

Educator Resources

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Pulaski County, Virginia

School Desegregation and Civil Rights Stories: Pulaski County, Virginia

In 1947, African American attorneys Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson represented a legal suit initiated by Dr. P. C. Corbin on behalf of his son, Mahatma Corbin. This case became part of a movement of local class-action lawsuits orchestrated by Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to equalize the public education of blacks. Mahatma Corbin v. County School Board of Pulaski County was one of the last equalization cases the NAACP Legal Defense undertook before pursuing the Virginia desegregation case, Davis v. County School Board Prince Edward County.

Dr. Corbin filed this lawsuit in Virginia federal court with the intent to achieve an improved education environment for his son. The bus ride to Christiansburg was very long and cold. The school was poorly heated and also too cold. A young girl had died of tuberculosis in 1941 partly due to the conditions, according to briefs filed. The Christiansburg School was also below standard and did not provide adequate preparation for college. As evidence, the legal team presented extensive photographs of school conditions.

Spottswood and Hill lost the first round in the Virginia federal court. Six months later, in November 1949, Baltimore's U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals came down on Corbin's side: The courts, the judge pronounced, have a "solemn duty" to strike down "forbidden racial discrimination." A school board spokesman said officials were "shocked" by the decision, insisting that "no discrimination against Negroes existed." A week later the board met to discuss a possible Supreme Court appeal. At that meeting, the board refused to provide high school facilities for blacks in Pulaski. The case proceeded no further.

Shortly thereafter, the NAACP rolled out a new strategy attacking segregation head-on in the Supreme Court. Local battles for equalization were abandoned.

Documents and Photographs

Source: Corbin v. Pulaski, U. S, District Court, Eastern District of Virginia, Roanoke Division, RG 21, National Archives Mid Atlantic Region.



Library at Pulaski High School, Plaintiff's Exhibit.
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Library at Christiansburg Institute, Plaintiff's Exhibit.
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Exterior of Christiansburg Institute, Plaintiff's Exhibit.
[View larger image](#)



Exterior of Pulaski High School, Plaintiff's Exhibit.
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Boys' Gym at Pulaski High School, Plaintiff's Exhibit.
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Boys' Gym at Christiansburg Institute, Plaintiff's Exhibit.
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Christiansburg Typing Classroom, Plaintiff's Exhibit.
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Pulaski Typing Classroom, Plaintiff's Exhibit.
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Plaintiff's Motion to Enter School. Page 1
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Plaintiff's Motion to Enter School. Page 2
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Defendants' Exhibit, Ownership History of Christiansburg Institute. Page 1
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Defendants' Exhibit, Ownership History of Christiansburg Institute. Page 2
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Other School Desegregation and Civil Rights Stories:

- [Ketchikan, Alaska](#). Irene Jones, a twelve year old girl of mixed Alaskan Indian and white heritage in Alaska, 1929.
- [Claymont, Delaware](#). On site viewing of "A Separate Place", the story of the education of African Americans in Delaware following the Civil War and through Belton v. Gebhart.
- [South Carolina \(Briggs v. Elliott\)](#). Explore the case of the courageous Reverend J.A. Delaine and the NAACP's efforts to end segregation in South Carolina public schools.
- [Girard College, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1965](#). A fourteen year struggle to end segregation is accomplished by William T. Coleman, a main architect of the legal strategy leading to the Brown v. Board decision.
- [Chicago, Illinois](#). Student School Boycott, 1965
- [Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library](#). Examine President Eisenhower's decisions on the Little Rock, Arkansas crisis.
- [John F. Kennedy Presidential Library](#). Explore Civil Rights history during the Kennedy Administration.
- [Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library](#) [↗](#). Explore Civil Rights at "LBJ for Kids".

 This page was last reviewed on October 29, 2019.
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Teachers' Resources

Primary Sources

- [DocsTeach.org](#)
- [OurDocuments.gov](#)
- [Founders Online](#)
- [Today's Document](#)
- [National Archives Catalog](#)
- [How to Cite Documents](#)
- [Document Analysis](#)

DocsTeach

- [DocsTeach.org](#)
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