

## DECATUR CITY COMMISSION

# No apology for 'Saturday school'

By KAREN HILL

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AJC 12/13/01

By a 3-2 vote, Decatur city commissioners voted not to consider apologizing for the long-ago practice of "Saturday school" that was designed to keep Jewish children out of city schools.

City Commissioner John Ridley asked at the Dec. 3 meeting that the commission vote to place a resolution of apology on the agenda for the Dec. 17 meeting. He and Andrew Harris voted for putting the resolution on the agenda; Jim Baskett, Kecia Cunningham and Mayor Bill

Floyd voted against it.

At previous meetings, Decatur resident Tom Keating, who wrote a book about the practice, had requested the resolution. In his book, Keating wrote that from 1902 to 1932 the school system held school on Saturdays, giving children Sundays and Mondays off. That effectively kept Jewish children out of Decatur schools because Saturday was their day of worship.

Keating and Ridley said the apology was important this year because it is the 100th anniversary of the Decatur school system. They also said it was appropriate for the City

Commission to apologize because for most of the last century the City Commission appointed the school board.

"I'm very surprised" by the vote, Ridley said. "The Old Testament says we are responsible for the sins of our forefathers."

But Floyd said the apology would be meaningless because it would not be coming from those who enforced Saturday school.

Floyd also said it was more important for Jewish families to feel welcome in Decatur now. "If we don't act the part, a piece of paper makes no difference," he said.

## Decatur Won't Apologize For Saturday School

Decatur won't be making apologies for holding school on Saturdays between 1902 and 1932, a practice that some say discriminated against Jewish children by keeping them out of city schools.

Last week, commissioners voted 3-2 against placing a resolution of apology on the Dec. 17 agenda. Resident Tom Keating, who wrote a book about the subject, had requested the resolution.

— Compiled from staff reports.

all 1/21/02

Vote?

Jewish me

RESOLUTION OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

WHEREAS Decatur has experienced 100 years of public education including three decades of classes on Saturday; and

WHEREAS Decatur is the only known school district in the United States with a history of classes on Saturday and a weekly holiday on Monday; and


WHEREAS Many citizens, prestigious individuals, as well as former graduates and elected officials have judged that Decatur excluded Jewish children by its peculiar practice of having regular school classes on Saturday; and

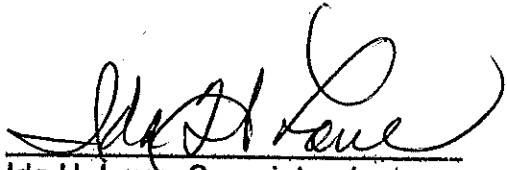
WHEREAS Past school boards took official policy action to establish and maintain this practice; and

WHEREAS Seventy years ago this month, on May 3, 1932, Mrs. William Schley Howard moved, and the Decatur City School Board of Education approved, the end of Saturday School:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that during this 100<sup>th</sup> year of public education in the City of Decatur, the Board of Education applauds, on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the decision to end the past practice of Saturday School.

This 14<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2002

  
W. Jason Uchitel, Board Chair

  
Ida H. Love, Superintendent

During this 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of public education in our community, I am formally requesting that the Board of Education render an apology for the exclusion of children due to a school calendar, which had classes on Saturday from approximately 1902-1932.

Former school boards in the 1920s and 1930s discussed, debated, and formally voted on this issue. The consequences of their actions <sup>maintaining</sup> Saturday school have been far reaching. It is fitting for this current board to have a resolution drafted and to issue a formal apology for these past actions, just as our City Commission has been requested to <sup>do</sup> apology, since it appointed members during that earlier era.

I would be glad to work with the superintendent, staff, and the board to help draft such a document, which could be acted upon in the December meeting.

*petition type*

City Schools of Decatur  
Board of Education

Board Action Summary

November 13, 2001

On Tuesday night, November 13, 2001, at the 7:00 p.m. citizen input session, the following citizens participated:

Mr. Rick Berg talked about the organization of some of the data from the study circles.

Ms. Elizabeth Gilchrist commented on the fund balance.

Mrs. Jan Goodloe representing Decatur PAGE on behalf of American Education Week thanked the board for its support of educators.

Mr. Gary Simms commended Ms. Sherri Brown, Coach Carter Wilson and everyone involved for the success of the centennial celebration, applauded the success of the sports programs, thanked the outgoing board members for their service, and congratulated the election winners.

Dr. Tom Keating remarked on the 100th Year Celebration and homecoming, thanked Ms. Cobleigh and Mr. Roberts for their service, and suggested that the board apologize for what he believes to be the exclusion of certain students by having Saturday School many years ago.

Mr. Paul Jones commented on the audience participation policy, the study circles process and a recent letter he received.

Mr. Tom Stubbs spoke on the final legislative agenda and the possibility of getting a class size waiver.

The City Schools of Decatur Board of Education met in regular session Tuesday night, November 13, 2001, at 7:30 p.m. in the Renfroe Middle School Media Center. The following actions were taken:

1. Approval of the November 13, 2001, amended agenda.

2. Approval of the minutes from the following meetings:

October 9, 2001, 6:00 p.m. special session; and  
October 9, 2001, 7:30 p.m., regular session.

3. Approval of the consent agenda that listed the following recommendations by the Superintendent:

- Addition of specified members to the advisory committee on sex/AIDS education.
- Personnel Report

4. Approval of the agenda items recommended by the Superintendent:

- A contract for a grant of \$20,000 from the Georgia Council for the Arts for the 2001-2002 school year.

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Rwanda I visited in the years after the genocide was a world in limbo.

S at Sol

I SAID EARLIER that power largely consists in the ability to make others inhabit your story of their reality, even if you have to kill a lot of them to make that happen. In this raw sense, power has always been very much the same everywhere; what varies is primarily the quality of the reality it seeks to create: is it based more in truth than in falsehood, which is to say, is it more or less abusive of its subjects? The answer is often a function of how broadly or narrowly the power is based: is it centered in one person, or is it spread out among many different centers that exercise checks on one another? And are its subjects merely subjects or are they also citizens? In principle, narrowly based power is easier to abuse, while more broadly based power requires a truer story at its core and is more likely to protect more of its subjects from abuse. This rule was famously articulated by the British historian Lord Acton in his formula "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

But like most truisms, Acton's adage is not quite true: to take an example from American history, President Lincoln's power was more absolute than President Nixon's, yet Nixon was surely the more fundamentally corrupt of the two. So, when we judge political power, we need to ask not only what its base is but also how the power is exercised, under what circumstances, toward what ends, at what price, and with what success. These are tough judgments to make, generally open to dispute, and for those of us who live in the astonishing overall security provided by the great Western democracies of the late twentieth century, they are the very stuff of public life. Yet we seem to have a hard time taking seriously the notion that places where mass violence and suffering is so widespread that it is casually called "meaningless" might also be places where people engage in meaningful politics.

Power

AA

SS

When I first went to Rwanda, I was reading a book called

Philip Brown with  
we were...

# Author concludes Decatur's policies once anti-Semitic

By David Beasley  
STAFF WRITER

Decatur was different.

For three decades, the city school system held classes on Saturdays, with students taking Sundays and Mondays off.

Tom Keating, a former Decatur school board member and career educator, was intrigued when he first learned of this unusual tradition, which ended in 1932.

He has now written a book on the topic, which paints a picture of old Decatur that is far different from the city's current image as a haven for diversity.

Keating concludes that Saturday school was a way to keep Jews, whose Sabbath is that day, from moving to Decatur.

Copies of "Saturday School: How One Town Kept Out the Jewish" are expected to be available at local bookstores this month. Keating concedes some city residents may give the manuscript a cool reception.

"I was bracing for people not wanting the story told," Keating said.

In the book he writes, "We need to know the truth, and we need to care."

Keating has no written proof of his assertion. If there was ever a city document stating the purpose of Saturday school, he could not find it.

Even when the school board debated changing the schedule, supporters of Saturday school made nebulous comments, such as "Monday is an unsatisfactory



**Tom Keating** says city schools' old Saturday sessions served to keep Jews out.

school day."

Keating's book relies instead on oral history. He cites a 1988 videotape of Andy Robertson, a former Decatur mayor who graduated from Decatur High School in 1923.

"Talk about being narrow-minded," Robertson said during a DeKalb Historical Society program. "I never went to school on Mondays in my life. I went on Saturdays. The obvious reason was the Jewish Sabbath."

Keating explores other possible reasons for Saturday school, but discounts each one, including the fact that Monday was "wash day" and "Decatur was just different."

It really was different, according to Keating's research. He found only two other cases of Saturday school in the United States — Palmyra, Va., and Emory University's Fishburne school for elementary and high school students. Again relying on oral histories, Keating attributed Fishburne's schedule, like Decatur's, to anti-Semitism.

"Saturday School: How One Town Kept Out the Jewish" Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, \$10. To order, call 1-800-766-1156. For more information, call Keating at 404-373-0742.



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Browse Catalog

by author:

- Keating, Tom, 1941-

by title:

- Saturday school : ho...

Saturday school : how one town kept out "The Jewish," 1902-1932 / by Tom Keating.

by Keating, Tom, 1941-

Bloomington, Ind. : Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, c1999.

Description: 60 p. : ill., map ; 23 cm.

Contents: School on Saturday -- Meetings and motions -- A history of inconvenience -- Seven possibilities and an answer -- Decatur: homes, schools, churches, and a junkyard -- A parallel case -- What's true? Who cares?

Bibliography note: Includes bibliographical references (p. 57-58).

Summary: The book illustrates an unusual example of anti-Semitic behavior in the United States.

ISBN: 0873678133 9780873678131

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Karl

remember do not forget

# Only the Guilty Are Guilty, Not Their Sons

By Elie Wiesel

**L**et me begin with a confession. I was wrong to believe that 50-odd years after the most cruel of human tragedies, caused by Hitler's Germany, some passions had begun to cool. For the victims, their children and their friends, the wounds remain understandably raw. They still have nightmares, and they are sensitive to certain words. They remember a time when the very word "German" evoked terror.

I became aware that I was wrong when I read about the criticism of the United Jewish Appeal's decision to honor Thomas Middelhoff, though it is the man Thomas Middelhoff who is being honored, and not the Bertelsmann communications empire of which he is chief executive. The event, to take place May 15 in New York, will probably be picketed by demonstrators.

Since I accepted the invitation to give the keynote address at the dinner, I personally have been fielding

*Elie Wiesel, a professor of humanities at Boston University, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.*

complaints from people I know and respect and from others whom I have never met.

The critics have voiced objections to what they perceive as an unduly hasty act of forgiveness. Some of these recriminations come from people who firmly believe that no German ought to be honored by Jews.

NYT 5/15/01

## Remembrance does not call for anger toward all Germans.

Surely not now, perhaps later — though one letter writer told me "even a hundred years will be too soon" and condemned "Jewish leaders willing to prostitute themselves" for money. Another letter writer argued that just as I had pleaded with President Ronald Reagan in 1985 not to visit the German military cemetery in Bitburg because it contained SS graves, I should not attend the "disgraceful event" for Mr. Middelhoff.

Thus Thomas Middelhoff, born in

1953 — a man who has never been accused of saying or doing anything to hurt or offend Jews and is, in fact, contributing to Jewish causes like the publication of Holocaust survivors' testimonies — is being compared to the SS! I read this argument with disbelief.

Of course, Jews must never — and will never — forget the Jewish tragedy that marked the last century and will haunt all centuries to come. To forget would be a sin. To remember is essential; it is a worthy endeavor, a noble cause for which many of us have fought relentlessly. But does it justify intolerance?

I know that to this day there are Jews, and not only Holocaust survivors, who refuse to set foot on German soil or even buy German cars. But to wish not to make Germany rich is one thing; to treat all Germans as guilty is another.

If, tragically, one chose to indict all Germans for the Holocaust, that would inevitably lead to exclusion and discrimination. Jewish academics could never invite German intellectuals and scholars to their conferences; Jewish music lovers would be expected to boycott concerts with German orchestras; and Jews could never, ever befriend Germans, no matter how long after the war they were born.

Over the years, countless German

personalities, political figures, scientists and artists have been singled out for a variety of awards by Jewish institutions of higher learning, hospitals and charitable organizations in both Israel and the United States. Do all these institutions stand accused of forgetting or betraying the dead?

Am I wrong to believe that to humiliate a German today just for having been born German and to boycott an evening for him is not what Jewish ethos is about? I would like to remind some of my fellow Jews that Hitler's Germany condemned all of us not for what we did or did not do, but solely for having been born Jewish.

We Jews do not believe in collective guilt. I have repeated over and over my belief that only the guilty are guilty; the children of killers are not killers, but children. I know from my own experience with German students that their burden is, at times, difficult to carry, heavy as it is with painful memories and questions about their fathers' and grandfathers' roles in the most terrifying genocide in history.

Relations between Jews and Germans will remain traumatized for a long time. That is to be expected. Auschwitz and Treblinka will never be eradicated from German history.

And yet, hatred must never be an answer. It does not serve memory.

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