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Conversations with Geneva students

Background

By GREENWAY STUART

During the recent boycott of Geneva Public Schools by black students, The Times sought student viewpoints from a group of black students and then from a group of white students.

The boycott now obviously has ended, but questions it manifested obviously have not. The state education dept. is investigating the whole situation and an interviewing team is now in the city.

The recent school racial trouble flared up Feb. 29, when a racist leaflet precipitated fighting at Geneva High School. The leaflet is said to have been printed in Arlington, Va., by the National Socialist White People's Party ... the American Nazi Party.

As background for this presentation of student views, the highly inflammatory leaflet is summarized below. The leaflet used ugly language and several hateful names for blacks. In the summary below, the ugly, racist language has been avoided in accordance with the policy of this newspaper. Furthermore, The Times clearly does not assume that the allegations in the leaflet are true. The summary follows:

The leaflet rhetorically asks white students if they have 'had it' with blacks bullying them, 'holding' their lunch money, stealing their clothes and pocketbooks, and bothering white girls in the halls. When a white student tries to do something about it, he gets "shafted," the leaflet alleges.

The leaflet on the other hand accuses the school administration of letting black students get away with anything because blacks stick together and the administration is afraid to oppose them. The statement asks, who can learn anything while "caged up" with blacks.

A school administration which believes blacks are equal is mistaken, says the leaflet.

If white students learn to stick together, there's nothing they can't accomplish, says the leaflet.

The leaflet concludes with a call for students to organize, throw the blacks into the streets and support "white selfdetermination in this school."

(There is no specific mention of Geneva schools in the leaflet, so it presumably was written to be used at other schools as well.)

Bob Woody, in explaining the reasons behind the recent black student boycott, said he felt that the board of education had slighted black adults by refusing to grant them a special meeting following the racial disturbance at the high school Feb. 29.

Woody said also that black students still want the board of education to commemorate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with a school holiday. Bob, and Jeanette Williams, clearly consider King to have been a great national leader of Presidential proportions.

Bob said The Times report of the trouble Feb. 29 was exaggerated and made it look as if the blacks were trying to take over the school or something. Bob felt The Times should have named the white student who brought in the racist leaflet, as long as The Times had named the two black students arrested on charges of assaulting the two teachers. The two teachers, who were supposed to be breaking up the fight, were "punching like kids," Bob added. The Times tells only half the story, he said.

The racial problems in the school begin in the home, says Bob. White parents teach their children that black is evil. Blacks are considered uneducated, always drinking, shooting dice, on welfare, says Bob. These are false stereotypes of the black man, says Jeanette. Black is used for funerals, white for angels, cleanliness.

"We've got 'the brand,' " says Bob. When the Europeans came to Africa, says Jeanette, they saw the African was black, and different from them. The Europeans considered themselves good. They were white. Therefore they considered the dark color of the Africans a sign of badness, Jeanette explained.

Bob says that as a child he was enamoured with whites for their whiteness, but he has no special feelings for them now.

Bob will meet a person halfway but no further. He doesn't go out of his way to make friends with whites, and he doesn't consider as friends those who merely say 'hello' to him. He says he has just one white friend. He feels he cannot trust most whites, or as Jeanette says, you don't know which ones you can trust. The change comes with high school, both say. In grade school Bob remembers, white and black played together. In junior high too, whites used to come out to where he lives and pal around.

Black student reaction

doesn't like the idea of white guys going interests. with black girls either.

Both negative attitudes are nonsense, said Deacon Woody.

The discussion turned to education. It's important to get black teachers in the schools, said Bob. It's hard to get them to come here,

said his father.

"Because they can't live where they want to," Bob retorted. "I know some black teachers will sacrifice to come here when they know what our situation is," Bob added.

Jeanette's Scholastic Aptitude Test scores in high school were not too high. Jeanette says that her high school guidance counselor discouraged her from trying a four-year college. Jeanette, however, applied and got accepted at three four-year schools; she chose Cornell, the hardest. Ironically, the one two-year school to which she had applied, did not accept her; "I just laughed," she said.

Jeanette found it rough-going the first semester at Cornell, but she made it with hard work and believes she will come near making the dean's list this semester.

Blacks have the ability, says Jeanette. It is because of cultural differences that they don't do well on aptitude tests; this was explained to her at Cornell. Nonetheless blacks do not get preferential course treatment at Cornell; they're in the hard courses right along with everybody else, she adds.

Jeanette found that making A's and B's came naturally for her in high school, but one area of education where blacks come up short when entering college, is writing ability, she said. However they can make it if they stick with it, says Jeanette.

how to study properly. He says his Jesus freaks really go out of themproblem is that he studies just by memorizing. When he asked a question in math class, his teacher said, 'That's what I give you homework for.'

girls, says Bob, who admits that he college is the obvious place to pursue his

Bob gives credit to his other Geneva High School counselor, who, Bob says, was fair, gave out all the facts, and left the decision up to him. Bob wrote to Bowie and got accepted.

When he gets to college, however, he says he's going to be pretty backwards in black culture, which he feels blacks should be able to learn about in high school, presumably through a black studies program. "I have to go all the way to Baltimore to learn about myself!" says Bob.

It's not enough to know that "Blacks come from Africa where people throw spears at elephants," said Bob. "Why can't we learn about ivory in Africa," one of the richest continents, says Bob. During the discussion, Jeanette and Bob told of some of the atrocities whites had committed against blacks - the lynching, the burning and the killing. Jeanette said the white man was practicing "deindividualization;" that is a psychological term she learned at Cornell. She gave an example she had learned about: An unborn child was ripped from his mother's womb and his head crushed in the streets. Children were brought to see the spectacle, said Jeanette.

Where did the black man learn to hate, asks Bob. "It was from the white man who made him a slave."

Bob suggested that whites should read Stokely Carmichael and Dick Gregory, "to find out where they're at." Jeanette added a lesser known author, Lerone Bennett, who described the lives of slaves.

Both Bob and Jeanette see a ray of hope for racial understanding and peace in the 'Jesus freaks,' a young movement with a strong personal commitment to Bob says he needs more training in living by the example of Jesus. The selves; they are very real people, says Bob

way or another - leave it at that," she says. "The tension is building up too high," said Bob.

People ask why black students are bitter, said Jeanette. The white students have had it good all their lives; they run into no social problems. Social problems -that's the whole life of the black, said Jeanette, mentioning the ghetto in the North and the life of blacks in the South. The whites rule things now, says Jeanette. What blacks have to do is get their own businesses, rule their own factories, have their own doctors. We need these professions, says Deacon Woody. Jeanette herself says she is becoming interested in psychology.

Bob explained his ambition to become a black speaker: "In these last few years things have been falling into line. My heart is opening up to my people. I believe I am on this earth to help somebody.

"I'm religious, I don't believe in killing or stealing," said Bob. Speaking can be more effective than fighting, he believes. "The mark from a punch goes away, but if you say something that hurts, it stays with a person."

"Let what you say come from your own mind and experience," Deacon Woody advises.

The discussion turned to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

King, toward the end of his life got tired of waiting for change to come, said Bob.

"Do you think Dr. King was a yesman?" asked Deacon Woody.

He was doing the right think in the early days, said Jeanette. Then they built him up as a world figure.

Yes, Dr. King began to talk about Vietnam and world problems, said Deacon Woody.

Eventually he would have become President, said Jeanette.

"If Robert Kennedy had become President, King would have been Vicepresident. He was smart enough," said Bob. Noting that King was an unusal person, Bob recounted a story he hadread from King's childhood:

Geneva High School Principal Vincent Scalise said he was later able to obtain for fact-finding purposes, a copy of the leaflet from a student who got it from the Auburn Community College campus. This later copy had the Arlington, Va. address of the National Socialists White People's Party printed on it, Scalise said.

The address apparently had been cut off the copy which precipitated the fight, and therefore people embroiled in the fight over the leaflet were unaware of its Arlington origin.

Another racist leaflet with different wording, but printed by the same outfit in Arlington, has since appeared on the Hobart College campus and been brought to Scalise's attention. As a measure to prevent appearance of this second leaflet at the high school, Scalise said he has announced to his students that it has appeared on the collegecampus, and that anyone caught with it will be suspended from school, or dropped entirely if over 16.

In past years extremist literature such as Black Panther literature upsetting to whites has also been circulated, said Scalise. Anyone caught with literature derogatory to any group will be equally punished, he said.

During the recent boycott, The Times asked Scalise to arrange for three students, hopefully representing a crosssection of white student opinion, to meet with this reporter and express their feelings on the racial situation at the school. The three students, all seniors, were Lou McGuigan, Domingo Leon and Bruce Thompson.

Lou McGuigan wishes to attend the University of Tampa, Fla., next year and major in business. Lou plays varsity baseball and also participates in two other sports during the year.

Domingo Leon says he wishes to major in police science at Auburn Community College next year. He works part-time as a stock boy for a store.

Bruce Thompson plans to study pre-med at Hobart College next year in preparation to becoming a doctor. He plays on the school tennis team. Bruce recently took fourth place in the Odd Fellows drug abuse essay contest, in which he advanced his thesis that apathy is the main hazard of drug abuse.

The interview with Lou, Domingo and Bruce took place at Geneva High School, after school, and before Lou and Bruce went to baseball and tennis practice.

The interview with the black students was arranged by Joyce Williams, a Geneva High sophomore, whom this reporter contacted because she was among the black students who read poems at the Jan. 17 memorial service for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in St. Paul Community Baptist Church.

The interview involved Bob Woody, Jeanette Williams, Deacon Laurie Woody and Joyce.

Bob is a Geneva High School senior who plans to study communication arts at Bowie State College in Maryland next year. At high school he has played varsity basketball and other sports.

But once they get in high school, they're through with you, says Jeanette. "I used to say 'hi' to them, but I didn't get a response I liked," she said. So she doesn't go out of her way to be friendly any more.

Bob says that the big problem in high school is the white girls. Parents let their children know they don't think much of black guys going with white

"Now who am I going to ask if I don't know how to do the homework!" says Bob.

Jeanette believes a tutoring system is needed for speed reading, a lot of writing, and new study habits.

Bob, like Jeanette, feels he was unduly discouraged from going to his chosen four-year school. According to Bob, the same guidance counselor Jeanette spoke of had thought he should not go to Bowie State College, a black college at Baltimore, Md. The counselor thought Bob would be unused to the atmosphere of an all-black student body.

However, Bob's ambition is to study black history and become a black speaker, and he feels that a black

"Do you see the gap (of racism) closing in the future?" asks Deacon Woody.

"If the deadheads die out!" said Bob. "Maybe the Jesus people can get to their own (non-black) people," and help everyone get away from stereotypes, said Jeanette.

Jeanette says when she first was awakened at Cornell to the oppression and cruelties blacks have suffered, it hit her hard and she felt she hated all white people. "Now I believe that (feeling) is wrong," she added.

Jeanette says that black people, men and women, have to get together and then the revolution will come.

What sort of revolution, she was asked.

"After black people have united themselves, change has got to come, one

This is really a sad thing that happened to King, Bob began. When King was a child he was good friends with a white boy. One day the white boy's parents said the two friends would now have to go their separate ways. When the white boy told him this, young King, being a sensitive boy, was hurt and told his mother about it.

"He did not hate," said Deacon Woody.

A minister Jeanette had heard recently, said that everything the white man gave the black man was bad, except God. "The white man gave us God and God has carried us through," said Jeanette. "Black people are a lot stronger mentally because of what we have been through," she said.

"Yes, we're used to being oppressed all our life," said Deacon Woody.

"I'm not used to it," said Bob.

"Everyone traces the trouble back to the flier," said Bruce Thompson, referring to the racist leaflet which precipitated the fighting at the high school Feb. 29. The leaflet was "derogatory, no doubt," said Bruce. "The Negroes got mad."

"I think the trouble was blown out of proportion, though," he said.

"At least once a year we have a racial disturbance," said Lou. "Every spring, when things get hot. You see the writing on the wall."

There is literally racist writing on the walls, in the school rest rooms and so on, Lou confirmed. It says things like 'Hate the niggers,' he said.

There is also writing on the walls against the whites, Lou said.

"I don't think the flier was needed to start the trouble," said Domingo Leon. "Everything in the flier was true . . . Maybe the language wasn't perfect English," said Domingo.

"The language was strong," said Bruce.

Domingo was asked to explain what he meant when he said everything in the flier was true. "They're always asking for money," said Domingo.

"As a group they can intimidate you," said Bruce. Do all of the blacks act as a group to intimidate whites, this reporter asked. "When tempers get hot, both sides start flying at one another," said Bruce.

"No, I don't think so," said Domingo. "The whites are defending themselves." The newspaper said there were about 40 people in the fight, but it didn't say there were five whites and 35 blacks in one room where the fighting took place, said Domingo. The news media didn't give an accurate picture of what happened, Domingo contends. The television crew which came to the school later, did not ask the students what happened. COMAC and the parents don't know what happened here, says Domingo. When asked if what the flier said about black students' treatment of white girls was true, all three students replied yes.

White student reaction

the reason they act that way, said Bruce.

"Black girls were jumping on our backs while we were fighting," said Lou, who was in the room where one of the fights took place.

There were actually two fights, said the three students. The second fight took place in the hall about four minutes after the first one. The second outbreak was the one involving the two teachers. The three students said that they thought the two teachers were trying to break up the fight.

The trouble is that in a fight you can't tell who's trying to break it up and who's fighting you, said Bruce. Greg Younger, one of the two black students arrested for allegedly assaulting the teachers, told Bruce that he was actually trying to break up the fight when a teacher struck him. And that made Younger start fighting himself, Bruce was told.

Domingo explained some of the white feeling behind an incident that happened the day after the fight. "Before the uprising, the colored had the school in the palm of their hands," said Domingo. "The next morning after the fighting, the white kids got smart," he said. "A hundred and fifty whites got together and stood outside the school to wait for the bus from Chartres Homes. When those colored kids got off the bus, they knew if they breathed wrong, it would be their last. After that we didn't have any more trouble from them," said

Domingo.

said. A lot of people think a Puertu Rican should stick with the colored, because they say Puerto Ricans are no better than the colored, said Domingo. "I've had my trouble with the colored, I stick with whites," he said.

The three students were asked if they get any satisfaction when they go to the school administration with a problem.

"The kids want the administration to help but won't go to them for help," said Domingo. "Mr. Scalise says if the kids brought the problems to him, he could stop the trouble."

Domingo said he knows of one teacher who has tried to send blacks who cause trouble, out of the classroom. But they said they wouldn't leave the class and stayed, said Domingo. So she let them stay, he said.

The three students were asked if there is enough discipline in the school. "Not nearly enough discipline; we need a bouncer," said Lou.

The teachers need to use "The ole ruler over the head," said Domingo. There is not enough discipline, said Bruce.

Certain teachers are more lenient than others, said Domingo. Certain teachers are tougher on white students than colored students, he said.

When a black student is hit by a teacher, the student will complain about discrimination and take it as far as he can, said Domingo.

The three students were asked what

can't the Italians and Puerto Ricans have their own counselors too?" said Bruce.

"I think some of the requests by COMAC (the principally black organization which sponsored the boycott) are reasonable," said Bruce. The request for an Afro-American Club at the school is reasonable, he said.

"But have you heard, it's for black students only," said Domingo.

"I think it's right to have an Afro-American Club, when you consider that Geneva has the highest black population in the area," said Bruce.

"If black studies are instituted next year, perhaps as a mini-course, would you want to participate?" this reporter asked.

"No," Domingo said. "We took it in history - studied the leaders, like Martin Luther King, as a part of the American history course. A lot of kids got riled up about it; they didn't see what good it was doing them."

"In junior English we read and studied some of the black writers," said Lou.

"I see no problem in taking black studies as a mini-course," said Bruce. "Anyone should be welcome to take it if he wants to. . . I think it would be rewarding and probably essential for understanding, if I could fit it into my schedule," said Bruce.

The three were asked if they had any black friends. Lou said he had a lot but they were not real friends because they turned against him after the fight.

Bruce said he has at least half a dozen good black friends who have never done anything to him.

Domingo said he has black friends,

Jeanette, Joyce's older sister, is a freshman at Cornell University, and is interested in psychology. She had just come home from Cornell for spring vacation when the boycott occurred. A senior at Geneva High School last year, Jeanette played several intramural sports and received the sportsmanship trophy and a citizenship award.

Bob's father, Deacon Laurie Woody, was also present during the interview, which took place in the Woody living room. He serves as a deacon of a local church. Joyce Williams was present too, but took part only to the extent of expressing her agreement with what was said.

The Times wishes to thank all the interviewees, as well as Vincent Scalise and Joyce Williams, for helping to make this presentation of viewpoints possible.

The white girls are scared, added Domingo. If the white girls stuck together, there would be no problem with the blacks, he said.

The black girls are boistrous, said Bruce.

The biggest problem in the school is the girls, said Domingo. Most of the problems are started by the black girls. he said.

When the black guys date the white girls, the black girls feel hurt and that's

It's ridiculous to have 65 colored controlling a school of 800," said Domingo. "The whites are waking up and getting together."

"I think the problem is that the blacks have been kept down so long that when you give them freedom they want more than the whites. They think they are better than the whites," said Domingo. "I don't agree with the concept that

they can have retribution for what our ancestors did," said Bruce. "It's not our fault what our ancestors did," said Lou. "We give them what they want;" the

blacks and Puerto Ricans get welfare, said Domingo. Everybody has had it rough, the Italians and the Poles had it bad too, he said.

"Being in the middle like me don't help things," said Domingo, a Puerto Rican. Being a Puerto Rican who hangs around whites causes disturbance, he

the absence of black students during the boycott had meant to them.

"The atmosphere is better," said Domingo. "I think my education has improved 100 per cent since last week (when the boycott started) I can walk down the halls and don't have to worry about them calling names, whistling at my girl and looking up her skirt when they are downstairs from her," he said. "I think this week without them is the best thing that ever happened. You can talk free - go ape. You can say, 'I don't like blacks.

"I think things have improved too," said Lou.

"There's a better atmosphere for learning; the tensions are relieved," said Bruce. "We talked for a long time about the present situation, in economics class today ... If the blacks can have a black counselor, why some of them better than his white friends, but just one true black friend.

"I just hope this all calms down and gets back to the way it was two years ago," said Lou.

Domingo said, "The parents don't know from one day to the next whether the white kids will walk out the way the black kids did. I can tell you, the white kids won't walk out . . . unless the school board gives in to COMAC's demands. I'd like you to get that in," said Domingo.

"This COMAC wants to stir up trouble," said Domingo.

Bruce said, "I'd like to see some more effective discussion." Last year they had TCB (Taking Care of Business - a school race relations group). It didn't do any good, said Bruce. "But if we could talk before the trouble starts, it would be a lot safer for everybody." said Bruce.