Uncovering Stories Buried in Institutional History: The Consultative Resource Center at the Curry School of Education, The University of Virginia

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"Our job was to get black and white people to talk": Uncovering stories buried in institutional histories

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Introduction

"You have to operate on the belief that black and white people have not communicated accurately but through a myriad of symbols without meaning. Once people eliminate symbols and establish an effective twoway communication process, then they can talk about almost anything." ¹



Much of what has been

written about local, state, and national approaches related to the desegregation of public schools focuses on administrative concerns, policy debates, and other issues faced by schools, yet there are still many stories of initiatives designed to facilitate school integration in the twentieth century to be told. The lives, the struggles, and the triumphs of people who did so much to transform the nature of public education are often lost in the mist of time; resurrecting their stories is often the challenge of the historian.

This paper evolved from research I began over ten years ago while writing the centennial history, *The Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, 1905-2005: Preparing Men and Women for Leadership in Scientific Educational Work.* At that time I was contacted by several retired Education faculty members, urging me to explore the history of the Consultative Resource Center, or what came to be called informally the De-Seg Center, that was based in the Curry School of Education from 1967 through

1981. Nathan Johnson and James Bash were founders of this Center and were eager to talk about the work of the Center and the outreach and long-term impact of the Center as Virginia struggled to address and reconcile issues related to integration.

I shared the research for this paper originally as part of a panel at the 2009 meeting of the American Educational Association focusing on mid-twentieth century initiatives for integration and was urged to develop it further for publication.³ As this paper discusses, much of the materials related to the Center's work are now gone. The sadly limited documentation I have related to the Center combined with the oral history from Bash and Allen, form the basis of the following discussion. I have been cautioned by subsequent reviewers to justify the claims I make about the reasons for the loss of such a significant cache, yet I can only conclude that the absence of more documentation is a result of many factors, including the frequent moves of the Center and the lack of acknowledgement on the part of the University of the significance of the Center's contribution to the struggles for integration in Virginia.

The Consultative Resource Center on School Integration, as it came be known, was established in the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia in 1967 as



part of Title IV legislation designed to address issues related to the desegregation of public schools. Prior to the years of the Center's existence, the state of Virginia, the city of Charlottesville, and the University of Virginia faced major challenges to school integration in the wake of massive resistance in the 1950s. The Center, while attached to the Curry School of Education, was funded with government grants; during the life of the Center it moved at least four times, and with each move much of the documentation related to the Center's activities was misplaced or lost.

The Center was one of at least ten such centers established nationally under the 1964 Civil Rights legislation, but I have been unable to trace activities of any similar centers in the South. ⁴ A reviewer of this paper mentioned a similar center at the

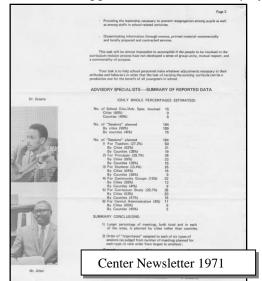
University of Massachusetts, and I found references to publications by the Center for Equal Education in Amherst. ⁵ I also found references to publications from a Desegregation Center at the University of Pittsburgh, but again, have not turned up any more descriptive information related to these centers. ⁶ Title IV legislation eventually turned to addressing issues of gender inequity in the 1980s and initiatives designed to address issues of desegregation were less supported by these funds after this time.

Background: The challenge of finding documents and related ephemera

"We were doing something that the state of Virginia did not support and the University of

Virginia did not support...The School of Education was interested in the grant money and so came along with our activities." ⁷

The main source of information that gives life to the Center's activities comes from the Center's newsletters and interviews with faculty who were associated with the Center. Combing records held by the University of Virginia I found a few references to the Center scattered in different administrative files. A doctoral dissertation written in 1973



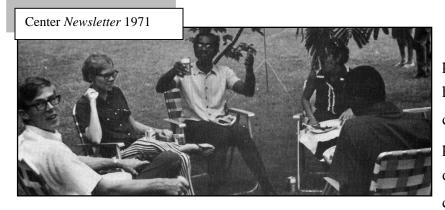
summarized the first five years of the Center's activities from 1967-1972 and provides tantalizing summaries of contacts made by Center personnel during this time, but summarizes little evaluative data related to Center activities. ⁸ At least one research study was carried out relating to the outcome of Center activities for participants, but beyond this, little evaluative information is to be found. ⁹

A doctoral dissertation describing the history massive resistance and of school desegregation in the city of Charlottesville between 1954 and 1969 makes no mention of the Center, although James Bash, one of the Center's founders, was a member of the dissertation committee. ¹⁰ Hank Allen, Center director for eight years, gave me two of the applications for federal funds to renew the Center, and these also provided a description

of Center activities. Professor Gregg Michel of the University of Texas at San Antonio was granted a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Virginia in part to explore the history of the Center, and his report provided much of the background for this paper. Michel came to much the same conclusion that I have: the absence of the Center from the University of Virginia's civil rights narrative reflects the "deep ambivalence which at the time many had about school desegregation in general and the center in particular." ¹¹

Goals of the Center

"Getting Across a Sense of Mutual Respect" 12



The Center's primary objective was to help local educational and community leaders solve problems involving displaced teachers, compliance plans, teacher

pupil relations, curriculum changes, extra-curricular activities, and other situations that would arise in connection with school desegregation. The directors believed that through participation in "open and engaging workshops" participants could come to understand the varied challenges they faced while addressing school integration.¹³ The activities of the Center were widespread and multifaceted, always aimed at bringing together diverse groups to examine their feelings and to plan for successful integration of schools for administrators, teachers, and students.

The work of the Center was voluntary: its programs were designed to help school systems "develop their own solutions to their own problems so that the tensions resulting from these problems will not disrupt the educational function of the schools." The Center intended to make available "specialists from sociology, law, and psychology in addition to education as needed".¹⁴

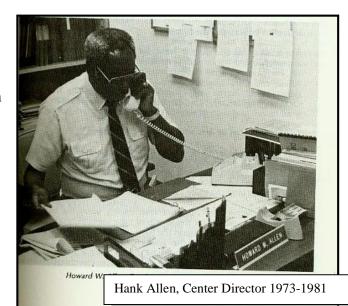
Placed in the larger story of state and national responses to Civil Rights legislation, the Center was an initiative based in a school of Education at a state University. It was designed to provide resources for aiding public school personnel in identifying effective instructional strategies associated with integration. The Center could contact school districts to publicize its services, but could not require them to work with Center personnel. The Center existed for fourteen years, ultimately providing resources to Maryland, West Virginia and the District of Columbia as well as Virginia.

Founding the Center

"The political climate was incredibly tense...and it was a difficult job...It was known that we should not publicize our efforts [in the early years of the Center]" 16

The Center was established through the efforts of Curry School professor James Bash who wrote the first proposal, hired the first staffers, and served as director until 1972. Both Bash and the associate director of the center, Nathan Johnson, had

public school backgrounds that were key to creating successful links with the schools. Prior to coming to the Curry School, Bash was a principal of a white high school in Farmville, Virginia. He was an outspoken critic of private white academies created during the school desegregation crisis there, a position that alienated him from other whites in the

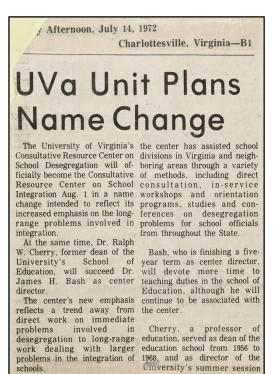


community and eventually led him to resign his principalship. Johnson was the first black professor in the Education School and in the University of Virginia. ¹⁷

Johnson, a former principal of George Washington Carver High School in Fieldale, Virginia, served as associate director for the entire time the Center existed.

Curry School Dean Ralph Cherry directed the Center for a year and was followed by

Professor Howard Allen who led the center until 1981. Allen was the primary author for

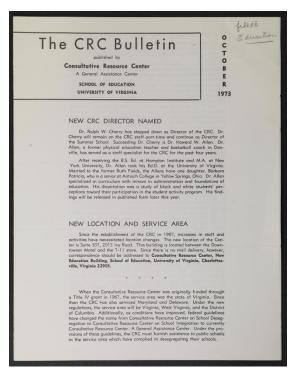


Since its establishment in 1967, program since 1956.

at least two applications for renewing federal funds for the Center. Writing in 1978 he summarized Center activities for the first nine years, citing the need for schools to avail themselves of the Center's resources and advice in handling discriminatory discipline problems that arose related to integration of the schools. He also included provisions for evaluating the services of the Center, data that has been lost over time.

In 1972, the name of the Center was changed to the Consultative Resource Center on School Integration to reflect a "new emphasis" and a trend away from "direct work on

immediate problems involved in desegregation to long-range work dealing with larger problems in the integration of schools although it continued to be known over time as the "De-Seg center" as a way of summarizing its overall goals. ¹⁹ At this time, Ralph Cherry,



former dean of the School of Education, took over leadership of the Center for a year; Hank Allen then directed the Center for the remaining eight years.

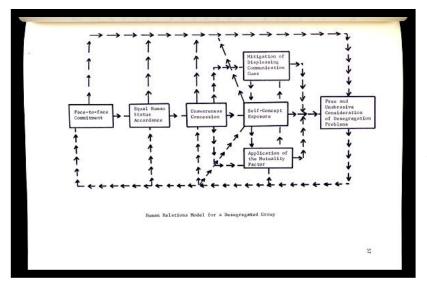
During the first eight years the Center employed a full time director, five full time 'staff specialists', one staff member part-time, one graduate assistant, and two secretaries: four Blacks and four whites, one black secretary and one white secretary. The Center's five programs included providing technical assistance to school personnel, training administrators

and supervisors to "deal with problems of desegregation and sexism," assisting in the selection, modification, and revision of curriculum and instructional techniques and materials, preparing counselors to meet the needs of minority students, and providing training opportunities for minority and majority educators (male and female) in developing leadership potential.²¹ In addition to these services, staff members of the Center conducted human relations sessions for administrative personnel, university police, dormitory counselors, and individual classes in the Education School.

Because involvement with the services provided by the Center was voluntary, it was important that the representatives of the Center be persuasive in order to have their staff invited into the schools. Bash employed George Copenhaver, a former superintendent of schools from Clifton Forge, to work with him, reasoning that superintendents would be more open to working with the center if the invitation to do so came from one of their peers. Once a request from a superintendent was received, the staff began planning workshops and seminars for the school district. Some of the issues covered in workshops and activities sponsored by the Center included curricular reform, minority student counseling, discipline in the integrated classroom, and analysis of the treatment of minorities in textbooks. The workshops and seminars focused on encouraging black and white school personnel to communicate honestly and openly with one another within the format provided by the Center.

Center Activities

"We went in and had a general discussion about issues related to integration and then moved into small groups. We were getting black and white people to talk to each other for the first time and this took time...We then began to discuss particular problems."²²



Describing the Center's programs in an interview in 2002, Professors Allen and Bash said "We were bringing blacks and whites together

for the first time---our job was to get black and white people to talk."²³ The Center's philosophy was based in the belief that workshops to encourage dialogue across racial lines were a way to ensure the desegregation process went smoothly in school districts. ²⁴ In addition to inservice workshops and seminars, the De-Seg Center sponsored two or three-day regional meetings and statewide conferences and retreats covering topics such as curriculum revision and strategies for increasing the number of black teachers and administrators in the district. The Center also held two-week institutes at the University during the summer session. Faculty members wrote several texts used to facilitate their work including one authored by Bash, Effective Teaching in the Desegregated School: A Guidebook, and Effective Administration in Desegregated Schools, published by Phi Delta Kappa Commission on Education, Human Rights and Responsibilities in 1966 and 1968.²⁵

Between 1967 and 1972 the Center made over 900 visits in Virginia and the District of Columbia, involving at least 2000 teachers, principals, counselors, superintendents and community leaders on one or more occasions.26 Further indication of the large numbers of persons served by the Center's activities was reported in the June, 1974 bulletin of the CRC: during the 1973-1974 school year, the Center worked with 85 school division in Virginia, West Virginia and Washington, D.C. Based on requests from superintendents in these school districts, the staff provided assistance with curriculum revision, counseling minority students, assistance to administrators and supervisors, educational leadership development institutes, and other related services. Seventeen two-



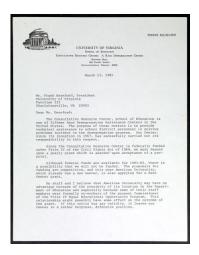
day workshops and 13 one-day workshops were held over this period in addition to an Educational Leadership Institute, which met for nearly six hours over a period of seven weekends at the School of Education; over 350 personnel participated in all the workshops. The Educational Leadership Institute was designed to increase the pool of black administrators and supervisors in integrated schools as well as to provide an understanding of issues and skills needed to work in multi-ethnic settings; thirty- five people participated in this institute with 25 of these stating they

intended to do further work at the University. Evaluative responses for the Institute showed that participants had a "78% grasp of ideas presented by the consultants."²⁷

John Mesinger, a Curry School faculty member who was active in the life of the Center, provided the following description of a 'typical' Center activity:

Bob Greene, EdD in Administration and one of the earlier black doctoral students at Curry and later vice president of Virginia Union University and I did a one day workshop, I think in Front Royal, VA. We started with a typical counter rotation of the people in two circles while music played. I pulled the plug when a white male building principal was opposite a middle aged black woman teacher from his school [I found all this out later]. The task was for the pairs to go off for ten minutes, interview each other, come back to the group and introduce their partners to the group. All came back except these two. The rest of the day they were absent until the wind up "what have we learned" portion. These two came back then and what they had learned about each other was so similar they could have been brother and sister! They had worked in the same school for at least ten years and knew nothing about each other until that day. There was not a dry eye in the group, including Bob and me. ²⁸

The Center consistently sought feedback from participants and educational leaders around the state about directions they could take. Participants regularly were asked to evaluate the content of workshops both in writing and verbally and to provide suggestions for succeeding programs; the "resulting evaluations were 95% positive in all cases."29 During this time, Curry professor Herbert C. Richards designed a study to develop and validate an instrument to measure racial attitudes and attitudes to change. This study concluded that individuals with less dogmatic personalities, or less strong attitudes toward racial issues, were more amenable to softening racial attitudes than those participating in programs with stronger, dogmatic racial attitudes.³⁰



"Warm Workshops"

A participant in a 1976 session led by Center members highlighted the passion of those involved: "In all my fifteen years of teaching, never before have I attended such an informative, highly stimulating



and valuable learning and training experience as this one!"³¹ The 1976 *Newsletter* of the CRC provides a description of activities carried out, in citing feedback and requests from several hundred participants in workshops for school counselors:

More skills training in group work' was a frequent request that we hope to again provide this year...Self-concept, values clarification and assertiveness training, particularly in conjunction with minority and sex role stereotyping, are subjects which repeatedly were mentioned.³²

The Center began addressing issues related to gender equity as well as racial equity in response to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibiting gender discrimination in educational institutions Writing for a continuation of funding 1980, Allen emphasized the central mission for the Race Desegregation Assistance Center staff was to continue to provide leadership and assistance in the implementation and improvement of desegregation efforts and to maintain an advocacy role in relationship to the concept of equal education opportunity.³³

Racial equity continued to be the central issue and passion of the

Center. Allen wrote of the Center's commitment to the principle that any effort to promote equal educational opportunity and to "foster the development of a healthy learning environment for both black and white youngsters cannot be satisfactorily



undertaken without an emphasis upon improving human relations to facilitate racial harmony."³⁴ However, gender equity issues were increasingly the focus of attention for federal monies and the Center lost its funding in 1981 when the sex equity center at the American University in Washington, D.C. won the federal grant for the area previously covered by the CRC.

Concluding Thoughts

"We believe we reached enough systems to believe we accomplished what we were meant to do...A stepping stone to our goals." 35

At an incredibly turbulent time in the history of school integration, the Center directors remained steadfast in their conviction that the depth of issues that arose were not merely addressed through legal rulings but would require years of working with educational professionals to achieve equality of education for students. The interviews with Bash and Allen, along with others, give life to the story of the Center's activities, and the legacy of their work is, I hope, illustrated in this paper. As they told me,

The most difficult thing we had to do was to get across a sense of mutual respect, of mutual support and relationship...We learned not to force issues but to be patient and let people think about what they want to say...just be quiet because people are thinking...We learned from body language...we learned to get people to be honest with each other...Deal with yourself first, discover how you feel, and then you can work with others. ³⁶

The story of the De-Seg Center illustrates an aspect of Title IV legislation in the

mid-1960s through the early 1980s. The part of the story that remains unanswered is the loss of the majority of documentation related to the Center's activities. Many faculty members were intermittently associated with the Center's activities, but it was staffed primarily by graduate students who traveled the state and region in response to requests for their services. What material exists, combined with the oral histories of those involved



with the Center's activities, provides a picture of a complex operation and outreach to virtually all areas of the state as well as in surrounding states. The other aspect of this study is potentially more negative: speculating about why so much has been lost to history certainly reflects something about institutional values of record-keeping. Looking back, without a doubt it can be said that the Center's outreach program provided an important ingredient to the integration of the public schools in the state, one whose impact is now, sadly, difficult to measure.³⁷

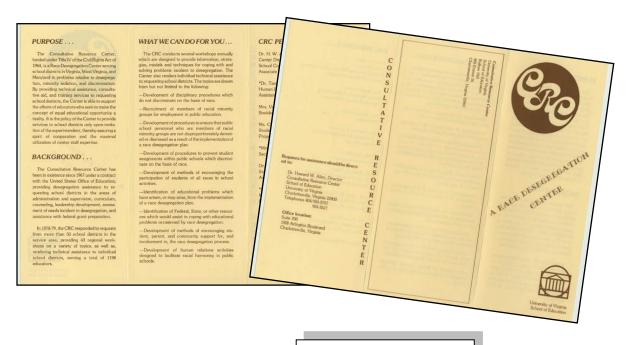
The memory of the Center's activities continues to elicit impassioned stories from those who worked to bring about changes for the schools of Virginia and the surrounding states.³⁸ The De-Seg Center is part of the overall history of relationships between schools and universities as they worked together to address the calls for educational reform resulting from Civil Rights legislation. And the process, if not the content, of the Center's operations, provides an early and interactive model of school/university collaborations.

In February 2012, Professor Patrice Grimes of the Curry School of Education invited Professors Bash and Allen to lead a lively discussion of the Center's activities at a Curry School symposium. The room was filled with students and faculty who were eager to hear about their experiences. Bash and Allen, along with several other faculty members who had been associated with the Center, were warmly received as they talked about the Center's contributions, sharing their visions and scope of their work with a 21st century audience.³⁹

Recognizing the significance of this initiative begun over forty years ago adds an important dimension to the story of desegregation in central Virginia and the contiguous states. While a final accounting of the influence of the work of the Center is elusive to document and evaluate, undoubtedly the Center reflects a commitment to university-school partnerships in order to facilitate the integration of the public schools which has been overlooked in the history of the Curry School and of the University of Virginia.

As I said initially, when I began the research for the Curry School of Education's centennial in 2002, I had no knowledge of the Center and its existence, and it was through interviewing one of Curry's former deans, Richard Brandt, that I met Professors Bash and Allen and began the search for documentation of the Center's work. I then had several lengthy interviews with Bash and Allen and their contributions have given life to the framework of this paper. Many historians have found when tracing documentation for a specific initiative, following paper and oral trails while re-creating events is challenging: had it not been for the determination of these faculty members to keep their story alive, I would not have been able to portray the Center's activities to the extent that I have.

It is interesting to speculate about the reasons for the loss of the Center's records and the lack of awareness of the Center's activities on the part of present-day Education faculty: is the loss attributable to understandable errors made in maintaining the records, or did the University simply choose not to recognize the efforts of the Center? In a state that was especially affected by the desegregation controversies, did university administrators consciously choose to minimize the efforts of faculty members to work with public schools on issues related to school integration, or was there a general lack of awareness of the impact of the Center's work? As I have had a chance to focus more closely on the Center's activities, I continue to find it disappointing that few traces of the impact of its educational outreach in such a critical way at a critical time in the history of school integration are available.



Center Newsletter 1979

¹ James Bash cited in Vallie Wendell Hylton. "A Historical Review of the Technical Assistance and Services of the Consultative Resource Center on School Integration (Title IV Civil Rights Act 1964 Public Law 88-52, Sections 403and 404, School of Education, University of Virginia, from March 1967 to February 1972." Unpublished dissertation. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1973. Hylton describes the goals of the Center to provide activities that will make a difference in the "affective area, not necessarily the cognitive, to help a community meet its needs in solving desegregation problems." p. 174

² Eleanor Vernon Wilson. *The Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, 1905-2005.* Charlottesville, VA. 2005.

³ Wilson, Eleanor Vernon "Desegregation, Transformation, and Self- Determination in the Twentieth Century" American Educational Association. April, 2009

⁴ Hylton. opcit. p.37. Hylton states that the Center was one of 20 such centers established in the South at this time. It seems to me that many of these may have been associated with local school districts, making records even harder to trace than if they were linked to universities.

⁵ Janet Ward Schofield. "University of Massachusetts Amherst School of Education, 1967-2007. Cited in *Review of research in Education*, Vol. 17, (1991), pp. 335-409

⁶ Ogle B Duff. Report on the future of school desegregation in the United States. University of Pittsburgh Consultative Resource Center on School Desegregation and Conflict, 1982.

⁷ Howard Allen. Interview. May 2002.

⁸ Hylton. opcit.

⁹ Herbert C. Richards, Nathan Johnson, and James Bash. *The Evaluation of Racial Attitudes and Attitude Change*. Monograph 3, Charlottesville, Virginia: ED Publications, Curry School of Education, June, 1972. ¹⁰ Dallas Randall Crowe. The Desegregation of Charlottesville, Virginia Public Schools, 1954-1969. A

Case Study. Unpublished dissertation, Charlottesville: University of Virginia., 1971.

¹¹ Gregg Michel. "Fellowship Report." Unpublished document prepared for the Carter C. Woodson Center, University of Virginia. Charlottesville, Virginia. 2000

¹²Howard Allen and James Bash. Interview May 2002

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ p. 2 "School Desegregation Resource Center Established" <u>Curry School of Education Newsletter</u>. May 10, 1967

¹⁵ The dean of the Curry School of Education, Ralph Cherry, served for a year as director of the Center in 1972.

¹⁶ Howard Allen and James Bash. Interview. May 2002.

¹⁷ When Johnson retired in 1979, then University president Hereford wrote him saying, "The history of the University will record you as the first black faculty member at the University and as a substantial contributor to many aspects of both secondary and higher education." RG 2/1/2.761 Box 13

¹⁸ p. 46. "A Proposal in Application for Section 403 Award to a Race Desegregation Assistance Center." August 24, 1978,

¹⁹ July 14, 1972. "UVa Unit Plans Name Change" *Charlottesville Daily Progress* RG 2/1/2.761 Box 13 Folder Consultative Resource Center

²⁰ "Consultative Resource Center School of Education University of Virginia" Annual report of the Dean of the Curry School of Education. 1976 RG 3/1/2.802

²¹ Ibid. The 'technical assistance to school personnel' as part of the Center's activities was described as assisting schools "in dealing with problems which evolve suddenly. Such problems include student disruptions, conflicts and confrontations."

²² Allen and Bash. Interview. May 2002.

²³ Ibid

²⁴Hylton, opcit. Bash Is quoted describing the format of the workshops based on a "systems approach to the development of friendship and mutual trust in a desegregated group." p. 57

²⁵ James Bash. <u>Effective Teaching in the Desegregated School: A Guidebook.</u> Phi Delta Kappa. Bloomington Indiana. 1966. James Bash and Roger Long. <u>Effective Administration in Desegregated Schools</u>. Phi Delta Kappa. Bloomington, Indiana. n.d.

²⁶ Hylton, opcit. Table of visits made between 1967 and 1972.

²⁷ p.1 "The CRC Bulletin" June, 1974 Consultative Resource Center, School of Education, University of Virginia RG 2/1/2.761. The CRC personnel made personal contact with "almost all" of the 134 district superintendents during the workshops on School Law and the implications of implementing the Civil Rights Act of 1971.

²⁸ John Mesinger. Personal communication. 2005.

²⁹p.1 "CRC Bulletin" 1974. opcit.

³⁰ pp. 25-26. 1972. Richards et al. opcit.

³¹ Newsletter Fall 1976

³² Ibid

³³ p.1 "A Proposal in Application for Section 403 Award to a Race Desegregation Assistance Center. August 1980

³⁴ Ibid. p. 26

³⁵ Interview with Allen and Bash .opcit.

³⁶ Ihid

³⁷ Michel, 2000. Michel argues that that CRC's history had been a "forgotten part" of the University's history and as such, its absence from the University's civil rights narrative "reflects the deep ambivalence which, at the time, many within the university community had about school desegregation, in general, and the center, in particular."

³⁸ Sondra Stallard, dean of the School of Continuing and Professional Studies, is one of many faculty members who urged me to be sure to include the story of the activities of the CRC in the history of the Curry School of Education. Some of her earliest associations with the University were traveling the state as part of the Center's programs. John Mesinger, a retired Curry School faculty member who I have previously quoted, reminisced about the Center's activities, shaking his head and reflecting on the many "stories we could tell." Interviews, 2005.

³⁹ February, 2012. Curry School of Education, University of Virginia. Forum on the history of the Consultative Resource Center on School Integration. Additionally, a plaque honoring the contributions of the Center is now placed in Bavaro Hall, the main building of the Curry School.

Selected References

Unless otherwise specified, the documents related to the Center came from archives at the University of Virginia's Small Special Collections Library. The illustrations used in the text were taken from these documents.

The interviews and personal correspondences cited in the paper were conducted between May 2002 and May 2005.

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