

THURSDAY, JANUARY 4, 1973
11:00 a.m./DETROIT PRESS CLUB
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UNCONSTITUTIONAL POLICE ACTION CHALLENGED BY COMMUNITY LEADERS--A Call for Public Hearings

A group of civic and community leaders issued a statement today condemning the conduct of the Detroit Police during the manhunt for three suspects believed to be responsible for the shooting of police officers on December 4 and December 27. They called for the Mayor and Detroit's Common Council to hold a Joint Public Hearing on the police misconduct of the last few weeks. The statement reads:

"We are outraged at the conduct of the Detroit Police Department. Their reaction to the unfortunate December 4 and December 27 shootings has been to victimize the community. They have engaged in activities which far exceed their powers. They have been verbally and physically abusive to ordinary citizens, as well as, brutal, capricious and deadly during the course of their search. We charge the police department with violating rights guaranteed to citizens under the Constitution.

We are calling for the Mayor and the Common Council, not only to investigate, but to hold a Joint Public Hearing to determine the degree and dimensions of these deprivation of rights. Numerous citizen complaints have been brought to our individual attention, but seemingly fall on deaf ears when referred to other forums for complaints. Many people are fearful of pursuing just grievances and therefore fail to protest vigorously their mistreatment. We all know these abuses are going on, but too few have raised their voices in protest. Putting on blinders and pretending not to see these deprivation of rights is unconscionable. Responsible citizens and officials who have said nothing are complicit in establishing a dangerous precedent for the abolition of liberty.

We have worked to rid Detroit of crime, drug traffic and other social ills affecting the life of our city. And we will certainly not remain silent when the police department breaks the law. It is particularly reprehensible when the rights of decent, law-abiding citizens are being deprived under the color of the law.

Since December 4, an innocent man has been killed, women and families have suffered indignities, doors have been kicked-in, illegal search and seizures have taken place, stop-and-frisk without cause is rampant, decent citizens have been unlawfully detained, many have been subjected to verbal or physical abuse, and in general, the conduct of the police has been unprofessional and unaccountable.

We are demanding a public hearing on these matters. There must be some accountability to the citizenry from our "protectors of liberty."

We face a situation in the community where not only must ordinary folk beware of the muggers and robbers, but they are not even safe in their own homes from the Detroit Police. At anytime a door may get kicked-in, without benefit of a search warrant and a family lined up against the wall with guns waving in their faces. All of this ostensibly justified in pursuit of three fugitives, who in fact, are not yet proven guilty of any crime.

We know that no suburban community would allow for one instant the kind of abuses, intrusions and excesses now being exercised in the City of Detroit. The Mayor and the Police Commissioner seem to have given their officers carte blanche to run over Detroiters. Suburbia wouldn't take it. Nor should we. So, again, we are calling for a Joint Public Hearing in which the Mayor and the Common Council would hear what the people of Detroit have experienced at the hands of their public servants.

Finally, we are appealing to all those who have a respect for decency and the law; and those who have been victimized, who have the courage, to join us in demanding that the Mayor and the Common Council immediately provide this forum. We encourage your participation. Join us in speaking out. Thank you."

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NAMES OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS ---

Elliot Hall, Esq., President, Detroit Chapter, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

Rev. Fulton Bradley, Executive Vice-President, Michigan Chapter, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

Mrs. Adrian James, President, Metropolitan Detroit Chapter, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

Mrs. Ruth Hughes, Chairwoman, Coordinating Council on Human Relations (CCHR)

Mr. Thomas Moss, President, Guardians of Michigan

William Goodman, Esq., National Lawyers Guild

Samuel Simpson, Esq., Wolverine Bar Association

Attorney Wilfred Rice, representing Rev. Leroy Cannon, a victim of the Detroit Police Department abuse and unconstitutional actions.