

Mapping the Desegregation of Education in Virginia: Where Are the Records?

by Sonia Yaco and Tonia Graves

A century from now, will desegregation in Virginia be a forgotten story? If we don't do a better job of saving our records, it could be. Currently, few records of school desegregation in Virginia are publicly available. While many priceless records of the "massive resistance" to the desegregation of Virginia education reside in the special collections of Virginia's colleges, universities, and historical societies, the whereabouts of most of Virginia's crucial records of desegregation are unknown. In 2008, Old Dominion University Libraries formed a statewide organization, Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE), to identify, locate, and preserve records that document Virginia's school desegregation process. DOVE members include librarians, archivists, historians, public officials, and private citizens.

During the twentieth century, many states have experienced unique social and cultural histories that bear documentation because they continue to impact today's society. Florida is the home of the Rosewood Massacre, in which over several days in 1923 white citizens attacked and killed black citizens and burned most of Rosewood. In the 1930s, thousands of "Okies" from the Dust Bowl traveled to California and other states seeking economic security. In 1992, the Rodney King riots lasted six days



and resulted in fifty-three deaths. The recent fiftieth anniversary of the massive resistance school closings in Virginia has increased public awareness of this important historical era. Imagine yourself as Dr. P. C. Corbin, who in 1947 filed a lawsuit in Virginia federal court with the intent to achieve an improved educational environment for his son. Corbin's son's bus ride to the Negro school was very long and cold. Upon arrival, the school itself was poorly heated and too cold. Several years earlier, a young girl had died of tuberculosis partly due to the inadequate conditions, according to briefs filed. No parent or child should be subject to this experience. To lose documentation of this story is to lose an important part of Virginia's history.

Founded by Sonia Yaco, special collections librarian at Old Dominion University (ODU), and Dr. James Sweeney, associate professor of history at ODU, DOVE had its first exploratory meeting at the Virginia Historical Society on July

31, 2008. At that meeting it was agreed that the main goal of the DOVE project would be to identify, locate, and preserve records that document Virginia's school desegregation process. DOVE's second meeting was held on September 30, 2008, at the Virginia Historical Society. The accomplishments of this meeting included a demonstration of a prototype of the online catalog, identification of regional task forces and their chairs, discussion regarding a methodology for a collection-level description, and the formation of a grant subcommittee. Subsequent meetings have been held across the

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Michael J. Stolee discusses a plan for busing for racial balance, ca. 1970.

Image courtesy of ODU Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

state at locations including Washington and Lee University, Virginia State University, and George Mason University. Meeting minutes, a project description, and a list of repositories are available at <http://www.lib.odu.edu/special/dove/>.

In 2010, DOVE members will travel to repositories, offices, and residences in the eight regions of Virginia identified by the task force as Tidewater, Greater Hampton Roads, Northern Virginia, Central Piedmont, Eastern Shore, Southside, Western Virginia, and Southwest Virginia. Officials at these repositories, as well as private individual record owners, will be interviewed to determine the content and condition of their desegregation records. DOVE members will survey records dated between 1945 and 1986 that fall into two categories: governmental and nongovernmental records. Governmental records include court proceedings, meeting minutes, and school board resolutions. Nongovernmental records include newspaper clippings, newsletters, diaries, independent documents, publications, personal correspondence,

videos/ audio files, scrapbooks, and photographs.

Old Dominion University Libraries is highly qualified to lead DOVE and ensure that accepted professional standards and procedures are implemented and maintained. In addition to participating in successful statewide collaborations such as Virginia Heritage (<http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/small/vhp/>), Old Dominion University Libraries has a Digital Initiatives Team charged to focus on digital collection-building and digital preservation. The Digital Initiatives Team seeks collaborative digital collection-building opportunities with other organizations that possess content meeting library and archival selection criteria.

DOVE is well on the way to meeting the performance objectives it established in 2008:

- Survey known collections for records on the desegregation of education in Virginia for addition to the DOVE catalog
- Identify previously undocumented records on the desegregation of education in Virginia for addition to the DOVE catalog

- Create a model for statewide collaboration between archivists, librarians, and historians
- Contribute to scholarship on the history of Virginia and massive resistance
- Create a catalog of primary and secondary resources that document the school desegregation process in Virginia, which will be useful to scholars, citizens, and educators.

According to Dr. Charles Ford, department chair and professor of history at Norfolk State University, scholars, teachers, and students may be the most obvious beneficiaries of the DOVE catalog. As the catalog grows, it will be much easier to discover the materials for which they are looking. Visit the DOVE website at <http://www.lib.odu.edu/special/dove/> to monitor DOVE's progress, and view the DOVE catalog at <http://www.lib.odu.edu/special/dove/scripts/viewitems.php>. DOVE members anticipate that their collaborative efforts will prevent the story of educational desegregation in Virginia from being forgotten. ❖