

housing, and commercial developments, and as to the effects on the community of urban renewal and the relocation of population—neighborhood conditions to which municipal attention should be directed.

The Commission recommends:

The police should formally participate in community planning in all cities.

THE POLICE IN THE COMMUNITY

Carrying out with proper efficiency and discretion the complicated law enforcement and community-service tasks the police are expected to perform is a formidable assignment under the best of circumstances: When the public sympathizes and cooperates with the police. Those circumstances do exist to a considerable extent in most rural, smalltown and suburban communities, and in many big-city neighborhoods. The chief limitations on police work in those places are the talents and skills of policemen and police administrators, and the funds, equipment, and facilities available to them. In city slums and ghettos, the very neighborhoods that need and want effective policing the most, the situation is quite different. There is much distrust of the police, especially among boys and young men, among the people the police most often deal with. It is common in those neighborhoods for citizens to fail to report crimes or refuse to cooperate in investigations. Often policemen are sneered at or insulted on the street. Sometimes they are violently assaulted. Indeed, everyday police encounters in such neighborhoods can set off riots, as many police departments have learned.

This is the problem that is usually—and politely—referred to as “police-community relations.” It is overwhelmingly a problem of the relations between the police and the minority-group community, between the police and Negroes, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican-Americans. It is as serious as any problem the police have today.

Of course, to say that there is much distrust of the police among members of minority groups is not to say that all

members of minority groups distrust the police, or to imply that only members of minority groups distrust the police. A survey of public attitudes toward the police conducted, at the Commission’s request, by the National Opinion Research Center shows, naturally enough, a spectrum of opinion. However, the differences in attitude by race are striking. Twenty-three percent of all white people thought that the police were doing an “excellent” job of enforcing the law, while only 15 percent of nonwhites held that view. At the opposite end of the scale, 7 percent of whites thought the police were doing a “poor” job, as contrasted with 16 percent of nonwhites. Roughly the same kind of response was obtained to a question about how well the police protect citizens.

With the questions, “How good a job do the police do on being respectful to people like yourself?” and “Do you think the police around your neighborhood are almost all honest, mostly honest, with a few who are corrupt, or are they almost all corrupt?”, the difference in response by race was more than striking. It was startling. Sixty-three percent of whites and 30 percent of nonwhites thought the police were “almost all honest.” One percent of whites and 10 percent of nonwhites thought the police were “almost all corrupt.”

It may be paradoxical that the same people who are most victimized by crime are most hostile to the police, but it is not remarkable. In view of the history of race relations in America and of the ghetto conditions in which most minority-group members live, doubt about American ideals and resentment against authority are to be expected among Negroes, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican-Americans. No doubt the police are condemned by the nature of their work to bear the brunt of such feelings.

However, this is not the heart of the police-community relations problem. Throughout the country minority-group residents have grievances not just against society as a whole, but specifically against the police. Commission observers watched policemen work in minority-group neighborhoods in a number of major cities, and the Commission has studied the findings of those who have made observations in many other cities. These observations indicate that any generalization about how “policemen”

National Opinion Research Center Poll : Affirmative Answers

Do police do “excellent” job?

White _____ 23%

Non-White _____ 15%

Are police “almost all honest”?

White _____ 63%

Non-White _____ 30%

Do police do “poor” job?

White _____ 7%

Non-White _____ 16%

Are police “almost all corrupt”?

White _____ 1%

Non-White _____ 10%