

## Two Virginia Newspapers Respond to the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* Decision, May 1954

### Time For Wise, Prudent Action

#### AN EDITORIAL

SOUTHERN Negroes, who were most adversely affected by public school segregation, in that it produced for them inferior schools, can afford to be magnanimous in the victory inherent in the unanimous decision of the Supreme Court, ruling out the long standing "separate but equal" doctrine.

In the South, particularly, the decision goes against political and social traditions of the majority group. There are many white southerners who will consider the verdict of the Court an historic development contrary to all of their beliefs—religious, political and social. There are many others who will accept the verdict with calm resignation, and a determination to adapt the ultimate results of the decision to everyday life in the region.

The Court took a step that should soften the impact of drastic change for those unready for it. While the high tribunal positively ruled that separate schools are unconstitutional, it postponed until next Fall argument on a decision as to when the Court's order is to be put into effect by the 21 states affected.

This indicates that there will be no precipitate action in the enforcement of the ruling. Deliberation on the part of the Court that is not inconsistent with the magnitude of the issue involved, was to be expected, and there is no doubt that it will be respected by the American minority, which has much to gain in the long pull, by the Court's decision.

A great victory has been won for America and for democracy, in the eyes of the world, and it may well be that the true historians of the future can record that the thing that was most effective in stopping the march of communism westward was the decision rendered Monday, May 17th, 1954, affirming the unconstitutionality of racial discrimination in a vital area of American life.

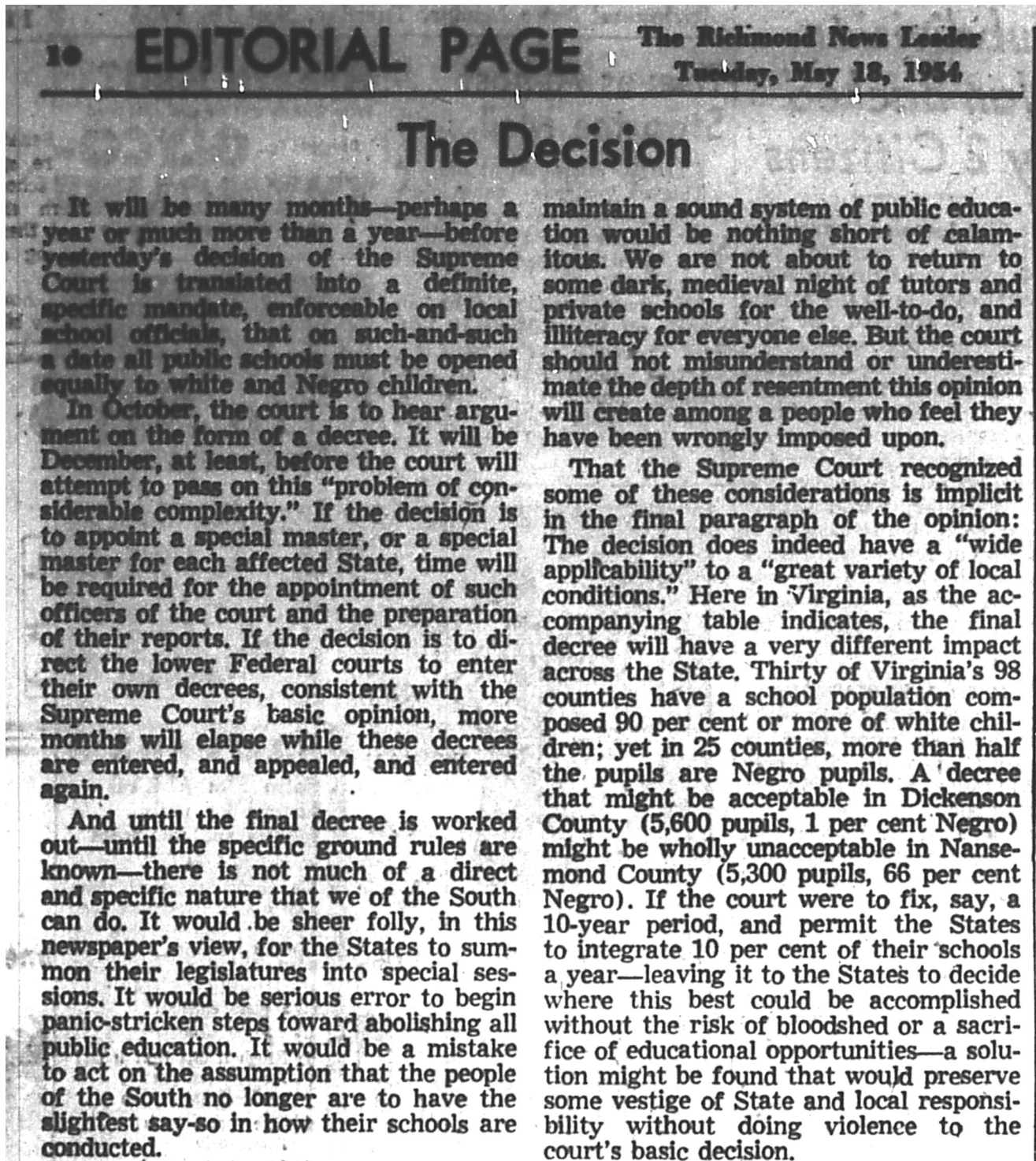
We advise that the decision be received with calmness, prudence, and quiet thanksgiving. The minority group now has the legal and moral backing of the highest court in the land, in its long struggle for equal opportunity with other Americans to prepare themselves to be decent and acceptable citizens. Let them remember that the same Courts that in succession made clear their rights as citizens, will protect them in these rights.

In the historic decision, great honor has been bestowed upon a hard-working group of Negro lawyers, and a credit to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Plain, democratic rights and privileges, that are extremely essential in a free democracy, have been won legally for an American minority of 15,000,000 people. But let it be remembered, in this great hour of triumph: "He conquers twice who upon victory overcomes himself."

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Citation: James J. Kilpatrick, "The Decision." *Richmond News Leader*, May 18, 1954, p. 10.



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This is no time for rebellion. It is no time for a weak surrender either. It is a time to sit tight, to think, to unite in a proposal that would win the Supreme Court's approval. It is a time, if you like, for prayer. The profound implications of the court's opinion are well understood in the South, and now that the basic opinion has come—now that the suspense has ended—we can ponder those implications, and consider the best and wisest recommendation to offer to the court next Fall.

In all of our thinking on the form of a decree, these factors should be paramount:

First, the court's final "ground rules" should be capable of being enforced, as well as men can predict these things, with peaceful public acceptance.

Second, the rules should be calculated to encourage the Southern States in preserving public education.

Third, the rules should leave to the States and to the localities the widest possible discretion, consistent with the court's basic opinion, in administering their own affairs according to local conditions.

All three points are important. If the court decides upon precipitate action—for example, that on Sept. 1, 1955, every public school everywhere must be opened to white and Negro children alike—some tragically bitter consequences may be envisioned. A tinderbox situation would be created, wanting only an overt spark to kindle an ugly flame. We can imagine that so abrupt a decree, admitting no exercise of discretion, would provoke a resentment in many localities that would manifest itself in abandonment of tax-supported education altogether.

However, if the court would consent to a more moderate program of integration, the prospect of preserving public education in the South would be immeasurably improved. The people of the South, if they are permitted to work out this problem calmly and rationally, will see to it that education is preserved, for white and colored children alike. Not to

A number of other immediate and practical considerations should be called to the court's attention next Fall. There is the very serious problem of Virginia's 6,000 Negro teachers and principals; from a wholly realistic standpoint, where will they fit in? There are the problems of such educational institutions as Virginia State College, Virginia Union University, Hampton Institute; what does the future hold for them? There are problems of curriculum that must be met in fairness to both races; how are these to be resolved?

These are questions to be weighed by the keenest minds the South can bring to bear on the matter. We will need all the wisdom and foresight and vision—and practical understanding of certain hard realities—that can be found. There is no need to re-examine here the root-causes that have led the South to adopt a pattern of racial separation: The causes are real, and they are embedded deeply in moral codes and in characteristics of behavior, in taste and tradition, in habits and customs and economics—and in prejudice, if you will, that is nonetheless a reality if it baffles logical explanation. To bring the two races together in the social intimacy of a classroom will not come easily to the South. This newspaper, as its readers know, believes in segregated schools. We believe also in abiding by the law—abiding by *all* the law, including laws that may be devised consistent with the law laid down by the Supreme Court yesterday.

We accept the Supreme Court's ruling. We do not accept it willingly, or cheerfully or philosophically. We accept it because we have to, and we accept it in the profound and prayerful hope that the court, when it comes to writing a final decree many months from now, will exercise wisdom and forbearance in drafting a mandate that will preserve good race relations, encourage continued public education, and recognize that the States and localities should be left a wide area for local responsibility consistent with the court's opinion.

Citation: James J. Kilpatrick, "The Decision." *Richmond News Leader*, May 18, 1954, p. 10.