Schooled: Racism, Resistance, and Education

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Scene 1

Opens in a history classroom with a dull droning teacher talking about Brown v. Board of Education.

Teacher:
“On May 17 1958 The Brown v. Board decision was handed down declaring that “separate educational facilities were inherently unequal.”

“Magic-school bus effect”

Narrator:
(stands up in the middle of the classroom facing the audience)
Hold Up! There has got to be more to this story than that.
(Other students and teacher exit stage bringing their desks with them.)
All we ever here about is Brown v. Board of Education. It was a landmark decision, but are we supposed to believe that one court case really solved everything? If that’s the case, wouldn’t schools be integrated today? But looking around I know that’s not the case, so what’s the real story?

Narrator:
(Walks across stage as Senator Byrd and his secretary enter)
It’s 1954. The decision on Brown has just been handed down and it is officially the law, but not everyone is willing to accept it as such.

Lights fade on narrator. Spotlight on Senator Byrd standing on stage. There is a secretary seated at her desk next to him. Byrd towers over the desk as he speaks. He stands up tall while the secretary sits leaning over the desk.

Secretary:
Senator Byrd, there are letters and phone calls coming in by the dozens. Senator Johnson left a message that he needs to speak to you immediately about the Brown decision. And your constituents are phoning in concerned about the future of Virginia’s schools.

Byrd:
We’ll draft a response right now. (Begins to dictate a letter) "You have my full assurance that the State of Virginia will do everything in its power to ensure that our schools stay segregated as God intended. This presumptuous decision by Supreme Court tramples on states rights and will not be permitted to stand. The forces of integration are working on the theory that if Virginia can be brought to her knees, they can march through the rest of the South singing, 'Hallelujah!'” But I personally vow that Virginia will lead the fight against integration. If we can organize the Southern states for massive resistance to this order, I think that in time the rest of the country will realize that racial integration is not going to be accepted in the South.”
Scene 2
Spotlight fades on Byrd. Scene changes to street in a black community. There is a young boy selling newspapers on the side of the road.

Paper Boy:

(Narrator stands in line to buy a paper and walks off the side of the stage, opens and reads off to the side. A group of black community members stand, grouped on the side of the stage with papers open, discussing amongst themselves.)

Black community member 1:
Hey hold on a second lets buy a paper. Did you hear about Byrd’s address? Well are you worried?

Black community member 2:
Afraid? No, this is real change. And the courts are behind us. Separate isn’t equal anymore. The whites are just trying to hold on and make one last stand.

Black community member 1:
They can’t defy the courts.

Black community member 2:
Even Byrd can’t defy the courts. He’s just trying to make a threat.

Black community member 1:
Well, I hope you’re right.

Black community member 2:
We cannot forget that these public schools were actually built for us also!”

Black Community Member 3:
“We can't let them hold onto the status quo.

Black Community Member 4:
We're going to fight until our children go to a good school.”

Black Community Member 1:
“You want your kids in that school? What values are they going to learn?

Black Community Member 2:
How are the other students going to treat them?

Black Community Member 3:
Or the teachers?
Black Community Member 1:
In our schools, we have our church leaders teaching the children solid values and dedicated to their education. But in those white schools, no one will care if they succeed.

Black Community Member 2:
We need to get into those schools and we need to show them why our children deserve to learn alongside their children.”

Black Community Member 4:
“I know what we want, I’m just afraid we’ll lose our community in the process .

White Community Member 1
I don’t know why they think they should be allowed to bring their kids into our schools.

White Community Member 2:
The thought of teaching them....

White Community Member 3
Just think of their kids in classrooms with our children…

White Community Member 4
Sitting with our children, sharing textbooks...

White Community Member 1
Drinking from the same water fountain...

White Community Member 2
“They would be playing sports with our sons.”

White Community Member 3
“It’s not going to work.

White Community Member 4
There are always private schools, if worst comes to worst.

White Community Member 1
“This isn’t about private or public schools; it’s about them coming to our places. Our schools, our stores and anywhere they please!”

White Community Member 2
Trying to date our--

White Community Member 3
“Darling don’t. Don’t even say it … we have enough to worry about right now.”
Black Community Member 1
Our children have what they need in our schools. They work with the finest teachers--

Black Community Member 2
They are schooled in our values

Black Community Member 1
They are protected from prejudice and slights

Black Community Member 4
--but what about indoor plumbing, heat in the winter, and new textbooks! Don't you think our children deserve better?

Black Community Member 2
You really think our children need to be among whites to succeed?

Black Community Member 3
This is not about integration--this is about equal opportunity. Our children should be in top-grade facilities with the same resources as the whites.

Black Community Member 4
Anything less than that, we are selling them--and ourselves--short.

White Community Members 1:
We're civilized people....

White Community Members 2:
“They don’t have any respect for our …

Black Community Members 1:
“…children’s needs. They don’t understand anything about our …

White Community Members 3:
“…way of life. They want to change everything. They want to take …

Black Community Members 2:
“…our hope away from us. They want to destroy …

White Community Members 4:
“…this city, this state and this nation. We will never stop fighting for our kids …

Black Community Members 3:
“…to have a better life. We won't stop until …”
Both Communities:
“We can be sure that they won't be allowed to destroy our children's educations forever.”

Scene 3
(narrator folds up paper and takes center stage while all others exit stage)
(Large white crowd gathers on stage, holding signs, mostly adults, general commotion and chaos of a protest, not one voice is heard.)

Narrator:
Two years later, in 1958 the struggle continues and Prince Edward County Schools shut down to prevent integration.

White Protester 1:
Keep our schools white! (yells over rumble of crowd, one voice over the crowd)

White Protester 2:
Stop integration now! (again, yells over crowd, but rumble continues in background)

White Protester 3:
In order to preserve the freedom of all, we demand our constitutional rights, as citizens, to govern ourselves as we so choose; and not at the direction of would-be dictators.

(Continuous rumble: rhubarb and cabbage in a round; Noise fades, one child steps forward out of the crowd)

White Child:
If they come to our school, we won't be safe. They're just not civilized. This is not what the Lord intended for the races.....

(White child steps back into the crowd, lights go out, crowd changes shirts if necessary. Crowd flips signs and now represents a group of black protesters.)

Black protester 1:
(over rumble) We want equal schools!

Black Protester 2:
(over rumble) Equality now! End segregation today!

Black Protester 3:
Separate is not equal!

(Black child steps out of crowd, as rumbling dies down)
Black child:
All of the white kids with money are off in their fancy private schools. But what about me. . .
.where am I supposed to go?
(Black child steps back into crowd, lights out.)

Sign Ideas:
White-
“Stop Integration!”
Circle with line “Integration”
“End Integration”

Black-
“Separate is not Equal”
“End Separation”
“Fair Education For All Now!!”

(Crowd Exits)

Scene 4
Narrator:
Meanwhile, at the News Leader, the letters to the editor kept pouring in.

Reader 1:
Regardless of those customs, habits, moral codes, etc., you speak of, you’ll agree that according
to the Good Book all men are created equal. Thus it should be now as in the beginning.
Integration is simply the way back to the right and normal way to live.

Reader 2:
“There is an older and higher law than even the Supreme Court--the law that parents have a right
to protect their young from harm. The white people of the South are trying to protect their
children from the immorality, the disease and the lack of refinement and the lack of integrity that
is so prevalent in the Negro race

Reader 3:
A Negro does my cooking and takes care of my children and if we are so afraid that our children
will be maladjusted because of school contact, then there is something wrong in the way you
have been bringing them up.

Reader 4:
Most Southerners face an emotional experience comparable to the physical experience of a polio
victim learning to walk. They have to unlearn lessons rooted deep down into the past beyond all
possible memory.

Reader 5:
One can almost hear the long ago rumble of guns at Fort Sumpter in South Carolina. It is noticeable in all the other Southern States as well. It is interesting to speculate as to whether the Supreme Court would have banned the public school segregation had the majority of its members, especially the Chief Justice, been born Southerners and therefore qualified to understand the racial problem confronting the South

Reader 6:
I cannot afford to hate, it is too costly for me. I am the father of five children. I will not bring my children up to the place of Justice with the thoughts that their father taught them to hate.

Reader 7:
On segregation of schools, what a shame that the white race has fallen to such an extent that we no longer control our own individual likes and dislikes. Personally, I have nothing against the colored race or any other race but if I choose to put my children through school, dancing or any other profession without the social or personal presence of negroes, Eskimos or what have you then that is my privilege.

**Scene 5**

*Outside of a courthouse, two groups of protesters gather. Black protesters are on the right and white protesters are on the left. (approx. 4 protesters per group) Each groups will be holding one or two signs piece. Image for slideshow: Outside of a courthouse. General rumble from both crowds, a commotion.*

Narrator:
Over a decade after Brown, the Supreme Court was still struggling to achieve integration. On May 17, 1968 it ruled that New Kent Country’s Freedom of Choice plan didn’t adequately comply with the school board’s responsibility to admit students to public schools on a non-racial basis.

Man:
The case of *Green v. County School Board of New Kent* is now is session. Chief Judge Haynesworth is presiding over the case.

*Man leaves the stage the way he entered and the lights go out for a moment. The lights come back on and the crowds resume rumbling, without any specific chants. The judge enters the stage and raises his hand in an effort to settle the crowd.*

Judge Haynesworth:
Fourteen years ago, the Supreme Court ruled, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, that separate education for white and black children could never be equal. At the time of *Brown*, states were told to integrate schools but without a set time frame for doing so. Since then, few districts have accomplished true integration.

*The white protesters groan and mumble. The Judge continues speaking, silencing the groans.*
Judge Haynesworth:
In the case of Green v. New Kent, it has been decided that states must submit plans to integrate schools and create more equality in education immediately. Further foot-dragging will not be tolerated.

The black protesters cheer and throw their signs in the air running to shake the Judge’s hand. The white protesters walk off the stage grumbling and moaning. The lights go out and everyone exits the stage.

Scene 6: The Hallway
Narrator:
But court cases couldn’t change prejudices. Even after 1960 when Virginia Governor Almond called for an end to massive resistance, the real work behind integration needed to be done on the ground, by the children themselves.

(Two students stand in the hallway, nearer to stage right leaning against a locker. On stage left, upstage, two black students start walking slowly into the hallway. As they do, two white students appear stage right, closer downstage, walking in the opposite direction down the hall. The white student further upstage is SALLY. SALLY’s friend is REBECCA. The black student further downstage is JOANNE. JOANNE’s friend is CAMILLE. The two pairs walk toward each other, and it becomes clear that if neither SALLY nor JOANNE move, they are going to collide.)

REBECCA (to SALLY):
Sal, if you keep walking, you know you’re gonna bump right into that girl, right?

SALLY (to REBECCA):
Yeah, I know. But I’m just sick of moving. This is my school, too.

JOANNE (on the other side of the stage, to CAMILLE):
Look at her, (points discreetly at SALLY) walking as if she owns this place. Who does she think she is? (CAMILLE shrugs)

(The two pairs continue to get closer, and SALLY and JOANNE each move over enough to not collide head on, but as they pass one another, their shoulders brush; each one’s body being slightly turned due to the impact. SALLY walks on proudly. JOANNE looks back over her shoulder, but continues in her step)

JOANNE (brushing off her shoulder with a look of disgust):
Jeez, watch where you’re going.

SALLY (turning around abruptly, one arm akimbo):
What did you just say to me?

JOANNE (stopped in her step, turns around to face SALLY):
I said, “Watch where you’re going”
SALLY (scornfully):
I’ll go wherever I want.

(JOANNE looks enraged. Camille grasps her arm, still facing the direction they were headed.)

CAMILLE:
Come on, Joanne, it’s not worth it.

JOANNE:
That girl better watch it.
(They exit.)

REBECCA:
Sally, why do you have to be so hard-headed? You could have just moved over a little.

SALLY:
It’s the principle of the matter.

(REBECCA rolls her eyes at the audience. ) Lets just go to practice.
(They exit.)
(Blackout)

Scene 7

Narrator:
School Board Meeting; Aug. 1971

Board President:
Now lets open the floor up for discussion on the matter of busing in the city of Richmond.

Parent in the Crowd:
Finally.

Board President:
The gentleman in the back, [gestures with hand]

James Charlesworth(white):
“I don’t have any problems with integration, but trying to achieve it through forced busing comes at an incredible expense to our children. In areas where students are economically and culturally impoverished-

Black man in the front:
“Culturally impoverished?!”

James Charlesworth:
Forced busing isn’t right! Our neighborhood schools are an important part of our community, and we can’t have our children sent all over the city!”

Margaret Freeman (black):
[raises hand] “Yes, I’d like to respond to that comment?”

Board President:
Go ahead, ma’am.

Margaret Freeman:
[stands up] where were you when black children were being bused long distances? It’s only a problem when your white children are inconvenienced, mm?”

[Some in crowd murmur in agreement. Several adults get up and leave.]

Margaret Freeman:
“For too long, we have seen our children bused past the white schools that are blocks away from our own homes.”

Board Member:
Better than the kind of voting some of y'all have been doing--Judge Maerhige has had the protection of U.S. Marshals ever since he ordered busing for Richmond public schools.

White man:
Shame what happened to his dog--they tied its legs together and shot it dead.

White woman:
Course there are some who said they should have shot the judge like a dog....wasted that bullet.

Board member:
This meeting has come to an end. The judge's order stands.

White woman:
Say what you want, we can vote with our feet. Unless you want your kids to be the last whites in their school.

Scene 8: Wythe High School: The Cheering Squad
(Lights up on four or five cheerleaders stretching and warming up. CAMILLE and JOANNE are amongst them. So is MS. EDMUNDS. SALLY and REBECCA approach from stage left)

CAMILLE:
Oh no. . .

JOANNE:
Now I know that tired white girl doesn’t think she’s gonna join this team. Not after what happened today!

(SALLY and REBECCA approach MS. EDMUNDS)

SALLY:
Hi, my name is Sally McCall, and this is my friend Rebecca, we’re here to try out for the cheerleading squad.

MS. EDMUNDS (friendly): Hey girls, great! We’re looking to mix up the squad this year.

(Rebecca smiles and is happy. Rebeca jabs Sally lightly in the ribs, as SALLY grimaces. Sally drags her feet.)

JOANNE:
There’s no way that frail girl can cheer.

CAMILLE:
Joanne, you haven’t even given her a chance.

JOANNE:
None of them gave us a chance, and now they think they can take over our school!

MS. EDMUNDS:
Joanne? Can you show Sally and Rebecca here how to do the spirit cheer?

JOANNE (annoyed):
Ugh, yes Ms. Edmunds. (turning to SALLY and REBECCA) It goes like this. (Gesturing the cheer quickly). Got it?

REBECCA (looking confused):
Umm... c-c-could yo-

SALLY (smartly):
Yeah, I got it. (SALLY adeptly imitates what JOANNE just did).

CAMILLE (to SALLY):
Wow! You’re good.

JOANNE:
That was nothin’. How about this? (She performs and even more complicated cheer, more quickly)

SALLY:
Got it. (Mimics JOANNE and adds her own move at the end) What else have you got? (Cockily)

JOANNE:
Okay, I guess you’re alright—even if you are a white girl.

SALLY:
I’m more than alright.
REBECCA (*Chimes in, rather timidly)*:
Come on Joanne, good is good.

JOANNE:
Fine.

MS. EDMUNDS:
Keep working girls, we need to have this routine down by Friday for the football game.

(*MS. EDMUNDS smiles at the girls and they smile back.*)
(*Blackout.*)

**Scene 9**

Narrator:
1974. White flight changed the look of public schools.

CAMILLE:
First it was Sally, and then it was Rebecca, leaving for the county schools. And then one day I looked around and realized that our whole cheerleading squad was black again. It was cool, but....

Sally's parents thought she couldn't get into a good college, coming from Wythe.

Rebecca's mom was worried about the fights in the cafeteria and kids smoking dope in the bathrooms.

And now they're in the counties, or attending those private academies.

They all had their reasons, but it's hard not to feel like those reasons all boiled down to skin color.

**Scene 10 “The Lost Generation”**

- Because of the education and opportunities that were lost to them forever by the closing of their schools.

On the screen in the background will be a montage of photographs (school building: shuttered and barred closed, students with signs I HAVE LOST FOUR YEARS OF EDUCATION, WHY FIVE?, sign on school building with chains across it, NO TRESPASSING sign on closed school) The scene will open with 2 adults standing facing audience...They are members of the “Lost Generation” who were denied an education for 5 years. Each will relate a personal story of those 5 years and its lasting impact on their life. Darkened stage: light shines on first Individual #1 then #2 as each speaks in turn.
Allen Simpson:
My name is Allen Simpson and I am a member of what has been called “the lost generation” although I surely don’t see myself that way. I was only 8 yrs old that day in 1959 when my mother told me that I wouldn’t be going to school that day, or maybe for a long time. At first, I thought, great, I don’t have to get up early or do homework, but soon, I started to miss seeing my friends. My parents as well as other Black parents tried to keep our education going. I went to school for a few months in the basement of the High Rock Baptist Church, but it was not the same... Some 5 years later my school, Prince Edward County Elementary reopened, but I was 13 and old enough to be put in High School, but I had missed so much, they put me in the fourth grade. I went back to school for a few months, but I was too humiliated to continue. I felt lost and stupid! I remember the first day when I walked into a classroom filled with much smaller 4th grade white children and another girl and myself, who were obviously, much older. I never raised my hand in class and when the teacher called on me, I was too mortified to even answer. I knew if I got the answer wrong the other kids, who were so much smaller than me, would laugh or snicker under their breath. After awhile, I began to get stomachaches and headaches every morning, when I would even think of going to school. My mother tried everything to make me go, but, in the end, she knew that it was making me sick and I wasn’t able to learn anything feeling the way I did. I felt lonesome in a way, than some who were sent away from home to school. I know I would have been so lonesome for my family. I took a series of menial jobs and succeeded later to get my GED, but felt that I was always crippled by my lack of an early education. It left a lasting feeling that I was not valued by society and was treated as a 2nd class citizen. To this day, I feel that I was cheated out of something because of the color of my skin. This was a further insult to injury since my own father had fought for this country in WWII and his own children were denied an education.”

Bertha Greene:
“My name is Bertha Greene, I was in the second grade when my school was closed by the Prince Edward County Board. My parents were very concerned that I would get an education so they sent me away to Iowa to a Quaker school. I was part of less than 5% of the more than 2,000 children that received schooling during those 5 years. I learned how important it is for a child to have an education and how lost I would have been without it. I later became a first grade teacher, even though I, as a child, was denied the right to an education as a first grader myself, or maybe because of it. I was often scared and always lonely, as I missed my family and friends. Some nights I would cry myself to sleep, feeling alone in a room that I shared with three other girls. I just wanted to be at home with my family. The family that I lived with was kind to me and they had the best intentions, but as a child of 8, all I knew was they were not my parents. My family would come every other month for a weekend to see me, and I looked forward to those visits for days, but when they left, I was again so sad and had to fight back tears as I went about my day I think sometimes, that has led to my feelings of uncertainty and occasional distrust as an adult. I know that in a way I was one of the lucky ones who did manage to get an education, but I feel that I still bear the scars of being denied an education in my community school, and being at home with my family as a young child. I feel that as a black child my life and future were not important to my community, and the scars of those feelings are still with me to this day.

The scene closes with scene on the background screen changing to that of Prince Edward County holding a symbolic graduation ceremony for the “lost generation” - those denied education.”
between 1959-1964- the state of Virginia apologized for the closings. Allen and Bertha stand and look out to audience.

**Scene 11—Graduation Scene**

Keynote Speaker:
Good evening parents, teachers, friends and family, and last, but certainly not least, graduates of the class of 2011. Here in Virginia we have a unique history. We have all heard of the struggles that were part and parcel of working toward integration within our community. Over half a century ago, Virginia was divided by a force known as Massive Resistance. As the president of our great nation, Barack Obama, has said, this generation knows a post-race America. I stand here proudly today, able to address that generation that has been fortunate enough to learn of this term as history rather than know it as a reality--

**Graduate ’68:** My grandson attends the John B. Cary school, and I’ve witnessed that segregation is not only a part of Richmond’s history.

**Graduate ’80:** I had never heard of this “Massive Resistance” before, but I did know about busing. Even though busing no longer exists, similar methods of segregation have arisen.

**Graduate ’91:** I attended George Wythe High School and there wasn’t a day where I didn’t feel the continuing effects of the struggle.

**Graduate ’03:** When I went to Henderson Middle School, we have barely any computers that always work, most of our textbooks are really old, and the building was practically falling apart.

**Graduate ’08:** At Mary Mumford, almost all of the students are white, and at Henderson, almost all of the students are black. When I look at the Richmond Public Schools today, I wonder if integration ever really happened.

The change envisioned by the courts and mandated in the Brown decision took over forty years to come to pass and we are still fighting this battle today.