

## **NYT. Raid at High School Leads to Racial Divide, Not Drugs, December 9, 2003**

By TAMAR LEWIN

GOOSE CREEK, S.C., Dec. 8 - It was partly a tip from an informant, partly the activity he saw on the Stratford High School surveillance cameras that led the school's principal to call in the police for an early morning drug sweep here on Nov. 5. But it was also tape from the surveillance cameras, showing the police drawing guns on students, handcuffing them, making them kneel facing the wall and finding no drugs at all that has set off protests and created a racial divide. For many residents of Goose Creek, a pleasant bedroom community north of Charleston, it was particularly disturbing that though blacks make up less than a quarter of the 2,700 students at the high school, two-thirds of the 107 students caught up in the sweep were black.

The legal consequences of the raid are still emerging. No charges were filed against the students. Instead, the local prosecutor has asked the state attorney general and the United States attorney's office to decide whether students' rights were violated. A class-action lawsuit on behalf of the students has been filed. The timing of the raid, which began at 6:45 a.m., apparently contributed to the racial skew: only the earliest buses, filled mostly with black students, had delivered their passengers; the later buses and students who drive had not yet arrived.

The principal invited the police to hide in utility closets and stairwells until he gave the signal that the first students had arrived. Then the police burst out, with a drug-sniffing dog. Pam Bailey, the spokeswoman for the Berkeley County School District, which includes Stratford High, said black students were not singled out. "This was not racial profiling," Ms. Bailey said. "When you have reports that some students are selling drugs at a certain time in a certain place, whether they're black, white or Asian, that's when and where you go."

But many students saw the raid as an example of racial bias. "If they were willing to get anybody, they would have come at a different time and searched the whole school, not just 107 kids out of 2,700," said De'Nea Dykes, a black 11th grader. Ms. Dykes said she thought the school's principal, George C. McCrackin, "was right to try to do something about the drug problem, but this wasn't the way." Ms. Dykes said she was leaving the restroom when she saw officers coming toward her with guns drawn and yelling at students to get down. "I assumed that they were trying to protect us, that it was like Columbine, that somebody got in the school that was crazy or dangerous," she said. "But then a police officer pointed a gun at me. It was really scary."

Jessica Chinnners, a white 10th grader, said that when she saw which students were being searched, her first thought was that the police were racist. "I looked down the long hall and saw the police lining up all these black students," Ms. Chinnners said.

Ms. Dykes, Ms. Chinnners and most other students interviewed, black and white, said the incident opened a racial chasm in the school. While some black teachers and parents say the raid was appropriate, and some white ones say it was excessive, many of the reactions break down along race lines. The week after the incident, the school's teachers, most of them white, held a demonstration along with some community members to express support for Mr. McCrackin.

Some black parents, meanwhile, have called for the firing of Mr. McCrackin. Last Thursday, hundreds of people, almost all black, turned out for a rally at which the Rev. Jesse Jackson denounced the incident along with the fatal shooting of a mentally ill black man in North Charleston last month. Mr. McCrackin declined to be interviewed. But in a Nov. 11 letter to parents, he said: "I was surprised and extremely concerned when I observed the guns drawn. However, once police are on campus, they are in charge."

There has been no formal decision on whether the police acted improperly. On Friday, the local prosecutor, Ralph Hoisington, said he was asking the state attorney general to decide whether charges should be filed in connection with the raid. Mr. Hoisington said he was convinced that the police goals were appropriate but that some officers' methods had been "ill-advised at best." He said he was asking the State Law Enforcement Division to share its report on the incident with the United States attorney's office and the F.B.I. to decide whether there were any federal violations.

The students' legal claims are getting under way, as well. On Friday, Ronald L. Motley, a prominent local lawyer, filed a class-action lawsuit against Mr. McCrackin; the schools superintendent, Dr. J. Chester Floyd; the Goose Creek police chief, Harvey Becker; and others, accusing them of violating the students' constitutional protection against unlawful search and seizure, as well as assault, battery and false arrest. The American Civil Liberties Union said it would soon file a similar suit, in which the racial issues would be explicitly raised. "It is completely illegal for police to go into a school with their guns drawn, dogs and handcuffs to find students who might have drugs," said Graham Boyd of the Drug Policy Litigation Project at the A.C.L.U. "The right way to do this, if they have reason to believe a student has drugs, is to call that student in to the principal's office and search the bag there."

For many of the students in the sweep, the raid is a humiliating memory. Rodney Goodwin, a 10th grader who came to Stratford this year, said he was in the cafeteria when the principal pointed him out, along with other students at his table, to three police officers, who told him he was under arrest and put plastic handcuffs on his wrists. Mr. Goodwin was taken to the main hallway, where, he said, a police officer pointed a gun at him as the principal patted him down and reached inside his pockets. "I really don't know why they did what they did to me," he said. "I didn't do anything wrong, but they arrested me."