

new YORK

Times

4-14-68

Many in L.I. Community Work to Ease Tensions

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Special to The New York Times

FREEPORT, L. I., April 13—

A potentially explosive condition in this South Shore community, which started with the burning of an American flag after the assassination last week of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., has been eased.

The precautions taken by school officials, students, community leaders, the police and the clergy to avoid racial incidents appear to have been fruitful. While disturbances have occurred in other areas of the county, only four windows were reported broken in scattered sections of the village during one night here this week. There were no arrests.

Schools Closed

The burning of the flag and the throwing of a chair through a window of the high school cafeteria by several Negro youths the second night following Dr. King's death, led to the closing of the district's schools, and the scheduling of meetings between the administration, the faculty and students.

After learning of the death of Dr. King, the school board met in special session and urged that the teachers should "discuss the implications of the assassination and the problems of human relations in our community and our country."

After announcement was made of the school closing on Friday, 400 of the 2,200 high school students volunteered to remain in the auditorium for a

Freeport Had Brief Flare-up After Death of Dr. King—American Flag Burned

dialogue between the students and faculty.

During the discussion, the Negro students, who comprise about 20 per cent of the high school enrollment, discussed their grievances. They talked about the militant Negro in the community, and the need for a way to bridge the understanding gap.

Many of the students learned for the first time of the existence of a community organization known as the Action Interracial Movement, which has been attempting to foster better relations between the races.

The students decided that the dialogue was so helpful that they agreed to meet again Saturday with school administrators, faculty and parents in the junior high school to discuss specific complaints.

Meetings Are Held

Meanwhile the interracial group held a series of meetings in the community and also met with Mayor Robert J. Sweeney. They discussed a proposed recreation site, and the need for immediate recreation facilities.

Then, on Sunday, a memorial service for Dr. King was held at the Holy Redeemer Roman Catholic Church. For the first time in the history of Freeport, Negro and white residents and members of all the major religious faiths met under one roof in a house of worship.

The following day, when the schools reopened, a student committee met with Albert Renken, the high school principal, and requested more books about Negroes in the school library, changes in the student government, and the hiring of more Negro teachers and a Negro guidance counselor.

Christopher J. Varrell, superintendent of schools, said that in the last two years the number of Negro teachers in the district had increased from 13 to 31. He added that a course in Negro history had already been planned for inclusion in the curriculum in September.

Communication Helpful

The communication between the students and the school administration and municipal leaders has had good results. While incidents involving Negroes have occurred in parts of Nassau County, this village of 40,000 persons has remained calm.

A letter sent by the school board to all residents here reviewed the actions of the last few days and said, in part:

"They (the students) must learn the importance of law and order and must also learn the true meaning of the 'United States of America,' the spirit and dedication to morality, justice, equality and understanding.

"Let us all join together—home, house of worship and school—to teach our youngsters that only through sincere brotherhood and love of man will we be able to achieve true and everlasting peace."