Popular Memory, Silence, and Trust: A Mother and Son’s Relationship to School in the Shadow of the Prince Edward County Closures

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POPULAR MEMORY, SILENCE, AND TRUST: A MOTHER AND SON’S
RELATIONSHIP TO SCHOOL IN THE SHADOW OF THE PRINCE EDWARD
COUNTY CLOSURES

A Thesis Presented

by

RORY S. DUNN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2022

History Program
ABSTRACT

POPULAR MEMORY, SILENCE, AND TRUST: A MOTHER AND SON’S RELATIONSHIP TO SCHOOL IN THE SHADOW OF THE PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY CLOSURES

August 2022

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This thesis is an oral history related to Prince Edward County’s infamous school closures from 1959-1964. It tracks the popular memory of the closures through the narrative of two natives of Farmville, Virginia: a mother and son. This thesis investigates the role of physical monuments in the development of historical consciousness related to the school closures, as well as the intergenerational effects of the closures on the son. This thesis marks that there were radial effects from the school closures that manifested within the subsequent...
generation, and that for this particular case study, awareness of the closures and their effects came to the son despite societal silence about the community’s trauma. There is a pressing need for a study of a larger scope to investigate the intergenerational effects of the school closures and how it manifests in subsequent generations.
I would like to thank Rita and Frank Moseley II for sharing their time and stories with me: their willingness to share their painful memories with a stranger is indicative of their strength.

This project would have been impossible without the sage guidance of Professor Juravich, who guided and instructed me through numerous drafts and brainstorming sessions. I am indebted to him, and to the members of my defense committee: Professors Tim Hasci and Kibibi Mack-Shelton. Their advice was crucial for finishing this project.

I would also like to thank Nate and Judy Layne for their kindness and willingness to introduce me to Rita Moseley. Nate’s friendship and advice were especially precious to me these last few years.

I am eternally grateful to my parents, Gary, and Stacy Dunn, for their unwavering support, love, and encouragement. I could not have done this program without you.

Lastly, I would like to express immense gratitude to my wife, Mary. Her willingness to read through my drafts, and to share her wisdom was invaluable. She was and remains a beacon of strength.
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INTRODUCTION

You know it’s hard to think that you would ever witness something like that. After all of these years of living in Prince Edward, I thought that they would never do something like that, make so many changes. It wasn’t just hard on the children‘ it was hard on the parents too. So, we just have so much to be thankful for that things did work out.” – Gladys Juliet Rainey Silence Broken After 50 Years

The late 1940s and early 1950s in the United States featured an impressive litany of court cases that challenged de-jure segregation. Of the many court cases that emerged as challenges to segregation, five were chosen as a bundle to be sent forth to the Supreme Court. The first of these five, Briggs v. Elliot, from Clarendon County, South Carolina, was the test case of the NAACP to determine the willingness of Black Americans to unify publicly as plaintiffs. By 1951, Briggs v. Elliot was joined by several other cases: Boiling v. Sharpe from Washington, D.C.; Brown v. Board from Topeka, Kansas; Davis v. Prince Edward County from Prince Edward County, Virginia; and Belton (Bulah) v. Gebhart from Delaware. Unfortunately, among the counties that participated in the Brown v. Board bundle, Prince Edward County is notably distinct.

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Prince Edward County, Virginia, is a location of considerable infamy in the history of desegregation. Following the victory of *Brown v. Board*, the county pioneered a drastic measure to prevent the integration of schools: total closure of all public schools in the county. The decision left the local community fractured, and the landscape of the county is dotted with reminders of the bitter division; Fuqua High School, previously Prince Edward Academy, remains as a monument to continued *de facto* segregation long after *Brown v. Board* had been settled.

Before the painful memories of “Massive Resistance” to integration, Prince Edward County was at the forefront of the fight for desegregation: students and teachers from the Black vocational school, the Moton School, fiercely advocated for the right to attend integrated schools. Student activists, like the now nationally recognized Barbara Johns, filed the *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, with help from the local chapter of the NAACP. The filing would become a companion case to *Brown v. Board* and catapulted the county into the national spotlight while simultaneously highlighting the obvious discrepancies between regional county schools and the Moton School. For the nearly 2,000 Black students that attended segregated schooling in the district, the amenities that housed them were valued at roughly $330,000. Conversely, the district’s White schools, which served about 1,400 students were valued at over $1.2 million.\(^4\) While the students

succeeded at winning their case at the Supreme Court, the ramifications of this win held serious consequences for those living in the county.

Under direction from individuals like Senator Harry Byrd, the Segregationist senator of Virginia, districts across the South participated in “Massive Resistance” to integration. In Prince Edward County, “Massive Resistance” was taken to new extremes. Following the Supreme Court’s decision, Senator Byrd dubbed desegregation as “the most serious crisis that has occurred since the War between the States.”5 Byrd organized local support against desegregation, and by July of 1956, the Gray Plan emerged from moderate wing of segregation supporters.6 The Gray Plan sought to financially penalize integration by shifting the cost burden of school management to integrated schools.7 Frustrated that the Gray Plan allowed integration on a legal technicality, the Governor, Thomas Stanley, opposed the plan. Stanley suggested a far more reactionary alternative; his “Stanley Plan” would deny all state funds to integrated schools, include tuition grants for private schools, and most importantly would shut down all public schools that challenged the action. Those interested in challenging the law would be required to bring lawsuits to the Attorney General of Virginia.8 The legislation provided protection for those in Prince Edward County to shut down public schools. In their stead, students would receive private school tuition vouchers bolstered with public funds that were used to effectively preserve K-12 education for White students.

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7 Ibid.
Simultaneously, Black families were dismayed to find that their taxes were allocated to voucher programs that facilitated segregation, and that their own children were locked out of schools.

The effects of the school closures were devastating. Literacy rates plummeted in Prince Edward County, parents lost childcare, teachers and administration lost jobs, and an entire generation of Black students lost both the building blocks of education and institutional trust in public schools. At a time when student academic loss is fresh from the closures of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is almost unfathomable to consider the loss of the 5 years of education some students endured. While schools were forced to integrate on September 8th, 1964, considerable damage had already been done to the community.

It is not surprising that the county has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. Studies on the effects of the closures began immediately after schools reopened, and the county has sustained continued academic interest to the present day. Most recently, the cultural and political histories of the county by Jill Titus and Christopher Bonastia have carefully charted the histories of the school closures by focusing on the local political actors within the county. Their analyses delved into the effects the closures had on the population living within Prince Edward County. Randolph Williams Jr. broadened the literature by incorporating narratives of excellence by victims of the closures, rejecting a longstanding historical framework of victimization. More broadly, the existing work on Prince Edward County was informed by the larger literature on “Massive Resistance”. Stemming over 50
years, the literature on “Massive Resistance” has gone through several iterations that have created harmful trends which have only recently begun to unravel. Henry Bullock helped establish a pervasive view that segregation literature was dichotomous in nature: Pre-
Brown v. Board and Post-
Brown v. Board. Narratives of victimization shaped earlier literature on “Massive Resistance”, inspired partially by the educational studies of the 1960s. Emphasis on Black perspectives began to emerge through cultural histories in the 1980s and 1990s, although the focus of these studies tended to be only on those immediately affected by “Massive Resistance”.

While these studies and accounts capture a wide range of experiences following school closures, they leave behind a certain group: the children and grandchildren of these individuals. The dearth of literature that follows the experiences of the subsequent “lost” generations in Prince Edward County is one that must be filled. Communities of support are critical to academic outcomes, and existing literature has already noted the existence of intergenerational effects of systemic racism on individuals. It is possible that school closures in Prince Edward County have had a radial effect, one that exacerbated school difficulties for descendants and simultaneously provided opportunity for exceptional stories of resistance. Interviewing these individuals reveals these narratives and invites further investigation into the longstanding effects of continued systemic racism. Beyond this, discovery of radial effects from longstanding systemic racism would invalidate claims that effects of segregation and “Massive Resistance” disappeared with the legal victories of Brown v. Board, Griffin v. Prince Edward County School Board, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
This thesis seeks to address four gaps that are present within the literature on Massive Resistance in Prince Edward County. First it seeks to address a common gap within the practices of both Bonastia and Titus: how popular memory of the closures manifests for the individuals who lived through the closures, and for their children. Second, it seeks to address how those who experienced such trauma came to view themselves within the larger historical narrative surrounding school closures: their historical consciousness of the event. Third, it seeks to address the shortage of literature on intergenerational effects from the school closures, with special attention to the subsequent generations’ struggle with institutional trust. Fourth, it attempts to build upon the narratives of excellence that Williams Jr. presents as it is transferred through familial hardship. These gaps emerged as a natural consequence of the larger literature on “Massive Resistance” which dichotomized the historical narrative on individuals living through the school closures.

Gladys Juliet Rainey, a victim of the closures quoted at the beginning of the introduction, noted that “After all of these years of living in Prince Edward, I thought that they would never do something like that, make so many changes”.9 Her comment reveals a common thread traced throughout this thesis: there was a community-wide breakdown in trust that occurred due to the closures. Building on two interviews and several other sources outlined below, the thesis reveals an intergenerational breakdown in trust with public schools. The mechanism by which this distrust is perpetuated is through the popular memory preserved within the county. Interestingly, this institutional distrust is preserved even though

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9 Moseley, Silence Broken, 50.
narratives of the closures were suppressed by both victims of the closures and perpetrators; this thesis finds that informal monuments to the closures affected subsequent generations, even without proper historical context. The result of these crystallized monuments to segregation were long-lasting distrust in public schools.
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO STUDY: MASSIVE RESISTANCE AND POPULAR MEMORY SIGNIFICANCE

Histories of School Closures in Prince Edward County

The most recent literature on Prince Edward County’s “Massive Resistance” are cultural histories that began to emerge in the early 2010s; these histories were valuable in that they popularized the Civil Rights struggles of Prince Edward County, but they largely neglected informal methods that preserve communal perspectives on historical events, such as popular memory. Jill Ogline Titus published *Brown's Battleground Students, Segregationists, and the Struggle for Justice in Prince Edward County, Virginia*, bringing one of the first cultural histories to the county: her microanalysis and comprehensive investigation of Prince Edward’s student activists highlighted individuals who were previously omitted from larger political histories of Virginia and the county. Titus primarily focused on important political activists on both sides of the desegregation issue. She discusses significant state obstructionists to desegregation like Harry Byrd, Lindsay Almond, and Thomas Stanley, but also carefully outlined the actions of local Prince Edward figures such as Robert Crawford: the president of the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties who held the ear of the segregationist state politicians.\(^\text{10}\) Titus simultaneously

captured the accounts of important local integration activists like Rev. Francis Griffin, and Edwilda Allen: pivotal figures in the 1951 Moton School strike that led the fight against Massive Resistance in Prince Edward County. Titus dutifully covers the student activist narrative within Prince Edward County and charted the long Civil Rights struggle from the first Moton School walkout in 1951 to the 1990s.

While Titus’s book comprehensively covers the political vein of history in Prince Edward County, she does not investigate the role of popular memory, nor does she track the role of the events within families affected by the closures. She stops just short of claiming intergenerational effects from school closures: in her last chapter she notes that:

> Across the county, parents found themselves unable to help their children with their homework or teach them to love school… minimum wage workers scaped by without a high school diploma and worried that their children would follow in their footsteps.\(^\text{11}\)

The trauma of the closures and the fight for opening the schools were no small matters; investigating how those closed out came to recognize the significance of the closures, and how their families process such regional history generationally are important gaps that need to be addressed.

Christopher Bonastia’s *Southern Stalemate: Five Years without Public Education in Prince Edward County* continued microanalysis of the county. Bonastia tracks the history of Massive Resistance in a similar manner to Titus; he incorporates the narratives of important activists in the fight against school closures but also dives into an analysis of the local

\(^{11}\) Titus, *Brown’s Battleground*, 204.
politicians and school board members that constructed resistance to integration. Where Bonastia’s book expands on Titus is through its tracking of the political history of Prince Edward County following reintegration. Bonastia analyzes school performance data and talks to important educational figures within Prince Edward County to track the long-term ramifications of the closures. Bonastia builds his analysis carefully by using court filings, newspaper clippings, and second-hand perspectives, but does not interview the children going to school to discuss their perspectives on the history of the county. That he did not do so omits a crucial aspect of the story of the school closures: how did children come to learn and process the historical trauma of the closures from their parents, and how might this manifest itself inside school?

Bonastia ends his book by discussing the school system of Prince Edward County today, where he begins to grapple with the possibility of such intergenerational effects from the closures. Through an interview with the then-superintendent of the district, Patricia Watkins, Bonastia highlights some of the difficulties that these minority students faced. Bonastia notes that “Watkins and the rest of the school administration focused intently on the ‘drastic’ achievement gap” and that “many minority parents and grandparents had not had ‘a very positive experience with schools’.”12 While suggestive of the familial influence on student trust in public institutions, Bonastia stops short of suggesting an intergenerational effect to school closures. He asserts through his interview with Watkins that the gap came

from a demographic mismatch between teachers and students. Bonastia’s focus on clippings, interviews with political and school leaders, and court documents underrepresents a crucial demographic in Prince Edward County’s story: the children of those who lived through the closures. Additionally, Bonastia avoids an analysis of the popular memory of Prince Edward County, instead relying on more concrete sources; investigations into how both the victims of school closures and their children processed the trauma of the events would be especially revealing of the “cultural-mismatch” Watkins ascribes to the achievement gap.

More recently, a local of Prince Edward County, Randolph Williams Jr., published a dissertation that challenges an undercurrent of the literature on school closures: narratives of victimization. His dissertation *How Direct Descendants of a School Lockout Achieved Academic Success: Resilience in the Educational Attainments of Prince Edward County’s Children* sought to highlight narratives of resilience, unlike previous scholars who emphasized the negative ramifications of closures. Williams Jr. interviews the descendants of those who experienced school closures and who have achieved a high degree of academic excellence; a stark departure from previous determinism which complicates the discussion surrounding how segregation affected subsequent generations. While Williams Jr.’s dissertation was novel and groundbreaking for its focus on resilience, it was relatively limited

\[13\] Ibid.
in its scope and did not investigate how historical consciousness and popular memory affected institutional trust.

It is impossible to discuss the recent literature of Prince Edward County without also mentioning the local history projects produced by citizens and the local Moton Museum. Working in concert with Longwood University, the Moton Museum, housed in the Black vocational school that was the center of the Civil Rights fight in Prince Edward County, has produced a periodical that captures the stories and image of locals affected by the school closures.¹⁴ Four issues of this periodical have been published and represent the local community’s collective effort to preserve and capture the experiences of those affected by the closures. The Moton Museum also hosts an oral interview series that has captured the varied perspectives on the closures, from those who experienced it, to discussions with local historians.¹⁵

There have also been attempts by local citizens to capture history by those who lived through the closures themselves. Rita Moseley, a victim of the closures herself, published *Silence Broken After 50 Years*, which details the experiences of nearly 150 individuals who lived through the school closures. Moseley’s book provides an invaluable insider perspective on the closings and provides an exceptional breadth of local experiences. The interviews offer succinct accounts of the closures and the effects they had on a great number of locals.

¹⁵ “Moton Interview Series.” Moton Museum, YouTube Collection. June 16th, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OjKfzqX9xg&list=PLZttbdJBbcYxQAvg83PGQh7G9uhHf0RUK&t=9s
The breadth of the project is impressive, but the interviews sacrifice an in-depth analysis of how popular memory of the events was constructed and how beliefs about the closures were potentially transferred between family members.

**Establishing Dominant Narratives in Massive Resistance**

It is important to note that the writing on Prince Edward County was created within the larger context of desegregation history; the broader literature on “Massive Resistance” is inexorably linked to the story of Prince Edward County. The writing about the period of “Massive Resistance”, the generalized resistance to integration that accompanied the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, is expansive and diverse; historians, anthropologists, and educators have all studied the ramifications of the school closures through intersecting lenses. The numerous stakeholders in education (i.e. parents, policymakers, educators, and historians) necessitate a sufficiently broad analysis of these lenses. To properly contextualize the events that transpired in and around Prince Edward County, Virginia, it is vital to understand the educational practices and policymaking, historical schools of thought, and anthropological practices of those studying desegregation. The intersection of these three scholarly practices undermined narratives of resilience while amplifying the negative ramifications of school closures and their prevalence in academia. Analysis of the popular memory of Massive Resistance is even rarer.

The historiography regarding the education of Black Americans in the United States has gone through dramatic changes just throughout the last 60 years. Henry Allen Bullock’s *A History of Negro Education in the South from 1619 to the Present* was among the first
comprehensive works regarding the experiences of Black Americans’ education in the United States. Bullock’s early career in academia originated at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia and he likely experienced firsthand the politics of Massive Resistance as he attended the HBCU.\textsuperscript{16} Bullock’s book covered the cornucopia of struggles Black Americans faced in attaining education, from the moment the first enslaved Africans set foot upon American land, through the tumultuous Reconstruction period, to the landmark case of \textit{Brown v. Board of Education}. Bullock sought to show that the restrictive policies levied against Black Americans throughout America’s history produced the conditions necessary to create leadership capable of dismantling segregation. What Bullock describes as a string of “historical accidents” paved the way for “the Negro college… to develop the leadership for the emancipation for the Negro American as a person.”\textsuperscript{17}

Bullock’s book rejected a cultural lens of analysis, instead focusing primarily on the economic conditions that slavery and the South forced upon Black Americans. Bullock shirks away from focusing just on important individuals and instead charts larger trends over time over several strata in society. Bullock argues that it was the economic conditions of Southern slavery and Reconstruction that created the individuals who would subsequently dismantle segregation: powerful, well-educated Black activists.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} Henry Bullock, \textit{A History of Negro Education in the South: From 1619 to the Present. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). VII.}
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} A much more comprehensive and grounded work came out roughly twenty years after Bullock’s piece: James D. Anderson published \textit{The Education of Blacks in the South 1860-1935}, which charts in detail the evolution of education for Black Americans. It remains a fundamental text about Black education.
Bullock’s book is vital to the literature of Massive Resistance because he inadvertently created a theme that remains pervasive in desegregation literature to the present; he charts that there were two distinct eras in policy history regarding Black Americans’ education: pre-*Brown v. Board* and post-*Brown v. Board*. The policies of the Reconstruction period negatively affected Black students, while *Brown v. Board* created a new era of African American history unyoked from the deleterious effects of Jim Crow South. In the epilogue, Bullock notes the following regarding the then recently passed Civil Rights Act of 1964: “it appears that this legislation will hold, leaving the Negro American’s desegregated life to go unchallenged. Millions of Americans now in their teens are expected to grow up accepting desegregation as an established institutional practice”.

While Bullock was establishing his dichotomous view of Black-American education, researchers of education were embracing empiricism over socio-cultural analyses. A growing obsession with data, testing, and accountability were exacerbated by the growing tensions of the Cold War. Fears that American students would fall far behind their Soviet counterparts led to widespread curriculum changes, data driven methods of testing and an increasingly large emphasis on vocational tracking for students who tested low on a variety of measures. One specific measure that was used to widespread and detrimental effect in studies of education was the IQ test. Prince Edward County did not escape these kinds of studies. Robert Green and Robert Morgan published *The Effects of Resumed Schooling on Measured* 

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Intelligence of Prince Edward County’s Black Children just two years following Bullock’s book.

Originally funded through Michigan State University, Robert Green and his colleagues sought to investigate the immediate damage to students caused by school closures. Green was already a staunch supporter of Civil Rights legislation. He served as the education director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and he gained national attention in Civil Rights litigation regarding housing equality.\textsuperscript{21} Green’s study, like his other work in Civil Rights, was well-intentioned, but this study had unexpected consequences. To prove the institutional damage, Green and Morgan highlighted the IQ gaps between Black students who experienced school closures, and the White students who attended private schools. While revealing the achievement gaps that emerged in “Massive Resistance”, Green and Morgan perpetuated a dangerously monotone picture of Prince Edward County’s Black students; according to their study, not only did Black students fall dangerously behind their White peers, but this trend was omnipresent across all age groups.\textsuperscript{22} The study ignored those who left the county seeking educational opportunities elsewhere. Additionally troubling was the use of IQ as the indicator for learning loss: a measure that suggested that lack of schooling had made the population inherently less intelligent.


From a national policy perspective, the reliance on instruments like IQ as a predictive measure relegated students to vocational tracks which were notably underdeveloped. Andrew Hartman tracks these significant changes in the field of education in his book *Education and the Cold War: the Battle for the American School*.\(^{23}\) While the origins of widespread standardized testing can be traced to the fear of Soviet international dominance and the bitter partisan fight over public education, their perpetuation into current educational practices has exacerbated racial disparities.

Scholars of education Rachelle Brunn-Bevel and W. Carson Byrd sharpened Hartman’s national analysis of educational practices like standardized testing through a more localized study of Virginia’s current testing procedures. Linking “White Flight” (the exodus of White students to private schools during Massive Resistance), school closures, and current educational practices, Brunn-Bevel and Byrd demonstrate longstanding ramifications of these intersecting conditions on the Black population of Virginia. Just a few of these ramifications were consistently lower tracking in courses, a heightened rate of school dropouts, and the creation of school policies that resulted in larger numbers of Black students being targeted for disciplinary consequences.\(^{24}\) Brunn-Bevel and Byrd’s piece also worked to dismantle the pervasive notion partially set up by Bullock that there are two entirely separate eras of school policy regarding the Civil Rights movement: segregation and post-segregation.

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\(^{23}\) Hartman, *Education and the Cold War: The Battle for the American School*.

Even as Brunn-Bevel analyzed Virginia as a whole, they built into their theoretical framework an analysis of Prince Edward County to challenge the pre/post-Brown v. Board literature. They note that “Prince Edward County Whites’ beliefs that taxes should aid citizens who paid the most, that segregation could be rationalized without discussing race…foreshadowed color-blind conservative arguments which became popular nationwide in the 1960s and 1970s.”

Brunn-Bevel set out to note that not only were significant effects on the immediate population during the emergence of these school policies but that there remains a radial effect on subsequent generations across the state that is evident in standardized testing data. Tapping into those radial effects and making them overt is a critical gap in the literature surrounding the closures of Prince Edward County.

Legal scholar Martha Minow worked to bring in the voices of various marginalized groups on national school policy decisions in her book *In Brown’s Wake*. While not a historian, Minow’s long tenure as the dean of Harvard’s Law school and her frequent intersections with the field of education helped her grant a valuable multi-disciplinary perspective to the discussion surrounding Massive Resistance. With remarkable clarity she dissolves the paradigm of an idyllic post-*Brown v. Board* school environment.

Integration takes more than ending segregation and more than putting students of different identities in the same school. It requires effective efforts to dismantle prejudices, to build common experiences around shared goals, and to assess success in terms of social ties across groups—not merely number of students attending the same school or even convergence in individual academic test scores.

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25 Ibid., 428.
In concert with Brunn-Bevel, Minow’s analysis helped establish an academic challenge to the dichotomous history of segregation established by the early literature of Massive Resistance: even with the reopening of schools in 1964, true integration would remain elusive due to a fundamental schism in goals between Conservative Whites and the Black population of the county. Minow additionally provided a reversal away from a victimization narrative in an important shift that empowered marginalized groups and enabled the introduction of narratives of great resilience. While Minow’s book focused on the reverberations of Brown v. Board nationally in lieu of a more localized lens, her shirking of the victimization narrative, the introduction of marginalized groups, and her challenge to the dichotomous history of Massive Resistance were valuable for historians who would begin to incorporate these aspects into their research of localized history.

Building on the marginalized lens present in Minow’s book is Amy Stuart Wells’ book Both Sides Now: The Story of School Desegregation’s Graduates. Like Minow, Wells focused on bringing in the previously undervalued voices of those who experienced the ramifications of “Massive Resistance”. To accomplish this, Wells pulls in a massive 550 interviews of individuals from six different high schools from the graduating class of 1980. In addition to these interviews, Wells builds contextual information by pulling in legal documents, school board meetings, and newspapers. Throughout her book, Wells tied in several different themes that continue the legacy of “Massive Resistance”, including school busing, tracking, conservative “color-blindness”, and changes to curriculum that have mitigated attempts at educational equity. Amongst the many stories she captures however
Wells noted that “many of the graduates, especially Blacks and Latinos, found their desegregated schooling experience *dispiriting* because it too often underscored how separate and unequal their lives were outside school”\(^{27}\). This trend is especially important because it hints toward the environmental differences in how people process popular memory; analyzing these community created and interact with popular memory is integral to the historical narrative of the school closures of Prince Edward County.

Cultural and microhistories replaced the determinism of the 1960s in the academic zeitgeist of the 1970s through the 1990s; these historical studies added nuance, but often neglected popular memory and historical consciousness as important mechanisms within local history. Emphasizing hyper-focused investigations of individuals and small communities, studies of Massive Resistance sought to uncover how regional communities who experienced resistance to integration navigated their struggles. This was a significant shift away from the broader nationalized histories of Civil Rights issues that were championed in the late 1960s. These cultural histories allowed for local traditionally marginalized populations to have a voice in the historical narrative: the poor, minority groups, and those disenfranchised by the powers who directed mainstream historical narratives.

Examples of these cultural histories of Massive Resistance are plenty: one such recent example is Matthew Edmond’s *The Private School Pivot: The Shrouded Persistence of*

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Massive Resistance in the Black Belt and Beyond. Edmond tracked the experiences of Black individuals just within the small area of Greene County, Alabama. Edmond chose the county due to its infamous “White Flight academy” and linked the hardships of Massive Resistance there to the continued ramifications of White flight on the Black students living in Green County today.28

Similarly, James Morris followed stories of Massive Resistance in northern Virginia with his book A Chink in the Armor: The Black-Led Struggle for School Desegregation in Arlington, Virginia, and the End of Massive Resistance. Morris hoped that by highlighting the struggle of Black activists in “Massive Resistance” he could change the conversation to encompass Black perspectives. He notes that “the local history journal lists none of the actions taken by Blacks and instead focuses on the White school board and White educational reformer.”29 Morris’s argument also introduces a geographic analysis of activist success against “Massive Resistance”. He notes that activists succeeded first in Northern Virginia because the “Byrd machine was weak where the Black population was minuscule,”

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meaning the cultural environment of the Northern Virginia was more susceptible to the legal
actions of NAACP than the far more socially conservative South-West of the state.\textsuperscript{30}

Morris argued that the political victories in Northern Virginia sowed the seeds of
further discrimination; because there were fewer Black students in the North, they were more
willing to compromise on other issues like bussing because of their small population. Morris
implies that White school boards in districts with larger Black populations would take note of
the compromises made and would subsequently weaponize these peaceful negotiations to
further alienate Black individuals within school districts. Morris’ article would tout a close
look at the roles of Black activists against “Massive Resistance” while weaving the
geopolitical layout of Virginia to bring a new multi-dimensional look at the “Massive
Resistance” movement. His emphasis on Black student activism on Massive Resistance in
Northern Virginia would draw attention to the similar veins of activism in Prince Edward
County while simultaneously suggesting a degree of durability to the systemic racism that
flowered during Massive Resistance.

The intergenerational effects of Massive Resistance in other geographic areas have
been increasingly placed in the spotlight, yet the discussion surrounding Prince Edward
County’s school closures has overwhelming focused on those who directly experienced
school closures and have continued the narrative of victimhood; there is a palpable need to
investigate the intergenerational effects of segregation in the county that balances both the

\textsuperscript{30} Morris, “A Chink in the Armor”, 359.
narratives of victimization and resilience. Students require communities of support to navigate school challenges. The effects of school closures may have eroded the capabilities of these communities to support their children and grandchildren. At the same time, presenting stories of exceptional resilience might also shift the conversation surrounding Prince Edward County’s School closures from discussions of victimization to those of community empowerment.

**Popular Memory and Historical Consciousness**

Integral to theoretical framework of this thesis is the concept of *Popular Memory*. Popular memory first entered academic discourse in the 1920s with the pioneering works of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. Academic use of popular memory became mainstream with analysis of the Holocaust, but over time, popular memory has been used more broadly within historical frameworks. While difficult to define, scholars of popular memory all note that it “is a form of memory that transcends individuals and is shared by a group”. This collective memory is less concrete than bodies of knowledge, and instead represents “a space in which local groups engage in an ongoing struggle with elites and state authorities to control the understandings of the past”. This space could be physical manifestations of

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33 Wertsch and Roediger, *Collective Memory*: 318.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 319.
historical events: monuments, buildings, markers. Collective memory can also be affected by intangibles, such as conversations between family members, shared cultural stories, and group-specific milieu.

The seminal study *The Presence of the Past* by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen brought popular memory into the current era by surveying and analyzing how Americans interact with the past, with a specific focus on the mediums by which popular memory is transferred.37 Their study is particularly important to this thesis because their data collection corresponds to the timeframe when one of the participants attended school and would more accurately reflect the participants’ feelings towards certain source material than the more recent AHA study by Pete Burkholder and Dana Schaffer.38

Popular memory interacts uniquely with the establishment of cultural identity; Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka establish six distinctive phrases in this interaction: the “concretion of identity”, the “capacity to reconstruct” identity, “formation” where cultural identity is crystalized, “organization”, “obligation”, and finally “reflexivity”.39 These steps serve two functions: to create, define cultural identity, and preserve cultural identity. The

interaction between popular memory and cultural identity is especially critical in analysis of historical trauma, which is internalized and can be passed generationally.

The importance of *Popular Memory* to this thesis cannot be overstated; the political nature of the school closures divided Prince Edward County into diametrically opposed groups: those who supported the school closures and their symbolic meaning, and those who did not. Both Conservative Whites and affected individuals worked to suppress overt narratives of the closures, leaving popular memory as the medium for how locals processed the trauma of school closures. Rita Moseley, an individual who lived through the closures, recalls this phenomenon. She notes about the town members:

> They never talked, I mean it was like something had happened and just disappeared in the whole town. You know, they never talked about it and I never knew that some of them, not them, but some of the other kids that I knew, I never knew that they walked out, I never knew they walked to the church, I never knew they were picketing until I saw the sign. I never knew any of that because my mother never said one word about what was going in Farmville, Virginia.\(^{40}\)

For those who were closed out, the trauma of the event brought forth shame and pain. Repression of historical trauma is not unprecedented. Scott Ellsworth through his interviews of the descendants of the Tulsa Race Riots of 1921 noted that “Some survivors grappled with PTSD, sometimes for decades, and naturally shied away from the subject. Others, like Holocaust survivors, purposefully did not want to burden their children with the horrors that they had experienced, so they didn’t talk about them at all.”\(^{41}\) While pain, fear of retaliation,

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\(^{40}\) Rita Moseley, interview by author, Farmville, Virginia, Oct. 1\(^{st}\) 2021.

and conscious decision-making on the part of those who lived through the closures
suppressed overt discussion of the events in the Black community of Prince Edward County,
different motivations inspired suppression in the White community. Frank Moseley the II
speculates on the history of the closures.

**Frank Moseley II:** It wasn't something that was really celebrated, or you know
brought up during Black History Month. It wasn't something that was a common
thread in the overarching history of landmark decisions.

**Rory Dunn:** Things that you would learn about in school history class?

**Frank Mosely II:** Right exactly

**Rory Dunn:** So why do you think that thread wasn't there. Why was that not talked
about?

**Frank Moseley II:** Well, it’s a lot of embarrassment.

**Rory Dunn:** From the White people that did the closings?

**Frank Moseley II:** Indeed.\(^{42}\)

Those responsible for school closures, and the legal and national attention that it
garnered, worked to distance themselves from the closures. The ramification of both the
Black and White communities’ efforts to suppress knowledge of the event was a diminished
overt historical narrative. Michel-Rolph Trouillot noted in his formative book *Silencing the
Past* that “We now know that narratives are made of silences, not all of which are deliberate
or even perceptible as such within the time of their production.”\(^{43}\) These bundles of silence,
according to Trouillot, were a result of unequal societal power dynamics: a feature intrinsic

\(^{42}\) Frank Moseley II, interview by author, Richmond, Virginia, March 7th, 2022.

\(^{43}\) Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon
Press, 2015).
to Prince Edward County’s political organizations. What remained for descendants of the closures was the underlying popular memory of the event.

Inseparably married to popular memory is the concept of historical consciousness. Jörn Rüssen is the foremost scholar on historical consciousness: a term he deems as the “making sense of the past” where individuals interact with history on three levels. Given that popular memory, while collectively created, is processed individually through several mediums, an individual’s historical consciousness affects how historical trauma is internalized. The first level of historical consciousness, dubbed “competence of experience”, regards an individual’s ability to reflect upon the past and differentiate it from the future; a process that occurs as children develop “historical sensitivity”. Competence of experience transitions to “competence of interpretation” where individuals can bridge temporal differences between past and present, and make inferences about the future based upon that knowledge. The last stage of historical consciousness, “competence of orientation”, is the application of historical knowledge where individuals utilize their understanding of history to bridge personal identity and future action.

The relevance of historical consciousness to the school closures of Prince Edward County is critical to understanding the relationship between descendants and their trust in public schools. How do descendants of those who lived through closures acquire historical

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45 Rüssen, “Historical Consciousness,” 69.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
consciousness of the trauma, and how does it affect their competence of orientation in interacting with the source of that trauma? This thesis investigates the narratives of resilience and hardship through an analysis of both the historical consciousness and the popular memory of one family affected by the closures. Throughout the interviews, it becomes apparent that historical consciousness of the tangible effects of the closures occurs without traditional mediums of popular memory (i.e., family stories, dedicated monuments, and museums). This historical consciousness occurs even as traditional narratives of history are suppressed and affects institutional trust in public schools.

**Methodology**

This project focuses on the experiences of a family who experienced the school closures in Prince Edward County through oral interviews with these participants. Oral history is an ideal medium for filling the academic gap: the nature of the topic and the relative recentness of the related events introduces several barriers that would make other methods more difficult and potentially less enlightening. School records of descendants are difficult to obtain access to and may not represent the wholistic experiences of those students; this may be especially true in an environment where public schools have lost the trust of the public. In some cases, these records might even span several states. Other public records, such as census information, are still sealed due to their relatively young age. Oral history also provides an exceptional avenue to reach narratives that are less likely to leave a

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48 Many students who experienced the school closures were often shipped to different states to continue their education.
paper trail such as popular memory. How students learn, or do not learn, about Massive Resistance from their fellow community members is especially revealing of the community’s trust in public education. While many secondary sources cover the experiences of school closures and the aftermath that followed when they were reopened, none to author’s knowledge cover expansively the experiences of the next generations. In contrast, the local community is used to oral history. Several oral histories have been conducted within Prince Edward County, and the Moton School Museum now runs an oral history project dedicated to preserving oral history. The community’s familiarity with oral history might have made it easier to find participants.

From a framework perspective, this thesis merges the practices of Bonastia and Titus with Williams Jr. to create a study that adequately investigates the role of popular memory and historical consciousness of the victims of school closures. The same framework is also applied to their family. The study also seeks to build upon the narratives of resilience pioneered by Williams Jr. while giving credence to the hardship faced by the individuals. To identify suitable participants, snowball sampling method was used. Snowball sampling is commonly used by ethnographers and oral historians to locate small, marginalized communities. In snowball sampling selection key community members use their expertise to highlight potential willing participants: this works particularly well in small, tight-knit communities such as Prince Edward County.

The two participants found using this method, Rita Odom Moseley, and her son Frank Moseley the II are ideal participants. Ms. Moseley was directly affected by the school
closures and had to seek educational opportunities outside of Prince Edward County. Following the school openings, she returned to the county and graduated. Ms. Moseley went on to work in the school district where she was shut out. Her son’s subsequent education in the same county provides a uniquely valuable insight into the community’s perceptions of the school closures. A combination of primary and secondary sources was used in the interviews to direct lines of questioning and to tap into public memory surrounding significant community members and events. Both participants signed a written disclosure form and were orally informed of the project’s purpose as well as the partners with whom their conversations may be shared.

The conversations with the community members were recorded on a high-quality audio recorder and were transcribed by hand by the author. The software *Otranscribe* was used in the transcription process as it is locally hosted on the interviewer’s device and therefore is inaccessible to third parties or the software developers. This ensured that the interviews were confidential in accordance to the privacy agreements outlined in the disclosure forms. This step was of the utmost importance given the difficulties in trust of the participants. Each thematic question set used in the interviews followed the same basic parameters defined for recording life histories of families as outlined by UCLA. Due to the small size of the sample, the interviewer went through extensive preparation sessions for each participant to personalize the set of interview questions. The question themes are

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available in Appendix A. Once the interviews were taken, the participants were provided the transcript to look over and to suggest edits that accurately reflected their voice and intended meaning. These reviewed transcripts form the base of primary source material in this thesis.

**Additional Primary Sources**

In addition to the oral interview, this project relies on several primary sources to build the contextual understanding necessary for conducting an interview. One critical source in finding participants was the Moton School’s yearbook collection from before school closures and after school closures. This collection includes several digitized versions of the Moton School’s yearbooks. The yearbook provides a comprehensive look at every individual who attended the Moton School, including all faculty and staff. Most useful however is the demographic nature of the source. The yearbooks provide names and faces of every student and individual that was suddenly affected by school closures and is useful for building both contexts for questions about the school’s significance following integration, and for identifying potential participants.\(^{50}\) These sources helped participants tap into the public memory surrounding significant events. In addition to the yearbook, there are extensive public records of school closures and growing community tensions captured by local newspapers in Virginia. The collection of digitized newspapers regarding the Moton School provides a snapshot of Massive Resistance in Prince Edward County and the surrounding

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regions that are useful for contextual information. Newspaper clippings were used to help direct the flow of the interviews.

Additional context is drawn from the various court cases filed out of Prince Edward County. Prince Edward County is frequently referenced as the county where *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* was filed in conjunction with *Brown v. Board*. While this is certainly valuable for the local context, there is another case that is more relevant to this study’s scope: *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*. A comprehensive account of this case filed by the “Fighting” preacher Mr. Griffin on behalf of the students and activists of Prince Edward County can be found through Cornell’s compilation of Supreme Court Cases. The text provides valuable information regarding the legal battles fought during “Massive Resistance”. It highlights significant Black activists as well as the court’s reasoning on their legal decision. This legal text has been cited by several studies and provides specifics about how tax money was allocated, as well as the history of local resistance to the opening of Black private schools.51

Perhaps most useful however were the various oral histories collected by the Moton Museum, which are conveniently stored at Longwood University and on the Moton Museum website.52 This collection of interviews, which span a timeframe from the 1990’s to the present features a great number of community members from teachers to parents and

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students. These oral interviews provided invaluable contextualization that was crucial towards the development of the interview questions.

**Limitations**

There are several constraints that are innate to oral history projects: the highly individualized nature of interviews, the small participant size, and the unique nature of Prince Edward’s school closures limit the extent of generalization beyond this project. The scope of this project is purposefully narrow due to both the time limitations and manpower limitations of the master’s thesis project; while this made the project more feasible to conduct it does limit the application of its findings. While the purpose of this project is to explore the intergenerational effects of school closures, these constraints may also provide a curtailed perspective that is not wholly representative of the subsequent generation’s experiences. Additional limitations concern the unpredictable nature of conducting interviews during a pandemic; potential participants who were part of particularly vulnerable groups were wary of participating in interviews. This may result in the overrepresentation of less-vulnerable individuals. The unpredictable nature of interviews may additionally result in deviations from the interview question scripts resulting in unexpected findings. Finally, there are some ethical considerations: the author is currently a teacher working in a surrounding county to Prince Edward County. There are students whom the author has taught that are either descendant of those who lived through school closures or have personal relationships with those who have experienced these closures. The author’s role as a member of the community may have had unknown ramifications on the interview process.
The rest of the thesis will cover the accounts of Rita Moseley and her son Frank Moseley II. Chapter 2 is a wholistic account of Rita’s story in chronological order, with an analysis of popular memory and historical consciousness at the end. Chapter 3 will follow a similar format for Frank Moseley II. Chapter 4 includes an analysis of Rita and Frank’s experiences and the conclusion. The experiences of Rita and Frank are important for the story of Prince Edward County. Their narrative provides insight into how historical trauma caused by systemic racism can be passed intergenerationally; to what degree can parents control the popular memory of events for their children, and how can this affect their subsequent historical consciousness of the event? How has trust eroded between public institutions and those who were shut out of those institutions, and to what degree does that trust pass between generations? This thesis demonstrates that in instances where traditional mediums of popular memory are suppressed, that historical consciousness of trauma can still occur; analyses of how this process occurs is invaluable historical work to those interested in rebuilding institutional trust. While this project is limited in its scope, inviting further analyses into areas that have suffered systemic trauma can help stakeholders in education understand how to initiate that trust building process.
CHAPTER 2: RITA ODOM-MOSELEY: PUBLIC MEMORY AND HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Prince Edward County: the Setting

Rita Odom-Moseley is a life-long inhabitant of Prince Edward County; The county is part of the northern section of Virginia’s Black Belt, and in the 1950s the community was still enthralled by the specter of Jim Crow. Segregation affected both the physical layout of the county and the job outlooks of its residents. After Board v. Board challenged this status quo, Rita experienced firsthand the school closures. When some schools were reopened in 1964, she completed her education and found employment back in Prince Edward County.

Rita’s story is in many ways a microcosm of the experiences of the “Lost Generation”: the generation of Prince Edward inhabitants that found themselves deprived of an education. As a child she endured the trauma of the closures and made inferences about the reasons behind her circumstances; as an adult, she had to confront the challenge of how to discuss her experiences with her children and students. While her story is in some ways typical of those that were closed out, she is notably atypical. Rita was one of the few students who managed to find an education outside of Prince Edward County. Bonastia estimates in

53Titus, Brown’s Battleground, 1.
his *Southern Stalemate* that of the “nearly twenty-seven hundred black students [that] were locked out of public schools; fewer than five hundred received some formal education outside of the county.”54 Beyond being in the minority of students that found education outside the county, Rita had the even more unique experience as an adult of working for the very school district that had sought to deprive her of an education. As a secretary within that school district, she gained invaluable insight into the long-lasting ramifications of the closures, where she saw firsthand how her neighbors’ kids experienced the classroom. Rita’s insight into the school closures is invaluable from an insider’s perspective: as both a victim of school closure and an education worker in that same district, she was uniquely positioned to observe how the effects of the closures radiated within her community.

**Early Life: The Schools Before the Closures**

When Rita was born, the local community of Prince Edward County was *de jure* segregated but relatively self-contained. Within the Black community, there was some stratification: there were a handful of Black professionals, including doctors, a dentist, several ministers, and at least 70 teachers prior to the school closures.55 Those who were not employed as professionals worked as laundresses or janitors for the two White colleges, Longwood University and Hampden-Sydney, the Craddock Terry Shoe Factory, as one of the local store owners, or as sharecroppers. Income for the Black community was substantially lower than the White community. In 1959, the year schools closed, “the median income for

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whites was $4,070, more than double the amount of [Black] families ($1,848). Social interactions between the White part of town and the Black community were limited to the occasional specialty good that could not be obtained from local Black-owned stores.

Rita Odom-Moseley was born on the 31st of January in 1947 in Prince Edward County, Virginia to Rosa Margaret Foster and R. D. Odom. Rita’s father, a soldier, left her mother after five years of marriage. The event had a profound effect on her household. She notes:

Like I said my father left and being a girl and maybe even if you were a boy, it left a hole in my heart, I just never felt complete because one reason: because the community I've lived in, everyone had a mother and a father except for one person and I’m not sure whether he was in service or whatever. But that was one of the things that shaped who I was. I was raised by a single mom, and when I say a single mom, I always tell people that she was married for five years. And she took care of us, we-always lived in a lower income neighborhood, but we never felt poor in our household because my mother always made sure we had what we needed.

While poor, Rita never felt that her family was destitute: she vividly remembers that her house became a focal point for other members of the community because her family always had running water, and never had their lights shut off for non-payment. Neighbors would often use the family’s outdoor water spigot if they were having water troubles themselves. In her own book, Rita notes that “my family walked everywhere because my

57 Virginia Department of Health; Richmond, Virginia; Virginia Births, 1864-2016
58 Rita Moseley, interview by author, Farmville, VA, October 1st, 2021.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
mother never owned a car”\textsuperscript{61}. While her mother was the breadwinner of the family, the household included an extended family that helped with the housework. In addition to her mother, the household included Rosa Foster the elder, Rita’s grandmother, Dorothy, Emma and Tristan Foster, her aunts and uncle, and her younger brother Earl Odom.\textsuperscript{62}

The family worked together to keep the house running. Rita and her family would often walk through the neighborhood to get their basic household needs. In one memory she notes that she and her brother used to transport bags of coal in a wagon to burn for heat in the winter.\textsuperscript{63} All of the shopping was done either at local Black businesses in her neighborhood or in the White section of downtown Farmville when they needed specialty goods.\textsuperscript{64} To support her family, Rita’s mother Rosa worked at Longwood College in the laundry department and was surrounded by elements of higher education. Rosa was even offered the opportunity to attend college but turned it down for reasons that she never explained to Rita. Though Rosa turned down the opportunity to attend higher education, obtaining an education for her children was vitally important for her: a passion which she would later share with her daughter.

The community’s schools were more than an important place for Rita: they were central to the community’s life socially and physically. Both schools were extremely close in proximity to Rita’s house. She was able to walk to her elementary school \textit{Mary E. Branch}

\textsuperscript{61} Moseley, \textit{Silence Broken}, 8.
\textsuperscript{62} U.S. Census Bureau; 1950 Census, Virginia, Prince Edward, 74-9; generated by A.I; using 1950.census.archive.gov
\textsuperscript{63} Moseley, \textit{Silence Broken}, 8.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
(previously the Robert Russa Moton High School) and later her middle school Mary E. Branch #2 (which would later house the Moton Museum), which were located just yards away from her family home. Both schools had garnered a degree of infamy both in the county and nationally. Mary E. Branch, her elementary school, was originally built in 1939 to educate the Black students of Prince Edward County. The building’s original capacity of 180 students was quickly dwarfed by its student population: in just under a year when enrollment ballooned to over 450 students. Students attended school in cramped classes in tar-paper shack buildings and had to stand in the auditorium during gatherings as there was little sitting room. The seating that did exist was not fixed to the auditorium floor but was instead provided via foldable chairs. In 1951 the school obtained national attention for student protests led by Prince Edward County high school student, Barbara Johns, who brought forth calls to end segregated education. John’s protest attracted support from the NAACP which subsequently filed the suit Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County with John’s fellow student Dorothy Davis as the named litigant.

Most White members of Prince Edward County were shocked by the calls for desegregation. Hoping that building a new school with better amenities would assuage the calls for desegregation in the county, funds were allocated by the school board to build a new school. The New Moton School, which would become Rita’s middle school, opened on Sept. 22nd, 1953, at a cost of $840,000 and featured significant improvements over the tar-paper buildings of Mary E. Branch. The new building included “21 classrooms plus a home

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economics department, industrial and agricultural shops, library, auditorium, gymnasium and cafeteria…”.

Attempts to modernize Black schools were a common practice in the Black Belt; beginning in the 1950s, enemies of integration used newer and upgraded schools to coax residents away from integration. These “equalization schools” were “considered a viable alternative to school integration by both Blacks and Whites.”

The New Moton School’s completion during the litigation of the Supreme Court case might have left the Black community of Prince Edward County fractured over the issue of desegregation.

As Brown v. Board and its bundle cases garnered more national attention, local media began to question whether the New Moton School had achieved the equal opportunity that Dorothy Davis and Barbara Johns had sought at the outset of the student protests. On December 13th, 1953, The Richmond Times-Dispatch published an expose that had supposedly interviewed 19 of the families taking part in the Davis suit. The Times-Dispatch claimed that those interviewed represented “a good cross-section of opinion”, and that of those families only “five said they favor[ed] integrated (nonsegregated) schools; six said they are opposed to them, and the remaining eight took varying stands that would place them

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66 “Prince Edward School for Negroes Enrolls 420” The Richmond Time-Dispatch, September 23rd, 1953. https://www.newspapers.com/image/?clipping_id=102836384&fcfToken=eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiIsInR5cCI6IkpXVCJ9.eyJmcmVlLXZpZXctaWQiOjgyODQ5NTg0MSwiZGVkJmcmVjZXNzaW9uLCJwYXlsbGluZ19sb2NhbGluZ19pZCIsIjoiNFU4NTY0QjE5IiwibmFtZSI6IjBhc3N1ZışXN0ZXJ0aW9uIn0.5XKTjv5ufdG1YNlIm1VTaX6tEuAhTmC5DG_NUN1YBk


68 Bolton. “Mississippi’s School Equalization Program”, 782.
Somebody between the two groups.” In the article, The Times-Dispatch quotes Dorothy Davis noting the following about integration: “No, I’d rather have it go on the way it is….I don’t think we’d be happy, and I don’t think they’d be happy.” The article shocked locals, and damaged the optics of the case which was still in the process of being litigated. It even invoked a response from Minister Griffin and Oliver Hill who were both instrumental in the organization of the suit. On December 22nd in a companion piece in the Times-Dispatch, Griffin noted “I thought it was the funniest thing I have ever heard of when a white reporter can go into a Negro’s home and exact the truth from them… what do you expect from a (segregated) group of people when confronted by a white man?” Hill later retorted that “it is our position that if you have two (identical) schools… but to one, Negro pupils and teachers are assigned, and to the other you assign other racial groups… we would still say you were getting pretty unequal opportunities”. Regardless of the actual unification of the Black community, the appearance of division gave White supporters of segregation ammunition to attempt to delegitimize the NAACP’s efforts.

70 Ibid.
71 Ali Wagner, “Minister Calls Ties-Dispatch Story Incorrect About Negroes Views on School Segregation” The Richmond Times Dispatch. Dec. 22nd. 1953. https://www.newspapers.com/image/?clipping_id=102894117&fcfToken=eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiIsInR5cCI6IkpXVCJ9.eyJmcmVlLXZpZXctaWQiOjgyODY1ODI3OCwiWF0iOiJxU1NTc2MjUxLCJ1cHljIjoiE2NTU2NjI3Mzd9._rKtwoBoJLTXxgDRegvLyd_Cu3u2YcbZfJkb0YUnA
72 Ibid.
Despite the notoriety that both schools had garnered, Rita was only four years old when the student protests occurred in 1951. Instead of recalling the political divisiveness, she recalls her attendance at both schools as being highlights of her childhood education. The teachers that worked at both Mary Branch #1 and Mary Branch #2 were dedicated community members, many of whom had actively contributed to the planning of the walkouts. Farmville, like other towns across the South were developing Black-cultivated social structures that prioritized and celebrated Black youth. Rita described the impact of her early education, and her teachers in our interview. She notes: “Yes I loved school, and I love to read, I was called ‘the bookworm’ at some time, so school was my passion. Those teachers were interested in us, and we knew they were, and they wouldn't allow you to go to another grade until you learned what they taught.” The support network she felt at both her elementary and middle schools would be juxtaposed by a period of unmoored difficulty: that community of support would not follow her to Blacksburg, VA where she would continue her middle school education. What distinguished Mary E. Branch #2 as special made the school closures in 1959 even more painful for the community.

**When School Closed**

In 1959, when Rita was entering the sixth grade, schools closed. Previous attempts at Massive Resistance had met with legal failure; when ordered by a federal judge to integrate

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school, the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors refused to allocate funding to the schools on June 3rd, 1959, citing the following:

The school board of this county is confronted with a court decree which requires the admission of white and colored children to all the schools of the county without regard to race or color. Knowing the people of this county as we do, we know that it is not possible to operate the schools of this county within the terms of that principle and at the same time maintain an atmosphere conducive to the educational benefit of our people.75

An article in the Richmond Times-Dispatch the following day noted that the defunding would leave “roughly 145 school-teachers… thrown out of work by the board of supervisors’ actions. Most of the county’s 70-odd white teachers will be employed by the Prince Edward School Foundation, an organization which will educate the county’s White children in September.”76 The foundation relied on substantial private donations to set up White private schools which would enable White children to continue their education.77 No such foundation existed for the Black community, nor was there a pool of communal wealth with which to support local students. Despite the crippling effect the defunding had on both Black professionals and students within the community, Rita doesn’t remember the exact day of the closures, nor does she recall overhearing discussions of the closures as a child. Instead, she remembers that the adults didn’t talk about it.78 Rita first found out about the closures through one of her friends. The claim seemed so outlandish that Rita didn’t consider it true.

75 Allan Jones, “School Tuition funds are Denied in Prince Edward”, Richmond Times Dispatch, June 4th 1959.
76 Richmond Times Dispatch Staff Writer, “Prince Edward Board Refuses Funds for Schools and Grants” Richmond Times Dispatch, June 4th, 1959.
77 It is important to note that there were some very poor Whites who did not attend school at all. Tuition vouchers did not completely cover the cost of schooling and left the poorest White families without school.
78 Ibid.
The reality of the closures didn’t solidify as real to Rita until she passed her old elementary school, a near daily occurrence given the school’s proximity to Rita’s house. She recalls the experience vividly noting:

So once I saw the large chains, and the huge lock on the door of the school I knew it was closed. I had to pass that and see that almost daily because somebody would send us to the store… so somebody would send us to the store for something, my mother, my grandmother, or if they didn’t it would be my friend’s family. When we had to buy groceries we had to pass that school. We had to pass it all of the time.\(^{79}\)

Beyond the loss of academics, the schools were stripped of their capacity as a community center for children. Not only were the doors chained and locked, but the outdoor playground equipment was removed: swings, see-saws, and the like were all removed except for one metal sliding board.\(^{80}\) The move by the county was a cruel attempt to punish Black families for nonconformity to integration; not only would schools be closed, but so would community access to play.

Despite the visibility of the closures, Rita recalls that her mother, Rosa, didn’t discuss the closures with her. Rita notes “I don’t remember my mother ever talking about the school closing; therefore, I drew my own conclusion of why it had closed.”\(^{81}\) The conclusion that Rita reached was that “White kids didn’t want to go to school with the Black kids. That’s what I believed, and the other thing is that it instilled so much distrust that today at my age,

\(^{79}\) Rita Moseley, Interview with author.
\(^{80}\) Ibid.
\(^{81}\) Moseley, Silence Broken, 8.
and throughout my childhood and adulthood, I have a hard time trusting people.”  

It is worth noting that without real understanding of the politics at play, Rita understood through her observations that what had happened to her was racially motivated across all age groups. The breakdown in trust, even after she came to other realizations, stuck with her throughout her entire life.

There are very few from Rosa’s generation still alive to discuss their decision to remain silent, but the adults’ silence might have been an attempt at protection; The districts’ fight to win desegregation had brought a good deal of ugliness between the Conservative White faction in Prince Edward County and the rest of the community. Just a few years earlier in 1954, leaders of the *Davis v. Prince Edward County School Board* case received death threats, endured cross burnings, and even saw a bomb left on the doorstep of Minister Griffin’s house.  

The painful memories of that initial fight were fresh in the community’s mind, and explanations of such things to children would have been difficult. For young children who had yet to go to school, the closures were not yet abnormal. Charlotte Herndon Womack, who turned 5 when the schools closed noted “I never questioned my mom about school because to me that was not abnormal, that was all I knew”.  

But for Rita, who had been to school and who had associated education strongly with her own identity, the closures

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82 Rita Moseley, Interview by author.  
84 Moseley, Silence Broken, 42.
were painful. To garner some piece of what had happened, Rita had to scrape by with discussions with her friends, and observations of her environment.

**To Blacksburg and Back**

Initially, like thousands of Black children in Prince Edward County, Rita went without education. Many did not have the considerable resources or connections required to send their kids to different counties for school. Eloise Lockett Jordan, a parent at the time of the closures, noted that “there was no decision to make. We could not afford to move to another county, and we were not sending our kids away to live with strangers or relatives in other counties.”\(^85\) Those who could not afford such luxuries went without. Rita recalled that during those first two years, her mother struggled to find accommodations for her. Childcare relief came in the form of the local Brownie and Girl Scout troops.

Most kids had relatives, or their parents had friends and they were able to send that kid. My mother had no one. So that is why I was out of school without an education for two years, because there was nothing she could figure out what to do. She couldn’t afford to purchase or rent a home and have two homes at the same time across county lines, and she didn’t know anybody to send me away to another state. We didn’t have relatives, because during that time relatives were together… So she just made sure that I had somewhere to go and something to do. So she put me in the brownie scouts the first year, and the second year she put me in the girl scouts.\(^86\)

The Girl Scouts was a lifeline for Rita and her family beyond just a form of daycare. Miss Annie May Griggs, the scout leader, took a liking to Rita and had connections outside of Prince Edward County. At the end of Rita’s second year in the scouts in 1961, Annie May

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\(^85\) Ibid., 58.

\(^86\) Rita Moseley, interview with author.
Griggs approached Rosa with a proposition: would she be amenable to sending Rita to school in Blacksburg, Virginia? Following Rosa’s agreement to the proposal, the following Sunday Rita found herself in a car with Annie May Griggs, and her mother on her way to an unknown family in Blacksburg: a somewhat larger town of roughly 5,000 inhabitants nestled between the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountain ranges.

The prospect of staying with another family was terrifying: Rita had never spent a night away from home. The journey to Blacksburg itself provided its own trauma. Rita recalls with stunning clarity observing a horrific car crash. Out of a crushed sports car she observed a man emerge from the wreckage unharmed: the sight, she claimed, tempered her spirit, and gave her the internal strength to accept her new situation. Rita referred to the moment several times over the course of the interview as a formative moment for her own faith, which would become an anchor for her as she navigated the tumultuous time in Blacksburg.

When Rita arrived in Blacksburg she was greeted by the two women who had agreed to house her: Mrs. Laura Anderson, a divorced and retired laundress, and her daughter Ms. Nettie Anderson, an assistant principal and teacher in Pulaski, Virginia. The two women lived in a house located on Cassalley St. between Fork Brad and Main St. in Blacksburg proper. One of the first things Rita noticed was that Laura Anderson was “the oldest person

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87 Rita Moseley, interview with author.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
[she] had seen in [her] entire life”. When Rita arrived in Blacksburg in 1961, Laura was 87 years old. In the house was another older student that Rita did not know, but who was attending the local high school. After the introductions and subsequent unpacking in the room upstairs, Rosa left. The moment is seared into Rita’s memory.

My mother didn’t say anything to me, she just walked away. She didn’t hug me, she didn’t kiss me, she just didn’t say anything, and she was walking and not turning around…she never turned around she just got in the car and then drove away. I knew if I screamed aloud, she would have probably come back and gotten me, and then I would have had to go back home to a place with no school.91

Following Rosa’s departure, Laura and Nettie Anderson drove Rita first to the school to show her where she would be attending, and then introduced her to another family so that she could meet some of her fellow peers before school. The experience was equal parts affirming and shocking: Rita had never seen a mountain before, and the other student’s house was located on a ridge. The environment was starkly different from the rolling plains of Prince Edward County. The opportunity to play with children her age helped distract Rita from the strangeness of her new circumstances. Any illusion of normality, however, was shattered when Rita found herself walking to school the next day. When recalling that moment Rita noted:

I walked an looked at the strange town, and looked at these strange people as I went along, and I wasn’t even sure I was going in the right direction, but when I found the school, I was on a mound, a tall mound and the school was at the bottom, and that’s when I felt like crying, but I didn’t because I knew if I had gone into school crying that I would probably be teased forever, so I walked

91 Rita Moseley, Interview with author.
around and walked around until I got to school. When I opened the door, the teacher was waiting for me. They had not started class.\textsuperscript{92}

Adapting to her new situation took months. Rita did not have any communication with her friends from Prince Edward County. Over the course of her tenure in Blacksburg, her mother only came to visit once: she did not have the money to visit regularly.\textsuperscript{93} She never got to see her brother, who was not afforded the same opportunity to go to Blacksburg. Unlike the other child housed by the Andersons, Rita did not go home over the Summer. Despite the difficulties of her situation, Rita excelled in school. She was chosen as her class salutatorian and was asked to write a speech: a moment which she described as one of the proudest she has about her own education. Her mother’s only visit to Blacksburg was for her middle school graduation.

The closures resulted in several families leaving Prince Edward County. Charlotte Herndon Womack recalls leaving the county temporarily. Her family relocated to Spotsylvania County in Northern Virginia and would maintain two houses over the course of three years.\textsuperscript{94} Others left permanently. Edith L. Goode was sent to live with relatives in Appomattox County, while her own parents relocated to Maryland. She never returned to Prince Edward County.\textsuperscript{95} The upheaval had a real effect on Rita’s community of friends. She never saw many of her friends again except “when they came home to be buried and [she] went to the funeral.”\textsuperscript{96}

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{94} Moseley, \textit{Silence Broken}, 42.
\item\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 71.
\item\textsuperscript{96} Rita Moseley, interview with author.
\end{footnotes}
A few weeks after her graduation, Miss Nettie Anderson returned home from work to tell Rita lifechanging news: schools would be reopening soon. Though traditional public schools were still shuttered, a privately funded 1-year long program dubbed the “Prince Edward Free School Association” had been founded following an investigation by a Michigan State University survey team. The goal of the survey was to investigate the immediate ramifications of the school closures on the children shut out. The findings were dire. Robert Green’s survey team found evidence that indicated severe learning loss amongst those closed out; while devastating, the results galvanized efforts to open schools for those shut out. Opening in 1963, The Free Schools operated with “a non-graded system… designed to permit each child to advance at his own pace”.

Funding came in part from local citizens but also from federal assistance because the educational crisis in Prince Edward County did not go unnoticed in the Oval Office. Then-Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy called for immediate action in the county, even going as far as to note that “the only places on earth not to provide free public education are Communist China, North Vietnam, Sarawak, Singapore, British Honduras, and Prince Edward County, Virginia”. Federal support and the acquisition of several grants provided funding to rent the previously closed schools for students to attend the 1963-1964 school year.

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Though some form of schooling was reopening in Prince Edward County, the Anderson’s provided Rita with a counteroffer to returning home. Nettie Anderson told Rita that she could stay with them and finish high school in Blacksburg; if she completed her education there, the Andersons would send her to college.\textsuperscript{99} To Rita the decision was not difficult.

I didn’t know the significance of a college education I didn’t know anybody, nobody in my community who had gone to college, and I didn’t even think about our teachers who might have gone so it didn’t mean anything to me because of that. What really meant something to me was going back home to my mother, my family.\textsuperscript{100}

Rita’s homecoming was bittersweet. She was reunited with her family and some of her friends but felt sad that many of them had left; as she entered high school in the Free School, she noticed that there were adult children, some as old as twenty, in the same room as teenagers.\textsuperscript{101} While it was evident that community trauma had occurred, Rita was struck by the fact that no one spoke of the experience.

They never talked, I mean it was like something had happened and just disappeared in the whole town. You know, they never talked about it, and I never knew that some of them… that they walked out. I never knew they walked to the church; I never knew they were picketing until I saw the sign. I never knew any of that because my mother never said one word about what was going on in Farmville, Virginia.\textsuperscript{102}

Over the course of the school closures, while Rita was attending school in Blacksburg, the NAACP had redoubled its efforts regarding the inequities in Prince Edward

\textsuperscript{99} Rita Moseley, Interview with author.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
County and had challenged legally the right of the school board to deprive public education to its citizens. Minister Griffin’s own children became the plaintiffs in *Griffin v. The Prince Edward County School Board* which sought to press that the issue of school closures was unconstitutional under the 14th Amendment. Alongside the suit, the Griffin family played a significant organizational role in the county. Boycotts of Farmville businesses and transportation to nearby Cumberland were organized with help from the NAACP; regular picketing and marches were planned from the First Baptist Church where Reverend Francis L. Griffin ministered.\(^{103}\) The community was at war, and many of Rita’s peers participated in the activities.

Silence about the events came from both sides of the community and was especially present in Rita’s life. For some in the Black community, the trauma of the events was something painful to be left behind. Rita noted that “people just didn’t want to talk about it. It was so painful too, because when you talk to people now about it they will actually cry. Men and women, because they still have that pain, they still have that neglect. I’ve felt since I’ve been an adult that they still have a lot of that hatred, some of them.”\(^{104}\) Meanwhile the White community was eagerly looking to distance itself from more national scrutiny and from the embarrassment that accompanied the great loss of Massive Resistance. Rita’s husband, who had worked for a retired member of schoolboard mentioned to her that the members felt a

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\(^{103}\) Moseley, *Silence Broken*, 61-62.

\(^{104}\) Rita Moseley, interview with author.
great deal of embarrassment over the closures and had an express a desire to bury the issue.105

Reopening the schools was not the grand victory that was portrayed nationally: bitterness in both the White and Black communities persisted. Rita’s recollection of the silence reveals a community wide impetus to bury the issue and to find some semblance of tense coexistence. Legal defeat had cost the White community substantial amounts of money. Meanwhile the Black community felt alienated by a schoolboard that was overwhelmingly White, and wholeheartedly disinterested in building up the neglected school district.

**Adult Life**

When Rita graduated high school in 1967, she initially stayed and worked locally in Prince Edward County at the Craddock Terry Shoe Factory. She worked there for nine years until she noticed toxic work conditions aimed towards workers nearing retirement. The owners, not wanting to pay the rising costs of workers nearing retirement, began pressuring elderly White workers to quit. Rita, feeling that if such toxicity could be leveled against White workers that her situation would be worse, left the factory and started commuting to adjacent Cumberland County. There she began work as an assistant secretary for the local chapter of Head Start; this would be Rita’s first professional experience in education.106 Nationally, Lydon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” bolstered funding to programs like Head Start and provided the opportunity for Black women to develop valuable professional

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105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
skillsets. Head Start programs allowed Black communities to invest grassroots support for education partially outside of the purview of public schools; Additionally beneficial to the community was that the program ensured job security with federal funds. Rita was one such person involved in the Head Start community.

The course of events in Prince Edward left Rita feeling withdrawn, but for her, the work in Head Start played a significant role in pulling her out of her shell. Rita worked for Paul Grossman, the director the Cumberland’s Head Start program. He took her to different offices, where, through her interactions with others she learned of a Head Start office in Prince Edward County. Eager to shed to her commute, Rita applied to jobs in education around Prince Edward, where she found herself working for Prince Edward County Public Schools as an assistant-secretary: the very school system that had shut her out years earlier. Rita worked in Prince Edward County schools for 35 years, becoming a full secretary before retiring in 2013.

While working in Prince Edward County school, Rita did not overtly make the connection between the school closures and her working climate: she was proud to go back to the school she graduated from and work. Many of her peers had families that now attended Prince Edward County Schools as students, and she was a firsthand witness to their children’s experiences in the schools. She noted the following:

109 Ibid.
At the beginning, I could see a lot of the children having the same feelings about what happened, because a lot of White teachers came here to teach, and I could see how they treated them. They were relating it to what their parents told them, so they were not nice to them. I remember one time—our new librarian came and kids were picking at her, you know doing something that they shouldn’t do, and I went over and talked to them and I told them that she was nice. I said ‘Besides she’s not all White…’. I was trying to talk them into not being mean to her.¹¹⁰

The trend Rita recognized of White teachers coming into the schools was not isolated to Prince Edward County. Across the South, Black communities found themselves stripped of their Black educators following Brown V. Board; It was a concerted attack on Black communities to “demonstrate the detrimental effects of Brown on black children and their opportunities to form valuable relationships with black teachers.”¹¹¹ In Prince Edward County, it felt as though Black identity was being attacked; the Black teachers who had been invested in the community were forced to leave when schools closed, and now were being replaced by White teachers chosen by a school board that had actively sabotaged the Black community. Rita saw that community resentment was bleeding into the schools through the children of those who had been shut out. Her insight as an insider in the school district was especially important in the development of her own decision-making with her children.

Rita did not tell her children about the closures until she began to write about her experiences; roughly when Gladys JoAnn Moseley, her daughter, and Frank

¹¹⁰ Ibid.
Moseley II, her son, were leaving middle school. Her experience within the schools, seeing the resentment of the kids led her to withhold her knowledge of the closures: “[She] didn’t want them to grow up with what [she] was seeing”.112 The decision to withhold her experiences was a purposeful one. Rita noted that she “didn’t want to them to grow being bitter and have hatred towards people. [She] just saw too much of it.”113 Informing her decision to withhold information about the closures was a shift in Rita’s own consciousness about why the closures occurred: she had previously believed that the reason schools closed was because the White kids didn’t want to attend school with the Black kids.

For Rita, this perspective changed suddenly when she was a young working mother. Rita used to frequent the Belk-Leggett’s and Hub Store in Farmville proper to buy shoes for her children. She noticed during her shopping trips that some of the adult store employees would follow wherever she went in the store; one particular employee, a young White high schooler, broke the norm by always making an effort to speak kindly to her as she checked out. One day Rita asked her where she went to school and was shocked to find out that she attended Prince Edward Academy: the White Flight private school established as a bastion for White education when the public schools were closed. She noted: “It shocked me, it changed something inside of me because I realized that it wasn’t the children. I realized too that it had to be the

112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
parents because the children had to do what the parents told them to.”114 Rita’s own mother’s silence had led to a twisted view, one that she was sure not to repeat with her own kids.

Change in the community was slow, and amends towards the closures were even slower. Integration crawled: Rita felt that the community was only pretending to move on from its marriage to Jim Crow. “I always said that Farmville was a great big stage of actors, there were actors everywhere, but I didn’t see a lot of change. Gradually we would see a Black person working in one of the stores or see a Black person operating the elevator. But every business that was White owned you never saw Black people in it.”115

Rita’s experience as both a participant within the school district and as a victim of the school closures have given her a novel and important perspective on generational silence. She experienced firsthand the suppression of the school closures from her mother and friends and was herself affected by the diminished trust that accompanied the closures. As she navigated the reopened schools as an employee Rita saw how the toxicity of the closures radiated to subsequent generations of students, even as overt narratives of the closures were suppressed. Her realization about the generational stance on segregation profoundly affected her view on the closures. Her somewhat unusual experiences as both a victim and insider informed her decisions on telling her own children about the closures. While Rita’s perceptions had changed, community healing stalled along with integration.

114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
Popular Memory and Historical Consciousness of the Closures

Starting in 2005 attempts to address the closures picked up. A commission to memorialize the student efforts for integration began under Governor Warner utilizing private donations as funding. By 2008, the Civil Rights Memorial Statue was completed and following a brief tour, was placed on the capital grounds in Richmond. It depicts Barbara Johns, Rev. Francis L. Griffin, and other students who participated in the walkout.\footnote{Rita Moseley, Interview with author.} Rita was a member of the committee and made some design suggestions for the memorial.\footnote{Rita Moseley, Interview with author.} In Farmville on June 5th, 2009 the Prince Edward County School Board dedicated a plaque and a “Light of Reconciliation” placed in the courthouse honoring the memory of those that endured the school closures.\footnote{Ken Woodley, “The Light of Reconciliation”, \textit{The Farmville Herald}. June 5th, 2009} It was the first time that the school board publicly admitted wrongdoing in the closures. On the day of the dedication, a member of the school board noted that “we grieve for the way lives were forever changed, for the pain that was caused, and for how those locked doors shuttered opportunities and barricaded the dreams our children had for their own lifetimes; and for all wounds known and unknown we regret those past actions”.\footnote{Ibid.}

To Rita, the measure was appreciated but it came too late, nor could it solve the pain and neglect that accompanied the closures. Attempts at some forms of reparations have been made. In 2003 the General Assembly of Virginia adopted a resolution aimed at providing

\footnote{\textquote{Civil Rights Memorial Concept.”} Civil Rights Memorial. Accessed June 18, 2022. \url{http://vacivilrightsmemorial.org/}.}

\footnote{Rita Moseley, Interview with author.}

\footnote{Ken Woodley, “The Light of Reconciliation”, \textit{The Farmville Herald}. June 5th, 2009}

\footnote{Ibid.}
scholarship money for those affected by the closures. Ken Woodley, the editor of the Farmville Herald, lobbied local politicians and then-Governor Mark Warner to consider the proposal. The fruits of his labor resulted in the creation of the *Brown v. Board of Education Scholarship Program*, which had amassed $2,293,842.72 in funds partially garnered by the state and by local philanthropist John Kluge. 88 students, including Rita Moseley, went back to school to achieve degrees from higher education. For Rita, the program funded both a bachelor’s degree at St. Paul’s College, and a master’s degree in Human Services, and Business Administration from Liberty University. It was a chance to fulfill the hopes for higher education that her mother had for her. The program changed Rita’s life but was relatively limited in its scope. Only 88 of the 2,700 children affected by the closures ever saw any form of remuneration from the state. Others, like David Wadsworth Topp, felt like the bill was just a gesture. “That’s all it was, a token and a gesture. I don’t think it was done in good faith and I feel if they really want to show us how remorseful, how sorry they were for treating us like that… they should open up the community colleges and universities to our kids and let our kids receive the education we didn’t get”. The motions belied a still existing community rift, fostered partially by the prevalence of Fuqua High School and other unofficial monuments of the closures.

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When traditional forms of interacting with historical narratives (history classes, museum visits, newspapers, television, etc.) are suppressed, members of any community rely on popular memory to inform private understanding of historical events. The medium for popular memory, as discussed earlier, is varied and disparate in form. In the case of Prince Edward County, interaction with popular memory for children was particularly difficult: adults from both sides of the community were silent about the fight for desegregation. Multi-generational silences made understanding the pervasive ill-feeling in the community difficult to understand, but certainly felt. In Rita’s case, her mother’s silence affected her perception of why the school closed, but she opted for silence as a protective measure for her own children.

During the silence what remained for the survivors, and the next generation to build historical consciousness were physical landmarks and discussions amongst peers. Historic sites are powerful mediums for preserving popular memory, especially when they are visited with family members and friends. Presence of the Past revealed that well over 50% of respondents felt especially connected to the past when they visited museums or witnessed historical sites. The only other category to score higher were gatherings with family, where stories would inevitably be passed down; something that the trauma of the closures had suppressed. For the community, the Moton School had been a symbol of Black pride and

124 Rosenzweig and Thelen, Presence of the Past, 20.
125 Ibid.
perseverance: a victory of the student protests from the early 1950s. For Rita, it would be perverted into a symbol of oppression.

When school closures initially occurred in September of 1959, one of the most influential monuments to segregation became the closed schools themselves. Rita’s family, like many other Black families, lived just yards away from Mary E. Branch #1. As a centerpiece of the community, passing the school was a prerequisite to completing several family chores, for communal play on the school playground, or making it to downtown Farmville. For Rita, the impact of seeing the physical closure of the school was critical for her own historical competence of orientation: how she viewed herself within the context of the historic event of the school closures. It is worth revisiting this section of the interview below:

**Rita Moseley** - I don't actually remember the day, because at the time in my surrounding people didn't talk about it. Particularly adults, and the way that I actually found out about schools closing is because one of my girlfriends told me, and of course I didn't believe it at that time. But then something happened. I lived behind the Elementary School and it was, just yards away from my house.

**Rory Dunn** - The Elementary School?

**Rita Moseley** - The Elementary School here on Main St. it’s across the street, from the Moton Museum.

**Rory Dunn** - Oh I see.

**Rita Moseley** - That brick building was the Elementary School. I lived behind that building. So once I saw the large chains, and the huge lock on the door of the school I knew that it was closed. I had to pass that and see that almost daily because everyday somebody would send us to the store. We had black businesses from one end of main street all the way downtown. So
somebody would send us to the store for something, my mother, my grandmother or if they didn't it would my friend’s family. When we had to buy groceries, we had to pass that school. We had to pass it all of the time.

Rory Dunn- You mentioned that people didn't talk about the closure or didn't talk about it, the adults, can you think about maybe why they didn't want to talk about it... or?

Rita Moseley- I don't know why they didn't, I don't know how much knowledge they had about it. When I said that people didn't talk about it, doesn't mean everybody because there were people in the community that were directly involved in conversations, meeting people from other states and planning, their children of course knew about it, but I never actually knew about it. I assumed why schools were closed, and then I found out years later that my assumption was wrong.\textsuperscript{126}

Historical consciousness of the reality of the school closures did not come through traditional mediums of popular memory (shared stories, traditional monuments, history class) but came through recognition of two facets of the social milieu: conversations with her friends about the closures, and informal monuments to segregation such as the closed elementary school. In this case, what Rita could not acquire through more traditional access to information (her parents, newspapers, or other trusted adult figures) instead came through knowledge preserved communally: her friend and the physical memorialization of the closures symbolized by the chains of the school. For adults, the closure of the schools was also a perversion of a previous symbol of victory. Those who endured the student walkouts in 1951 were proud of the newly built \textit{Mary E. Branch #2}: the building represented a victory against the inequalities of Jim Crow South. Now that it had been closed, it had gone from a place of empowerment to a symbol of Massive Resistance.

\textsuperscript{126} Rita Moseley, interview with author.
Others from the Lost Generation came to historical consciousness of the closures through the inverse of the closed Black schools: observations of the White children who still attended via White Flight schools. Harry Lee Eddins Jr. had not yet attended school when the closures first occurred but has vivid memories of watching his White peers attend school.

I was too young to understand the concept of school closed, but I used to live of the avenues, which is first, second, third Avenue and we used to come through there to go to the store, and we used to see white kids go to school and they seemed to be having fun. When school reopened, I had a little animosity against white people because I didn’t think the school books were fair to our history. They left out a lot of our history concerning the country in our studies, so our books were half-truths.\textsuperscript{127}

The Prince Edward Academy, established by the private fund to educate the White youth of Prince Edward County during the closures, was just a mile from the closed Mary E. Branch #1 and Mary E. Branch #2. The academy’s central location in town made it difficult to miss for those completing chores in Farmville proper. The juxtaposition of school closure and school attendance by race did not go unnoticed; while political nuance is difficult to grasp as young children, perceptions of unfairness are difficult to ignore. For Harry Lee Eddins Jr. the realization had long term ramifications: “It made me kind of prejudiced because I seen how much society looked down on use as people of color, and how we had to take a back seat or be second-class citizens…I think we lost in segregation, I think we lost because what was once a thriving Black community is lost and we were just pushed to the side.”\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{127} Moseley, Silence Broken, 68.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 69.
Eddins’ understanding of the closures, informed by the popular memory of the event, crystallized mistrust of the White community in Prince Edward County. His mistrust extended reasonably into his experience in schools after they reopened where narratives of Black history were suppressed, and discussion of the closures were muted by those who perpetrated them. Discussion of the school closures would not officially enter state curriculum until 2008.\textsuperscript{129} His experience was not an isolated occurrence, and Prince Edward Academy would continue to represent the divisions within Prince Edward County even with the subsequent generation of students.

Frustration with school closures were not always aimed externally at the White community. Competence of orientation is a crucial part of historical consciousness which involves “guiding action by means of notions of temporal change, articulation of human identity with historical knowledge, and interweaving one’s own identity into the concrete warp and woof of historical knowledge”.\textsuperscript{130} For young children, separation of external political events from personal causation is difficult. Shirley Ann Davison-Eanes was six years old when schools closed but immediately related the closures to her own family life. She notes “I think I probably felt like it was something I had done; the reason schools had closed stem[ed] from something else that was going on in my personal life. I think I associated everything that happened outside my home environment, and kind of put it all

\textsuperscript{129} https://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/history_socialscience/2008/index.shtml
\textsuperscript{130} Rusen, \textit{Historical Consciousness}, 70.
together and made it part of my home environment.”\textsuperscript{131} In her case, understanding of the closures came with an association of personal fault.

Through observations of her social environment, Rita reached “competence of interpretation”: there was a clear distinction between the past and the present, and inferences could be made about the future state of her life. While seeing her elementary school in chains was a lynchpin moment that solidified her understanding that schools were closed for the foreseeable future, assumptions about the causes of the closure came from the limited information that she had access to as a child. For her, the closures seemed to be the result of her White peers rather than any larger political motivation.

\textbf{Rory Dunn}- That's an amazing story. Um so did you feel betrayed somehow by the county, betrayed by the institution that was supposed to be there for you?

\textbf{Rita Moseley}- Well I felt was one thing that school was closed really because the White kids didn't want to go to school with the Black kids. That's what I believed, and the other thing it instilled so much distrust that today at my age, and throughout my childhood and adulthood, I have a hard time trusting people. And that's why I always pay close attention to what people say when they talk. I can get a feeling from those people if they are genuine from my lifelong experience of examining each person carefully...

\textbf{Rory Dunn}- So are there markers that you recognize in a person that is someone that you should not trust versus trust?

\textbf{Rita Moseley}- Repeat that please.

\textbf{Rory Dunn}- So are there signs that indicate to you that this is a person you can trust versus not trust as you talk to them?

\textbf{Rita Moseley}- You know I just have this instinct, of how they talk and what they say. I just have a feeling when some of them are not sincere, they are

\textsuperscript{131} Moseley, \textit{Silence Broken}, 48.
saying things just to get what they want or what they need from me. But they are really not feeling it.\textsuperscript{132}

Here Rita notes that her inference was that the reason schools were shut down was due to racial tension from White children. This is especially revealing of the social climate of Prince Edward County; Rita had already experienced social conditioning from the inherently separate environments of White society from Black society in Farmville. The natural conclusion from her observations of both the closed Black schools and Prince Edward Academy would be that her peers wished for segregation. Crystallization of mistrust from the event would follow Rita well into her adulthood, even after her revelatory experience in Belk-Leggetts.\textsuperscript{133} Crystalized mistrust of both public schools, those associated with control over education continued into subsequent generations of students. That Prince Edward Academy continued to operate effectively as a White Flight school for the next several decades reaffirmed the informal monument to Massive Resistance.

From Rita’s experience, there were several lingering effects of the school closures on the Black community in Prince Edward County. First, there was a pall of silence that affected the parents and children who endured the closures; For parents this might have been a function of the pain that came with the closures. For the children, this silence left little to explain their condition except their physical observations and conversations with each other. Meanwhile, the trauma of walking by her school’s chained doors, and conversations with her friend group left Rita with an enduring distrust of White people. As an adult, Rita recognized

\textsuperscript{132} Rita Moseley, interview with author.  
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
that her initial assumptions about the closures were incorrect, but that there was still lingering 
resentment from the community that manifested as behavioral problems in the school where 
she worked. Rita’s observations of that generational resentment within the community-led 
her to make the concerted decision to withhold knowledge of the closures from her kids.

The racial division that existed after schools reopened did not go unnoticed by those 
who returned to school. Children continued to attend Prince Edward Academy in large 
numbers even as attempts to entice students back to the county schools were made. Peggy 
Eddins distinctly recalls the first White student to attend R. R. Moton school nearly two years 
after schools reopened: a girl named Patricia Tooa.134 Harry Lee Eddins Jr. recalled that the 
school board decided to change the school’s name to make it more enticing to white 
students.135 The newly named “Prince Edward High School” grew its White population to 
four students by the time he graduated, but he noted that those students were either the 
children of the school board members or were too poor to attend the academy.136 The divide 
in attendance at the county schools were distinctly visible to Rita’s son Frank Moseley II, 
even before she told him formally about the school closures. 137

134 Moseley, *Silence Broken*, 70.
135 Ibid., 68–69.
136 Ibid.
137 Frank Moseley II, Interview with author.
CHAPTER 3: FRANK MOSELEY II: INTERGENERATIONAL ECHOES OF THE CLOSURES

**Lasting Turmoil: The New Setting of Prince Edward County**

To understand the environment in which Rita’s son Frank attended the public schools in Prince Edward County, it is useful to briefly track the history and politics of their reopening. Much of how the reopening was handled continued to damage public perceptions of the schools. The role of both the school board and the administration of the schools was critical in that public relations crisis.

The Free Schools were a temporary stop-gap measure to help individuals who were shut out return to school from 1963-1964. A year after their formal support from the Kennedy administration and the wave of national attention, traditional public schools reopened, and students began to transition back into their care. Some students, like Rita, returned to Prince Edward County from afar, and rejoined their families. Others permanently left. Despite the legal losses that had handicapped state-funded Prince Edward Academy, White enrollment remained exceptionally high. Meanwhile, White enrollment in the public schools remained so low that the number of white students in the system could be

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counted on one hand for the next several years.\textsuperscript{139} Jill Titus aptly describes the Academy’s dedication to continued segregation during this time as a “heritage of defiance.”\textsuperscript{140}

Public trust in the schools had been eroded from both sides of the community. White people still controlled the school board of Prince Edward County, and the Black community felt wary of the school board that had already dealt them considerable damage. The White community felt embarrassed and angered by their continued losses in the court system and were especially wary of the growing political power of Rev. Griffin and the economic reach of his boycotts.\textsuperscript{141} White concerns about the possibilities of Black school board members grew in the face of Black organized political strength.

By 1970, newspapers in counties as far as Norfolk were still following Prince Edward County’s circumstances closely. \textit{The Daily Press} discussed the turmoil within the district in an article of October 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1970; the then assistant superintendent of Prince Edward County, Frank Barham, incisively noted that “We’re not completely trusted by either the White or the Black community… the Whites thought we would come in and be ultra-liberal and take up the cause of the negro. The negroes thought we would be pawns of the White power structure.”\textsuperscript{142} Both Ronald Perry, the new superintendent of the county schools and Barham sought to revitalize the public schools which had seen a great degree of budgetary neglect

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 151.
\textsuperscript{140} Titus, \textit{Brown’s Battleground}, 201.
\textsuperscript{141} Titus, \textit{Brown’s Battleground}, 195.
\textsuperscript{142} Syd Courson “Dual School System Remains 16 Years After Court Decision” \textit{The Daily Press}, October 11\textsuperscript{th}, 1970. https://www.newspapers.com/image/233384735/?terms=Prince%20Edward%20Academy&match=1
from the previous administration. They were met with mixed feelings by the Black community over several policy decisions that occurred under their leadership.

Distrust from both sides was well earned, but those in the Black community were especially wary of public schools. While it was a victory for schools to be reopened, there was a perceived loss of control over their children’s education. The free schools had operated largely under Black leadership, but the school board remained predominantly White. Amongst those White school board members, it became very clear that their priorities did not lie with the public schools. Of the four White members of the school board that year, three of them had children attending the segregation academy. The last remaining White member did not have children. In 1969, James Holmes and N. P. Miller became the first Black men to join the school board. Their addition to the board marginally increased the visibility into the decisions of the previously opaque committee but left control with the Conservative White majority.

Further fueling division in the county was the renaming of the R. R. Moton High School. The school’s name was changed in 1969 by the county to Prince Edward High School, perhaps as an attempt to draw White students back to the public school system. Members of the Black community felt enraged that there was little community outreach about the decision and felt a degree of identity loss, as the school had previously bore the

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144 Ibid.
name of a Black man.\textsuperscript{146} The optics of the move were divisive, but not unprecedented in tone: even the traditionally more progressive local colleges, Hampden Sydney and Longwood College provided tuition payment plans for their faculty’s children to attend the academy rather than public schools. By 1970, White attendance in public schools had barely risen. Just 46 students attended the county’s public schools compared to 1,369 Black students.\textsuperscript{147} For all intents and purposes, segregation continued and, worse still, public schools poorly represented the interests of the Black majority who attended them.

Meanwhile, frustrations over funding percolated within the White community of Prince Edward County. A series of court losses had confounded plans to publicly fund the segregation academy, and the backlash from the original plans had stressed the White community financially. Grants had originally been provided to White families via state funding at the outset of the closures; when this plan failed, the county distributed local funds to help White families pay their tuition fees. A federal court order deemed this to be a misappropriation of funds and subsequently ordered that the $180,000 sum be returned to the county’s coffers.\textsuperscript{148} The order financially stressed the White community, the effect of which was only exacerbated by the taxes White families paid into the same public schools they avoided. Nonetheless, despite the financial difficulties of paying into two separate education systems, a teacher in Prince Edward County noted the following, “The White population in the county isn’t disturbed about the school system anymore because it doesn’t affect them

\textsuperscript{146} Moseley, Silence Broken, 255.  
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
except when the tax bills come. They have nothing at stake, so they don’t really care at all.”

Superintendent Perry, an outsider from Pennsylvania, found himself tasked with the job of trying to rebuild public trust, an especially difficult venture as the former district superintendent, Bryant R. Harper, had sent his own children to the segregation academy. Harper resigned from the position in 1969 following intense backlash from the Black community in the form of boycotts, student walkouts, and protests. Perry had to walk a thin line between appeasing the Conservative majority of the school board and convincing the Black community that he was not a saboteur like his predecessor.

As Perry and Barnham navigated the early years of trust-building with the Black community, they experienced highs and lows. Perry had initially won a fair deal of clout with the Black community by sending his own children to the public schools: the measure did not go unnoticed, especially given the stance of his predecessor. Perry had also won a degree of federal aid for the school system, which helped alleviate some of the financial neglect of the years immediately following its reopening. Perry and Barnham even managed to open the county’s first public kindergarten, a move that provided earlier childcare and educational rehabilitation that many parents needed. From a professional development standpoint, the duo worked together to provide “in-service programs, curriculum workshops, and evening

150 Ibid.
151 Titus, Brown’s Battleground, 197.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid., 197.
graduate courses for faculty”. The benefits were matched with equally important breakdowns in trust. A large majority of Perry’s staff was White, and the some within the Black community felt as though he was erasing the Black identity of the school, a claim that was partially substantiated by Perry’s support to rename the schools. Perry resigned in 1972 under bad terms with the Black community, stating in his own resignation that community groups involved in hiring new teachers were discriminatory against Whites. His comments were not well received.

Perry’s replacement fostered a more unified age for Prince Edward County Schools. James Anderson emerged as the superintendent of Prince Edward County Schools, a position he would hold until 1997. Anderson carefully navigated the divisions in the community by noting that he would not deliberately attempt to draw White students to the public schools; this pleased both sides of the community. As Anderson entered his position, education funding shifted under Virginia Governor Linwood Holton. The policy shifts forced the school board to increase the budget of the public schools. Meanwhile, the economic revitalization of Prince Edward County invited families from different parts of the nation to attend the schools. By 1980 “Whites made up nearly 25 percent of the district’s 2,200 students,” although it should be stressed that this integration largely came from individuals who moved to the district and not from longstanding residents. The Prince Edward

154 Ibid.
155 Ibid., 198.
156 Ibid., 197-198.
157 Ibid., 198
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid., 199.
Academy remained a bastion of segregated education throughout the 1970s, although its status as such would come under increasing scrutiny in the late 1970s.

National attention was drawn to White Flight schools by court cases like *Green v. Connally*. The case took aim at the racially motivated admissions processes of private schools that benefited from tax exempt status. Following a few similar cases, the IRS radically changed the tax code by denying tax exemption to schools:

> which have been determined in adversary or administrative proceedings to be racially discriminatory; or were established or expanded at or about the time the public school districts in which they are located or which they serve were desegregating, and which cannot demonstrate that they do not racially discriminate in admissions, employment, scholarships, loan programs, athletics, and extracurricular programs.\(^{160}\)

The tax change had a maelstrom-like effect on private schools across the country, and Prince Edward Academy was no exception. Strongly opposing the decision, Prince Edward Academy lost its tax exempt status in 1978.\(^{161}\) The early 1980s saw the Academy’s tuition balloon to over $1,300 dollars a year; student enrollment began to decline precipitously.\(^{162}\) Desperate to reduce to cost of tuition, in 1986, Prince Edward Academy admitted 5 Black students as an attempt to demonstrate that its admission process was not discriminative.\(^{163}\) The token admission worked; in April of 1986, the school regained its tax-exempt status, albeit with a fair amount of criticism.\(^{164}\) Democrat J. J. Pickle, who was on the House

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\(^{162}\) Ibid., 202-203.

\(^{163}\) Ibid.

committee that oversaw the efforts of the IRS noted that “It seems to me that the Internal Revenue Service has literally leaned over backward to give the benefit of the doubt to Prince Edward Academy.”165 Locals questioned the intent behind the academy’s token integration, and Black students remained an infinitesimal minority of the school’s population throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s.166

It would be in this setting, that Frank Moseley II attended public school in Prince Edward County. The divisions with the local community over public-school policy and the enduring legacy of Prince Edward Academy would overshadow much of Frank’s time in public schools. Growing dissatisfaction with curriculum and observations of White attempts to continue segregation was inescapable throughout the South; Frank’s experience in school bolsters that historical trend.167 At the same time, frustrations with the public-school experience augmented a growing drive for Black-controlled education outside of the purview of public school. Frank’s own experience in Prince Edward County would gear him towards creating his own alternative to an education system he viewed as woefully inept.168

Frank Moseley’s II’s Experience in Public School

The Prince Edward County that Frank Moseley II grew up in was different from the Prince Edward County that his mother and father lived in as children. The school closures

165 Ibid.
168 Frank Moseley II, interview with author.
and the mismanaged years following the district’s reopening had drained the county of much of its original Black population. Seeking better opportunities, many of the families that Rita grew up with had left the county. Economic revitalization in the 1970s welcomed immigrants to Prince Edward County in large numbers. Recalling his neighborhood, Frank notes that “one of the interesting things I recall about my childhood was that we lived in a low-income neighborhood where most of my childhood friends, not all of them, but a lot of them had single parents. They were raised in single parent households.” Juxtaposed to Rita’s neighborhood growing up, the shift in demographic is notable and indicative of some long-term effects in community stability; what had once been a community of two-parent households now endured the difficulties of single-parent childrearing.

Despite the difficulties the local neighborhood endured, Frank recalls with great respect the environment his parents secured for him. He notes:

I don’t think I recognized that as much when I was younger, my parents did an amazing job of shielding me from poverty. We always had food in the refrigerator, even if it wasn’t the top-shelf name brand food. But we always had something to eat, the power was always on, and the water was always running. We always had presents at birthdays and Christmas. So, they did an amazing job of using the resources and income that they had in order to raise two children.169

The result of his parents’ hard work secured Frank an environment where “there was not a lot of stress outside of being a kid”170. While he avoided stress from economic factors, Frank felt isolated as a young child, partially due to the age gap between him and his sister.

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169 Frank Moseley II, interview with author, Richmond, Virginia, March 7th, 2022.
170 Ibid.
While the siblings were close growing up, Gladys JoAnn Moseley, his sister, was 8 years his senior. The age gap and difference in sex made sibling play difficult. Instead, Frank fostered a community of friends and cousins to play with. Building a community with them was difficult, and there were times when Frank felt like he was bullied, and he didn’t understand why. The experience left him feeling like a social outcast, a feeling which would follow him into school.\textsuperscript{171}

Rita made sure that Frank also grew up with an interracial community. The experience gave Frank “a different perspective on race than a lot of my kids in my neighborhood that never got to have those experiences. I remember kids, White kids, getting picked on and I’m stepping up in front of Black kids to make sure they don’t get beat up,”\textsuperscript{172} When asked to explain why he felt like he had such a different experience from the other neighborhood kids, Frank noted that “they didn’t have a mom like mine that accepted the school closing in a way that wasn’t resentful”\textsuperscript{173} While it was something he did not feel as a young person, Frank felt that there was a tangible resentment within the community for reasons he did not understand.

Frank’s elementary school provided no reprieve from bullying; he recalls vividly being bullied for his name.

They used to call hotdogs ‘Franks’ right? And so, everyone would go in on me. ‘Oh, we having Frank’ ‘Franks for lunch.’ ‘Frank this’ and ‘Frank that’ or ‘were gonna eat a Frank’ ’Frank the wiener’ and so for me it was like why, why me? Why am I getting picked on? It didn't really turn me off from school, like I know some kids now

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
they get bullied, but it turned me off from kind of appreciating my own identity as being an individual. You know I remember going home in tears asking my mother why did you name me Frank? Like out of all the names, all the cool names, you had to pick Frank the name of a hotdog.

She said ‘I didn't name you after a hotdog. Right? I named you after your father.’ And I still didn't understand ‘Well why did his Dad name him Frank after a hotdog?’ None of this is making sense to me. The reason why I don't do it as often as I probably have done in the past now, but I make a point of saying Frank Moseley the II because she explained to me that that was how in Europe, that was how kings were acknowledged by being the 2nd, the 3rd, King James the I, the 2nd, queen so-on and so-forth174

The moment was a shift for Frank, one that established for him a lifelong interest in legacy; he was proud of his name and determined to leave something behind in the way that his parents before him had done.175 Frank applied himself early on in school and found himself enjoying his elementary school classes. Rita pushed for him to apply for the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program, part of the vocational tracking system that Superintendent James Anderson had implemented.176 Vocational tracking, a somewhat controversial educational process, divides students into different “tracks” based on academic performance. Meant to boost student attainment, tracking has been criticized due to the bottlenecking of student demographics, which often leaves Black students relegated to lower tracks.177 Looking back upon his application and acceptance into the TAG Arts program, Frank noted that “my mom made sure I was integrated in a way that was inclusive with all of my, even at a public school, White counterparts”.178 At the time, Frank didn’t understand why she pushed so hard

174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
176 Titus, Brown’s Battleground, 198.
178 Frank Moseley II, interview with author.
for him to be in integrated classrooms and why she had advocated so heavily for him to be placed in the advanced educational tracks.

A common theme of Frank’s early childhood was engaging with the informed decisions of his mother and failing to recognize the shadow of the school closures in them. While Rita worked hard not to disclose the story of the closures to Frank, he remembers moments when she would share snippets of the truth regarding the school closures, although these happened mostly in relation to his father’s experience.

Now the thing that my mom did consciously, is tell us… before the school closing story, that my father never graduated from high school because they closed the school. I didn’t really understand it at that young age. But I would hear her say that right? Not a lot, but I would hear her talk about it ‘you know your dad never finished high school’. I never really understood why, but it was never really anything they dwelled on right? My dad may have mentioned it a couple of times as well.179

Consciousness of the truth behind the closures would escape Frank until he was much older and in high school himself. He continued experience moments where, as a young person, he had difficulty connecting historical cause and effect. When recalling moments with his mother, Frank noted:

Now that I think about it there was an experience that my mom told me about the school closings, and I didn’t understand it. Again, she told me these things but in references that didn’t really capitulate with the actual facts and timeline, so I am not understanding that these things happened the way they happened. I knew that my mom had to leave and go. She told me stories about having to go to Blacksburg right? But I didn’t understand that it was because of the school closings. I knew that these things were happening in my parents’ lives, but I didn’t know that it was an effect of the school closings. I just thought these were things that were happening in their life.180

179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
Frank’s inability to draw connections between the events of his parents’ lives and the school closures makes sense: the competence of orientation that is part of historical consciousness is something that is typically achieved later in life, and Frank heard these stories when he was in elementary school. Additionally, while the effects of the closures were tangibly present within his home life and the local community, explanations behind the closures were purposefully kept hidden. Even as Frank entered middle and high school, the local of history of Prince Edward County was kept out of traditional history curricula. He notes “it wasn’t something that was really… brought up during Black History Month. It wasn’t something that was a common thread in the overarching history of landmark decisions”. He was more likely to learn about the March on Washington, Selma, and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. than the school closures because those that had contributed to the closures were embarrassed, and there was great pain from the victims in discussing the closures from those affected. Frank’s own father, like Rita, had been closed out from schools; the experience resulted in him not graduating high school. Out of his parents, Frank noted that his mother was almost always the one that discussed events of the closures with him because “it’s a very hurtful situation for him. Even to this day he kind of laments the fact that this opportunity for him to do other things was taken from him… he was just embarrassed to go back.”

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181 Ibid.  
182 Ibid.  
183 Ibid.
As a child, there were moments when the long-lasting effects of the closures manifested in moments that left Frank feeling confused but aware that something deeper affected the community’s interactions. These moments would reveal the undercurrents of racism solidified in the physical environment of Farmville that remained from the closures. In one memory, Frank recalls playing with his friends on a playground near Prince Edward Academy.

There was also a playground, right? I don’t know if it was fenced off or if it was just an open playground. The kids in the trailer park I would go and play with. Across it was a field, just a grassy field and we used to go play football over there and tag. But you know it had the swing set, the jungle gym, all the little stuff you would see on a playground in a normal community, that’s where it was. I remember telling my mom she was like ‘where have you been?’ oh we were up there playing. ‘You were playing where?’ and she just kind of freaked out! ‘Don’t you know that you’re not supposed to be over there, that’s the Academy’s!’ It was like an alarm went off, like I had done something wrong. I was like ‘what are you talking about I was just on the playground?’ You know, I didn’t understand.\(^{184}\)

Rita’s reaction to the moment confused Frank and he incorrectly assumed the reason behind her concern. “I’m just thinking that kids that don’t go to the school were there. It’s a private school, they don’t want kids from Prince Edward County to go to that school, not because we were Black.”\(^ {185}\) The moment did forge an acute awareness for Frank that Prince Edward Academy existed and was distinctly different from the public schools. Frank started walking up to the school on weekends to look through the windows and noticed how nice the classrooms were.\(^ {186}\) While Frank admitted that at the time he did not have the ability to

\(^{184}\) Ibid.
\(^{185}\) Ibid.
\(^{186}\) Ibid.
compare the quality of the two schools, he did note that there was a difference between them and that by the time he was about to leave elementary school that it was readily apparent that there was a separate school system.\textsuperscript{187}

Still, throughout Frank’s childhood, understanding of the real historical events that preceded the creation of the school escaped him. When stories of the closures reached Frank, he related them to his own experience which often left true understanding behind. Middle school, 1985-1988, was a particularly tumultuous time because Frank switched schools twice. He initially attended what used to be called the R. R. Moton school, was transferred to what used to be a Free school, the Worsham school, and the following year landed at a newly rebuilt Prince Edward High School.\textsuperscript{188}

But when I was at that school [Moton], and going through those doors, again there is another memory that is coming back, my mom did tell me that she used to go up to that same school, and that it was closed down. But again, I left that school and went to Worsham, and then I left that school and went to Prince Edward High School. They closed both those schools down. So, I didn’t think that it was closed down back then because of racism… schools close. It’s an old school, they upgraded, there’s a better school. We’re cool. I thought the same thing happened to them, right?\textsuperscript{189}

\textbf{High School}

When Frank started attending high school at Prince Edward High School in 1988, he noticed certain trends in the city of Farmville’s layout. The isolation that Prince Edward Academy created for Whites effectively occurred outside of school in town. Income

inequality, redlining, and gentrification relegated low-income Black families to Virginia St., Southside, and Parkview Gardens. Meanwhile, wealthier White families lived on Hill St. and Third Avenue. The town’s layout effectively prevented accidental cross-racial interactions, except for the stores on Main St.\textsuperscript{190} The awareness of a very separate society became difficult to ignore.

As Frank became a teenager, the role of Prince Edward Academy and what it represented became more apparent, even without the full story from his parents. Interacting with other students from his school made it clear that the Academy was more than just a separate school system, but that there was malicious intent behind that separation. As Frank became interested in girls, he noted that some of the girls he went to school with:

\begin{quote}
Got transferred from that school to Prince Edward [Public Schools]. Sometimes their parents taught at the Academy, but they went to public school ‘cause they couldn’t afford it, I don’t know. But either way we started to kind of coming with that crowd and I’m sure their parents hated it. Once we understood as young Black boys the dynamics that ‘hey we’re not supposed to be tasting this forbidden fruit \textit{per se}’. We’re not supposed to be going out, we’re not supposed to be seen. They’re bringing us to their little hangout spots where nobody else would know that they’re with us and if they see us in public we have to ‘oh we don’t know them, they don’t know me’. But that was when we started to understand that there was a difference between race and why they went to that school, and why they thought maybe they were better than us.\textsuperscript{191}
\end{quote}

The mixed-race interactions were indicative of a generational shift in the perspective on interracial relationships, but also of awareness of the still existing societal norms that enforced racial separation. When asked whether both sides of the mixed-race relationships

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.
were aware of their parents’ views on interracial dating, Frank said “Absolutely, and I think that now that I look at these old Civil Rights movies back in the sixties, I can understand my parents’ fears. Because they were getting murdered for being seen or going on dates or holding hands or whistling. You know all this craziness over interracial interactions”.\textsuperscript{192}

Regional hesitation over interracial relationships was compounded by national trends on interracial relationships. The plaintiffs in \textit{Loving v. Virginia}, the interracial marriage case that emerged from nearby Caroline County, Virginia, had only won the victory in the Supreme Court in 1967.\textsuperscript{193} The case would have been on the forefront of Black parents’ minds.

The separation of the Academy was recognized by Black students, even as their parents remained silent about its origins. Frank noted the phenomenon by stating

> Once you were in public school and you were a certain age you knew about the Academy. Even if you weren’t thinking about it you were thinking about it. It was kind of subconsciously embedded in your head that there were White kids that were maybe coming from that school that are going here, or that there were White kids that are fleeing to that school if they didn’t like it here.\textsuperscript{194}

While the history of the school closures often escaped the consciousness of the students, the lingering effects of segregation were readily apparent and poorly concealed. Frank realized, especially in high school, that Prince Edward Academy was actively segregationist. Like many in Prince Edward County, he noted that the forms of integration the Academy took were nominal.\textsuperscript{195}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[192] Ibid.
\item[194] Frank Moseley II, interview with author.
\item[195] Ibid.
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They started recruiting Black athletes from Prince Edward County to try and come to their school by giving them free tuition. So it was just like well, if you could have done that for the star athletes, why wouldn’t you have done it for anyone else… that was the goal. Pick the best students that you can from public school, give them a free ride and promise them access to greater opportunities because of their connection. That would then let their school look like it is a diverse and inclusive school which it has never been.  

During Frank’s time in high school, he also noticed that resentment towards the segregation of Prince Edward Academy was becoming palpable amongst the student body. While tensions existed between the separate school systems, internal tensions between the White and Black population in the public schools resulted in self-segregation. Frank noted that the lunchroom, which offered freedom of seat selection, a feature unavailable in the classrooms, was always self-segregated. If your parents were “rebbish”, a term Frank attributed to Rita as a description of those with sympathies to the Confederacy, that “you sat at a table with a very small group to yourselves.” This trend of self-segregation continued well into the 2000’s with then Superintendent Patricia Watkins expressing surprise upon her appointment that the district had race-separated cheer-leading squads. Bonastia notes in *Southern Stalemate* that “Watkins found that students in elementary and middle school [were] not cognizant of racial issues, but that in High School ‘you tend to see a big difference in the groups of students who gather together at lunch…” For Frank, the consciousness of

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196 Ibid.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
200 Ibid.
the division came in part from observations of his environment, but also the musical setting of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

We were conscious of those things. It was more of us than there was of them. And again, during that era, it was the music of that generation that kinda fueled, shaped and molded how we looked at… whether it was about stop the violence or whether it was about getting back in touch with Africa, or whether it was ‘F the Police’.201

Music and television had a profound effect on tension within the school. Frank asserted that the juxtaposition between what he and his friends were consuming, and what his parents and teachers were saying fostered a sense of rebellion and unique identity amongst his peers.

Like we’re not that generation anymore. We’re not going to be held by those standards, those limitations, those fears. We were very conscious of our parents’ fears and hated it. Right? Like we had all watched Roots. It was like a household tradition, you know? As soon as it came on every year, and every year the schools would prepare for it… like ‘aw Roots is about to drop again, you know Roots is about to drop!’ And so they would prepare for the fallout, because they knew that kids would come to school and they would be tense.202

One moment in his high school career had a lynchpin effect on Frank’s understanding of the racial environment in Prince Edward County. When he obtained his work permit, he started to work catered events at Longwood College; he was excited for the job and to begin earning money, and many of his classmates both Black and White worked there. One night, Frank served a table with one of his coaches: Coach Meadows. He waited on the table of 8 for a good portion of the night, but when the time came for the table to leave a tip, they decided to leave it for Frank’s White classmate Dana. She did not wait on the table.

201 Frank Moseley II, interview with author.
202 Ibid.
I’m just like dude are you serious? Its not like he didn’t know who his server was. Right? I go to your school. I am in your class. You know the difference between me and Dana right? Why would you do that? Why would you allow that to happen? So I lost all respect for him at that point. My mom was like ‘no…’ I was like ‘No, I aint going back to that job. I’m not doing nothing with that dude.” 203

Rita erred on the side of innocence for Coach Meadows and tried to note that perhaps it was an honest mistake. She urged Frank to explain his perception of the moment to the coach at school. Frank never did, although he noted later that his mother had talked to Coach Meadows for him: her intervention encouraged a half-hearted apology from the coach which Frank summarily dismissed. 204 The slight changed Frank’s perception of Farmville and damaged the relationship he had with some of his teachers.

All these things that were in my subconscious started to click, right? Just like the Academy, Longwood College, all White. You know what I’m saying? Once I started looking around, I’m just like ‘so that’s who they think I am.” The role that I am supposed to play is the server. Right? And even the server that doesn’t get compensated. The server whose tips get given to the White girl. I was like screw this, I’m out. 205

Frank felt subsequently felt disconnected from what he was learning, and aimless in high school. He struggled to balance what he was learning with what he felt his job prospects were, especially considering the barriers he felt existed in securing good jobs within the county. An interest in computer and electronic technology was dashed when he learned that mathematics was involved: a core class that he struggled with. 206 The moment deflated him and left him feeling ambivalent about the future, especially because so many members of his

203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
205 Ibid.
206 Ibid.
family worked in the service industry. The work was low paying and seemed degrading especially with his own experience as a server informing his perspective.

My father worked construction. My mom was an administrator to the secretary, well she may have been a secretary at that time. And my grandparents worked in a furniture manufacturing warehouse. You know my aunt did retail. Its just not anything that was like ‘oh do you want to be a lawyer, do you want to be a doctor. That takes 8-10 years of life in school’ I don’t like school that much right, to where I ‘d want to do those things… I don’t know what it is that is out there for me.207

While Frank was struggling in high school, his sister was attending college in Danville, Virginia. Her experiences in college were novel: she was the first person in their family to attend, but it did little to shift Frank’s worldview. He couldn’t draw connections between the opportunities that college presented and tangible effects in his own life, partially because no one else was visible in his community that had gone to college. Frank’s disillusionment with school corresponded with activities outside of school that began to concern his parents. He began to shoplift and was caught twice. Luckily, the charges were kept off his record due to a misdemeanor one chance program the state was endorsing.208 Rita took the moment to sit Frank down and explain, for the first time, the whole story of her experience. Her story affected him and helped him forge understanding of his family’s struggle during the closures.

She’s like ‘Do you want to go to college?’ and I was just like ‘I don’t know, not really.’ And she’s like ‘well you know, we really never got the chance to go to college. You know why?’ And I was like ‘no’… ‘Yeah well back when we were going to school, they closed the school down. They didn’t want us to have an education.’ That was probably when she told me, they can take anything from you,

207 Ibid.
208 Ibid.
but they can’t take what’s in your head. And that was something that really kind of resonated with me.\textsuperscript{209}

Still, for Frank, the moment was more about seeing the pain his family endured and understanding the wishes they had for him than it was about personal understanding of how the closures affected the whole community. He notes:

So yeah my mom then explained to me that, when they closed the schools she had ‘I had to go to Blacksburg, well that’s where I had to go because there was nowhere else to go to school’. And what was more heartbreaking than losing her education was losing her family… so yeah seeing that pain and kind of understanding that the situation caused that pain, and me understanding how important it was for my sister who got it, for whatever reason, my sister she got the story apparently it clicked with her right away… It didn’t click for me, but I knew it was something that meant something to them. I didn’t want to disappoint them as far as graduation high school.\textsuperscript{210}

The moment was pivotal in understanding his parent’s feelings about the closures and helped Frank solidify his concept of familial legacy; despite the importance of the conversation, the knowledge that schools closed for the whole community did not yet clarify his understanding of the broader effects of the closures. Generational silence of the event might have curtailed Frank’s ability to generalize his parent’s pain to the larger community.

Formal education through the public school system was an area in which Frank began to apply himself, at least nominally for his parents. As he began to bring his grades up, Frank’s uncle visited him during his Junior year of high school in 1992. The visit was prompted by his grandmother’s death. The experience was transformative for him, and it was

\textsuperscript{209} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.

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the first time he had met his uncle, another victim of the closures. His uncle, a devout Muslim who had spent time in Pakistan, exposed Frank to Islam, the writings of Malcolm X, and self-education. To Frank, it was the moment where he “start[ed] to value education in a different way, like self-education”. Frank would go on to graduate with honors from Prince Edward High School in 1993 but would carry his uncle’s lessons with him as he attended North Carolina A&T State University.

**College and Adult Life**

Frank’s experience at A&T was disappointing. He originally went to learn to be a teacher, drawing inspiration from a gym teacher he liked in high school. Once he found out about teacher salaries, something he dubbed “inconsistent with his desired lifestyle”, he quickly moved to business administration. He dropped out in 1996, feeling as though he had acquired what he needed to be a successful entrepreneur. Once out of college, Frank got caught selling drugs and was convicted of felony charges. The moment was a wake-up call and he had to “start from scratch pretty much”. Rita advised that he look at St. Paul’s College, the place where she had gone back for her own degree. It was another moment of profound realization.

So I went back to school, that’s when I graduated from St. Paul’s College after my mom had graduated. So I think during that period of time, I learned how [the

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211 Rita Moseley, Interview with author.
212 Frank Moseley II, Interview with author.
213 Ibid.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
closures] impacted everybody else in that town. I only knew about how it impacted my family, my Mom, my Dad and my Uncle. But then I started to see how other people were impacted by it… you get the bigger picture.217

Once Frank graduated in 2009 with a B.S. in business administration, he found the direction he felt he was missing from his earlier education: providing alternative education opportunities outside of public schools. He started a nonprofit based in Richmond, Virginia called the Social Education for Economic Development Initiative (SEED4ALL) in 2020. The goal of the organization was to act as an intermediary for Black and other minority youth by providing access to resources aimed at skill building and financial literacy. When asked why he decided on SEED4ALL, Frank noted:

Frank: So, understanding everything that they went through made me realize that public schools were never going to teach what we needed to learn. They were never going to teach entrepreneurship; they were never going to teach the language of money; they were never going to teach Black history. Look at how they’re pushing back on critical race theory, right? So what was it that we could do. What was it that I could do with what I had learned, with everything that I have acquired?

Rory: So it was a recognition that public schools were no longer capable of building the financial…

Frank: Oh they’re capable!

Rory: Well there are parties that are purposefully obstructing the capability of building those financial skills, that history that is meaningful and important.

Frank: Right.

Frank holds to this day, the belief that public schools willfully sabotage student success in lieu of another goal: “They are trying to turn them into service industry workers, so they can keep this machine going right?” 218 His conclusion is eerily like the one he came

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217 Frank Moseley II, Interview with author.
218 Ibid.
to following his revelation working for the Longwood Catering service and fits into a larger trend of Black disillusionment with public education. Urban areas in the 1960s and 1970s across the United States saw a concerted effort to develop Pan-Africanized education, separate from the public schools which were seen as inept, white-washed, and subversive to Black excellence.  

For Frank, public schools were concerned only with appearances, not student results or skill-building. SEED4ALL would try to rectify that misdeed by crowdsourcing resources from the local Black community geared towards meeting students where they needed help. Its core mission is to “remove the barriers that adversely impact economic growth for low to moderate-income Africa Americans and people of color in the underserved communities of Virginia.”

**Popular Memory and Historical Consciousness**

Frank’s understanding of the school closures is like the experiences of many of those who grew up in affected families; a pall of silence from both the perpetrating community and those affected left little explanation to the next generation. In Frank’s family, the pain and shame his father felt about his lack of education kept him from talking, and Rita’s determination to raise her son without resentment kept her silent until he was high school age. While Rita’s and Frank Sr.’s silence initially had the intended effect of sheltering their

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220 Frank Moseley II, Interview with author.


222 Rita Moseley, Interview with author.
children, effects from the closures became readily apparent to Frank through observations of his environment. Frank’s understanding of the racial undercurrents of Farmville became more nuanced as he grew up and developed more a robust historical consciousness.

Informal monuments to continued segregation, like the physical space of Prince Edward Academy, were quickly recognized by Frank as distinctive early in his childhood. Frank’s recollection of his moment on Prince Edward Academy’s playground reveals that as young as elementary school, he was beginning to develop competence of orientation. The Academy was a marker for a larger distinction within his own community. While he would not develop full understanding or even awareness of the school closures until later, for Frank the Academy had already become a symbol of the community’s division. Parental awareness of the Academy’s role in the closures is evident from Rita’s reaction to Frank’s play. Even though Frank was occasionally exposed to both snippets of the truth regarding the closures, as a young child it was difficult for him to link causation to the effect of the closure. In one significant moment where Rita discusses the Moton school where they had both attended, Frank incorrectly assumed that the schools were closed because other newer facilities were being opened; Frank came to this conclusion because it mirrored his lived experience.223

Awareness that the uniqueness of Prince Edward Academy was a function of intentional segregation came to Frank as he attended middle and high school. Interactions with his White peers, both inside and outside of school, necessitated a degree of code-

223 Ibid.

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switching. Frank noted that both White students and Black students were aware of their parents’ preferences toward segregation in public, and they adapted to the expected social norm depending on their physical location. It was a point of rebellion, but also a realization of the long reach of segregation. When discussing dating White girls, he noted:

This was empowering because these daughters of yours that you were trying to keep so protected from us, all they want to do is come hang out with us... it was kind of like an inside joke for us, but at the same time it was always troublesome in the sense that if you ever wanted to have something more with anyone, you knew that you couldn’t.

His interaction with his White peers reveals that by the time Frank is in high school he is beginning to develop competence of interpretation: he was analyzing events in real-time and relating them to the past. In doing so, he was creating a framework with which to relate this past to future events. While the traditional means by which popular memory is usually passed down was suppressed (familial narratives, museums, official monuments), in the subsequent generation there was a subconscious recognition of the effects of the past on the present.

Even while popular narratives of closures were suppressed, resentment lingered in subsequent generations of students. Again, the section below merits further analysis:

Rory-But you felt like there was a resentment that existed?
Frank-With whom, within the community?
Rory-Yeah
Frank- Absolutely.

224 Ibid.
225 Ibid.

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Rory—And it was tangible in the schools too?

Frank—Yeah, I think it was. It was for a lot of different reasons that we didn’t understand. Once you were in public school and you were a certain age you knew about the Academy. Even if you weren’t thinking about it you were thinking about it. 226

Here the Academy represents something of a focal point for resentment, which Frank claims isn’t necessarily understood but is certainly felt. Frank noted that this resentment sometimes developed into animosity within the school, a factor he contributed to the fact that “they didn’t have a mom like mine that accepted school closings in a way that wasn’t resentful”. 227

It is useful to briefly discuss the role of media and its effect on how people interact with the past. Frank noted that shows like Roots, and music from groups like NWA, and Brand Nubian helped his friend group forge an identity that was distinct from their parents where “[They] were not going to be held by those standards, those limitations, those fears”. 228 Rosenzweig and Thelen’s The Presence of The Past is helpful in discerning the omnipresence of such media during this timeframe, as their study ran concurrently with the time period when Frank attended High School (1988-1993). Their survey found that 81% of those surveyed watched television or movies about the past, and while most respondents viewed these sources skeptically, the interactions from the past that engaged respondents most deeply were familial history. 229 As Frank and his peers were engaging with media that

226 Ibid.
227 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
229 Rosenzweig & Thelen, Popular Uses in American History, 21-22.
discussed Black history, they were relating it to their familial experiences of hardship, especially because that history was absent from the classroom. Remnants of painful history surrounded Frank and his classmates, permeated in their music and media, yet there was no official recognition of it in school or in the larger community.

Frank’s eventual engagement with familial narratives was especially formative for him. The visit from Frank’s uncle informed how Frank would later interact with public schools. His Uncle had experienced the closures but had become a champion of self-education through reading and religious self-discipline. His modeling would become integral to building Frank’s competence of interpretation, especially in how it interacted with Frank’s experiences through the Longwood catering job. Frank gained a recognition that self-empowerment was the only method of reliable skill-building and that public schools were unable to provide that service due to purposeful curtailing of the necessary skillsets.

Even without the traditional narratives through which popular memory is usually passed, Frank and his peers were acutely aware of racial inequity through the crystallization of Prince Edward Academy as a symbol of segregation. Experiences outside of the school, the depopulation of Black teachers, and the growing animosity within the community fostered a feeling of resentment which could be tangibly recognized in the public schools. The pain and damages from the school closures radiated through environmental scars to the subsequent generation of students.
CONCLUSION

Frank and Rita’s stories provide an invaluable new insight into the narrative of the school closures in Prince Edward County. While there already exists a considerable body of literature on the immediate ramifications of the closures, very little currently exists that discusses the popular memory of the closures and how the trauma of the event has persisted through generations of students. Analysis of the historical consciousness of both Rita and Frank provides insight into how the community engaged with the popular memory of the closures and how it subsequently affected behavior within that same community. Their stories provide evidence of how historicized trauma can persist even when generational silence prevents traditional methods of knowledge preservation.

This thesis first sought to analyze how popular memory of the closures manifested for both victims and their children, and how those who experienced community trauma came to view themselves within the larger historical narrative of the closures. Both Rita and Frank experienced persistent silence about the closures from their parents and the community; as familial modes of communicating the past are critical in preserving popular memory and have been found to create high rates of connectivity to the past, the silence about the closures
was particularly noteworthy to both Rita and Frank. Varied levels of historical consciousness of the closures instead came to them through observations of their physical environment. The trigger for this competence of orientation oftentimes came through buildings which had become crystalized in the community as symbols of the closures and segregation.

For Rita, when parental and community silence inadequately explained school closures, acceptance and recognition of the event came through observations of her elementary school and conversations with her similarly aged peers. The school’s previous status as a symbol of Black-controlled education, pride as a community center, and Rita’s own self-enrichment were perverted when the doors were chained. Purposeful removal of the school’s playground equipment destroyed the school’s use as a community center for children and sent the painful message to parents that support of integration had cost the community a precious focal point. Due to either pain or protection, the Black community maintained a pall of silence over the closures. For Rita, who did not have this vital context, the school’s chains represented something else: a fervent desire for White people to keep education separate, and to deprive her of something she loved. The experience would foster a permanent distrust of White people, which remained even despite her realizations later in life.

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231 Rita Moseley, Interview with author.
232 Ibid.
Frank, experienced similar generational silence, albeit for a different reason from his parents. Understanding the historic trauma that occurred in his community came from his observations of the segregation academy as a child. As early as elementary school, the Prince Edward Academy had become distinct in his mind as separate from his community.\(^{233}\) As he entered middle and high school, conversations with his friends and observations of those who attended the Academy solidified an understanding that the school represented something that was inherently racist. Frank recognized that the Academy hung subconsciously throughout the minds of his friends “even when [they] weren’t thinking about it”.\(^{234}\) A failure on the part of his school to address the obvious trauma within his community fostered a long-lasting belief that public schools could not adequately serve the needs of Black students.\(^{235}\) This trend is consistent with the work of individuals like Russell Rickford, which demonstrates a nationwide disillusionment of public schools in Black communities.\(^{236}\)

The interviews demonstrate, albeit with a narrow scope, that historicized trauma can persist intergenerationally, even when narratives of that trauma are suppressed by both the perpetrators and the victims. Informal monuments to that trauma are crystalized within the community and subsequently forge historical consciousness of community wrongdoing. While historical accuracy of the events is often lost, as is in the case of Rita and Frank, resentment lingers.

\(^{233}\) Frank Moseley II, interview with author.  
\(^{234}\) Ibid.  
\(^{235}\) Ibid.  
\(^{236}\) Rickford. “Community Control”. 

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This thesis also sought to address the gap in the existing literature on intergenerational effects from the school closures, especially regarding institutional trust. The interview with Rita, reaffirmed that institutional trust in the public schools was damaged in the generation that was closed out. Rita felt from her observations and conversations with her peers that White people were difficult to trust. Institutional mistrust was common amongst Rita’s generation and fits in existing literature of Prince Edward County demonstrated by Titus and Bonastia. Where Rita’s narrative is particularly insightful however, is in her status as an insider to public schools. Rita observed and confronted intergenerational resentment and distrust within young children, especially of White teachers within the Prince Edward County public schools. Observing the ramifications of this intergenerational effect convinced Rita and her husband to withhold knowledge of the school closures until her children were old enough to process it, noting “I didn’t want them to grow up with what I was seeing.”

Frank’s perspective reiterates this finding, that despite the official silence on the closures, there was a pervasive resentment and anger amongst his peers. Early in his educational career, Frank noticed a resentment in his peers he didn’t share, something he attributed to his mother’s decision to let go of resentment. In high school, Frank noted that bitterness against those that attended the segregation academy, and against people with

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237 Rita Moseley, interview with author.
238 Titus, Brown’s Battleground & Bonastia, Southern Stalemate.
239 Rita Moseley, interview with author.
240 Ibid.
241 Frank Moseley, Interview with author.
“rebbish” attributes in the public schools sharpened due to a number of factors: the generational social norms that affected interracial relationships, the culture of music and media in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the actions of school community members outside of school settings.\textsuperscript{242} For Frank, the role of Coach Meadows was especially formative: his first real experience in the labor world had stripped away the veneer of labor equality and uncovered some of the pervasive systemic racism within the county.\textsuperscript{243} His experience was not only a catalyst for learning more personal family history from the school closures but also made him reevaluate his perception of public schools.

Both Rita and Frank’s experiences demonstrate that despite suppression of the school closure narrative, that community resentment manifested powerfully within the public schools. The resentment had a tangible effect on student-teacher relationships and helped forge distrust that public schools were not truly ordered towards Black students’ best interests. Again, these findings mirror those found by Rickford, and Oakes: inadequacies within public education led to the establishment of Black controlled education outside the purview of public schools.\textsuperscript{244}

Lastly, this thesis sought to expand upon the scant literature on narratives of excellence that rarely accompany stories of historicized trauma caused by systemic racism. Both Rita and Frank endured considerable trauma in school and proceeded to forge successful careers geared towards community empowerment. Emphasizing these

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{242} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{243} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{244} Oakes, \textit{Keeping Track} & Rickford, “Community Control”.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
accomplishments provides greater nuance to the story of Prince Edward County and shifts the discussion away from victimhood.

Despite the difficulties of her circumstances, Rita became the salutatorian of her middle school while being separated from her family during the school closures.\textsuperscript{245} She graduated high school, and started a long and successful career in the public school system.\textsuperscript{246} Although Rita initially turned down the opportunity to go to college, she enrolled in Saint Paul’s College in 2005 and graduated with a bachelor’s degree.\textsuperscript{247} She later attended Liberty University in 2010 and obtained a master’s degree in Human Services and Executive Leadership.\textsuperscript{248} Rita is now an accomplished author, with three published books and a fourth in the works. She frequently provides guest lectures at the Moton Museum and at local schools to spread awareness of the school closures. She is most proud, however, of her two children both of whom are college-educated.

Frank Moseley II channeled the disillusionment he felt in public schools into developing opportunities for disenfranchised youth to pursue self-education. Frank attended North Carolina A&T State University, where he began to learn the fundamentals of business: something he felt was woefully missing from his public-school education.\textsuperscript{249} After being convicted of a felony drug charge, Frank rebuilt his life. He attended and graduated from

\textsuperscript{245} Rita Moseley, interview with author.
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{247} Moseley, Silence Broken, 11.
\textsuperscript{248} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{249} Frank Moseley II, interview with author.
Saint Paul’s College, acquiring a B.S. in Business Administration. He is currently the founder and director of SEED4ALL, an organization dedicated to empowering young minority men through alternative education. Frank also is heavily involved in the Center for Common Ground, an organization dedicated to fighting voter suppression. Frank is the Director of Democracy Centers of Virginia, which works to inform, organize, and mobilize communities of color to vote in local elections.

Highlighting the successes of those who endured significant systemic racism helps reassert Black agency into the history of Massive Resistance. Pulling out those narratives is especially valuable in the story of the Prince Edward County closures, where the overwhelming amount of published historical work emphasizes victimhood and the negative ramifications of the closures. A more holistic account addresses the severity of the closures while also incorporating Black agency-centered history.

While this thesis is relatively limited in scope, it does demonstrate the value of using historical consciousness as a framework to track how popular memory shapes subsequent generations. This method is particularly useful in understanding how communities internalize and pass down trauma from systemic racism, especially where generational silence affects traditional means of preserving knowledge. The need for further, larger investigations into how the history of the school closures in Prince Edward County have radiated into

250 Ibid.
252 Ibid.
subsequent generations is palpable; such investigations would be invaluable for several stakeholders in education, such as teachers, community panels, and administrators. Understanding of the lingering effects of the closures would be useful in rebuilding the community’s faith in the public school system. Similarly, applications of the same process can be used to determine the relationship between physical landmarks and intergenerational trauma in other cases of systemic racism.
APPENDIX A: LIFE HISTORY QUESTIONS

Childhood

A. Early Childhood/ Initial Experiences Regarding Education

What were/are your parents like?

Where was family originally from? Were they originally from Farmville, or did they make their way there?

What stories did you hear growing up about your family, and their education?

What were your parents’ attitudes towards education before/after the school closures?

Do you feel like you internalized any of their perceptions as a young student?

What did your parents do for a living?

As a child, did you contribute to the family income or help your parents in their work in any way?

What was your parents' religious background?

How was religion observed in your home?

What were your parents' political beliefs?

What political/ other organizations were your parents involved in?

What other relatives did you have contact with growing up?

Describe your siblings and their interactions with your when you were young. What did you do together? What conflicts did you have?

What were your family's economic circumstances? Do you remember any times when money was tight? Do you remember having to do without things they wanted or needed?

What were your duties around the house as a child?

What skills did you learn (e.g., cooking, carpentry, crafts) and who taught them? What activities did the family do together?
B. Community

Describe the community you grew up in and especially your own neighborhood.

Can you remember the races and ethnicities in your neighborhood? What did people do for a living? Were there notable class differences?

Where did people shop? What was the largest town or city they remember visiting when they were young and what were your impressions of it?

C. Early Schooling

Describe your school friend, or your favorite teachers (if you had any). Where there any particular mentors that inspired you, or moments that strained your relationship with education?

Did you have any favorite subjects?

Where there any special activities at either school that have struck you? Where there moments where you felt especially alienated/ homesick? Can you tell me about them?

Were there any moments where you experienced discipline from figures in power? What did this look/ feel like?

Did you experience any teasing or bullying at school?

D. Friends and Interests

What did you do in your spare time after school?

Who were your friends and what did you do when you got together?

What were your plans when you finished school? Education? Work?

What did you want to be when you grew up?

Were there different groups in school? Which did you belong to? How do you think you were perceived by others?
E. Work

Did you work any jobs during your teenage years or at school?

Were you contributing to family income? If not, how did you spend money?

Adulthood

G. Further Education

Can you describe your relationship to higher education? Did you go to school for more degrees? What drove this desire/ was there a goal in mind?

Did you reflect upon your earlier experiences in education as you worked to get your advanced degree?

H. Adult Work

How did your childhood perspectives on education and society influence your adult working life?

I. Marriage or Formation of Significant Relationships

How did you meet. What drew you together?

Describe your decision to marry/move in together.

Did you talk about your experience with the education system to your significant other? What was their reaction?

What was most difficult being in a relationship originally? What was most satisfying?

Were there any significant changes in your relationship?

J. Children

What were/ are your children like when they were/are young. How have they changed or not changed?
What was your relationship with your children like when they were young versus your relationship with them now?

What activities did your family do together?

Do you have any established family traditions?

What was most satisfying to you about raising children? What was most difficult?

What values did you try to raise your children with? How did you go about doing that?
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