

City Unrest: A New Test For Police

Charges of police brutality arose before the dust settled after Sacramento's Father's Day disturbance in Oak Park. Reporters trying to determine just what happened found themselves caught between conflicting versions.

Police complained to reporters: "Why do you give these people all this attention and only give their side?"

Those caught up and in some cases injured in the police sweep asked substantially the same question: "Why don't you ever tell our side?"

Uphold The Law

The policeman is, of course, sworn to uphold the law. Indeed, suggests Sacramento State College police science instructor Robert Jagiallo, the law may be literally the point that creates antagonism — but not necessarily between lawmen and law-breakers.

"The law is in many ways the private domain of the influential segments of society," Jagiallo states. "These segments are represented by lawyers who have designed a system which operates on magic words, and only the lawyers know what the magic words are and what they mean . . ."

Jagiallo suggests, also, that the mostly white composition of police forces creates distorted vision.

"The white community is not viewed as different. Therefore, it does not arouse fear and anger; its attitudes and beliefs are readily understood by the police and, as a consequence, they are more likely to make a greater allowance for deviant behavior."

Understanding is a problem, certainly.

"It's like my kids at home," one officer says. "If I give them too much, and don't put a tough hand on them now and then, they get out of line. These people, these kids in the ghetto, have never had a father to keep them in line. It is the policeman's job to keep these trouble-makers in line."

This absence of a male family leadership was cited as a factor in Negro unrest by Patrick Moynihan, now a



Nixon aide, in a report to former President Johnson.

No Friend In Court

Joseph Rooney, who retired as chief of police this month, says: "We have a good, stable black community, and we have a group of militants causing trouble — a very small group."

This attitude — that only a small group of "trouble-makers" keeps Oak Park and Del Paso Heights stirred up — is aggravated in the policeman's mind by the belief that the courts recently have turned against him and in favor of the criminal.

This viewpoint finds frequent expression locally from Sacramento County Sheriff John Misterly. In one recent talk this summer, for example, Misterly said: "The (arresting) officer acted according to what had been the law, then all of a sudden he finds out that the Supreme Court of the United States finds that it isn't any good and it is changed."

Associate Justice Leonard M. Friedman of the Third District Court of Appeal, however, says these Supreme Court rulings have resulted in an upgrading of performance by many police departments.

"Intelligence, patience and sound training methods," he says, "will enable police agencies to work with the Bill of Rights, not against it."

In any case, the policeman on the



beat is under the most pressure, since he is the most visible symbol of the society that seems bent on breaking the person who feels outside.

"No one has ever told a policeman what is 'good judgment and tact' — a phrase that is dinned into him — but he is expected to act with 'good judgment and tact,' says Dr. Addison W. Somerville, an SSC psychologist who instructs California Highway Patrolmen and Sacramento police officers in human relations. "A lot of old policemen," he suggests, "don't know how you deal with these people, the angry blacks."

Mutual Distrust

Feelings of distrust thus are in many cases shared, Somerville feels. And the sociological equation that results can be expressed by such epithets as "pig" for policeman or the officer's reference to the "spear-chuckers" or to black neighborhoods as "Zululand."

The Police Community Relations Division was created little more than a year ago in an attempt to break down barriers to understanding. Under the command of Lt. James McManus, the division seeks to multiply peaceful contacts between the police department and such neighborhoods as Oak Park and Del Paso Heights.

"A policeman has to be aware," he says. "You have to keep up. You can't

sit back and let society pass you by, and police departments have done that for years. Now they have to change.

"Largely, crime prevention and community relations go hand in hand."

The new division made an outstanding start under Chief Rooney. And his successor, Ray Dehner, has pledged to work to expand and improve the program.

How Much Brutality?

"Police brutality!" That cry has become familiar at every confrontation, but there has been little attempt to define just what constitutes brutality in such a situation. Thus McManus poses a pertinent question: "Just what is police brutality?" To him, it is today more psychological than physical.

Still, in the streets or on campuses when trouble erupts, the two elements tend to merge. In these circumstances an officer's professional training and personal psychology are tested to the utmost.

Perhaps "enforcement" becomes "brutality" at the moment when the "policeman" falls before his personal feelings. In any case, one answer to what a policeman should do to quell a riotous mob is simply that it should never have come to that. And if it does, the policeman — though he is the most accessible target — is far from being its real cause.

The Black Cop: A Tough Beat

"It's hard being a black person in American society today, but it's even harder being a black policeman."

In Sacramento, not many have had the experience. The speaker was one of only 11 Negroes on the city's police force of 450, and only 10 among sheriff's deputies. He and several other Negro officers spoke — reluctantly — with reporter Rich Harris, also a Negro, their very reticence underlining the tension they feel in their work today.

"Fellow blacks who don't understand this society are down on you for enforcing laws white men made," he said, "and white officers hassle you because you're black."

Said another: "We don't feel the black community is behind black police, because they are skeptical of us. They feel we are Uncle Toms, traitors to the race, and they feel we aren't helping the 'black struggle' — black people being able to enjoy what this country should stand for: Equality."

Understanding Abuse

They can accept this abuse, they say: "Blacks have been treated pretty badly in this country." Still, they feel that they are making a contribution: "An all-white police force isn't going to help the situation. It will only make it worse."

Another explains the importance of increasing Negro representation on the force:

"Fellow white officers don't understand black people, and they forget they are officers of the law. They let emotions get into their jobs. They get uptight when they are called names. No person needs to be killed or beaten because he called a policeman a 'cracker' or a 'pig' or a 'peckerwood' or 'dog' or 'Gestapo'. I've been called some of those names — and worse, too."

In their view, the department would be improved if more Negroes were employed. "This department needs a shaking up," says one, "and it could use at least 50 black officers."

All Are Patrolmen

They are aware of the fact that no Negro now holds a supervisory position on the police force — all 11 are patrolmen — and show few illusions about how some white colleagues would react to working beneath a black supervisor.

"Many of my co-workers have said they would quit if a black officer were over them," one relates. "Let them quit! Because that day will come."

"If citizens want an equally represented force," another officer says, "they must start questioning

and demanding new police policies that include more black officers in higher positions."

This fact has not escaped one man who has striven to improve the racial composition of the force, the city's first Negro councilman, Milton McGhee.

"Add men to the police community relations unit," he suggested in a recent interview with reporter Doug Dempster, "and through it elevate some minority policemen to higher positions.

"Does it make sense to hire 15 policemen one year, 20 the next and so on, ad infinitum, for patrol work? That doesn't help. We must put the new men where it counts — to improve attitudes, to get at the root causes of crime, to prevent crime."

Policing Police

"Attitudes" is a key word: That prejudice lurks behind a number of badges can hardly surprise; that its presence can influence an officer under pressure seems equally obvious. As reporter Rich Harris summed up his talks with the Negro officers:

"They all agreed that some fellow white officers must stop thinking of every black person as 'a nigger'."

In this field, the individual officer can police himself.