

## Our View

# Remembering nine brave children

Heroes come in all sizes, ages and colors. Some heroes are well-known, while others are anonymous.

As we honor the integration of Alexandria's public schools, which took place 60 years ago next week, on Feb. 10, 1959, it's important to remember both the famous and lesser-known participants in the struggle for civil rights in our city.

Ferdinand T. Day and Samuel W. Tucker were perhaps the leading figures of Alexandria's civil rights movement. Day was a leader in Alexandria's African-American community, a teacher and federal government worker who in 1964 became the first black member of Alexandria's school board. Day went on to become Alexandria's first black school board chair, and Alexandria's new elementary school on Beauregard Street was named after him.

Samuel W. Tucker is known to many in Alexandria because his name also adorns an elementary school in the city's West End. Tucker was a lawyer who worked for the NAACP on integration cases and argued before the Supreme Court. He's remembered in Alexandria for organizing a sit-in at the whites-only public library in 1939, an orderly protest that led to the arrest of the five young black men who participated.

One of those arrested men was Tucker's brother Otto, who 20 years later was one of the three lawyers representing the families in the lawsuit "Jones v. the School Board of Alexandria" that we examine in today's page 1 story "The day two sisters proved T.C. Williams wrong."\*

Otto Tucker is an unsung Alexandria hero, as were the parents who worked with him and the other two lawyers on the case. It took the intervention of the courts to overcome the "massive resistance" effort in Virginia that was intended to block integration.

But the real stars of that dreary day in the middle of February almost 60 years ago were the nine school children who broke the color barrier in Alexandria. Those children were: Jessie Mae Jones, age eight; Margaret Lomax, six; James Lomax, eight; Sarah Ragland, eight; James Ragland, 13; Patsy Ragland, 14; Gerald Turner, six; Sandra Turner, seven and Kathryn Turner, 11. The children integrated three formerly all-white schools that day: Theodore Ficklin Elementary, William Ramsay Elementary and Francis Hammond High School.

When we think about the bravery of those children long ago, it's important to consider what that must have felt like: To walk into a school full of people who mostly didn't want you there. To face the uncertainty of whether your very presence was going to result in violence, as it did in many other places. To sit in a classroom with other children your age – and be the only one with dark skin.

These were exceptional children, chosen for their intelligence and character, and they were important spokes in the large wheel of the civil rights movement that rolled forward bit by bit. What they endured in the winter of 1959 and beyond helped pave the way for Alexandria to later have black members on its school board and city council, a black mayor, for Virginia to elect a black governor and ultimately, for the United States to elect a black president.

Those gains were hard won, and important steps in that journey were taken on Feb. 10, 1959. Alexandrians of every race and background owe them a tremendous debt of gratitude.

\* *The Times* previously told the story of James Lomax and his sister Margaret in the May 3, 2018 *Times*, "The homeless man who made civil rights history."

The first installment in our series on integration in Alexandria ran March 22, 2018, and was called "A school cook's forgotten civil rights stand."

# Opinion

"Where the press is free and every man is able to read, all is safe."

- Thomas Jefferson



## Your Views

# Vision Zero may save your life

To the editor:

I am responding to the letter, "Vision Zero has zero benefits" in the Jan. 17 Alexandria Times. The writer views the Vision Zero program as anti-automobile and infers that the city plans to remove automobiles from our streets. The letter concludes that Vision Zero is not needed "but we need four lanes on Seminary Road."

With all due respect, I disagree. Vision Zero is a plan that's a combination of engineering, enforcement and education programs focused on street safety. When implemented correctly, it can save lives and reduce the frequency of vehicles crashing into pedestrians, cyclists and other road users.

In Alexandria, the number of pedestrians and cyclists crashed into by vehicles has hovered in the lows 80s from 2016 to 2017. It looks like such crashes decreased in 2018, perhaps because of the public awareness of Vision Zero, or the result of street engineering changes that have been implemented in recent years. King Street has gone from 10 crashes annually to zero in the past 12 months. Unfortunately, the percentage of people killed or seriously injured has increased in

Alexandria over the past three years, going from 8 percent of all crashes to 16 percent.

This is due to speed. The speed limit on some of Alexandria's four lane roadways like Seminary Road is 25 mph. However, in June 2018 radar guns registered many cars traveling at more than 40 mph on Seminary Road. Police confirmed that speeding is a problem on Seminary Road, even in front of the middle school and hospital.

Road engineering studies have proven that drivers are inclined to go faster on wide, multi-lane roadways. Conversely, drivers will instinctively go slower if the path ahead is not as wide. Cyclists and pedestrians will avoid roadways where cars are traveling at high speeds. Perhaps that is the reason why the number of pedestrians and cyclists killed or seriously injured on Seminary Road is not as high as some other streets in Alexandria.

No one likes sitting in stalled or slow traffic. On the other hand, as a person who was crashed into while walking with the right of way in the middle of a crosswalk, I know

SEE VISION ZERO

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## Our View

# We need consumer-based local politics

It's an economic truism that competition benefits the consumer.

When more than one company produces or provides goods or services, consumers have choices of what to buy and where to buy it. Consumer choice forces providers to make concessions they would otherwise likely forgo – in price, quality and service – in order to attract customers.

This principle applies in the medical world as well.

Alexandria's abundance of doctors and medical facilities – both in the city and regionally – means residents have some choice of doctors and where to have procedures, generally regardless of their insurance. This competition gives hospitals extra incentive to improve quality and reminds doctors that their practices are not tenured.

Politics is another realm where competition benefits consumers.

Perhaps it seems odd to think of citizens as consumers of politics, but we are. And the same principle of competition applies: When politicians and political institutions, i.e. parties, know constituents have no other options, they lack incentive to compromise.

When control is assured, politicians can push through their own agendas, and political consumers are left with no real choice. Lack of moderation is detrimental even to those in the majority party.

Both Republicans and Democrats behave this way in places where they have near total control. Both parties gerrymander districts when they control state legislatures – one reason why Tuesday's Democratic sweep in Virginia is so significant heading into the 2020 U.S. Census.

In the five House of Delegates or State Senate races that were in districts partly or entirely in Alexandria, only one Democrat faced opposition on the ballot. In the other districts, four local Republicans ran as unofficial write-in candidates. All garnered less than 8.5 percent of the vote.

Extremist policies on both left and right become ascendant when Congressional representatives come from too-safe districts or safely blue or red states, or when one party has long-term control of all levers of government in a state.

In Alexandria, local party competitiveness was effectively quashed when city council voted in 2009 to move our local elections from the spring to fall. As we wrote in the Nov. 8, 2012 Alexandria Times:

"The decision to reschedule local elections from May to November was made in June 2009 by a lame-duck and Democratic-controlled council, two of which, Tim Lovain and Justin Wilson, had just lost their seats to Republican Frank Fannon and then-Independent Alicia Hughes. That decision, made in the name of increasing voter turnout, smelled of sour grapes – and a lingering odor remains. Lovain and Wilson, who voted for it, reclaimed their former seats from Fannon and Hughes on Tuesday."

One-party rule won the day in 2012 and continues unabated in Alexandria.

A case can be made that political consumers in Alexandria of all persuasions benefitted when people like Fannon, Hughes, former Vice Mayor Bill Cleveland and former City Councilor Claire Eberwein served on council. They were generally for fiscal restraint, but mostly they were independent voices and raised concerns that forced their Democratic counterparts to seriously consider alternatives to the status quo.

The trend on our current one-party city council, led by now-mayor Wilson, is toward passing text amendments that take the public out of an increasing number of local government decisions. While supposedly done in the name of efficiency, in fact they're another form of disenfranchisement.

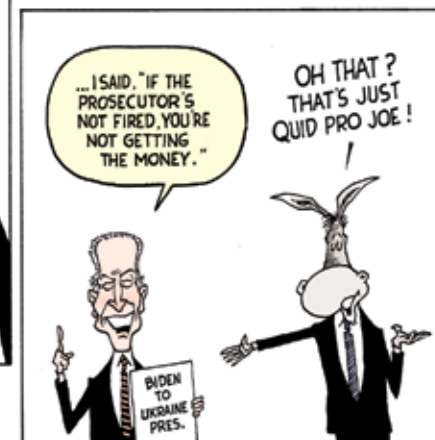
If a voter can't speak at a public hearing on a zoning move that will impact their quality of life, that citizen has no political say. When one party controls all of the levers of government, then voters have no alternative.

Competition – economic, medical and political – benefits consumers. Monopoly benefits only those in control.

# Opinion

"Where the press is free and every man is able to read, all is safe."

- Thomas Jefferson



## Your Views

# Why pick the most damaging Metro location?

To the editor:

The City of Alexandria, WMATA and Coalition for Smarter Growth, among others, are risking public safety in their push to build the Potomac Yard Metro Station Alternative B on top of wetlands in a flood plain of the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

This recklessly sited proposal will destroy functioning forested floodplain and wetlands, significantly increase impervious surface runoff and degrade adjoining freshwater tidal wetlands by using them for stormwater management. This will greatly exacerbate dangerous flooding along the parkway and pose serious threats to public safety. None of these significant impacts can be effectively mitigated, especially with the loss of natural floodplain values.

Alternative B is by far the most environmentally damaging choice of all the practicable alternatives considered and is the only one that needlessly situates the project in wetlands and a flood plain. In contrast, there are several good practicable alternatives that meet the project purpose and do not significantly impact the environment: bus, VRE, Alternative A and B-CSX.

However, the city stubbornly favors only Alternative B because building it on city and federal parkland maximizes development opportunities at nearby Potomac Yard. Why give up one foot of developable land in a post-industrial site when one can re-purpose "unused" wetlands and parkland instead?

-Hal Hardaway, C. Dara,  
Jimm Roberts,  
Alexandria

The opinions expressed in letters and columns are those of the writers only and do not reflect the views, nor receive the endorsement, of the Alexandria Times.

## Our View

# Environmental actions speak louder than words

Alexandria's elected leaders must make difficult decisions that often involve tradeoffs – and those choices seldom leave all sides happy. But when a clear tradeoff is made, our leaders then need to own their choice rather than pretend none was made.

Exhibit A is our city's clear preference for development over environmental protection. The most egregious example of development's preeminent place in Alexandria was the decision to locate the Potomac Yard Metro station in the midst of five acres of wetlands rather than in a nearby, non-wetlands location.

The final permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was issued on Nov. 15, meaning that construction of the new Metro station on site B – the wetlands site – can now proceed. See our story on page one, "PY Metro proceeds on wetlands site," for details of that approval.

While we have a hard time cheering the city's prioritization of development dollars over the environment, it was not an unreasonable decision. This new station has been discussed for the past 20 years, and its location next to the new Amazon headquarters and the Virginia Tech Innovation Campus was an unprecedented chance for Alexandria to maximize commercial tax dollars into the future.

For years, Alexandria's tax base has skewed toward residential over commercial, meaning our city's homeowners have borne an increasing tax burden. Since everyone wants to pay fewer taxes but few want cuts to government services, city leaders wound up in a bind.

It's at least understandable, if not commendable, that they reached for the biggest economic payoff possible when deciding where to locate the Potomac Yard Metro stop.

What's not acceptable is that they want to also claim the mantle of environmentalists – because in decision after decision, our city has not prioritized the environment.

Another example of the city's preference for development over the environment was the Karig Estates decision. There, the city ignored the presence of an intermittent stream and an ancient stand of trees to allow maximum development, when a less environmentally destructive alternative was available.

City council's vote for a "road diet" on Seminary Road is fast proving to be another environmentally suspect decision. Though done in the name of promoting biking and walking, road diets seem to be a fad. Significant numbers of nearby residents claim the narrowing of that major artery from four lanes to two is causing major traffic backups. An environmentally prudent decision would have caused less vehicular idling in traffic, not more.

We find it peculiar that within a one-month period, city council passed a resolution declaring a climate change emergency that calls for drastic reductions in the city's carbon emissions, while also receiving final approval to damage or destroy four acres of tidal wetlands near the Potomac River.

For the uninitiated, wetlands are crucial to flood mitigation, carbon reduction and protection of important aquatic species of plants and animals. According to Ramsar, the oldest modern, global intergovernmental environmental agreement:

"Wetlands are the planet's most effective carbon sinks and represent unrealised potential for climate mitigation. ... Wetlands make communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change. They provide buffers against sea level rise and storm surges, and reduce the impacts of floods, droughts and cyclones."

In other words, wetlands do just what city council called for in its climate change resolution.

City council passed a feel-good environmental statement with no teeth. It also chose to destroy or damage four acres of wetlands for a Metro station when a good alternative was possible. As usual, actions speak louder than words.

# Opinion

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- Thomas Jefferson



## Your Views

# Let's take back Seminary Road

*To the editor:*

I woke up this morning with a twinge of empowerment. Last night I picked up my "Take Back Seminary Road" bumper sticker and it is already displayed on my back windshield for everyone to see. Oh, how I couldn't wait to start driving my daily route through #justintrafficjam and voice my public discontent.

This issue hits close to home for me. In fact, it hits my childhood home directly with a bullseye, as I was born at Alexandria Hospital and grew up on Seminary Road. I attended both public and private schools here, walking down Seminary Road every day. You could say I am a true local.

My parents still reside there and we frequently gather at their home for family events. I also travel on Seminary Road daily to take my children to school. I know these neighborhoods well, especially Seminary Ridge, where my squad of neighborhood teenage girls would gather at someone's house in the summer and play flashlight tag, kick the can, drink slurpees and watch Jaws in 3D on TV.

I am disappointed and appalled with the current situation on Seminary Road, which is a major thoroughfare between Duke Street and

the BRAC building. It also has several schools, the only hospital in the city and a fire station. This situation has been caused by the road diet recently approved by city council.

For city council not to have heeded the wishes of 13 civic associations is shocking and unbelievable. I truly cannot believe that four people – Mayor Justin Wilson, Vice Mayor Elizabeth Bennett-Parker and Councilors Canek Aguirre and Del Pepper – could impact the lives of so many citizens on a daily basis. Your road diet has created more traffic, more carbon monoxide and more aggravation for your citizens who pay way too much in taxes and, to add insult to injury, have to pay for all of this.

Last week, your city employees installed another "No turn on red" sign from Seminary Road to St. Stephens Road. Why not simply install crosswalk signals that will delay stop lights when pedestrians are present?

I have heard that another "No turn on red" sign will be installed from Seminary Road to Quaker Lane. Is that true? If so, that will just aggravate the already increasing congestion and lead to more delays. All

## CIVIL RIGHTS IN ALEXANDRIA

### Jones v. The School Board of Alexandria



PHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

**Above:** Kathryn Turner enters a car after her first day at William Ramsay Elementary the day after Alexandria schools integrated. **Right:** An article written by Edward Peeks lists the children who integrated city schools and the parents who accompanied them. It was published in the Afro-American on Feb. 21, 1959.

# The day two sisters proved T.C. Williams wrong

*This is the third installment in an ongoing series about civil rights in Alexandria.*

**Former superintendent opposed desegregation lawsuit 60 years ago**

BY JIM MCELHATTON

Sixty years ago next week, the namesake of Alexandria's only public high school – former superintendent Thomas

Chambliss “T.C.” Williams – appeared in a federal courtroom to defend the policies that preserved segregation in the city’s public schools.

Unreported at the time, the schools chief, in his initial denial of the students’ application

SEE **CIVIL RIGHTS**

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## 9 enter 3 Va. schools

BY EDWARD PECK

Alexandria did not get a single Tuesday in the Virginia desegregation column as more children entered these public schools formerly set aside for whites.

“Everything went exactly as planned,” said Police Chief Edward A. Mason, who has 60 officers on duty at the schools as a precaution against trouble.

Raymond W. Sanger, assistant school superintendent, said there were no incidents or calls from white people.

Student bodies suspended will allow to appeal Hester for cooperation in all three schools, he said.

ALEXANDRIA joined Arlington and Norfolk in periodic integration, starting with a “smelter” Little Rock.

The nine children were accompanied by their parents to William High School on Seminary Rd. near Shirley Park Elementary in West Alexandria, and Public Elementary downtown on Second St.

James E. Loman, 8, and his sister, Margaret, 6, entered Public at 10:30 a.m. on Feb. 21. They were accompanied by their mother, Mrs. Pearl Colman, and grandmother, Mrs. Ella Loman.

Police turned back the grandmother at the entrance of the school grounds in keeping with a decision to allow only pupils and their parents to enter.

Speakers at all three schools consisted mainly of newsmen and photographers who were kept by police guards in fenced areas.

NO REPORTS of photographs were allowed to enter a building with persons who carried cameras, papers for the admission of the children.

The Ramsey was Kathryn Turner, 11, her sister and brother, Brenda, 7, and George, 6, accompanied by her mother, Mrs. Sarah Turner, 21 Lincoln St.

Also Jessie Mae Jones, 8, with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. Jones, 210 Seminary Ave.

The fifth child in the group was Sarah England, also 8, 200 Lincoln St.

HER OLDER sister and brother, Frank, 14, and James, 12, entered Francis at 10:30 a.m. toward the other end of town.

They were accompanied by their mother, Mrs. Sarah M. Hester, 1000 N. Washington St.

The father, Jack Hester, was on his construction job as maintenance worker for the Alexandria Housing Authority.

Mr. Jones is a taxi driver for the Army. Mrs. Turner runs a beauty supply business in Washington.

“EVERYTHING went well,” Mr. Turner said after the activities concluded in Ramsey. “It was just another school day.”

He expressed his confidence in other parents who like the children from the history-making day in stride.

“I got to go to work now,” Mr. Turner said, driving from his job to his business in the Klaxton.

Reporters and cameramen gathered around the homes before and after the children left for school.

THE NINE were among 16 who applied for transfers. They were admitted under a 1954 court order issued by Federal District Judge Albert V. Bryan.

The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals turned down a plea by the Alexandria school board for delay of integration until next September.

The board decided against appealing the case to the Supreme Court and went ahead to integrate.

ATTORNEYS FOR the plaintiffs were Frank D. Reeves, James M. Nabes 2nd, and Charles L. Tucker of Alexandria.

The 60 policemen used in Alexandria were some of the 100 who were ordered to the school by the Supreme Court and went ahead to integrate.

Those named last enrollment in the air in Alexandria here have had been in Arlington.

The parents' integration moved a little farther at the Old Dominion. “In a few years, we’ll all be one happy family.”



PHOTO/SHELLEY CASTLE PHOTOGRAPHY

# PUPPY BOWL XV

Introducing Pirate, Alexandria's own Puppy Bowl XV competitor. Don't be fooled by those big brown eyes, though – this Animal Welfare League of Alexandria alum plays ruff. Read the full story on page 10.

## INSIDE

**School Board**  
Amended high school capacity plan gets unanimous approval. Page 12

**Arts**  
Husband-and-wife duo Ellie and Drew Holcomb bring “The You and Me Tour” to the Birchmere. Page 14

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**ADOPTABLE PET OF THE WEEK**

**~ The Calico Cat & The Gingham Dog ~**

This 5-year-old Calico cat is certainly the delight of the AWLA cat adoptions room, and her pretty portrait may be irresistible to any potential adopters.

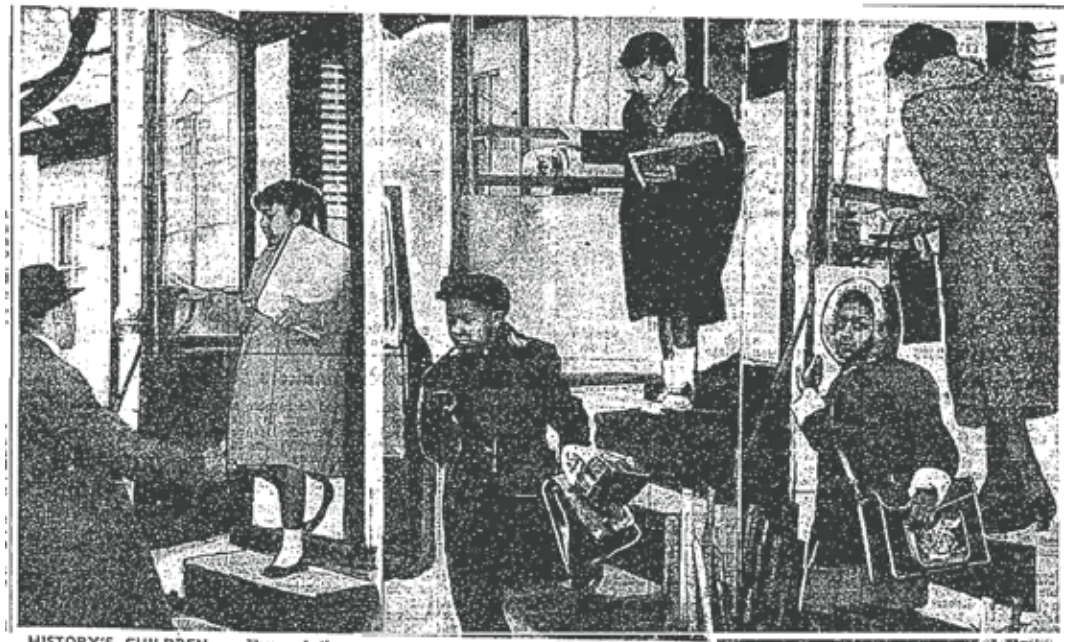
Everyone loves Lena, even our dogs, gingham and otherwise. Calicos, to those who love them, are a very special breed of cat, and to know them is to love them.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT LENA, PLEASE CONTACT THE AWLA AT 703-746-4774 or visit: [www.alexandrianimals.org](http://www.alexandrianimals.org).**

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**HISTORY'S CHILDREN** — Four of the children ordered admitted by the courts to a previously all-white elementary school are shown leaving for school on the first day of Alexandria desegregation. From

left to right, Georg Turner assists his daughter, Kathryn; Gerald Turner runs ahead of Sally Ragland at top of stairs and Sandra Turner precedes her mother, Mrs. Edith Turner, closing the door. The three

Turner youngsters and Sally were driven to William Ramsey Elementary School by Mr. Turner. (AFRO Photos by Maurice Sorrell)

COURTESY/AFRO-AMERICAN

**CIVIL RIGHTS** FROM | 1

to attend all-white schools, deemed the prospect of black and white students sitting in class together “a very questionable situation.” Williams later refused to say under oath whether he personally agreed with segregation one way or another.

Ultimately, a federal judge denied the school system’s bid to reject the applications of nine out of 14 black students seeking to attend white schools during the 1958-59 school year. On the day of that decision, Feb. 10, 1959 – more than four years after the Supreme Court’s “Brown v. Board of Education” ruling – racial barriers in Alexandria public schools quietly fell. There were no riots. There were no massive demonstrations. Except for reporters and police, few citizens bothered to show up when school opened that day.

On one hand, the lawsuit that integrated Alexandria schools, “Jones v. the School Board of Alexandria,” reflects a sad chapter in the city’s civil rights history. After all, court records and



COURTESY PHOTO

Kathryn Turner.

transcripts in the case at the National Archives reveal troubling testimony by Williams and legal arguments steeped in a time of segregation.

But the case files, including report cards and handwritten teacher notes about the students who would literally change the face of education in Alexandria, also provide, perhaps, a much more important and enduring lesson. It is about the resilience of children to change history.

“Going into that school and being able to raise your hand in class and have your homework right gave me the feeling I was OK,” Kathryn

Turner, one of the first nine black students to integrate city public schools, said.

Walking alongside Turner on the misty February morning, past police barricades, was her younger sister, second grader Sandra Turner (now Bond) and brother Gerald Turner, who was in first grade. Bond still remembers the police dogs, angry white parents and shouting reporters. More than anything, though, she recalls a deep sense of isolation in her new school.

“I think I was focused on making sure I had on my favorite coat and being apprehensive,” Bond said. “Just hoping we wouldn’t be in any jeopardy that day.”

The Turners were not alone. Other families – Lomax, Hundley, Ragland, Taylor, Jones – were also part of the lawsuit. (When Williams learned Blois Hundley, an African American school cook, had children in the lawsuit, he fired her, offering her job back only after intense backlash. She declined.)

In court papers, the le-



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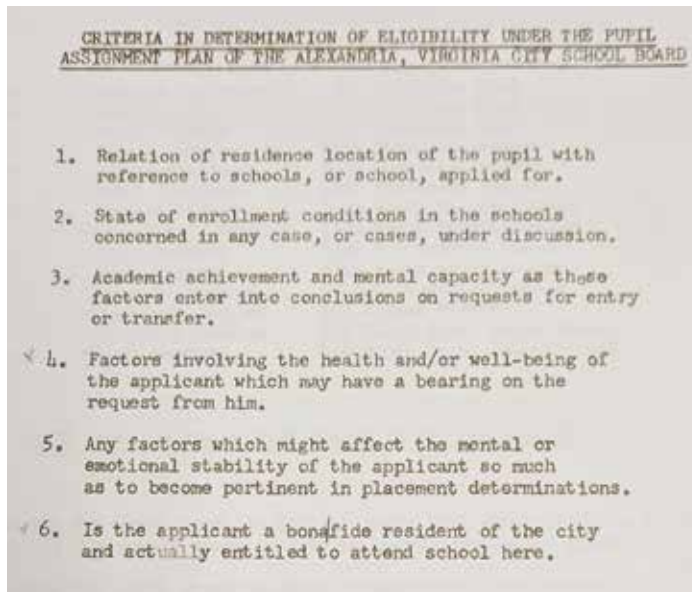
CIVIL RIGHTS FROM | 4

gal arguments put forth by the school district to justify blocking the Turner children and others from transferring to white schools are hard to follow, at least two generations removed.

The school arguments were sometimes completely unrelated to grades. In short, though, Williams and the school board argued that these black students, along with the schools they sought to attend, simply were not ready.

One sign of how much things have changed since then is Alexandria's new superintendent, Dr. Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D., who is an African American T.C. Williams graduate. Hutchings oversees a school district that would be unrecognizable to Williams today, with students from 114 different countries and a myriad of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Hutchings said in a statement that ACPS should not shy away from "uncomfort-



DOCUMENT/JONES V. SCHOOL BOARD CASE FILES, NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Academics were only one small piece of the overall, highly subjective criteria Alexandria's school board relied upon to reject transfer applications of black students seeking to attend white schools in the late 1950s.

able conversations" about equity in schools, then or now.

"Even though our city and nation have made some significant progress in regards to race relations, there is no doubt in my mind that we still have a long way to go to ensure equity in our public schools," Hutchings said in the statement, noting that equity is not just about race but resources, funding, academic opportunities and other issues.

As for the Turners, they went on to excel in school.

Kathryn Turner, who eventually earned a degree in chemistry from Howard University, has had a long and successful career. She is the chief executive officer of a large technology company, Standard Technology, Inc., and she's served on the boards of publicly traded

companies as well as local charitable organizations.

Bond spent part of her professional career covering desegregation in Boston as a photojournalist.

The sisters' memories of that momentous day 60 years ago are as different as they are vivid.

**Segregated Alexandria**

In the late 1950s, the Turner family lived in the Lincolnia section of Alexandria, which back then was mostly rural farmland before the development and construction of Landmark Mall pushed farmers away a few years later.

Edith and George Turner met while George was stationed at Camp Lee during his time in the service.

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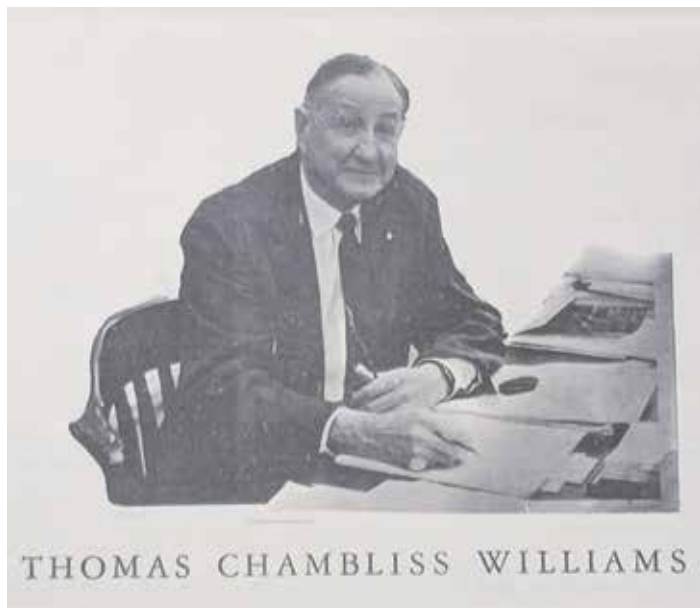
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THOMAS CHAMBLISS WILLIAMS

PHOTO/ALEXANDRIA PUBLIC LIBRARY LOCAL HISTORY/SPECIAL COLLECTIONS  
Portrait of T.C. Williams for the high school dedication ceremony program in 1965.

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George Turner never graduated from high school. His wife earned a master’s degree. They had three children. The family attended Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in Franconia run by Edith Turner’s cousin Milton Sheppard. Sheppard and the Turners were active in the local NAACP.

Neither Bond nor Kathryn Turner remember ever being asked if they wanted to go to a whites-only school.

“In my family, we were told to do it,” Turner said. “This is what we’re going to do. And you’ll be fine.”

Not just any student was asked to be part of the NAACP lawsuit that aimed to force Alexandria to integrate. The civil rights attorneys, who were filing cases across Virginia, vetted prospective plaintiffs vigorously to make sure students did well in school, according to Brian Daugherty, whose book “Keep On Keeping On” documents desegregation in Virginia. This way, school officials could not reject students’ applications on the basis of academics.

“They were not willing to settle and just be silent,” Bond said of her parents.

For her part, Turner said her mother was never one to be “intimidated or contained” when it came to her children. As a child, Turner said she suffered from hay fever. She recalled walking into an allergist’s office once with her mother.

A nurse stopped them at the door. She tried to turn them away.

“The doctor doesn’t see colored people,” Turner recalled the nurse telling her mother. “My mother said, ‘Let me talk to the doctor.’”

Turner is not certain about the details of the conversation her mother had with the allergist. But one thing was certain.

“He ended up taking us on as patients,” she said.

Months before the NAACP sued the city school board and Williams, the Turners and other families wrote letters to Williams asking that their children be allowed to attend whites-only schools at the start of the 1958-59 school year.

The applications languished. Ultimately, the applications were rejected

on the basis of highly subjective criteria and, in some cases, portrayals of students that Williams’ administration supplied to the school board that were misleading at best.

One of the black students seeking to transfer to a white school was reported absent for 82 days, but actually only missed 15 days of class for the year, according to transcripts.

Another student was rejected, in part, on the basis of a handful of negative teacher report card comments, when not one of the many more glowing comments about the same student were forwarded to the board.

Still other students were rejected because of supposed overcrowding concerns at the whites-only schools. But records show that after the black students were rejected, white students continued to transfer into the same schools. Attendance continued to climb.

Alexandria was hardly alone. Across the Commonwealth, school districts in the late 1950s refused to integrate under the state’s “massive resistance” policy.

For the Turners, school administrators had no basis to argue with their academic performance. The Turners were excellent students. Instead, their applications were rejected on the basis of very different criteria.

The official one-page decision rejecting Kathryn Turner’s application to attend the Charles Ramsay school noted that, if admitted, she would be “the only pupil of her race so enrolled.”

“This, in Alexandria, will be a novel and unusual situation. Such a situation will constitute a disruption of established social and psychological relationships between

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**ALEXANDRIA**  
*Symphony Orchestra*

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pupils in our schools as they (the schools) have previously operated," the rejection said.

The schools went on to argue that if Turner transferred to Ramsay, the "situation will be an unnatural one, which, as such, cannot contribute to normal and natural progress either for this girl or for the other pupils in the grade, who will find themselves in an artificial situation also."

In court, NAACP attorney Frank Reeves pressed Williams to defend the rationale. Under cross-examination, the superintendent acknowledged academics played no part in rejecting Turner's application to transfer. She was, he admitted, a very good student.

**Feb. 10, 1959**

Among the news coverage of the day Alexandria schools integrated, there is a wire services photo of Turner entering a car after her first day at William Ramsay. In the photo, white classmates watch her. Some are smiling, others laughing. A few appear to be pointing.

Turner is smiling, too, but it is hard to tell from her outstretched palm and her expression whether she is waving back at the children, or perhaps telling them to stand back.

Shown this image nearly 60 years later, Turner is asked what she thought back then, what these children were doing. Were they waving? Were they happy? Were they jeering and teasing?

Turner said she is not sure. She doesn't remember anyone in the photo. But while many of the first wave of African American students to attend white schools in Virginia were subjected to harsh treatment, Turner does not recall having such a difficult time compared to others, including members of her own family.

**“I think our parents certainly reflected on the fact that we all stand on the shoulders of our ancestors from slavery to now. We have a responsibility and almost an obligation to keep striving to ensure that civil rights don't get rolled back.”**

– Sandra Bond,  
one of the first African-American students to  
attend William Ramsay Elementary School

Turner attended Ramsay for one year, then eventually went to Hammond, which was then a high school. When she glanced at her yearbook not long ago, everything written from former classmates seemed to be positive.

"I don't have a negative impression," she said.

Turner said she does remember other, non-school related inequalities of the era. For instance, there was only one movie theater and swimming pool she could go to in Alexandria.

"There were a lot of things about Alexandria ... white only," she said.

But she said her mother instilled in the Turner children the sense that they were just as good as anyone else. Education was a hard-won commodity. Once you got a good education, Edith and George Turner told their children, nobody could ever take it away. No matter what.

"I would go back and say it was really my mother," Kathryn Turner said. "She really did feel that race shouldn't define you or limit you."

**A different perspective**

For Bond, things in her new school were harder and more complicated.

She remembers her second grade teacher doing little to welcome her. Bond walked into the classroom and immediately thought nobody at all looked like her or her family.

"It was an isolating expe-

rience," she said. "I didn't feel a part of the class. You were in it, but not of it."

Bond was protective of her brother. They tried to eat together at lunch. They sat on the school bus together, when other kids would tease them. But even at age eight, Sandra Bond said she knew the expectations of her went beyond her grades.

"It was more a feeling you have to endure this," she said. "You have to persevere. You can't fail."

As a second grader, she said she had no idea who T.C. Williams was, let alone the fact that the superintendent was testifying about her and her siblings. At the same time, though, she said she knew there were groups who opposed and resisted school desegregation.

Bond said, while her father didn't live to see Barack Obama become America's first black president, her mother did. She said her mother did not talk much about Alexandria, and she probably did not think she played an outsized role in the city's history. Still, she added, her parents likely felt proud the family had helped make a difference.

"I think our parents certainly reflected on the fact that we all stand on the shoulders of our ancestors from slavery to now," Bond said. "We have a responsibility and almost an obligation to keep striving to ensure that civil rights don't get rolled back."

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