

October 1, 1969

MEMORANDUM TO: Education Committee, CCR
FROM: Staff
SUBJECT: Student Unrest at Cooley High School

I. Brief Chronology of Current Conflict

At mid-day on Friday, September 19, 1969 Cooley High School was dismissed for the day. This followed a walkout of about 100 black students demonstrating in anticipation of an afternoon rally called for that day at Northwestern High to protest the pending execution of Fred (Ahmed) Evans of Cleveland. Subsequently, about noon, a fire alarm of unknown origin was sounded and hundreds of additional students, mostly black, left the building. Following the fire drill police arrived, fights broke out between black students and the police, and the school was closed to all students.

When Cooley reopened at 8:00 a.m. Monday, September 22, small groups of black and white students fought sporadically for several hours in the corridors and on the grounds of the school. At about 11 a.m. approximately 500 black students attempted to hold a meeting in the school auditorium, whereupon the school principal used the public address system to dismiss school. Encounters between students and police during this time are the subject of separate CCR Field Division investigation. The school remained closed from Monday noon until Wednesday morning, September 24, when it reopened under the surveillance of some 40 volunteer parents, clergymen and specially assigned school attendance personnel and teachers. The school has remained open for its normal schedule since September 24.

II. Past Recent Incidents of Conflict at Cooley

Three fire scares at the school within the past year have been the result of false alarms. Fights and troubles between blacks and white students have erupted shortly after these fire alarms. As the percentage of black students at Cooley has changed from about 15% to just over 50% in 3 years, there have been frequent criticisms by black students that whites are favored in opportunities to participate as well as when students are disciplined.

III. Problems and Demands Asserted and Response in Community

When seven students were asked to speak to a Cooley Parents Club meeting on September 23, the students asked that Breakthrough and the police be kept away from the school, that drug traffic with students be halted, and that a non-credit seminar in political and social awareness with weekly meetings and outside speakers be instituted for interested students, faculty and community. The seminar request was endorsed by the Cooley Parents Club at their meeting September 23.

At a meeting of approximately 40 students September 25 led by staff of Northwest Community Organization, many students, including some dissidents who were suspended, complained of many white racist teachers and curriculum that is not relevant.

Approximately 15 area clergymen have for a year or more listened to dissident students and calmed violence. On September 26, the Ministers met with the school principal at which time they expressed grave concern over student suspensions, called for sensitivity training for Cooley teachers, and stressed the need for communication between school, parents, students, and community, including clergymen.

IV. Response of School

The school administration has not replied to date on the seminar requests as endorsed by the parents club, nor on the drug traffic among students. The administration's emphasis is on returning to normal conduct of school and on repairing teacher confidence.

V. Underlying Issue in the Conflict

A number of observers including area clergymen, black leaders, and area community organizers believe that the underlying issue in the current Cooley situation is the impending racial segregation of the Cooley community. At present both the blacks, notably black students, and the whites, including student's, teachers, and residents, are competing for dominance at the school. One of the white students said the predominant feeling among white students is that "the blacks are trying to take over Cooley." At present the percentage of black students just barely exceeds 50%. Any outside influences which are present find ready conflict among the student factions.