

Roanoke Times, Roanoke, Virginia: Tuesday Morning, May 3, 1949

Pulaski School Action Dismissed by Barksdale

A complaint by a group of Pulaski County Negroes that because of their race they were being discriminated against in provision of school facilities and bus transportation was dismissed yesterday by U.S. District Court Judge A. D. Barksdale.

Criticizes Facilities

Although finding reasonable equality of education in the County, the judges opinion contained criticism of facilities for both races in Pulaski as well as many other Virginia counties.

The jurist pointed out that four of the 26 elementary schools in the County are for Negroes, and that the Calfree Training School for Negroes in Pulaski is a moderate and adequate school and the newest in the County. Other Negro schools in the County compare favorably with those provided whites, he said.

“The inadequacy of many of the elementary schools for white children is shocking,” the judge declared. “Very few have modern plumbing: some do not even have their own water supply. In some instances, white children are temporarily being taught in basements of churches and in temporary tar-paper buildings.

Buses used for transportation of the Negro students are as good as those used for white children and as well equipped, Judge Barksdale said. He said he found no discrimination in the enforcement of the Virginia Compulsory School Attendance Law.

The Negro high school used by Pulaski County Negroes was found to be fully accredited by both the State and Southern Association. Of the three white high schools in Pulaski County, only one, Pulaski, is accredited by both groups.

Differences in curricula were found to be “inconsequential and definitely not discriminatory.” He said he did not feel County high school Negroes would be benefitted by forcing the School Board to erect a high school within the boundaries of the County.

See Disservice

“I do not believe that Negro high school pupils of Pulaski County would be benefitted by requiring the County School Board to comply with a decree such as is sought by the plaintiffs,” continued the Judge. “I believe that I would render a disservice to the cause of Negro education by entering such a decree.

“I do not find the conditions existing in Pulaski County to be the same or similar to the conditions existing in some of the Eastern counties of Virginia, as described by Judge Hutcheson in his opinion in Freeman vs. County School Board,” Judge Barksdale concluded.

Prior to 1939, Judge Barksdale observed, Pulaski County had no high school facilities for Negroes

In 1939 or 1940, the County began to send its Negro high school students to Christiansburg Industrial Institute, a high school for Negroes owned until 1947 by the Friends Freedmen’s Association of Philadelphia.

In 1947, the Institute was conveyed to the School Boards of Montgomery and Pulaski Counties and the City of Radford to be operated as a joint high school, as authorized under the laws of the State of Virginia and regulations of the Virginia State Board of Education. Tuition-paying Negro students are also taken at the Institute from outside the two counties and Radford.

Judge Barksdale pointed out that the Christiansburg Industrial Institute for Negroes has 233 pupils and 15 teachers in 1947-48. The largest high school for white children at Pulaski had 606 students and only 25 teachers during the same school year.

At the Institute for Negroes, Judge Barksdale said, the per capita cost for education in 1947-48 was \$118.35 while at the three white high schools in Pulaski County, the per capita expenditure in the same year was \$102 at Draper, \$98.39 at Pulaski and \$95 at Dublin.

Heard at Dublin

Arguments in the action dismissed by Judge Barksdale yesterday were heard by the jurist last October.

Four specific complaints were made by the plaintiffs.

First, they charged that the Pulaski County failed to provide facilities for elementary education of Negro children equal to facilities afforded white children.

Second, they said that the school bus transportation was not equal to that provided by white children.

Third, Pulaski County authorities were charged with not enforcing the Compulsory School Attendance Law as far as Negroes were concerned.

And, fourth, the high school facilities for Negroes were alleged to be inferior to that provided for white children.

The principle of segregation of the races in schools was not attacked in the suit. The plaintiffs did not expressly admit the constitutionality of segregation, Judge Barksdale observed, but at the same time did not attack it.