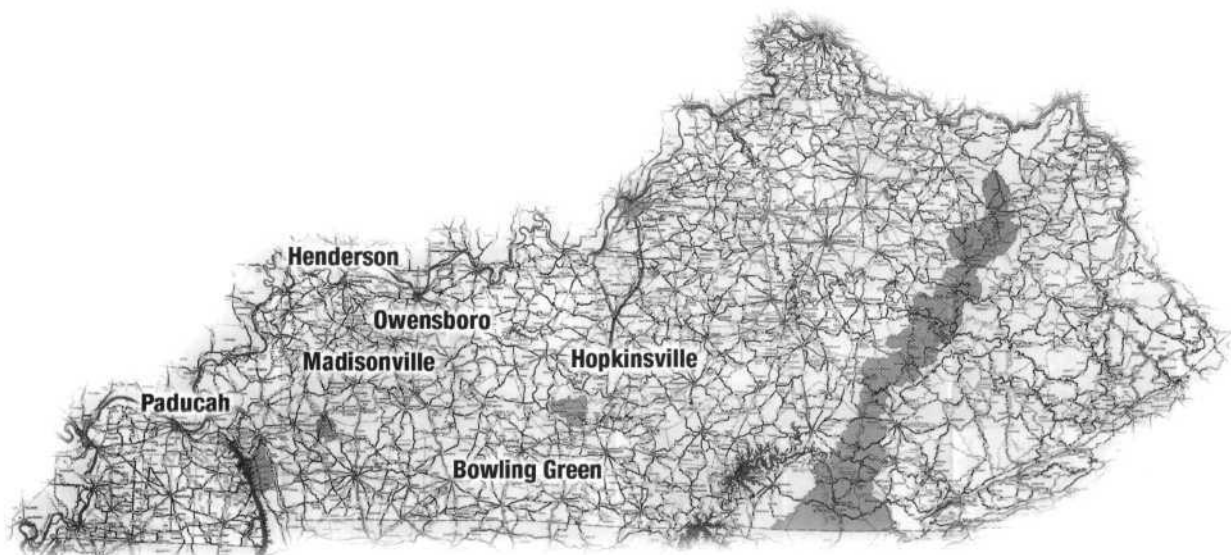
Injunctions, however, did not assure black students a safe entrance to white schools and did not remove threats that circumvented the spirit of *Brown*. After court hearings, Crumlin returned to Louisville as extremists instilled greater fear in black communities, took away activists' jobs, and fueled public opinion toward maintaining segregation. Effective integration did not take place in Hopkins, Union, and Webster counties for several years, although Hopkins and Union counties had token integration following the suit. In 1954-55, these districts had taught 527 and 290 black students in their legally segregated schools. Two years after Brooks' order only five black students enrolled in previously white Hopkins schools and only twenty-three enrolled at Sturgis High in Union County. In Webster, no African American student entered a white school until fall 1963.³⁹



White intimidation leveled at those who challenged Jim Crow, which deterred most African Americans, delayed effective integration. For nearly a century, white Kentuckians wishing to protect segregated society instilled fear in local black residents. George C. Wright has revealed a high frequency of lynchings, especially in western Kentucky. In the Jackson Purchase alone, whites lynched forty-nine blacks, twenty in Fulton County and thirteen in Graves County, which Wright characterizes as "two of the counties with the most lynchings in the entire state." In addition, "night riders" torched African American-owned barns and threatened white employers who hired black workers. Wright catalogues over three hundred lynchings that occurred statewide, forty-one percent of the black victims met their fate somewhere in Kentucky's twenty-seven western counties.⁴⁰ Although white-on-black violence had certainly diminished by the mid-1950s, fear remained and challenges to tradition increased threats. Rarely documented, such extremism, whether initiated by the KKK, the Citizen's Council, or other segregationists, intimidated the black community to prevent implementation of the courts' mandates.

These threats came in various, sometimes explosive, forms. After the Gordons expressed a formal desire to attend decent facilities by enrolling at Clay, locals ignited dynamite a short distance from their home in Wheatcroft. In

A 1964 bird's eye view of Madisonville, Kentucky, where segregationist Edgar Arnold published the Madisonville Messenger, which railed against Judge Brook's ruling in favor of integration. The Filson Historical Society



1960 Official Kentucky Department of Highways road map, distributed by the Department of Public Relations, Frankfort, Kentucky. The Filson Historical Society

nearby Union County, when school began after litigants had won their court battle and a handful of plaintiffs attended the high school, segregationists dynamited Camp One, an African American neighborhood, hoping to discourage integration. Further harassment came when a “black-faced Negro dummy . . . was strung up in front of a Main Street store” in Sturgis just prior to the black students’ enrollment. Threats hit home for residents of Boxtown, another black community in Sturgis, when segregationists threatened kidnapping and “burning the entire Boxtown down” if black students continued at Sturgis High. And when threatening crowds arrived near the integrating blacks’ homes late at night, “laying in the middle of the floor” was the only precaution the victims could take to avoid potential gunfire. As late as 1959 in Bowling Green, as he prepared for commencement, Western Kentucky College’s first black graduate feared snipers; indeed, his own parishioners advised him to accept his diploma without attending the ceremony.⁴¹

Cross burnings also sent a powerful message to African Americans pursuing equality. In early September 1956, after black students enrolled initially at Sturgis High and as litigation began, Klansmen “burned a cross out in the middle of a park” where black children played. In Webster County, segregationists burned two crosses at Sebree “on the heels of news that Negroes might attempt to enroll” at the community high school. Such intimidation served its purpose; the Union County students returned to the all-black Dunbar School in Morganfield until the following year and Sebree High School never integrated. Additional cross-burnings in Madisonville discouraged plaintiffs there from integrating. Local NAACP activists, too, felt the heat from burning crosses on more than one occasion during the struggle to integrate the Hopkins County system. Willie Mae Elliot saw an ignited cross in front of her home during the early stages of the lawsuit. The Van

Leers and twenty other plaintiffs pursued the legal battle. After Judge Brooks' ruling, young James Van Leer enrolled at Waddill Avenue Elementary. Days after classes began, his family discovered a torched cross outside their home after midnight. Indeed, segregationist pressures deterred every litigant in the suit except the Van Leers. Most plaintiffs dropped their names from the suit during the fall of 1956 and when school began in 1957 only young James Van Leer enrolled in otherwise white schools.⁴²

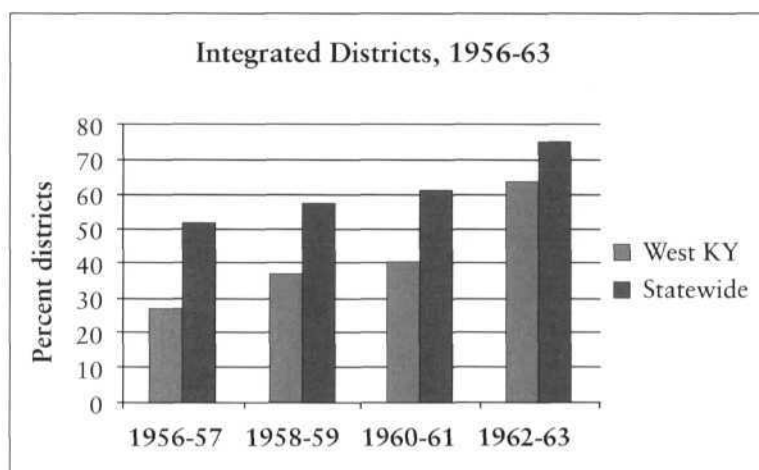
When explosions and cross burnings did not deter brave black residents, they suffered economic reprisals. Morgantown's White Citizens Council president Jerry Waller boasted that "many Negro parents have been told that if their children do register [at the white school] there will be no jobs afterward for them." When young James and Theresa Gordon enrolled at Clay, their father lost his job as a mechanic and could not find work within a forty-mile radius of his home. The city disconnected the family's water and shopkeepers refused to sell the family goods, forcing Mrs. Gordon to travel to Henderson for groceries. This harsh treatment persuaded the family to relocate to Ft. Wayne, Indiana. In Hopkins County, Edward Elliot, Elizabeth Van Leer's brother, lost his job for merely associating with the NAACP.⁴³

The local press often criticized activists seeking equality and misinformed readers that black residents desired to maintain their own separate schools. Newspapers declared that "even local Negroes feel that professionals in their race are pressing their demands too rapidly." The *Sturgis News* stated that "[c]ustom dies slowly" and discouraged black parents from "forcing" their children's entrance into white schools. Henderson's *Gleaner and Journal* printed the headline "Negroes request new school of their own, want their children taught by own teachers." Henderson's NAACP branch president, James Clancey, and others claimed this notion was simply false. Most black parents and pupils desired decent materials, more class offerings, and a generally better opportunity that could only be gained in the otherwise all-white schools.⁴⁴

To be sure, the strongest printed opposition to mixed schools came from the staunchly segregationist *Madisonville Messenger*. From the May 1954 order through Judge Brook's ruling against Hopkins County, the *Messenger's* editor published scathing editorials against the federal judiciary, the NAACP, state-level officials, national publications, and local activists. The day after the Supreme Court's ruling, the *Messenger* chastised the nine justices for removing "customs in vogue since the founding of the country," questioned the governor's statements about the state's compliance by asking "[w]hether [Governor] Wetherby speaks for the average Kentuckian," and bashed the "big town press." The newspaper's anti-integration rhetoric temporarily faded as the Hopkins board maintained segregated schools over the following two years.

When Jim Crow faced danger again, the paper recharged its segregationist stance and publicly blamed local, state, and national “agitation.” It labeled the NAACP “a Negro pressure group” and tainted both James Crumlin’s and Jack Greenberg’s reputations and praised the congressmen who signed the Southern Manifesto. In an extreme effort to persuade white taxpayers to maintain disproportionate school funds, the publication printed the headline, “Plaintiffs in school suit carry 3 per cent of their tax load.” Perhaps the most damning action was the *Messenger*’s insistence on printing the names and addresses of black plaintiffs on its front page. Social pressures followed; black residents lost jobs and watched crosses burn, causing plaintiffs to drop their names from suit. As plaintiffs departed, the paper emphasized the NAACP’s waning efforts and declared the suit was unjust. In an attempt to verify African Americans’ satisfaction with Jim Crow, the newspaper claimed that litigants, wishing to remain anonymous, admitted that they had “been shoved out in front” and that “they did not understand what it was all about.” After Judge Brook’s decision and the first day of school, the paper printed that “NAACP pressures and haranguing” could have caused large scale integration in Madisonville, but “[w]ith one NAACP exception [James Van Leer] wisdom apparently prevailed among Hopkins County’s Negroes.”⁴⁵

Outspoken opposition to the landmark Supreme Court ruling and the need for lawsuits demonstrate that communities west of the Bluegrass accepted the new order of things at a much slower pace than the remainder of the state. Of course, threats and oppression against black Ken-



tuckians occurred in the state’s urban centers and in other parts of the state, but the Pennyroyal, Purchase, and Coal Fields saw the greatest resistance. The several suits in federal court, white boycotts, gradualism, and public opinion reveal sentiments of white communities and reluctant school boards. For every academic year between and inclusive of 1956 and 1963, school districts in the west lagged behind the state as a whole in the percentage of integrated schools.

Although integrating schools in western Kentucky came at a greater cost to African Americans and at a more gradual pace than the state as a whole, the effort surpassed that of school districts located farther south. Additionally, three of the region’s largest cities experienced minimal racial strife during the late 1950s and early 1960s. State executives complied with the Court’s initial ruling, and district administrators

either complied immediately or gave in when district courts ruled. Certainly, the press—local, regional, and national—reported conflict far more widely than accommodation. Twelve of forty-two districts integrated in 1956, operating twenty-six buildings with biracial enrollments. Three cities—Owensboro and Paducah (both of which integrated in 1956), and Hopkinsville (integrated in 1958)—experienced minimal conflict. An Owensboro case resulted in individual boards of education having to teach black students as early as 1882 and Judge Brooks' position, revealed in his three-case ruling in 1957, was known to school officials there. The city was "on the progressive side of integration" during the late 1950s and early 1960s, public parks and private businesses integrated before law mandated, and "nobody outwardly rebelled against it."⁴⁶ Paducah—with a strong NAACP, an aggressive white civil rights attorney, and a pre-*Brown* desegregation victory—had little trouble sending black Lincoln students to Tilghman High. The urban character and position on the Ohio River allowed these two cities to experience a smooth transition. Hopkinsville accepted its first black students two years later, when peaceful race relations there allowed Louis McHenry to enroll his daughter, Linda, at Belmont Elementary. McHenry worked as an attorney in the city, had served as Kentucky NAACP president before Crumlin, and filed suits against non-compliant boards in the region as early as 1956. When his daughter entered Belmont, Hopkinsville's African Americans worked as magistrates, city councilmen, and policemen, and the city board refused to allow angry whites to transfer their children to all-white buildings. By 1962, the city's first African American won a seat on the board. *De facto* segregation and black parents' desire for their children to attend the all-black schools contributed to the gradual pace there; most black residents resided near Crispus Attucks High School and between one-third and one-half of the city's black population opposed closing the recently improved all-black schools.⁴⁷

The state government complied with the Court's ruling, implementing policies that sped the process and standing up to segregationists. Indeed, Frankfort sent a clear message in May 1954 and strengthened it throughout the era. Governor Chandler activated the Guard to protect citizens of Sturgis and Clay, the attorney general threatened boycotters with conspiracy charges, and the Department of Education promised to revoke white boycotters' teaching certificates in Clay. Many school administrators followed the Court's will even before these reprimands, but such actions were largely overlooked when non-compliant superintendents and principals dominated the press. In Russellville, schools integrated with little fanfare and "all the black teachers were accommodated" with teaching positions. During the Henderson boycott, Superintendent C.B. West assured, "[s]chool will be kept open. The buses will run even if they have only one child on them." In districts where boards unsuccessfully defended segregation in court, administrators insured

peace after defeat and few if any appeals reached the Sixth Circuit Court. In fact, Principal Dixie Lois Logan of Madisonville welcomed James Van Leer to Waddill Avenue Elementary and firmly warned protestors that peace would be the order of the day. A year later, Jesse Edwards, principal at Pride Elementary, faced more trouble than her Waddill colleague. Amid bomb threats, unruly mobs, and obnoxious phone calls, she followed the law and kept peace within the building. James Howard, a black student attending Sturgis High, maintains that Principal Earl Evans “was a good man.” Webster County High Principal Wilbur Collins diplomatically handed conflict at Webster County High’s first mixed graduation in 1964 when he asked Danny Witherspoon, a white student reared under segregationist beliefs, to march hand-in-hand with one of the two black female graduates. Witherspoon placed his beliefs aside, ignored peer pressures, and joined hands with one of the black graduates. As he departed the gymnasium after the ceremony, black parents in attendance showered him with gifts.⁴⁸

Progressive citizens persuaded their communities to accept integration on moral or legal grounds or simply to avoid the negative publicity that had been cast on reluctant communities like Little Rock and Sturgis. National reporting of the crisis in Little Rock during 1957 and 1958 painted this otherwise progressive southern city, which had integrated public facilities and its university, as a town dominated by extremists and law-breakers. Violence and intimidation were abundant, but most protestors arrived from out of town, even out of state. A number of western Kentucky residents wished to avoid similar news coverage when regional and national reporters camped at Sturgis, Clay, Madisonville, and Fulton to report on the conflicts. The mobilization of the Guard, confrontations, and boycotts made their way into *Life*, *Time*, and the *New York Times*. Even a London, England, newsman reported the “violence and hooliganism” in the small town of Clay. Community leaders and citizens realized quickly that such publicity could only shame their communities and begged for compliance.⁴⁹

Those who denounced segregationist protests had experienced integration elsewhere and pleaded with reluctant factions hoping to protect community reputation. A “red-faced University of Kentucky student” told the *Henderson Gleaner and Journal* that he was “ashamed to even mention [he] was from Henderson” after the news of the boycott reached the Lexington campus. He warned that “the sooner the citizens of Henderson turn a deaf ear on Mr. Waller [the Citizens Council’s key instigator] . . . the better off the town will be.” Another Henderson native with “Negro buddies” in the Air Force was “pretty teed off the way white people [were] treating them back home,” correcting segregationists’ self-proclaimed godly character telling the “so-called Christians” to consider their actions come judgment day. A Bowling Green resident criticized the corrupt, misguided school officials and was ashamed

that “the force of law is required to cause them to do what is universally considered right.” He reminded readers of Little Rock and Ole Miss, arguing against “[b]ungling at Bowling Green for the prejudicial few who will not yield.” The *Park City Daily News* remained quiet about the dispute until Swinford’s order; then, the editor begged readers to “extend no welcome to outside rabble-rousers bent on futile, last-ditch resistance.”⁵⁰

Sports, both in and out of school, fostered an understanding among the races in the dugout, on the court, and in the stands. Black and white students and youth commonly played pick-up basketball games in local gyms and on outdoor courts before any school districts integrated and Little League Baseball typically integrated before public schools. Competition at the high school level contributed to integration when state-level policy required students to attend classes in order to play, bringing boycotting white student-athletes back to class. Meanwhile, segregationists accepted talented black athletes for their skills. A white Webster County coach recalls segregationists shifting their attitude at an early interracial basketball game when a black teen displayed his talent on the court at a district tournament. When the African American player entered the game and scored consistently, fans set aside their prejudices, claiming “the better he shot, the whiter he got.”⁵¹

Federal court orders and state-level reprimands trumped resistance in western Kentucky and guaranteed at least token integration. Good faith efforts on the part of compliant administrators and accepting white communities as early as fall 1956, whether before or after legal action, made school integration a reality by fall 1962 when over half of the school districts in the area operated integrated schools. By 1964, 92.5% of school districts had some black students attending classes with white students, at the same time that only 19.6% of school districts in the former Confederacy had any mixed enrollments. Roughly sixty-two percent of Kentucky’s African Americans attended school with whites, while only two percent of black residents of the old Confederacy did so. In that same year, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act and the Supreme Court declared “[t]here has been entirely too much deliberation and not enough speed in enforcing the constitutional rights we held in *Brown*.” Title VI of the omnibus bill authorized the U.S. attorney general

Black schools

From 1872 until 1965 they met the needs of students

By MARALEA ARNETT

In 1871, the Henderson City Council appointed an all-white board of trustees for the black schools and they opened a two-room frame building for elementary black pupils in September, 1872. At first a white principal was employed but, by 1874, John K. Mason and his wife had been hired as principal and teacher and, as other teachers were needed, graduates of the school were hired.

No provisions were made for high school subjects until Hence Jones, the lawyer-teacher, read the Plessy-Ferguson decision: “Equality of treatment is accorded when the races are provided substantially equal facilities even though these facilities be

Kennedy building on the corner of Dixon and Alvasia streets.

This drive was led by the PTA, with Ora Glass as president and Saphronia White as secretary, and they presented the building to the school board with the request that they remodel it and equip it as a high school. It was opened in 1924 and remained in use until the board erected a new building at Alvasia and Clay in January, 1932. This was built at a cost of \$40,600, of which \$3,600 was donated by the Rosenwald Fund.

Henderson County was slower in developing adequate schools. By 1935, there were 15 one-room schools for black pupils and one three-room school at

Corydon, which included two years of high school.

The county board paid tuition for black students who wished to attend Douglass High. Again, the black community furnished a leader in the drive for improved schools.

Dorris Thomas, of Cairo, made a study of all black property owners in the county, and took a statement of the amount of taxes paid by them to the school board, to prove that they deserved better buildings and equipment. It is not surprising that his son, Herman Thomas, became a principal in Evansville.

The Douglass High School became the center of black culture and inspiration.

Every Friday afternoon the student body became the Dunbar Literary Society and presented programs on black history, black achievement and current events. Black artists and scholars were brought to the city for concerts and lectures on a regular basis. The principals who followed Jones were: Franklin P. Smith, T.J. Long, F.A. Taylor, B.Y. Norris, Kenneth Meade, W.H. Storey and Herbert Kirkwood.

Just as the Supreme Court decision of 1896 gave birth to the school, another decision on May 17, 1964, signed its death warrant. In May, 1965, Douglass High and the grade schools were closed and a new era began.

A headline from the Henderson Gleaner, July 4, 1976. The Filson Historical Society

to bring suits against school administrators and empowered the Department of Health Education and Welfare to cut off federal aid to southern schools that refused to desegregate. Indeed, New York congressman Adam Clayton Powell originally suggested this provision in July 1956, prompting the *Madisonville Messenger* to criticize his proposal as a “race-mixing amendment.” The measure finally became a reality when the law passed in the summer of 1964. Yet representatives from the western Kentucky region voted against the bill, as did all but seven congressmen from the former Confederacy.⁵² Despite the fact that Congress targeted border states and western Kentucky less than those in the deep South, the bill’s passage encouraged administrators to consider ramifications if full integration did not take place. By fall 1964, every district in western Kentucky and in the state had at least token integration; only Graves County held out, but integrated fourteen of the district’s buildings a year later, removing district-wide segregation from the region entirely. Although most districts in the Purchase, Coal Fields, and western Pennyroyal had integrated somewhat by 1963, the number of integrated buildings and the number of African American students attending formerly all-white schools increased drastically after the Powell Amendment. During the same years, Hopkinsville, with a generally passive administration, tripled its integrated buildings and increased the number of African Americans attending classes with whites more than ten-fold. School consolidation, closure of aging Jim Crow schools, and strong black educators willing to attend white schools helped cause this increase. Yet this new federal law also played a role in bringing African Americans into traditionally white classrooms.

Integration in Western Kentucky, 1963-65

Integrated	1963-64	1964-65	1965-66
Districts	37	38	39
Buildings	134	158	219
Black Students	2661	3796	9489

Source: Kentucky Department of Education, *Racial Integration in the Public Schools of Kentucky* (Frankfort: Department of Education, 1971), 150-217.

In 1966, the Kentucky General Assembly passed a statewide Civil Rights Act. Introduced on the first day of the 1966 session and held up briefly in the Rules Committee which added twelve amendments “designed to preempt resistance from Western Kentucky legislators,” it passed quickly in the House. In fact, the only member of the Senate who voted against the bill represented Graves County.⁵³ This lone anti-civil rights vote does not implicate all residents of that county as being bigoted obstructionists against the Supreme Court’s integration rulings, neither do the actions of Citizens Councils, school boycotts, necessary court orders, and white-on-black intimidation reflect the opinions of all white resident of western Kentucky. Harmonious integration

took place in a few districts immediately and although they might not have embraced them, residents accepted changes in their racial tradition over time in all locales. Unquestionably, however, western Kentucky resisted the *Brown* rulings, as evidenced by the decade-long struggle to effectively integrate its public schools. ❧

1. *Louisville Courier-Journal*, October 21, 1956.
2. For this essay, "western Kentucky" generally refers to the area west of Owensboro and Bowling Green, including these cities, their respective counties, and the counties between them. It includes Kentucky regions: Jackson Purchase, Western Coal Fields, and the western portion of the Pennyroyal. The author analyzes enrollment and census data from the twenty-seven westernmost counties. With the exception of a lawsuit against the Adair County Board of Education (this county is twenty miles east of the area defined) and one mention of Allen County (adjacent to the twenty-seven county area), all events occurred within this "western" region. When statistics are discussed, enrollments and populations from Adair and Allen counties are not included.
3. John E. Kleber, ed. *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 461, 827; Lowell Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 11, 20-22; George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynching, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 72-73.
4. Christopher Waldrep, *Night Riders: Defending Community in the Black Patch, 1890-1915* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 53, 81, 146-49; Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky*, 72-73.
5. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) 163 U.S. 537; Charles Thompson, "Harlan's Great Dissent," *Kentucky Humanities* 1 (1996), 8-12; *Kentucky House and Senate Journals* (1904), 180-181; Richard Allen Heckman and Betty Jean Hall, "Berea College and the Day Law," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* [hereinafter cited as *Register*] 66 (January 1968), 35-52.
6. Michael Lowery, interview by author, tape recording, Madisonville, August 15, 2002, Kentucky Oral History Commission, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort [hereinafter cited as KOHC]; Harold Oldham, interviewed by author, tape recording, Bowling Green; Alystine Turley-Adams, *Rosenwald Schools in Kentucky 1917-1932* (Frankfort: Kentucky Heritage Council and African American Heritage Commission, 1997), 25-29; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, May 19, 1996.
7. George C. Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky, Vol. 2: In Pursuit of Equality, 1890-1980* (Frankfort: The Kentucky Historical Society, 1992), 177-82; Glen Murrell, "The Desegregation of Paducah Junior College," *Register* 67 (January 1969), 63-79; *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) 339 U.S. 629; *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education* (1950) 339 U.S. 637; Kermit Hall, *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 540, 851.
8. *Kentucky House and Senate Journals*, 1950.
9. Kentucky Department of Education, *Racial Integration in the Public Schools of Kentucky* (Frankfort: Department of Education, 1971), 316-19 [hereinafter cited as Kentucky DOE]. The Department of Education issued annual reports tallying enrollments by race from 1956 to 1968. This 1971 publication combines these reports into one volume. The twenty-seven county area includes those counties along and west of the William Natcher Freeway, which connects Owensboro and Bowling Green. Simpson County is also included. Black students resided in every school district during the era, except for Marshall County and Dawson Springs after 1960. School districts include all public schools, county and independent. The area contained forty-three school districts in 1955. Three closed or consolidated during the era with the final academic year in operation listed: Hickman, in Fulton County (1955-56); Marion, in Crittenden County (1956-57); and Trenton, in Todd County (1956-57). Few independent school districts remain in the area today.
10. Bureau of the Census, 1950 vol. 17, table 42, 87-93. Trigg County was the only district in the area with a sizable black high school population (131 black children ages 14-17 lived in the district in 1950) that did not operate a black high school.
11. Herbert Oldham interview, August 9, 2002, KOHC; Gladman Humbles, interviewed by author, tape recording, Paducah, August 9, 2002, KOHC; *Park City Daily News*, May 18, 1954.
12. Kentucky DOE, 316-19.
13. Henderson Independent Board of Education, Minutes, May 10, 1954; Herbert Oldham interview, August 9, 2002, KOHC; Elizabeth and James Van Leer, interviewed by author, tape recording, Madisonville, August 11, 2002, KOHC; Gladman Humbles interview, August 9, 2002, KOHC.
14. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), 347 U.S. 483; *Brown II* (1955), 349 U.S. 294; *Madisonville Messenger*, May 17, 18, 1954; *Owensboro Messenger*, June 1, 1955.
15. Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 41; *Madisonville Messenger*, May 18, 1954, July 14, 1956; *Park City Daily News*, May 18, 1956.
16. *Sturgis News*, May 27, 1954; *Madisonville Messenger*, May 18, 1954; *Henderson Gleaner and Journal*, September 13, 14, 1956 [hereinafter cited as *Henderson G-J*]. The quote is from Associate Justice Robert Jackson.
17. Kentucky DOE, 97-112, 316-19; The ten percent figure is an estimate assuming black student population remained constant from 1954 to 1960.
18. *Sturgis News*, September 6, 1956; James Howard, interviewed by Betsy Brinson, transcript, 2001, KOHC.
19. *Sturgis News*, September 6, 1956; ; Film, *Living the Story: A Documentary of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 2001).
20. *Madisonville Messenger*, September 13, 1956; *Union County Advocate*, September 13, 1956; *Louisville Defender*, September 27, 1956.

21. Henderson G-J, September 4, 26, 1956.
22. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky*, 26, and Wright, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 85-86; John Johnson, interviewed in *Living the Story*; James Howard interview, 2001, KOHC.
23. Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 44; *Madisonville Messenger*, September 18, 1956; *Union County Advocate*, September 13, 1956; *Sturgis News*, September 13, 20, October 11, 1956; Henderson G-J, September 27, 1956; Francis Wilhoit, *The Politics of Massive Resistance* (New York: George Braziller, 1973), 26-39.
24. James Clancey to Gloster Current, December 17, 1955, NAACP Papers, part 3, series C, microfilm reel 1, Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County [hereinafter PLCH]; *Sturgis News*, September 20, 1956; *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968), 391 U.S. 430.
25. Roy Wilkins to Donald Jones, July 21, 1955, and "Press Release," July 16, 1955, both found in NAACP Papers, part 3, series C, microfilm reel 1, PLCH.
26. Jack Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 227; Elizabeth Van Leer interview, August 11, 2002, KOHC; Clara Willis Flowers, interviewed by author, tape recording, Columbia, August 8, 2002, KOHC.
27. Kentucky DOE, 50-63, 316-19.
28. Jones to Current, July 30, 1955, NAACP Papers, part 3, series C, microfilm reel 1, PLCH.
29. Sylvia White and Bonita Todd Lasley, interviewed by author, tape recording, Columbia, August 8, 2002, KOHC.
30. Fred Willis, interviewed by author, tape recording, Louisville, August 20, 2002, KOHC; Clara Willis Flowers interview, August 8, 2002, KOHC; *Fred Willis v. Harbert Walker*, 270 F. Supp. 331 (1955); Wright, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 201-202.
31. Clara Willis Flowers interview, August 8, 2002, KOHC.
32. *Louisville Defender*, September 13, 1956; Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts*, 227.
33. Kentucky Attorney General, *Opinions of the Attorney General* (Cleveland, Oh.: Banks-Baldwin Law Publishing Company, 1956), 178-81; *Sturgis News*, September 20, 1956.
34. Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts*, 227; *Madisonville Messenger*, February 8, 1956; *Sturgis News*, February 14, 1957.
35. *Wilburn v. Holland*, 155 F. Supp. 419 (1957); Janice Newburn, interviewed by author, tape recording, Fulton, August 14, 2002, KOHC.
36. *Louisville Courier-Journal*, April 11, 1963; *Park City Daily News*, January 31, 1963; *Willie Larry Lawrence v. Bowling Green Board of Education* (1963), Case 919, accession number 73A43, National Archives and Records Administration, Atlanta, Ga. [hereinafter cited as NARA].
37. *Park City Daily News*, August 29, 1963.
38. For a thorough look at the federal judiciary's role in school desegregation in the late 1950s, see J.W. Peltason, *Fifty-Eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), passim; "The Political Graveyard," <<http://politicalgraveyard.com>>; "Judges of the United States Courts," <<http://air.fjc.gov>>.
39. Kentucky DOE, 84, 161.
40. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky*, 307-23. An appendix in Wright's book lists 353 lynching victims, 264 of whom were African Americans. Of those, 108 lynchings of African American occurred in the twenty-seven county area.
41. *Madisonville Messenger*, September 13, 1956, September 4, 1957; *Louisville Defender*, September 13, 1956; James Howard interview, 2001, KOHC; John E. Johns, interview by William Lynwood Montell, tape recording, Bowling Green, July 8, 1977, KOHC.
42. James Howard interview, 2001, KOHC; *Madisonville Messenger*, September 11, 1956; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, September 11, 1957.
43. *Sturgis News*, September 5, 1957; James Clancey to Gloster Current, December 17, 1955, NAACP Papers, part 3, series C, microfilm reel 1, PLCH; *New York American Journal*, September 19, 1956, found in NAACP Papers, part 3, series D, microfilm reel 5, PLCH; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, September 3, 1957; and Elizabeth Van Leer interview, August 11, 2002, KOHC.
44. *Paducah Sun*, May 18, 1954; *Sturgis News*, May 20, 1955, May 27, 1954; *Madisonville Messenger*, July 13, 1956; James Clancey to Gloster Current, December 17, 1955, NAACP Papers, part 3, series C, microfilm reel 1, PLCH.
45. *Madisonville Messenger*, May 18, 1954, July 13, 14, 19, 21, 27, September 3, 1956; John Horace Cox, interviewed by author, tape recording, Madisonville, August 11, 2002, KOHC.
46. Kentucky DOE, 50-63, 50-169. Districts with integrated enrollments in 1956 include: Calloway, Daviess, Henderson, Logan, McClean; and Independent Districts: Marion, Murray, Owensboro, Mayfield, Henderson, Russellville, and Paducah; Grant Talbott, interviewed by Dan Hildenbrandt, tape recording, Owensboro, May 12, 1999, University of Kentucky Special Collections.
47. Phillip C. Brooks, interviewed by William Lynwood Montell, tape recording, Hopkinsville, November 30, 1977, KOHC; *Louisville Defender*, October 2, 1958.
48. Jim Young, interviewed by author, tape recording, Russellville, August 10, 2002, KOHC; *Louisville Defender*, September 27, 1956; Dixie Lois Logan, interviewed by author, tape recording, Madisonville, August 11, 2002, KOHC; Jesse Edwards, interviewed by author, tape recording, Madisonville, August 15, 2002, KOHC; James Howard interview, 2001, KOHC; Brenton "Danny" Witherspoon, interviewed by author, tape recording, Mattoon, August 17, 2002, KOHC.
49. Virgil Blossom, *It Has Happened Here* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), ii; *Clay Tribune*, September 14, 1956.
50. Henderson G-J, October 2, September 14, 1956; *Park City Daily News*, January 13, April 10, 1963.
51. Wayne Wilson, telephone interview with author, July 15, 2002.
52. Kentucky DOE 131-47, 171-92; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, August 23, 1964; *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* 20 (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1965), 380, 606-607; *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* (1964), 377 U.S. 218; Hugh Davis Graham, *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy 1960-1972* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 76, 156; James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and its Troubled Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 142; *Madisonville Messenger*, July 10, 1956.
53. Kleber, ed., *Kentucky Encyclopedia*, 191.