

Rachael Deane: Proposal

Notable for his career on the Supreme Court and specifically for his opinion in the *Bakke* case, Lewis Franklin Powell Jr. was an influential force in race relations long before he was appointed to the bench. As chairman of the Richmond, Virginia, School Board from 1952 to 1961, Powell was involved in the political and legal uproar following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Powell was labeled a moderate by his contemporaries because of his opposition to massive resistance, but his true political views at the time were often unclear. The proposed paper will investigate and clarify Powell's position on desegregation, his opposition to the massive resistance movement, and any differences or distinctions between his thoughts and actions as chairman and in his private life.

On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court decided in *Brown v. Board of Education* that separate educational facilities for black and white students were inherently unequal. The decision caused uproar in Virginia, which was under the influence of the powerful Democratic machine of Senator and former Governor Harry Flood Byrd. The Byrd machine, with help from Richmond's influential *News Leader*, enacted a strategy of "massive resistance," or total opposition to the *Brown* decision. The legal basis for the plan was the doctrine of interposition, which had been a popular states' rights theory during the early years of the Republic and later during the Civil War. This theory proposed that states had the right to interpose their will against any action of the federal government. At the time of *Brown*, Powell was chairman of the Richmond School Board. He was responsible for formulating the Board's official stance on desegregation and for keeping Richmond's public schools open during the massive resistance crisis. In addition, Powell was an influential citizen with ties to the Byrd organization and to Virginia's elite black and white societies.

Because of the difficulties of opposing massive resistance in Harry Byrd's Democratic Virginia, Powell's private and public actions during the crisis may have differed. **This paper will clarify Powell's political ideology and make distinctions between his actions as public servant and as private citizen. In addition, it will evaluate the success of Powell's opposition and its ultimate effect on desegregation in Virginia's schools. It will also serve as an interesting and useful tool in evaluating Powell's influence on racial politics before his legendary Court career.**

An abundance of primary sources make possible this paper's investigation. James Jackson Kilpatrick and Virginius Dabney, the editors of Richmond's *News Leader* and *Times-Dispatch* during the period, used their editorial pages to encourage massive resistance. Kilpatrick was especially influential as the main creator and proponent of the doctrine of interposition as it applied to the massive resistance movement. Another newspaper of the time, the *Richmond Planet*, offers a black perspective of the crisis. Washington and Lee University's Lewis F. Powell Jr. archive provides the personal papers and correspondences of Powell. The *Virginia Bulletin*, a monthly publication of the Virginia Congress of Parents and Teachers during the time period, provides information about the status of Virginia's public schools immediately following *Brown*.

Because of the significance and popularity of the history of *Brown* and its implications for Virginia, secondary sources are also plentiful. Marie Tyler-McGraw's *At the Falls* is a respected overview of Richmond's social history and provides a starting point in research. John C. Jeffries' biography of Powell adds detailed information about Powell's life, career, and political views. Monographs about desegregation in general and massive resistance in particular also aid research. J. Harvie Wilkinson, a close friend of Powell and another figure in the massive

resistance movement, has published useful books about integration and about Harry Byrd's Virginia. Numerous historical, political, and legal journal articles, including an autobiographical sketch by Powell, also prove useful.

The massive resistance movement in Virginia is a fascinating event in history with far-reaching implications. By examining Powell's political views and actions during the time, this paper will add a unique historical perspective to the existing studies of integration and racial politics.