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## COMMISSION ON COMMUNITY RELATIONS

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October 1, 1970

MEMORANDUM TO: Honorable Common Council

FROM: Curtis E. Rodgers, Secretary-Director

SUBJECT: Racial Problems at Henry Ford High School - A Supplemental Report

### I. Summary of Progress in Restoring a Positive School Climate

According to reports received by CCR staff from varied community leadership sources, as well as school and police officials, a reasonable level of racial harmony has existed at Henry Ford High School beginning with Friday, September 25, 1970. The racial atmosphere has improved to the point that it has been possible to reduce police presence as much as fifty percent, using COP (Scooter Patrol-Rangers) officers primarily. The police achieved their greatest success, police officials report, when they sealed off the school area for several blocks in all directions late last week, until all students were out of the school area. This week, school and police officials have noted no undue congregating of white students in groups to harass black students, as occurred last week, and black students are proceeding directly to the buses and home. The police have achieved this success despite the use of a common route from school by all students at certain points, which posed a serious control problem earlier last week when tensions were most evident.

The police made 33 arrests in the school area during the school week ending September 25, 1970: 6 black males, 2 black females, 21 white males, and 4 white females. Typical charges, fairly evenly distributed, were: creating an improper diversion, carrying concealed weapons, robbery and larceny, felonious assault, possession of narcotics, assault and battery, and malicious destruction of property. Officials agree that the number of arrestees under the last charge cited is amazingly small for confrontation situations of this type. No known arrests have been made during the current week.

It appears that the improved situation at Ford High School - characterized as "walking a chalk line to avoid antagonizing anyone" - has resulted from continuous intensive efforts of central school administration, the administration at the school, and police officials to respond affirmatively to restore order and harmony by relating to the apparent emergency situation with sensitivity and understanding. Undoubtedly, there are community and school factions who

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have and will continue to disapprove of some procedures used, but it appears that problems are being confronted and slowly resolved within the limits of available school, police, and community resources.

Because of the time limitation factor, CCR staff's investigation has not been of sufficient scope to identify precisely all of the elements having a significant relationship to the problem that has surfaced at Ford High School. Many unresolvable conflicts in the accounts communicated to staff, in apparent complete sincerity, are evident throughout this summary. A candid assessment of all information available to CCR staff at this point clearly indicates that definitive answers can emerge only if a more intensive investigation, involving direct and extensive experience with the problem, is conducted. The problem is complex and apparently all elements of the community spectrum have shaped its form in some measure.

## II. Evaluative Judgments of Causes

Assessments of causes of the recent disorders vary widely among individuals and groups. It is generally agreed that black students experienced no special problem of harassment in prior years and controversy in a negative racial sense was minimal. Also, it appears that interracial participation in athletics, and practice sessions that preceded them, occurred regularly, without apparent incidents, even at the height of the crisis. The most frequently asserted explanations as to causes were:

1. Some white students rejected the presence of the new additions to the black student body, which was resented in turn by black students. The community also, reportedly, disapproves of "black intrusion" and transmits these feelings to their children.
2. It is alleged that some of the ninth and tenth grade black students from Beaubien Junior High School - Wyoming and Pembroke Avenue - especially the girls - have provoked physical confrontations with white students unnecessarily and have labeled older and better adjusted blacks as Uncle Toms and sell-outs.
3. The problem of outside agitators is the most frequently mentioned cause. They are described as: recognized dropouts from Ford High and other schools; refugees from nearby and distant suburban areas; and the incendiary rioting type. (Circulation of inflammatory leaflets by blacks and whites - outsiders primarily - has been noted on various occasions. A recent one reportedly calls for a city-wide meeting of blacks and a petition drive requesting transfer of all blacks from Ford High to predominantly black schools.)
4. Alleged inadequate access to the school principal for the purpose of presenting grievances. A counter-assertion from an apparently reliable source is that the principal has worked well with black students over the years and has made available a Black History class as an elective.
5. A strong feeling exists that central administration has begun to implement the April 7, 1970 change in school feeder patterns intended to achieve a measure of integration. School officials assert unequivocally that this view is in error. The shift of some black students from Beaubien Junior High to Ford High, rather than Mumford High, was made necessary by overcrowding at Beaubien and Mumford. Also, some blacks came to Ford High in addition to

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Beaubien Junior High, as the result of graduating from other feeder schools in Ford High's constellation: Taft Junior High, 19501 Berg Road, near Pembroke; and Mettetal Junior High, 19355 Edinborough, between Cambridge and Vassar. Officials say Ford has not had "open" enrollment for the past two years. Also, they say that minor adjustments, as was made for Beaubien students, are made every year under existing authority, as previously described following the announcement of the School Board's April 7 plan, now inoperative.

6. Allegedly, some Ford High faculty are ill-equipped to handle current problems sensitively and with understanding, as they tend to act condescendingly, even harshly, to some blacks who do not fit the expected stereotypes.

### III. School and Community Attempts at Solution

Mr. Samuel Milan, principal of Henry Ford High School, informs staff that two executive board meetings of the Parent Teacher Council have been held recently to consider identification and resolution of recently surfacing school problems. Also, Area and Region superintendents and two assistant superintendents have conferred frequently and at length through Friday, September 25. Mr. Melvin Chapman, Region 4 Assistant Superintendent, represented central school administration at Ford High School on Monday, September 28. A school community agent participated as needed on several days through Friday, September 25, 1970.

Mr. Milan reports to staff that two meetings have been held with the school faculty and contacts were initiated with students on September 25, 1970 and continues. They involve these students: the presidents of the decentralization committee, the senior class and the student council, and there are plans to involve a student representative of the 10B class, as this group would possibly feel deliberately excluded. A portion of the school population believes these efforts have been of a nature that will not have a meaningful impact on basic problems.

A meeting of school, police, parents, and community leadership persons on Saturday, September 26, 1970, gave extensive consideration to Ford High School's current problems and made useful recommendations to the school's administration and its cooperating groups.