

Out Peace Program for Ferris

exhausted, yet elated at their hopes for reconciliation. Said Nielsen:

"We can end it by 7,000 students saying it's all over—no more fear, no more anger."

At Ferris State — on Feb. 27 and again on May 19 — a series of incidents rapidly escalated and ended with 200 whites and blacks fighting with fists, rocks, bottles and clubs.

No one was seriously injured in either clash. In the May 19 incident there was \$5,000 damage to dormitory plate glass. Some 35 windshields on white students' cars were smashed. Cars of two black leaders, one of them Snead's, were overturned and wrecked.

The cause of Ferris' racial problems seems to lie less in the triggering incidents — fights, insults, misunderstandings — than in the peculiar convergence of forces that makes Ferris' chemistry unique.

Ferris State College sprawls in a massive, barracks-like campus on the outskirts of the quiet town of Big Rapids (pop. 8,000). Under the energetic rule of President Victor Spathelf, Ferris has mushroomed from **Malden** a mere 600 students in 1952 to its present size, which wavers between 8,000 students in the fall and 7,000 in the spring.



THE HIGH turnover is partly because of transfers, and partly because of Ferris' educational policy of accepting many students who have had problems in high school or at another college. Ferris is proud that it is a "second-chance" institution, the only one in Michigan.

But Ferris' rapid growth has far outstripped the facilities of the town for diversion. Few students remain on campus for the weekend. "We're a suitcase college," they say.

The absence of outside entertainment makes Ferris a kind of pressure-cooker. Most

students live in huge dormitories, and cannot escape each other. The close contact has until now caused friction rather than integration.

Many students feel the college has grown beyond the ability of one man to govern it. Neither students nor faculty members are challenging Spathelf's rule, but several are discouraged that tensions were not defused.

Nielsen and Snead agree that Spathelf "seemed to unbend" after the second clash, and quickly offered his cooperation in getting the ribbons printed.

Spathelf says he had no prior warning of either clash. He concedes the situation at Ferris is "volatile," but adds: "This is typical of the total structure of the United States."

But Ferris, whose motto is "Serving Michigan Uniquely" is probably more unusual than Spathelf concedes.

ALMOST ALL Ferris students are from Michigan. They come proportionately from all over the state, with the heaviest percentage from Wayne County. About 380 students are black, a full third more than last year.

Many of Ferris' students are attracted to a broad vocational program that offers courses in technical areas such as welding, cosmetics, refrigeration and television repair.

College officials say the students come from much the same background as students at other Michigan colleges, but the "second-chance" policy and vocational program appear to draw white and black students with personal attitudes and academic backgrounds that create tension.

It is into this atmosphere that Snead and Nielsen are stepping with their offers of reconciliation.

"We're asking you to forget it, to forget those times when some blacks pushed you off a sidewalk, or when you called someone a nigger and then shut your window," Nielsen told about 100 dormitory students at a recent meeting.

"Sure you're going to argue,

but you should argue because of the person, and not because you're white and he's black," Snead added.

The students applauded. Later, after the meeting broke, a black student hit a white student as hard as he could

in the stomach. The white student was pinning his stomach muscles. They were laughing.



AP Photo

A Bid for Peace at Ferris State

The Big Rapids Chamber of Commerce president called it "a beautiful thing." Most students at Ferris State College agreed that it was as they launched a "Let's-Start-Living-and-Working-Together-Now" movement to reunite black and white students, split by two racial clashes in less than three

months. To launch the drive, Ron Snead, 25, of Grand Rapids, president of the student chapter of the NAACP, pinned an "I've-Had-It-with-Fighting" ribbon on coed Alice Sovern, 19, of Grand Rapids. Thousands of the ribbons were distributed on the campus and in the city Thursday.