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POLICE AGENCIES AND THE PREVENTION OF RACIAL VIOLENCE*

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A student of the sociology of knowledge might draw interesting conclusions from an appraisal of the control-oriented literature which appeared in the aftermath of the race riots in the two world wars. At the time of World War I there was a great deal of racial strife, and the public peace was further disturbed by a series of outbreaks of industrial violence. Control-oriented publications of the World War I period dealt specifically with the suppression of civil violence.¹ Discussions centered around the legal aspects of military intervention, the fine points of feeding troops, and the utilization of civilian transport for troops and guardsmen. There were learned discussions on formations to be used in dispersing crowds and on the error of using blank ammunition.

After a decline in major interracial clashes during the decade of the 1930's, Negro-white violence erupted again during the Second World War. The most dramatic outbreaks of the period 1942-1945 were the Detroit and Harlem disturbances of 1943. While the Detroit riot was, in background, in pre-

* This note is concerned primarily with description of three current philosophies of policing racial conflict in the United States. The importance of police (and other external agencies of control) in preventing or permitting actual violence is examined in, "Relationships Among Prejudice, Discrimination, Social Tension and Social Violence", *THE JOURNAL OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS*, 2 (4) 302-310 (Autumn, 1961) and, in the specific areas of housing and recreation, in, "Negro-White Relations in the Urban North: Two Areas of High Conflict Potential", *THE JOURNAL OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS*, 3 (2) 146-158 (Spring, 1962). The importance of police attitudes in current events in the South is discussed in, "Urban Racial Violence in the United States: Changing Ecological Considerations", *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY*, 66 (2) 109-119 (September, 1960) and comparisons of English and American experience are to be found in, "Factors Contributing to Colour Violence in the United States and Great Britain", *RACE*, 3 (2) 3-19 (May, 1962).

¹ See, e.g., HENRY A. BELLOW, *A TREATISE ON RIOT DUTY FOR THE NATIONAL GUARD*, Washington, 1920, or United States War Department, War Plans Division, *MILITARY PROTECTION: UNITED STATES GUARDS: THE DEFENSE OF PROPERTY DURING RIOTS, STRIKES AND CIVIL DISTURBANCES*, War Department Doc. No. 882, Washington, D. C., 1919.

cipitating incident, and in chronology of violence a "Northern style" riot much like the 1919 Chicago riot, there was little actual interracial violence in the Harlem disturbance. This lack of overt interracial conflict resulted from differences in ecology and in the application of police controls rather than from differences in general background factors in the two cities or from any lower degree of tension in Harlem.

Other disturbances occurred during the war period and continued into the years immediately following the war. Since the end of World War II there have been large-scale disturbances but no real race riots (though the threat remains, and perhaps increases with growing Negro militance in the struggle for desegregation in both North and South). There have been a number of incidents which, had it not been for the presence of better police controls than existed in the past, might easily have erupted into major urban riots. The crucial importance of the role of the police has become increasingly evident as we have a larger number of well-documented cases of racial strife in both North and South, and success in control—also in both North and South. One consequence of increasing public and police concern has been a more self-conscious attention, by police agencies, to interracial problems.²

This concern by police agencies has been demonstrated by a proliferation of police programs in the area of inter-group relations. Although many of the plans formulated by police agencies as a result of World War II disorders and disturbances in the post-War period have been directed to tactics and to the efficient mobilization of police forces,³ the riots of World War II and subsequent

² The two paragraphs above draw heavily on chronological and descriptive historical materials presented in, "Lawlessness and Violence in America and Their Special Manifestations in Changing Negro-White Relationships", *JOURNAL OF NEGRO HISTORY*, 44 (1) 52-72 (January, 1959).

³ Davis McEntire and Joseph E. Weckler, "The

disturbances have also precipitated a new focus on the *prevention* of disorders rather than their suppression once started.⁴ Three, quite different, approaches to the problem of the prevention of racial social violence have appeared in this literature, and in the practical programs which it has engendered or accompanied.

The first approach has focused on changing the attitudes of the individual policeman. It assumes, and correctly, that most policemen are possessed of the prejudices and attitudes of the socio-economic groups in the population from which they are drawn. Programs with this orientation emphasize re-education of police and the reduction of hostilities toward minority groups. These programs, utilizing all the methods of current-day education, including lectures, workshops, and a wide variety of visual and audio-visual aids, have the purpose of explaining the cultural and educational differences which form a background for differences in the behavior of minority groups. They attempt to show that discrimination has encouraged the growth of attitudes hostile to the police among minority group members—and counsel patience. They attempt to convince the policeman that there are no racial differences in intelligence and innate criminality. They point out the damage to the position of the United States in world affairs which results from publicizing discriminatory treatment of minority groups. Such programs, whether carried out under the aegis of law enforcement agencies themselves, or of other agencies interested in general problems of interracial relations, are of questionable efficacy. Robin Williams' survey of educational approaches to the reduction of prejudice has shown that even where subjects are predisposed to favorable changes in attitude, that education, alone, has

little real effect in changing deep-seated prejudiced attitudes.⁵

The second general approach emphasizes the need for "professionalization" of police. This viewpoint assumes prejudice and anti-minority attitudes are widespread, and further recognizes that changes in such basic attitudinal patterns are extremely difficult to attain. The term professionalization has been used in two ways. McEntire and Weckler, for example, feel that the raising of educational standards, the development of civil service systems, career service, and a variety of specialized training programs will raise the calibre of the police.⁶ An equation of higher educational standards with lower prejudice is explicit.⁷ Professionalization in this view means not a change in the attitudes of policemen as much as the recruitment of policemen who will have different and more "enlightened" attitudes. Since a raising of the educational level of police officers can only be a long term goal, these authors ultimately fall back on a program of the first type, with in-service training of the type utilized in the "Richmond Plan".⁸ It may be submitted that such an orientation, while it may produce immediately observable changes in verbal attitudes, might fail the crucial test of changing performance in actual situations of racial violence.

The other approach envisaging "professionalization" also assumes prejudice and anti-minority attitudes as common characteristics of the police. Again, it is stated that attempts to change these attitudes would be largely futile. In this case, however, the approach does not go on to attempt to change attitudes in the face of its own admission of the difficulties involved. Professionalization here means the enforcement of the laws correctly, whatever the officer's own opinions may be.⁹ Lohman states that an officer who does not correctly

Role of the Police", ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF POL. AND SOC. SCIENCES, 244 82-89 (1946).

⁴ JOSEPH E. WECKLER, and THEODORE E. HALL, THE POLICE AND MINORITY GROUPS: A PROGRAM TO PREVENT DISORDERS AND TO IMPROVE RELATIONS BETWEEN OPPOSITE RACIAL, RELIGIOUS, AND NATIONAL GROUPS, Chicago, 1944; MILTON A. SENN, A STUDY OF POLICE TRAINING PROGRAMS IN MINORITY RELATIONS, Los Angeles, 1952; Division of Criminal Law and Enforcement, Department of Justice, State of California, GUIDE TO RACE RELATIONS FOR PEACE OFFICERS, California State Printing Office, 1952; G. DOUGLAS GOURLEY, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND THE POLICE, Springfield, Illinois, 1953; and, especially, JOSEPH D. LOHMAN, THE POLICE AND MINORITY GROUPS, Chicago, 1947. For cases of police action in preventing or controlling racial disturbances see B. WEISBERG, "Racial Violence and Civil Rights Law Enforcement", UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LAW REVIEW,

18, 769-783 (1951). A summary of these programs is CHARLOTTE EPSTEIN, SUMMARY OF MATERIALS ON HAND CONCERNING POLICE TRAINING IN HUMAN RELATIONS, Philadelphia, 1955, typescript.

⁵ ROBIN M. WILLIAMS, JR., THE REDUCTION OF INTER-GROUP TENSIONS, Social Science Research Council Bulletin No. 57, New York, 1947.

⁶ *Op. Cit.*

⁷ For examinations of such assumptions see Williams, *loc. cit.*, and FRANK R. WESTIE, "Toward Closer Relations between Theory and Research: A Procedure and an Example", AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW, 22, 149-154 (1957).

⁸ DAVIS MCENTIRE in collaboration with ROBERT B. POWERS, A GUIDE TO RACE RELATIONS FOR POLICE OFFICERS, Department of Justice, State of California, 1946.

⁹ Lohman, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-102.

enforce the law with complete impartiality is himself in violation of the law. As a part of the program directed by Lohman, police officers were compelled to familiarize themselves with civil rights statutes. Under this interpretation of the meaning of professionalization, the police officer who, knowingly or unknowingly, violates the rights of minority group members or in any way shows himself to be partial, is liable for disciplinary action.¹⁰ A sharp distinction is made between the private attitudes of the officer and his professional role obligations.

Evidence on the value of such emphasis is only suggestive, but a comparison of the response of Negro "protest" organizations to police activities of the Detroit and New York Departments in the disturbances in those two cities in 1943 would indicate that inculcation of a professional attitude (backed by disciplinary action) has some chance of success in reducing flagrant violations of civil rights of minority group members. The difference in the outcome of the Cicero and Trumbull Park disturbances¹¹ offers further indirect confirmation. Finally, the introduction of Federal troops, believed to be under firm discipline and to act impartially, has had a salutary effect in stopping riots.¹²

Thus far, experimental work by sociologists and psychologists provides little evidence that attempts to change basic attitudes can be successful.¹³ At the same time, there is ample evidence that personal feelings and public behavior can vary sharply. Of relevance here is the fact that a prejudiced police officer can, when threatened with loss of his job, behave in accordance with the law. Similarly, white Guardsmen in the South have, in the last few years, enforced the law without partiality in spite of their own attitudes. The long-

range implications of this fact are now widely recognized by professional police officers.¹⁴

The third general approach has emphasized what has been called "preventive policing".¹⁵ In his volume, *The Police and Minority Groups*, Lohman has sections on tension situations and on the role of police officers in dealing with them. The tension situations are largely those contributing as background factors to urban racial violence in Northern cities: housing, recreation, transportation, and similar areas. His discussion includes an elementary outline of the mechanisms of crowd formation and crowd behavior. He then notes, partly through the utilization of cases, the points at which police action can effectively be applied, and what police action will be effective. The discussion here is essentially tactical: disperse the crowd, pick up trouble-makers, prevent milling, and so on. More generally he emphasizes the necessity for organizational plans which permit the rapid mobilization of police forces and make possible an immediate *display* of force rather than a belated *use* of force. The importance of rumor control is emphasized by these writers like Lohman who note that failure to control rumor has been the cause of several major riots. Preventive policing, in brief, means listening and watching for signs of danger, and the immediate application of controls once danger is observed. Commonplace though such postulates may seem today, failure to observe them in the past has permitted major interracial disturbances which *might* otherwise have been avoided.

These three approaches to the prevention of race riots are by no means exclusive. Police departments in most Northern urban areas today (and in many in the South), incorporate at least some of the principles into their training programs and into daily operating procedures. It must be remembered however, that handling problems of race relations is only a part, and in actuality a relatively small part, of the total job of a police force.¹⁶ Police officials are faced with ordinary operational problems, with factional disputes, with a frequently hostile press and public. Police departments are understaffed and recruitment is a

¹⁰ Another embodiment of this orientation can be found in the New York Police Department policy on racial and religious attitudes as found in Art. 29 of the Department's *MANUAL OF PROCEDURE*, December 31, 1949.

¹¹ In both Cicero, Illinois, and Trumbull Park police officers privately stated anti-Negro views. In Cicero ranking officers failed to demand professional behavior and violence and disruption followed. In Trumbull Park, the Chicago police under similar strains, contained a potentially much more disruptive situation. See materials cited in my 1961 article, *op. cit.*

¹² ALLEN D. GRIMSHAW, "A Study in Social Violence: Urban Race Riots in the United States", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1959, Chapter 10. The Detroit riot of 1943 and the Little Rock disturbances of 1957 provide examples of effective Federal military action.

¹³ Williams, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ See, e.g., papers by LAURENCE W. FULTZ and JESSE E. CURRY in, *PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE EIGHTH ANNUAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON POLICE AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS*, East Lansing, 1962.

¹⁵ Lohman, *op. cit.*, Weckler and Hall, *op. cit.*, and Weisberg, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ WILLIAM M. KAPHART, *RACIAL FACTORS AND URBAN LAW ENFORCEMENT*, Philadelphia, 1957.

continual problem. Police training programs are already faced with a situation in which there is too much to teach and too little time to teach it. Even in-service training in race relations creates strains on personnel which officials may find it difficult to justify to themselves.

Events of the decade just past, and of that ahead of us, will permit a more meaningful assessment of such programs and practices as have been introduced in the years since the riots of World War II. We have little reason to believe that there are sharp differences in basic attitudes held by whites in urban areas in the South. Most whites there, as is probably true in the North as well, hold some prejudiced attitudes toward non-whites. The different experiences in successfully meeting prob-

lems of school desegregation in, for example, Washington, D. C., Houston and Dallas, Texas, and Atlanta, Georgia—as contrasted to Little Rock and New Orleans—provide a rich source of information for persons responsible for developing policy. Similar conclusions can be drawn from reactions to “sit-ins”, “freedom rides”, and attempts to register Negro citizens to vote. Early evidence seems to suggest that the followers of Sumner’s dictum, “State-ways don’t make folk-ways”, and the gradualism-education proponents, are wrong, and that good policing alone *can* make a major contribution to the maintenance of interracial peace in the face of increasing demands, by non-whites, for equal rights.