

5C) Westbury High School Erupts

"Tense" Westbury Schools Closed, *Newsday, April 1, 1968*

Westbury-- School officials closed Westbury High School and Westbury Junior High School this morning in apparent attempt to ease racial tension. A spokesman for District Superintendent Cecil L. Rice said the high school was closed at 10:30 AM and students sent home after Rice and School Board President Carl Lundborg spoke at an assembly in an attempt to tune down the unrest. Nassau Police Commissioner Francis B. Looney, who sent reinforcements to the area, said, "Tensions have been building up." He added that precincts throughout the county had been alerted in the event of anything happening."

Lundborg said that there had been an argument in the high school last Friday between a white boy and a Negro youth. He said rumors had spread throughout the school and created a tense racial atmosphere. He said, "friction had been building up for the last two months," but he declined to give further details. "We are trying to head off a summer of rioting here," said Lundborg.

According to police . . . about 20 white youths were playing ball in the Westbury Junior High School field at about 4:20 PM. Six or seven Negroes walked across the field, threatening the white boys and arguing with them. Third Squad Det. Anthony Visslailli said one of them started arguing with Patrick Barchi, 17, who was there with his brother, James, 20. According to the police, one of the Negroes drew a knife and slashed Patrick across the chest and James on the hand.

Racial Tension Reports Cited, *Newsday, April 2, 1968*

Westbury-- The junior and senior high schools were closed for the second day today as a result of reports of racial tension among youngsters in the district. District Superintendent Cecil L. Rice said that classes in the junior and senior high schools would not be held today "to allow community leaders to meet with the students to cool off some tempers." At a special assembly in the high school yesterday before the schools were closed, School Board President Carl Lundborg and Rice told the students that the board had decided on several courses of action after a meeting with community groups on Sunday. They said that the steps included: (1) seeking qualified Negro teachers (there are now about 30 in the district); (2) creation of two additional posts, dean of students and guidance counselor, jobs which the board hopes can be filled by Negroes; (3) plans to be made to expand vocational training and to provide more guidance counseling for those students not bound for college; (4) as previously decided, a course in Afro-American history next fall.

High School Is Still Closed; Work to Ease Race Tension, *Newsday, April 3, 1968*

Westbury-- The junior high school reopened today, but the senior high remained closed for the third day as efforts continued to ease reported racial tensions among district youngsters. Police in patrol cars parked near the junior high school watched as pupils went to classes this morning, but there were no incidents.

In yesterday's meetings, the youth center run by the Westbury Community Council for Economic and Educational Opportunity was attacked as a contributor to the tensions by the head of the Westbury National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and parents. School board president Carl Lundborg said that a mother's group in New Cassel voiced concern over the center to Rice in early March. They maintained that it was a breeding ground for racial tension, which would directly affect the district's educational system.

When parents and administration members met yesterday, Mrs. Susan Potter, a member of the youth center's advisory board, said, "What is preached at that youth center is nothing but black power, black power, black power ..." James Wortham, the youth center's director, denied the charges. There is no black power being taught at this center, whoever thinks that just ought to come around and see for himself," he said.

Westbury HS Open; See Tension Eased, *Newsday*, April 4, 1968

Westbury-- All classes resumed at Westbury High School today after a three days shutdown aimed at easing reported racial tension among students.

There were no incidents as students trooped into the high school today for the first time since Monday. At least four Nassau County detectives stood by in unmarked cars. There were no uniformed police at the school. The day opened with an assembly at which the new Biracial Student Organization made up of 11 Negro and 11 white students, plus seven faculty advisers held its first meeting last night in an atmosphere of apparent good will. The group will serve as a liaison between the student body and the school administration. John Menghini, who said he was spokesman for the group, said "I don't think you could have formed an organization like this a few days ago."

Mrs. Doris Webber, a Negro teacher at the Park Avenue Intermediate School, was named dean of girls for the district, with exact dates yet to be spelled out. A dean of boys also will be named.

Faculty members meeting yesterday at the high school agreed to a school board plan that included the biracial student group and the new deans. The plan worked out in the last three days to help ameliorate the reported tensions, includes the following mentioned moves: (1) addition of a Negro guidance counselor to the present staff of four white counselors and increased emphasis by the staff on the problems of the 25 percent of the student body, mostly Negro, that does not go on to college; (2) proposed curriculum changes to offer courses aimed toward students not college bound; (3) a direct effort to seek more Negro teachers. Presently the high school has three Negro and 57 white teachers; about 1,066 students, 285 of whom are Negro.

Questions:

- 1- Why were Westbury schools closed?
- 2- What changes did the Westbury School Board agree to implement?
- 3- The Westbury African American community was divided in its reaction to a youth center in New Cassel. According to these articles, why was the youth center a source of controversy?
- 4- Write a letter to the Westbury school board explaining your plan to ease racial tension in Westbury schools.