

A6 CENTRAL ILLINOIS Decatur, Illinois • Wednesday, November 10, 1999

Some question Jackson's role in controversy

By BRETT WILCOXON

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MOUNT ZION — As the controversy over the expelled students continues to divide the people of Decatur, some residents in nearby communities say the issue is cut and dried.

"They say that while the fight is not likely to be resolved, the school board, it protects them that the Rev. Jesse Jackson, an internationally recognized civil rights leader, is facing off against a school board discriminating its students."

As Jim Mounts and three friends sat talking and sipping coffee at Mount Zion Cafe on Main Street, they were talking, and from the Herald & Review and discussing Jackson's presence.

"I was in a bad mood all day yesterday because of the fight," said Mounts, a 20-year resident of Mount Zion who retired from Caterpillar Inc. "We not a member of the community and he doesn't belong here."

"I would be very thankful if the Decatur community would stand up and support the school board."

A few feet away, Charles Cuter questioned Jackson's motive for being in Decatur. He said he believes it is racially motivated.

"There were white boys (that had been expelled) he wouldn't be here," he said.

From his seat next to Mounts, Roger Park said Jackson should not be in Decatur trying to use his political leverage to change a decision made locally.

"The school board made their decision," he said. "They're there."

Despite his reservations, Mounts said he expects Jackson will eventually defeat the school board. "He'll get his way before it's over," he said.

Jackson argues that the punishment handed down by the school board is too harsh and that students should not be expelled because they can't learn effectively if they're not in school.

As Marry Elling left the Big Kmart on the east side of Decatur, she too said Jackson was making a mistake.

"It's perfectly disgusting," the Lovington resident said. "Jesse Jackson is making a political statement over what should be a school board issue."

Elliott added that Jackson has created a racial divide in Decatur that is bound to hurt the city in the long run. She said only one official, Decatur City Councilwoman Betsy Stockard, had the courage to cross that line to stand up for what she believed in.

After viewing the video of the fight, Stockard reversed her stance and has supported the school board.

"I'm proud of standing up for law and order," Elliott said.

Kristen Walker, 23, said Jackson is doing damage and others will have to deal with in the years to come.

"He's just going to come in here and stir everything up and leave," said Centro Gordo resident Kristen Walker, who headed into Kmart.

As he moved in front of his Forsyth home, Mike Bowles echoed the remarks of others: think the whole thing has gotten blown out of proportion because Jackson is here, Bowles said. "He's not helping anything."

CHARGES: Complaint calls zero-tolerance unconstitutional

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suit it's the Rev. Jesse Jackson's vow to "stay the course" in fighting to have the students reinstated.

Jackson, who was to speak at the rally that was going to meet in TUESDAY night with Glenn W. McTee, superintendent of the Illinois State Board of Education, to discuss the issue.

A legal defense fund has been established for the students — who will be represented by Decatur attorneys Roger Miller and Lewis Myers Jr. of Chicago — and the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition received pledges of \$15,000 for the fund to support the rally Tuesday, Jackson said.

Jackson responded to the complaint by telling the court that he had to file a motion to U.S. District Court in Urbana. Six of the seven expelled students had filed motions to stay the school's zero-tolerance policy toward violence is unconstitutional.

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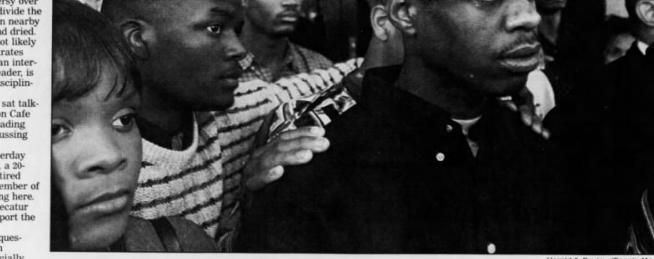
The students also contend that the school board was wrong to accept them as "other-like" activity, doled out punishment disproportionately and failed to provide the students any notice or warning that they could be expelled.

Myers said a hearing before a federal judge must be held no later than Nov. 18.

The case was filed on behalf of students Roosevelt Fuller, 17; Gregory Howell, 17; Jarrett, 17; Ernest Bowles and Courtney Carson, all 17; and 16-year-old Shawn Honorable, 16.

"I think you want a fight," said Myers, rhetorically addressing the school board, "you've got one."

Jeffrey Taylor, attorney for the Decatur school board, said he



LEGAL ACTION: Expelled students Shawn Honorable, right, Gregory Howell, center at back, and Courtney Carson stand arm-in-arm to listen to an attorney for the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition describe legal action filed on the students' behalf. The lawsuit said their expulsion was a 'gross injustice and has caused irreparable harm.'

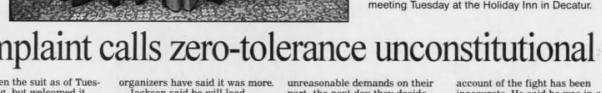


▲ HUGS, NOT FISTS: The Rev. Jesse Jackson is flanked by the hugging expelled students and other Eisenhower students during a prayer vigil Tuesday evening at The Church of the Living God Temple No. 3.



▲ SIDE BY SIDE: Eisenhower student Elizabeth Baker was at the Rev. Jesse Jackson's side during a morning appearance at Eisenhower High School.

▲ TOGETHER IN FAITH: Pastors supporting the Rev. Jesse Jackson and the expelled students bow their heads in prayer to start the day at an early meeting Tuesday at the Holiday Inn in Decatur.



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