

Edmund D. Campbell:
Fighting for the Elementary Rights of Every Arlingtonian

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The Arlington County Board begins its vision statement by stating, “Arlington will be a diverse and inclusive world-class urban community.”¹ Over the past one hundred years, Arlington has gotten much closer to turning this vision into a reality. In 1920, Arlington was a collection of loose neighborhoods with no public parks,² the schools were segregated under Jim Crow Laws,³ and the County was not appropriated enough delegates proportional to its population.⁴ For all three of these problems, Edmund D. Campbell came up with the solution. By convincing the County Board to invest in public parks, fighting legal battles to allow for the desegregation of Stratford Junior High School, and winning the court case that led to the “one man, one vote” ruling, Campbell improved the lives of all Arlington residents.

Born on March 12, 1899⁵ on the campus of Washington and Lee University,⁶ Edmund D. Campbell was greatly influenced by his upbringing in Lexington, Virginia. His father, a

¹ “County Vision,” [Arlingtonva.us](https://arlingtonva.us/departments/cmo/county-vision/), Arlington County Government, Accessed April 14, 2020, [departments.arlingtonva.us/cmo/county-vision/](https://arlingtonva.us/departments/cmo/county-vision/).

² Cas Cocklin and Edmund D. Campbell, “Edmund Campbell Interview,” *Center for Local History Community Archives*, April 12, 1991, May 8, 1991, and May 13 1991, 5 and 15, libraryarchives.arlingtonva.us/Detail/objects/928.

³ Web Editor, “The Story of Arlington Public School Desegregation,” Arlington Public Library, Arlington County Government, January 11, 2018, library.arlingtonva.us/2018/01/11/the-desegregation-of-arlington-public-schools/.

⁴ Cocklin and Campbell, “Edmund Campbell Interview,” 58.

⁵ William F. Causey, “Edmund E. Campbell: An Illustrious Career at the Bar,” The Historical Society of the D.C. Circuit, The Historical Society of the D.C. Circuit, February 15, 2020, dcchs.org/judges/campbell-edmund-d/.

⁶ Bart Barnes, “EDMUND D. CAMPBELL DIES,” *The Washington Post*, December 9, 1995, www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1995/12/09/edmund-d-campbell-dies/d1d666ad8-e7c4-4e77-a0a6-c90e0eb8e7c8/.

professor of geology and eventual Dean of Washington and Lee University,⁷ likely played a key factor in his son's academic pursuits and success.

Campbell enrolled in nearby Washington and Lee University at only fifteen years of age, where he graduated four years later with the best rank in his class.⁸ From there, Campbell ventured off to Harvard College to earn a master's degree in economics.⁹ Although economics appeared to be Campbell's future, his path changed because his employer went bankrupt.¹⁰ Wanting to have a more lucrative and steady career, Campbell returned to his childhood home and studied law at his alma mater, once again graduating first in his class in 1922.¹¹ Campbell's legendary run as a lawyer was about to begin.

Law took Campbell to Arlington, Virginia, where he lived while working at the Washington D.C.-based law firm Douglas, Obear, and Douglas.¹² In addition to practicing law, Campbell became more involved in Arlington affairs. He was elected to the Arlington County Board in the early 1940s.¹³ There, one of his most notable achievements was persuading the County Board to create a parks system. In part because of the initial \$500,000 bond he urged the County Board to dedicate towards public parks,¹⁴ Arlington has continued to sustain an

⁷ Causey, "An Illustrious Career at the Bar."

⁸ Barnes, "EDMUND D. CAMPBELL DIES."

⁹ Barnes, "EDMUND D. CAMPBELL DIES."

¹⁰ Cocklin and Campbell, 2.

¹¹ Causey, "An Illustrious Career at the Bar."

¹² Cocklin and Campbell, 4.

¹³ Barnes, "EDMUND D. CAMPBELL DIES."

¹⁴ Cocklin and Campbell, 16.

exemplary parks department, which ranked fourth out of the one hundred most populated cities in the United States by the ParkScore® Index in 2018.¹⁵ All Arlingtonians can relish in the beautiful parks they live near knowing that Campbell was responsible for dedicating the first financial resources towards their creation and maintenance.

In 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States would release the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas* decision, which ordered that all public schools in the United States be desegregated.¹⁶ The Byrd Organization, a Virginian political machine headed by former Virginia Governor, State Senator, and United States Senator Harry Byrd Sr., was against the decision.¹⁷ Since its inception, the organization fought to prevent African Americans from gaining civil rights or the right to a proper education.¹⁸ This was a part of its overall political conservatism and unwillingness to change the status quo.¹⁹ Due to the control of the Byrd Organization over Virginia politics during this era, the Virginia General Assembly passed the “Massive Resistance” laws.²⁰ All schools were forced to close by the order of the governor unless every parent of every child attending a school agreed to let the schools be integrated.²¹

¹⁵ “Arlingtonva.us,” *Arlingtonva.us*, Arlington County Government, May 23, 2018, newsroom.arlingtonva.us/release/arlingtons-park-system-ranked-among-nations-best-2/.

¹⁶ Mark Jones, “It Happened Here First: Arlington Students Integrate Virginia Schools,” *Boundary Stones*, WETA, February 2, 2013.

¹⁷ Brent Tarter, “Byrd Organization,” *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities, November 27, 2017, www.encyclopediavirginia.org/byrd_organization#start_entry.

¹⁸ Tarter, “Byrd Organization.”

¹⁹ Tarter, “Byrd Organization.”

²⁰ Jones, “Arlington Students Integrate Virginia Schools.”

²¹ Cocklin and Campbell, “Edmund Campbell Interview,” 50.

State funds were withheld from schools that integrated, while other funds were redirected to white families so they could send their children to nonintegrated private schools.²²

Arlington would enter the debate when Dorothy Hamm, prominent civil rights leader, went through a court battle to integrate Stratford Junior High School.²³ The judge who presided over the case only allowed certain African American youth into the school during the following semester of the 1958-59 school year.²⁴

After this case, Campbell realized that if Stratford accepted African American students, then the school and all other Arlington Public Schools would be shut down. To prevent this from happening, Campbell created the Save Our Schools movement.²⁵ The initiative began as a gathering in Campbell's house and grew into a statewide organization with representatives from all different counties of Virginia.²⁶ The committee's goal was to find ways to keep the schools open for the children. This approach helped the group find as wide of a support base as it did, since its mission statement did not mention integration.²⁷

In the fall of 1958, Campbell received a message from some African American individuals in Norfolk. Their schools had closed and they wanted them reopened on behalf of their children.²⁸ Campbell now had a difficult decision to make. He knew that it was morally

²² Jones, "Arlington Students Integrate Virginia Schools."

²³ Cocklin and Campbell, "Edmund Campbell Interview," 50.

²⁴ Cocklin and Campbell, 51.

²⁵ Cocklin and Campbell, 51.

²⁶ Cocklin and Campbell, 51-52.

²⁷ Editor, "The Story of Arlington Public School Desegregation."

²⁸ Cocklin and Campbell, 52-53.

right for schools to be reopened and integrated, creating equal education opportunities for all.²⁹ However, as his law partner Benjamin W. Dulany pointed out, his career in law could end, and he would be faced with hate from all sorts of people.³⁰ In spite of these potential challenges, Campbell agreed to represent the Norfolk parents who approached him, knowing it was the right decision to make.³¹

The case was heard in federal court shortly after Campbell took up the case. A decision was made in the case, known as *James v. Almond*, on January 19, 1959. The three-judge panel issued a ruling in favor of the Norfolk parents and their children.³² The “Massive Resistance” laws were declared to be unconstitutional, and Virginia schools would have to be desegregated without any barriers.³³ Campbell therefore set the stage for Stratford Junior High School to accept African American students. His battle, though, to make this a reality, was still ongoing.

With “Massive Resistance” over, there was still one hurdle left to overcome: a vote in the Senate of Virginia to continue the school year.³⁴ The Byrd-affiliated Democrats still made up a good portion of the state senators, so the possibility of the vote falling in favor of closing the schools was very probable. Campbell’s Save Our Schools campaign worked relentlessly to sway

²⁹ Benjamin W. Dulany, “A Tribute to Edmund Douglas Campbell,” *Washington and Lee Law Review* 53, no. 4 (1996): 1215, scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/wlulr/vol53/iss4/2/.

³⁰ Dulany, “A Tribute to Edmund Douglas Campbell,” 1215-1216.

³¹ Dulany, 1216.

³² Cocklin and Campbell, “Edmund Campbell Interview,” 53.

³³ Causey, “An Illustrious Career at the Bar.”

³⁴ Cocklin and Campbell, “Edmund Campbell Interview,” 54.

the state senators in favor of keeping schools open. The grassroots support of the movement led many of its followers to Richmond, where they spoke directly to those legislators who were voting on the school matter and implored them to keep the school year as planned.³⁵ Campbell's efforts and investment into the Save Our Schools movement paid off, as the Senate of Virginia voted to keep the schools open for the rest of the year by the slimmest possible margin in a 20-19 vote.³⁶ The close vote showed how important and impactful Campbell's efforts to lobby people in favor of keeping schools open were. His movement may have been the difference between an orderly end of a "Massive Resistance" and a holdout that could have further delayed African Americans receiving an equal education in the Commonwealth .

As a result of Campbell and his work with the Save Our Schools movement, Stratford Junior High School, now known as Dorothy Hamm Middle School, became the first public school in Virginia to desegregate.³⁷ This happened on February 2, 1959, and without the same levels of chaos seen after the Little Rock Nine attended a previously all-white school.³⁸ Arlington showed its commitment towards acceptance and equality, which persists to this day. The only reported out-of-the-ordinary incident was a case of some firecrackers being lit in a bathroom, which caused little disruption to the school day.³⁹ Campbell set the wheels of integrating Arlington Public Schools into motion by taking down "Massive Resistance Laws" and keeping

³⁵ Cocklin and Campbell, 54.

³⁶ Cocklin and Campbell, 54.

³⁷ Editor, "Arlington Public School Desegregation."

³⁸ Jones, "Arlington Students Integrate Virginia Schools."

³⁹ Jones, "Arlington Students Integrate Virginia Schools."

schools in session with his Save Ours Schools organization. Although Arlington only started to become truly integrated in 1971, when a plan was devised to diversify the student bodies of each school,⁴⁰ Campbell was crucial in taking the first steps towards the eventual integration of Arlington schools.

In 1962, Campbell was involved in yet another prominent court battle. This time, he was fighting for the fair redrawing of the House of Delegates and Senate of Virginia districts.⁴¹ Arlington became more and more populous throughout the 20th century, yet the state legislature did not create any more legislative districts for those more populated areas of Arlington.⁴² The current system of districts made it so large swaths of land with few people were represented the same as small areas with many people, like Arlington.⁴³ Laws made it so if one place wanted another legislator, another place would lose its legislator to keep the total number of legislators the same.⁴⁴ Clearly, Arlington was not going to receive the number of legislators that reflected its population growth. Harrison Mann, the delegate of Arlington's district for the House of Delegates, believed this system of deciding which places get delegates was unfair and likely against the law. He asked Campbell to argue this in the courts, to which Campbell said yes.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Editor, "Arlington Public School Desegregation."

⁴¹ Barnes, "EDMUND D. CAMPBELL DIES."

⁴² Cocklin and Campbell, "Edmund Campbell Interview," 57-58.

⁴³ Barnes, "EDMUND D. CAMPBELL DIES."

⁴⁴ Cocklin and Campbell, "Edmund Campbell Interview," 58.

⁴⁵ Cocklin and Campbell, 58.

After many appeals, Campbell's court case, known as *Davis v. Mann*, reached the U.S. Supreme Court.⁴⁶ The issue of reappropriating state legislators was involved in many other cases considered by the Supreme Court during this time, so they were compiled together and one final verdict, headed under *Reynolds v. Sims*, was issued on behalf of all of them.⁴⁷

The Court held that the system in place for distributing state legislators in Virginia and elsewhere was unconstitutional.⁴⁸ Virginia now had to divide legislators based on the population of an area, making it so each person was equally represented in the House of Delegates and Senate of Virginia under the "one man, one vote" ruling.⁴⁹ Because of Campbell's success in this case, Arlington would become much more represented in the Virginia legislature, with three delegates and its own senator.⁵⁰ Each Arlingtonian can now be satisfied knowing that their voices are being heard and present in the Virginia General Assembly. Thanks to Campbell, the rising population of Arlington will never negatively impact its representation in both houses of the General Assembly. Equal representation, one of the central tenets of democracy, was upheld by Campbell on behalf of Arlington. He even handled the *Davis v. Mann* case pro bono, showing his love and service towards Arlington.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Causey, "An Illustrious Career at the Bar."

⁴⁷ Causey, "An Illustrious Career at the Bar."

⁴⁸ Causey, "An Illustrious Career at the Bar."

⁴⁹ Cocklin and Campbell, "Edmund Campbell Interview," 60.

⁵⁰ Cocklin and Campbell, 60.

⁵¹ Cocklin and Campbell, 61.

Campbell served many roles during his life while residing in Arlington. He was a community leader,⁵² County Board member,⁵³ congressional nominee,⁵⁴ lawyer,⁵⁵ and founder and active member of St. Peter's Episcopal Church.⁵⁶ These titles, as prestigious as they may be, do not truly reflect the impression he left on Arlington. He set the standard for how Arlington was going to be in the future: the "world-class urban community...in which each person is important."⁵⁷

Campbell set the standard for the Parks Department by pushing for the County's first investment in the creation of public parks.⁵⁸ The Arlington Department of Parks and Recreation is currently rated as one of the best in the nation for a place of its population.⁵⁹ He set the standard for a county where everyone deserves to be educated, no matter their race. Now, over half of the students that attend Arlington Public Schools during the 2019-20 school year are nonwhite.⁶⁰ He set the standard for counties having the number of legislators reflect their

⁵² Cocklin and Campbell, 61.

⁵³ Barnes, "EDMUND D. CAMPBELL DIES."

⁵⁴ Cocklin and Campbell, "Edmund Campbell Interview," 39.

⁵⁵ Causey, "An Illustrious Career at the Bar."

⁵⁶ Cocklin and Campbell, "Edmund Campbell Interview," 66-67.

⁵⁷ Arlington County Government, "County Vision."

⁵⁸ Cocklin and Campbell, "Edmund Campbell Interview," 16.

⁵⁹ Arlington County Government, "Arlington's Park System Ranked Among Nation's Best."

⁶⁰ *Arlington Public Schools K-12 Civil Rights Statistics by School, 2019*, Distributed by Arlington Public Schools, www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Civil-Rights-Table-1-2019-12-13-web-002.pdf.

burgeoning population. As a result, Arlington has tripled its number of delegates since the 1960s and has its own state senator.⁶¹

Campbell worked towards improving Arlington for everyone. It is no wonder why he became the namesake of Campbell Elementary School in 2017 along with his wife, Elizabeth.⁶² He fought for every person in Arlington's most elementary rights.

⁶¹ Cocklin and Campbell, "Edmund Campbell Interview," 60.

⁶² "History of Campbell," Campbell Elementary School, Arlington Public Schools, Accessed April 26, 2020, campbell.apsva.us/history-of-campbell/.

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