

# TWO HIGH SCHOOLS EXCHANGE STUDENTS

## Groups From Moriah in Port Henry and John Dewey in Brooklyn Take Part in 'Life Swap'

Two teachers from John Dewey High School in Brooklyn looked around at what their school had to offer its relatively well-off students — an innovative curriculum, relaxed atmosphere, political awareness — and they found something was missing: middle-American values.

So, Larry Abrams and Paul Weiss, the two teachers, sent out 750 letters to rural schools throughout the Northeast, trying to find one whose political profile was conservative, whose students and parents held strongly different attitudes from theirs on such issues as abortion, capital punishment, homosexual rights and welfare.

They found their school—Moriah High—in Port Henry, N.Y., a small paper mill town on the shores of Lake Champlain, 140 miles north of Albany. Everything about Moriah, including the number of parents who said in their "value questionnaire" that they were "proud to be Americans" (80 per cent, compared to 40 per cent at Dewey), fit the Abrams and Weiss conception of a conventional, middle-American high school.

### Different Dreams in America

"We were conducting a course called 'The American Dream,'" Mr. Abrams said, "and it occurred to us that different Americans have different dreams—and an exchange program with a school like Moriah could really open the students' minds to this."

That exchange—called Life-Swap—was concluded a few days ago as 70 Moriah students returned home after a three-day visit to New York City and John Dewey, leaning out of their bus windows to shout last-minute phone-numbers to their cheering friends from Bensonhurst-Coney Island.

"It was fantastic," was the assessment of the exchange most frequently heard.

But despite the myths and stereotypes that had been broken down during the exchange—which began with a trip to Moriah by 150 Dewey students in May—some reservations remained on both sides.

"We're obviously more aware of things, both politically and socially," said Tommy Meringolo of Dewey. "They're just not as interested in what's going on."

### Attitudes Toward Teachers

List Larrow of Moriah admitted that many of her friends did not know what E.R.A. stood for, but she had reservations about the familiarity between teachers and students at Dewey.

"If I ever called my teachers by their initials, they'd go crazy," said Miss Larrow. "I think you can take it too far."

Rich Friedman was one of the few Dewey students who agreed with her, saying, half-jokingly: "I'm sure in five years I'll be suffering for being so loose with my teachers."

For many of the Brooklyn students, the trip to Port Henry was their first sobering look at rural poverty.

"One girl called us in a panic the first night," Mr. Weiss recalled. "Her host family lived in what could literally be called a shack, and there was no shower. We told her to check into a motel if she thought it was really necessary, but she realized that would be defeating the whole purpose of the exchange. She stayed."

### Brass Band and Bouquets

Other Dewey students, after the initial euphoria of a brass-band reception at Moriah High and the presentation of bouquets by the cheerleading squad, found themselves on their own for the first time in an ethnically homogenous environment. Kevin Days, a black student from Brooklyn, was not very reassured when a well-meaning student said to him brightly, "You know, we have a Negro at Moriah."

Wendy Weiss said: "When my host family found that I was Jewish they wanted to know if I knew David Berkowitz." She said she was embarrassed when her guest from Port Henry saw a moaning man sprawled on the sidewalk in Brooklyn.

"All my life I've lived in Brooklyn and I've never seen anything terrible—then that had to happen," she said.

On the whole, Moriah students stoutly defended their conservative values and resented being considered "hicks", though many were envious of the broad curriculum that Dewey's bigger budget and student body could provide.

"Imagine having a course on death," said a Moriah girl, rolling her eyes.

But the greatest source of fascination to the Port Henry students was New York City itself. "I never expected the lights to be so beautiful," said Peter Allen. "For the first time it destroyed my image of a mean, ugly city."