

May 12, 1974

Police Break Up Student Fracas

By Martha M. Hamilton
Washington Post Staff Writer

Shortly after 11 yesterday morning, more than a dozen Montgomery County policemen went to Rockville's Richard Montgomery High School to move between two angry groups of black and white students who had squared off in the school yard.

Police dispersed the two groups of about 50 students but at 11:15 a.m. classes were dismissed by school officials, who expressed the continuing fear that racial fights would break out.

About 200 white students stayed behind and milled about on a grassy lot across from the school as buses hurried most of Richard Montgomery's 1,340 students home. Some on the lot were crying and some were yelling. Many of them were ignoring police orders to leave.

"I'm proud I'm white," one girl yelled.

"Goddamn niggers," another in that group shouted at no one in particular.

County police arrested 10 of the students who would not leave and carried them off in the large, yellow county school buses to the Rockville police station, where they were charged with disorderly conduct.

As the 10 were taken onto the bus by county police officers with nightsticks, students remaining on the lot raised clenched fists and shouted encouraging words.

The crowd eventually broke up and there was no fight at Richard Montgomery yesterday.

County school officials said the high school, about 8 per cent black, will be reopened Monday.

A county government spokesman said that about 20 students involved in yesterday's incident will meet with parents and school administrators in separate black and white groups in an effort to avert further trouble.

The racial animosity that troubled Richard Montgomery High on the 20th anniversary of the Supreme Court's school desegregation decree, and 11 years after the school itself was desegregated, was the outgrowth of continuing tension and bitterness, according to officials and both black and white students at the school.

More than a dozen students were injured and 14 students suspended as a result of the racial fighting at the school

Police Separate Students

SCHOOL, From D1

two years ago. Students said yesterday that there had been intermittent minor racial fights this school year.

"There are a lot of OK black kids," said Tom Rapalus, a white 12th grader. "But a lot of them have to show off in front of their friends. If you touch one of them wrong, they'll jump you."

"All this stuff has been going on for two months with little incidents in the hall," said Sharon Belliveau, also a white 12th grader. "Today the white kids decided to fight back."

"Those old rednecks think they're the baddest things around," said one black student who refused to give his name. "We don't need no gang around because blacks take care of their own."

Both black and white students complained of the way disciplinary problems were handled at the school. Black students claimed they received the harshest punishment; white students contended that they suffered the stiffest penalties for disciplinary infractions.

Dr. Thomas Warren, principal of the school, said the racial problems came from a small group of both black and white students.

"If one is prone to believe one is being mistreated, almost anything one sees is taken as evidence of that," he said. "I hope you understand it is a small group in relation to the school's population."