

# Police Community Relations Project Committee

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July 15, 1970

MELVIN E. BYRD  
Associate Director

The Honorable Roman S. Gribbs  
Mayor of the City of Detroit

Mr. William M. Day  
Chairman, New Detroit, Inc.

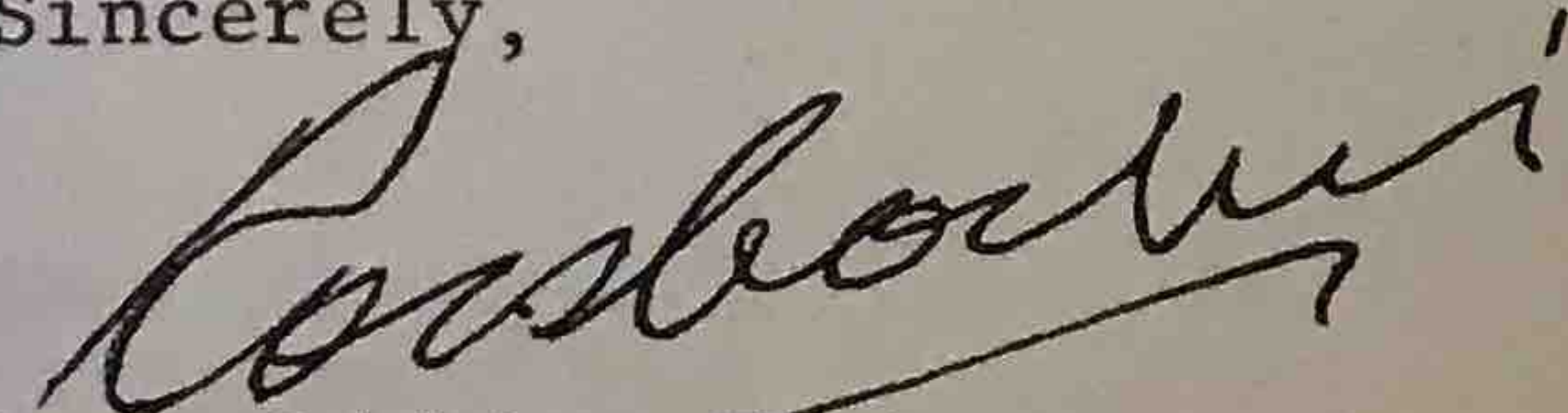
Gentlemen:

The Police Community Relations Project Committee was appointed in March of 1969 by the Mayor of the City of Detroit and the Chairman of New Detroit, Inc., to develop positive action programs in the area of police-community relations.

We are pleased to enclose a report that summarizes our areas of study and presents recommendations. This report deals with serious police-citizen relationships that divide us as a community. It is hoped that this will be viewed as one of the efforts that seeks reasonable solutions to the problems of our city.

This is submitted with the hope that appropriate steps will be taken by the City administration, New Detroit, Inc., and other interested groups, to secure its implementation.

Sincerely,

  
Ross Corbit, Chairman



## INTRODUCTION

In March of 1969, the Mayor of the City of Detroit and the Chairman of New Detroit, Inc., appointed a 24-member Committee to develop action proposals in the police-community relations area. (Exhibit A) The charge to the Committee was based upon the assumption that many of the problems dividing the Detroit community were already known. It assumed that programs tried in other major cities, as well as the experiences of knowledgeable Detroit residents, could form the basis for proposals that would provide protection and fair treatment for citizens, build bridges of understanding between the police department and minority communities, and improve law enforcement with the cooperation of police and citizen.

From the outset, it was understood that the 24-member Committee would be a unique appointment of differing points of view and opinion in the community. Representatives from the Police Department, the minority communities and other Detroit citizens would be brought together to reach consensus within the constraints of different viewpoints. The Committee includes business and professional men and women, members of the judiciary and the bar, leaders of social action groups, the heads of police officers' associations, and representatives of the Police Department's top command. The Committee would examine previous studies of police-community relations, would contact agencies and individuals with experience in the area, and contact other cities and experts to develop sound proposals for the Detroit community.

The Committee began its work from the premise that Detroit has one of the finest police departments of any of our major American cities. There was the



honest recognition that various problems existed requiring a fresh look for hopeful improvement and change.

The Detroit community has experienced a series of incidents that have impeded cooperation between black citizens and their police department. The recommendations that follow attempt to bridge the gap of misunderstanding and encourage new relationships between police and citizen. Only by a conscious willingness to confront long-standing grievances and antagonistic feelings can Detroit hope to move ahead with the enormous task of protecting its citizens and providing a safe environment for individual opportunity.

Nearly every crime commission report underscores, with strong conviction, that to mount a significant campaign against crime, methods must be employed to attack the conditions of life that underlie criminal activity.

While this report will concentrate on police-community relations, the Committee recognizes that the entire criminal justice system (prosecution, courts, corrections, etc.) has a relationship to the continuation of criminal behavior and that individual programs must be developed in these areas as well. In recent years, there has been a shift in thinking away from "blame the individual" to the recognition that crime and delinquency are symptoms of disorganization of the community and its institutions. Nearly every report recommends that at least three elements are crucial to crime prevention. First is the urgency of changing social conditions which now support crime to a climate that discourages its growth. Also, there must be an improvement in the ability of the criminal justice system to detect, apprehend, judge and rehabilitate offenders. Finally, steps must be taken to reduce the opportunities to commit crime.



In every analysis, a stated objective was to eliminate inequities so that the system of criminal justice can win the respect and cooperation of all citizens. This also means the development and implementation of specific proposals to deal with the delicate relations police have with the urban poor, minority groups, and youth.

In its 1967 report, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice made the following observations:

"1. There is need to recognize the variety of functions which police perform today, particularly in the large urban community. The demands upon police are likely to increase in number and complexity rather than decrease.

"2. Important and complex social, behavioral, and political problems can adequately be dealt with by American government only if there is room for administrative variation, innovation, and experimentation of a kind presently lacking in the police field.

"3. To deal adequately with current law enforcement needs requires an explicit acknowledgment that police are one of the most important governmental administrative agencies in existence today. It requires also that major changes be made to equip police to develop appropriate administrative policies and a willingness and capacity to conform with these policies."

Professionals all conclude that the capacity to deal with crime crucially depends on a police department's relationship with the citizenry. Hostility or lack of confidence by segments of the population has serious implications



for police performance. A dissatisfied public will not support the police enthusiastically over such issues as police salaries, working conditions and benefits. Public hostility affects police morale and reduces an officer's enthusiasm for doing a job well. Poor rapport between police and community tends to isolate the officer from the community that he serves. The breakdown in communication reduces the capability for both police and community to understand each other and frustrates the development of programs that serve the community and its changing needs.

It has been shown that public hostility has its impact on police-street operations. Officers may be reluctant to act or may respond by use of unnecessary force, verbal abuse or other improper practices when they are fearful or may respond improperly in a tense situation. Hostility evidenced by racial minorities, when they perceive that police act because of bias, will tend to perpetuate poor police-community relations and diminish support of the community in effective police performance. Poor police-community relations increase the danger of police work.

The reduction of crime cannot be accomplished without active citizen support of the police department. To a large extent, the concept of teamwork in crime prevention is an indispensable part of modern police work. The attitudes that people have, how they perceive police response, and how their actions relate to what they believe, often are as important as what is objectively true. The Committee has examined assumptions believed to be true by the minority community, by policemen, and by others. The process of examining these matters in an atmosphere of mutual respect resulted in different conceptions of the problems.



There were those in the community who predicted that the very makeup of the Committee would prevent meaningful accomplishment. Over the past several months, attitudes of Committee members have been modified and changed. Abrasive issues have been frankly discussed and analyzed, and, at times, great emotion was in evidence. The Committee represents the diversity of opinion in our community, and demonstrated that agreement could be reached on difficult community issues despite that diversity.

Many of the recommendations discussed within the Committee during the past year have proven to be valuable. Some have been adopted by the Detroit Police Department during the course of Committee meetings and are operating policies and procedures today. Carrying out law enforcement assignments and the community relations contacts they engender is most difficult, even under the best of circumstances. A number of studies have indicated the depth of distrust of the police by minority group citizens and suggested areas of major sensitivity in these contacts. The response required by these contacts and the problems generated in our big cities necessitate the establishment of community relations units within police departments. These units require specially-trained personnel who are aware of the issues that divide citizens and create individual hostility or large group reactions. They can develop procedures that handle citizens' complaints, improve screening of police applicants in an effort to eliminate bias, and develop recruitment programs designed to attract minority group police candidates.

It is true that the greatest rate of crime increase has taken place in large cities like Detroit. Crime statistics reveal that young men and boys commit most of the crimes and most of these are committed in cities. Two powerful social trends are placed in focus: the increasing urbanization of



America and the restlessness of male youth. It has also been assumed that an abundant society provides many opportunities for crimes against property and crimes for profit.

#### Committee Process

The Committee began to meet in early April, 1969, and formed three working subcommittees to study the subject matter in a number of categories. (Exhibit B)

The following were identified as key issues in police-community relations in Detroit:

1. The necessity to establish communication and cooperation between the police department and all segments of the community.
2. The demand for greater restraint in the exercise of police power and the use of deadly force; minimizing the opportunity of confrontations having great potential for community disruption.
3. Demand for increased police services, for better protection and effective efforts to reduce crime.
4. The crisis in obtaining manpower for the Detroit Police Department.
5. The necessity to educate and train police to be responsive to and involved in community service.
6. Fair treatment for both policeman and citizen in adversary or complaint situations.
7. The development of police-community efforts of teamwork and cooperation.
8. Determination of the community relations impact of policy, structure and function of the Detroit Police Department.

As the Committee work proceeded, it became clear that the problems of young people deserved greater attention. The Detroit Police Department Youth Bureau in 1969 had a responsibility for an estimated 102,000 Detroit boys in



the age category of 10 through 16 years. Members of the Youth Bureau interviewed 29,700 boys in 1968; many of these youngsters were contacted on several occasions. Approximately one in 10 boys in the 10 through 16 age category was involved in police contacts of some serious magnitude.

Wayne County's Juvenile Court is flooded with cases revealing parental neglect and brutality. The total environment creates and nurtures young people who are under-achievers and unable to participate in normal activities. The Court's facilities and staff are woefully inadequate for preventive work. Greatly increased resources could help in identifying potential problem youngsters before their behavior results in serious acts requiring drastic measures.

A staggering increase in drug abuse and drug distribution has had a direct relationship to crimes involving young people. Representatives of the Detroit Police Department Youth Bureau estimated that over 50 percent of crimes against property were related to drug use. In some cases, serious crimes against the person were a direct result of a young adult's narcotic addiction. The Committee was shocked to learn that very little has been done over the past 10 years to reduce the mounting drug abuse. The Committee became aware that it could not deal with community relations problems exclusive of other societal influences.

The inability of young adults to secure meaningful employment has influenced youthful criminal activities. The failure of our educational institutions to adequately equip and qualify young graduates for the world of work contributes to the formation of antisocial behavior. An increasing number of school dropouts leads to a greater proportion of under-21-year-old youths in crimes against property and individuals.



The Committee became aware that misunderstood or unclear Detroit Police Department policies resulted in community relations problems. Strong support and endorsement were given to a comprehensive analysis of the management function of the Detroit Police Department. During this writing, consideration was given to a management assistance effort endorsed by the Mayor and New Detroit, Inc. The Committee did not deal directly with these issues, as the management effort will review the structure, function and administration of the Detroit Police Department. (Exhibit C)

The issues that emerge in this report must be exposed to rational analysis by the total community. It is the Committee's sincere hope that its exchange of ideas and recommendations, placed before the Detroit community, will be reviewed and objectively analyzed.

The Committee agreed unanimously that the issue of police-community relations demands continuing review and involvement. Their experience since April of 1969 revealed that it often takes time for people with differing viewpoints to get to know each other. Constructive criticism and the development of sound recommendations can only take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. A public body, representing the diversity of community opinion and attitude, should continue and build upon the findings in this report. The Mayor and the Board Chairman of New Detroit, Inc., should agree on a continuing effort to implement the findings and recommendations and update activities that reflect changing community needs and conditions.



Police Community Relations Project  
Committee Members

ROSS CORBIT, Chairman; Member of the Board of Hiram Walker, Gooderham Worts;  
Chairman of the Police Committee of the Greater Detroit Chamber of  
Commerce.

CLYDE CLEVELAND

Resigned, June, 1969.

THE REVEREND ROY A. ALLEN, Chairman, Subcommittee on Police-Community Relations,  
Detroit Commission on Community Relations.

ELJAY BOWRON, Detective-Sergeant, Detroit Police Department; President of the  
Detroit Police Detectives Association.

CHARLES W. DROUILLARD, Directory Production Manager, Marketing Department,  
Michigan Bell Telephone Company; Representative, New Detroit, Inc.

JOHN J. FLAHARTY, Former Member of the Detroit City Plan Commission.

GEORGE W. HARGE, Deputy Chief Inspector, Detroit Police Department.

MRS. JESSIE KENNEDY, Region Superintendent, Region Four, Detroit Board of  
Education.

FRANCIS A. KORNEGAY, Executive Director, Detroit Urban League.

MRS. GOLDA KROLIK, Former Member of the Detroit Commission on Community  
Relations.

WILLIAM OWEN, Inspector, Detroit Police Department; Commanding Officer of the  
Citizen Complaint Bureau.

CARL PARSELL, President, Detroit Police Officers Association.

ROBERT QUAID, Inspector, Director of Personnel, Detroit Police Department.

ROLAND ROBERTS, Inspector and Commanding Officer of the Tactical Mobile Unit,  
Detroit Police Department.

JAMES D. SCHMIDT, Managing Editor of the Northeast Detroiter and Harper Woods  
Herald Newspapers.

ROBERT SHEEDY, Lieutenant, Detroit Police Department; President, Detroit Police,  
Lieutenants and Sergeants Association.

FRANK S. SZYMANSKI, Judge, Probate Court.

THOMAS P. THORNTON, Judge, United States District Court.



JAMES L. TRAINOR, Representative of the Mayor.

THOMAS TURNER, President, Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO Council; President,  
Detroit Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of  
Colored People.

MRS. JEAN WASHINGTON, Trustee, New Detroit, Inc.

THE REVEREND ROOSEVELT T. WILLIAMS, President, Council of Baptist Pastors.

PIKE WILSON, President, Van Dyke Farms Improvement Association.

CHARLES W. WITHERS, Vice-President, Detroit Police Officers Association.

JOSEPH SCHORE, Director.