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Centennial staff blames 'community' for violence

By James Kroemer
Of The Courier

The faculty and staff of Centennial High School issued a strongly worded statement Friday blaming the "whole community" for the racially inspired brawl that took place at the school Thursday morning.

However, the report also said the incident was unmistakably initiated by a group of 50 to 60 white students.

The faculty - staff statement, including minute-by-minute details of the clash, calls for legal action by both the police and the school board against any student found responsible for planning the melee.

School opening?

Meanwhile, officials said, meetings at Centennial among teachers, administrators, and black and white students and their parents, would continue through Sunday in an attempt to find ways to elminiate further outbreaks.

These meetings started Friday morning and were expected to continue all day today and until 4 p.m. Sunday, when school officials will decide if the school will open Monday.

One source said Friday that the high school "will reopen Monday morning unless something unforeseen happens over the weekend."

The faculty-staff account on Thursday's events says, in part:

"A group of 50 to 60 white boys gathered in a seemingly planned effort. . .to await the arrival of the bus carrying black students to school."

When the bus arrived, it continues, the "armed" whites moved toward it, and when the black students disembarked, they moved toward the group of whites and the fighting started.

Ultimate blame

But ultimate blame, the statement said, must lie with the parents of the students and their racial attitudes.

"This was not an isolated or spontaneous incident," the statement said. "It happened because of underlying beliefs and attitudes which have prevailed with the citizens, and the children of those citizens, in the city of Champaign for a long time.

"This was not just a group of kids looking for a fight. This was a group of youths acting on prejudices that, without effort, will not be changed."

"The ideas are destructive in that they cause people of opposite races to hate each other, cause educational facilities to close and blood to be shed.

"It is not the youth alone—the entire thinking of the community is responsible, and—in the opinion of the faculty of Centennial — the community, the board of education, and the students must begin work immediately to change these destructive beliefs and ideas."

The statement made no mention of any need for changes of attitude on the part of the school's faculty and staff.

However, in the mimeographed timetable issued by the faculty and staff, blacks were originally referred in two places as "colored boys." This was later crossed out and the term "black students" was substituted.

3 conditions

The statement listed three "prerequisites to the resumption of school."

— It said the identities of students and non-students involved in the riot should be learned, and legal action should be taken against any students found responsible for plotting the confrontation.

—The parents of the white students involved should be called to school to discuss the actions of their children. Black parents should also be called, but emphasis should be placed on talking with white parents because "the overriding issue is that the whites attacked the blacks."

—Finally, the statement said, an investigation of "why uniformed police took 25 minutes to arrive on the scene" should be conducted.

The statement concludes:

"The faculty of Centennial encourages the board, the administration, and city officials to take appropriate action toward those individuals who were instrumental in the disorder.

"We stand unanimously in full support of such action and offer any and all assistance to find solutions to both the immediate and long range problems."

Inside Line

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—Inside Line—

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Cloudy

'Timetable' says group of whites started melee

A minute-by-minute account of Thursday's racial clash at Centennial High School, compiled from the eyewitness statements of students and teachers, was released by the faculty and staff Friday.

The earliest signs of trouble reportedly came Monday when two white girls got into an argument with three black boys, the timetable states. A teacher reportedly intervened, but one of the white girls told her boyfriend about the disagreement and he sought out one of the black youths and attacked him, the statement says.

Their fight ended without serious injury, but both were suspended. On Tuesday, the same two white girls were reportedly taunted by the same blacks, and tension in the school increased.

On Wednesday, the timetable says, lunch periods were switched around because of reported confrontations brewing. A Champaign juvenile officer was in the building several times during the day, and reportedly assured the administration that uniformed officers would be at the school when it opened Thursday.

According to the timetable, events followed this sequence Thursday morning:

7:50 — Plain clothes officer was outside Centennial building in an unmarked car.

7:55 — White youths assembled outside Centennial.

7:58 — White students were instructed to disperse by administration.

8:00 — Whites drift apart, then re-assemble. First call to police.

8:05 — second call to police.

8:10 — Third call to police.

8:12 — Administration goes to south lot to disperse group of whites. Whites defy school principals.

8:15 — Blacks' bus arrives. Whites meet black students. Riot starts. Fourth call to police.

8:24 — Fighting stopped by faculty. Fifth call to police.

8:25 — Police arrive in two cars.

8:45 — Two girls in a home economics class tell the class and teacher that the two girls who started the whole thing were teasing the black students to gain the attention of their boy friends.

9:30 - 9:30 — Black students rampage school, entering classrooms and threatening white students. Sporadic fighting continues.

9:15 — Buses arrive to take black students home.

9:20 — Science hall showcase shattered.

9:30 — Teachers are requested to keep students in first hour classes rather than allow students in the halls which are still dangerous.

9:45 — School is dismissed for the day.

9:55 — Last students leave school.

10:30 — Faculty meeting to gather evidence and discuss the reopening of school.

11:00 — Closure of school Friday is announced.

Champaign Police Chief Harvey Shirley responded to the implied criticism of his department by saying the police arrival was delayed because of confusion.

He said the first calls were transferred to the juvenile department, which reportedly decided not to send marked units and uniformed officers immediately because officials feared it would aggravate the situation.

"I personally went out there just as soon as I heard what was going on," Shirley said.

But he added, "Does it really matter who was called or when? That whole thing should never have happened. The school has 90 (faculty and staff) people out there for 1,200 students.

"We have 78 men for a city of 60,000," the chief said.

He repeated his charge that criticism of the police was simply an effort by some to find a scapegoat for the incident.

CHAMPAGNE FUNERAL

Donald Blue, mayor of Lafayette, Ind., sees off the last run of the Wabash Cannonball with a bottle of champagne Friday as the train prepares to leave his town for the last time. The historic train also passes through Champaign County on its way from Detroit to St. Louis. (AP Wirephoto)

Amtrak gets highball across America

Washington (AP)

The Federal appeals court rejected an effort Friday by the railroad unions to sidetrack Amtrak, the new national railway passenger service, from beginning operations as scheduled Saturday.

The decision by a three-man panel upheld a decision earlier in the day by a U.S. District Court Judge Howard F. Corcoran.

He rejected their plea that a delay be granted so that arguments over the fairness of labor protective provisions could be heard.

Corcoran also turned down the request by the Congress of Railway Unions and passenger groups to delay the discontinuance of trains not being taken Amtrak, a corporation created by Congress last year, to start its job at midnight. Twenty railroads have signed up to switch their 360 passenger trains to Amtrak, which immediately will abolish 178 of the trains.

The Amtrak system would connect all but one of 29 cities with at least one million population each. In addition it catches 26 of 27 cities with populations from 500,000 to one million and hundreds of smaller cities along the routes.

Criticism has come from members of Congress, passenger groups, organized labor and bypassed communities.

After the decision by the appeals tribunal was announced, a spokesman for the National Association of Railroad passengers told a reporter:

"We are going to drop our opposition on a legal basis although there are further lobbying moves that are not explored."

"It appears likely," he said, "that Amtrak will go into effect at 12:01 A.M."

Corcoran said there is no indication that Congress, in setting up the corporation, intended the Secretary of Labor's certification of Amtrak agreements with the railroads "to be reviewable on the merits by the courts."

The unions had told Corcoran that Secretary of Labor James D. Hodgson's certification violated the law by permitting unfair rules for workers affected by the discontinuance of trains not taken over by Amtrak.

The judge found that the protective arrangements certified by Hodgson not only meet the requirements of the laws "but they in fact exceed those requirements in significant respects."

showing of irreparable harm."

Corcoran had said he had no jurisdiction in the matter.

William G. Mahoney, counsel for the railway unions, said he would not appeal further to the Supreme Court because there wasn't time before the Friday midnight deadline.

The way appeared clear for

Sentimental farewells for classic trains

Rail buffs mourn greatest train robbery

By the Associated Press

More than 150 trains, including old favorites like the Wabash Cannon Ball, the Pocahontas and the Nancy Hanks, set over rail service, increase the number of riders and cut losses.

Parties and other special observances were planned to mark the passing of some of the trains; other last runs were and California flags for the last run out of Union Station en route to Chicago.

On the way, at North Platte, Neb., a tourist promotion group

The Norfolk & Western's Pocahontas, which has been plying the rails between Cincinnati and Norfolk, Va., since 1926, was scheduled to leave on its last run just before midnight.

passing is Ward Hall, steward on the train who started as a waiter in 1934. "I remember when celebrities like Jack Dempsey, Robert Taylor, Gene Tunney and Lily Pons rode this train," he recalled. "But we haven't had any celebrities for a

Friday. It took its name from the hobo ballad and was a descendant of freights and passenger trains of the 1800s. There were to be special ceremonies at Lafayette, Ind., where Purdue University students and other riders fought earlier ef-