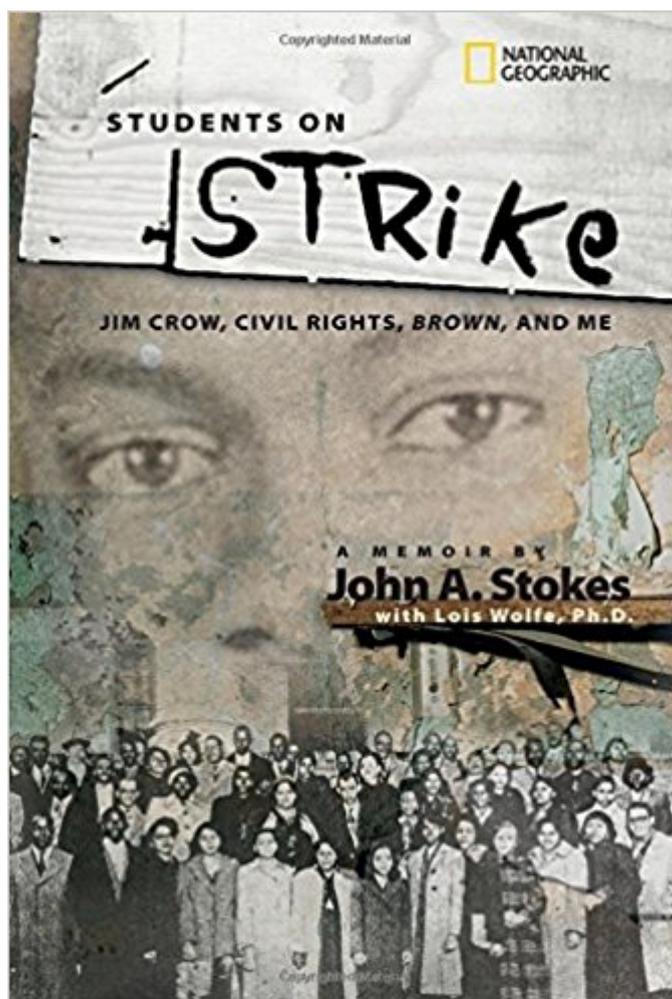


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# Students On Strike: Jim Crow, Civil Rights, Brown, And Me



## Synopsis

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's 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's 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.

## Book Information

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Grade Level: 5 and up

## Customer Reviews

Several years prior to the Supreme Court's desegregation order, students at an all-black high school in Prince Edward County, Virginia, were driven to strike against the terrible conditions there. Their complaints were eventually folded into the class-action-suit *Brown v. Board of Education*, and this fascinating account, co-written by Stokes, who was one of the strike's leaders, explains how, with NAACP guidance, the strikers' efforts to "correct a molehill" shifted to a larger battle. Although the book initially provides powerful, personal details about injustices Stokes experienced in the Jim Crow South, autobiographical elements are eventually subsumed by the collective action, described in positive tones somewhat at odds with the closing admission of rifts in the black community over the strike's aftermath (schools were closed for more than five years). One is left wondering if there's more to the story than is celebrated here, but little can undermine the inspirational aspects of the strike, which will motivate and guide young activists today. A section of small black-and-white photographs, a bibliography, and a resource list are included. Grades 5-8. --Jennifer Mattson

John Stokes grew up as one of six children on a small farm in Kingsville, VA. After high school, he served two years in the U.S. Army, before graduating from Virginia State University. He worked as a teacher in the Baltimore public school system, retiring as a principal in 1994. He now lives in Lanham, MD.

I assigned this book for summer reading. I can write all sorts of lessons and do all sorts of activities to teach the Jim Crow Era, but this book did more to help my students understand the overt racism in America after the Civil War. They have grown up in a time of multiculturalism and diversity. The

idea that students could be denied a proper education because of the color of their skin is a foreign idea. Because this story is told from the perspective of someone their age, they approached this book differently. They appreciated that it was not the usual history book, but a true story that grabbed their attention; they forgot they were learning about American History. I highly recommend this book for all high school students. Your students will thank you.

I've read this book multiple times and can't get enough! My high school students love it!

Very important part of history makes this a good and easy read. Would highly recommend it to elementary and up.

The book is for a future social studies project, but I received the book on time, and the book is in excellent condition.

Mrs. Cuthbertson's Core 2 6th Grade Class Book Review Vista PEAK Exploratory, Aurora, CO Have you ever wondered what life was like in the Jim Crow South? Have you ever wanted to meet a person who lived in the Jim Crow South? This book, *Students on Strike* by John A. Stokes, will let you experience many emotions. In this book, a group of students had to stand up for their community and their county to fight segregation. When the narrator and his twin sister Carrie were twelve years old they walked to school together. The schools they attended were only for "colored" kids, because during this time race mattered to some people. They attended a school named Robert Russa Moton High School. Their high school was the county's only school for African Americans, located in Farmville. The one-story school was built for 180 students, but there were more than 450 pupils! Recognizing the inequalities between Moton and whites-only schools, John, with his classmate Barbara Johns, helped lead a strike for all the students in April 1951. They walked out and refused to return to class until construction began on a new high school for African Americans. Life in the Jim Crow South was hard for blacks. You couldn't go to the same school or restaurant as whites. Between fighting for an education and hiding in the shadows, it was pretty rough. In the text it states, "Did you ever wonder what it would be like to buy shoes and clothes without being able to try them on to see if they fit right?" (pg. 23). This really stood out for us because that doesn't happen today and it shows how segregated the two races were at this time. Another reason why life during this time was harsh was that, "Money didn't matter in the Jim Crow South. Color came first." (pg. 24). There was a variety of Jim Crow laws like these, that enforced

segregation. Blacks were also forced to use different water fountains and different movie theaters. There was also violence against the blacks, such as burning crosses, threats, and some were often severely injured or even killed. John A. Stokes wrote this book because he wanted to tell readers how they separated the races in the South during this time, and how black people were treated. He also wanted us to remember what happened in the past, and he didn't want us to forget about the Jim Crow South, so we won't do it all over again. As an adult, John A. Stokes was a success in the teaching profession before retiring as a principal in 1994. John A. Stokes received multiple awards and recognitions due to his stance for the rights of all people. As each chapter unfolds this book surprises and wows the reader with this true historical story of the author's experiences in life. This book would be perfect for middle schoolers. Not only did we like it, but we are almost positive that every other middle schooler that reads this will fall in love with it, too! The vocabulary is mostly for middle schoolers and there are some inappropriate parts for younger children. John A. Stokes uses words that elementary children wouldn't understand. For example, words like social injustice and nonsegregation/integration. Here's a quote from a poem John's teacher read him: "Look not at the face nor the color of the person's skin, but look at the heart which is deep within. For the face and the skin will one day fade away, but the deeds of a good person will never decay." This book has many surprising turns and twists that leave you on the edge of your seat! We highly recommend! After reading this we truly hope you get the chance to read this wonderful book. John stood up for what he believed in and it shows how hard people worked to get to where we are today and to make a difference.

This book really brings the era of segregation to life for students in middle or high school. It also demonstrates the Brown v. Board was not a simple ruling in 1954, but the beginning of a decades-long struggle for racial equality in the schools. One of the interesting aspects of the story in Prince Edwards County was that the change was led by the students themselves. I would recommend it for educators teaching the civil rights era, because it does teach more about the experience than a textbook ever could. I would suggest this book along with Andrew Heidelberg's account of when Norfolk, Virginia's schools closed for an entire semester in 1958-1959. When Andrew was one of the 17 African-American students who were ordered by a judge to be let into white schools, Governor Almond ordered that those schools be closed based on the state constitution, which prohibited whites and blacks from attending the same school. That year 10,000 children were barred from attending school simply because politicians feared 17 black children going to white schools. The Norfolk 17 and the R.R. Moton protests are important events in the

desegregation of American schools, and the stories of these students are great educational materials.

This book was a great read with so much info on Jim Crow and how it affected minority education. This is a great book for black youth and young adults to learn about the events that lead to the the desegregation of school and the civil rights movement. Well done Mr. Stokes... Well Done!!!

I am ashamed to say that I was unaware of what went on in Prince Edward County, VA, in the Jim Crow South. This is a haunting recounting of a dreadful time for these young people, and it is astonishing that it went on in America! I fully understood Mr. Stoke's reasons for waiting fifty years to write this, and I hope those who may have harbored bitterness about the stand he and other brave young people took will understand it, also. I highly recommend this book!

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