



Students on Strike: Jim Crow, Civil Rights, Brown, and Me

John A. Stokes, Herman Viola

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John Stokes has waited more than 50 years to give his eyewitness account of "The Manhattan Project." This was the name he and a group of fellow students gave their strike at R.R. Moton High School that helped to end separate schooling for blacks and whites, not only in his home state of Virginia, but throughout America. Told in Stokes' own words, the story vividly conveys how his passion for learning helped set in motion one of the most powerful movements in American history, resulting in the desegregation of schools—and life—in the United States.

As a child tending crops on the family farm, John Stokes never dreamed that one day he would be at the center of the Civil Rights Movement. Yet, on April 23, 1951, he and his fellow students walked out of the school and into the history books. Their school was built to accommodate 180 students, yet over 400 black students attended classes in leaky buildings with tar paper walls. A potbelly stove served as the only source of heat, and the school lacked running water, indoor plumbing, and a cafeteria. Yet to Stokes and his fellow students, it was their path to a better life.

Students on Strike is an evocative first-person narrative from a period of radical change in American history. Stokes recounts the planning of the student walkout, the secret meetings, the plot to send the principal on a wild goose chase after "truant" students, and the strategy to boycott classes until conditions improved. The author recalls the challenges in persuading teachers and parents to support the strike, and the intimidation that came in the form of threats and a cross-burning on school grounds. Archival illustrations from Stokes' scrapbook add to the emotional impact of his story. The narrative follows the course of the lawsuits filed by the NAACP, which would become part of the historic *Brown v Board of Education* ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court and the subsequent end to segregation in America.

Young readers will relish this inspirational account of the heroic struggles of John Stokes and his fellow students; they will also learn a timeless lesson that people with little influence—but with great determination—*can* make a difference.

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