

DISTRUST, ANIMOSITY DRIVE WEDGE

Negro vs. Police: War of Words Rages On

BY VAN G. SAUTER
Free Press Staff Writer

Some time ago, while driving down an alley in an integrated neighborhood of large, rambling houses, a squad car came across a shabbily dressed Negro carrying a paper sack. The policemen threw their lights on the man. He stopped and faced them.

"What are you doing in the alley?" a policeman asked. "None of your business," came the response. "What's in the package?" "None of your business." "Who are you?"

"NONE OF YOUR business." With that, the man turned and started walking on down the alley. The police stopped him, put him in the squad car and took him to the precinct station house. There, the man demanded to see the highest ranking officer on duty.

He then identified himself as a doctor, pulled out a driver's license that showed he lived in one of the large, rambling houses, and opened the small paper bag to reveal a somewhat wilted poppie he was taking to his daughter.

This was only an incident in a grimy alley, but it symbolizes the wedge of distrust and animosity between the Negro community and Detroit police. It is a wedge that could shatter Detroit's racial peace.

As the Negro doctor saw it, he wouldn't have been stopped—let alone questioned—if he had been white.

"BUT WHAT the hell is a cop supposed to do around here," a policeman shot back. "Do you think we like to run through those alleys? We're there to protect that doctor and his neighbors. How are we to know he was a bum or a doctor. All he had to do was give his name and open the bag. That's all. Is that too much?"

Department Blamed

Today, many Negro leaders in Detroit sincerely believe that the department has a negative attitude toward the Negro community, that some Negro prisoners are brutalized, that the department is actually run by bigots and that Police Commissioner Ray Girardin is either unable or unwilling to correct the situation.

Mayor Cavanagh and the police categorically reject the charges. They deny the negative attitude, the brutality, the presence of bigots and the ineffectual leadership.

And at this point, after the charges and the denials, the dialogue ends in an ominous silence between those who represent Detroit's Negro population and those elected and appointed to serve the city as a whole.

The fight erupts over the more dramatic cases of alleged brutality, but to the average Negro, the problem has many faces.

IT COVERS the doctor and his poppie and the impolite policemen who tell you to "move on, fellow" as well as the currently debated case of Barbara Jackson, a Negro prostitute who contended she was shoved to the pavement and injured during an arrest last August.

Actually, the problem is not as severe as the Negro leaders make it out to be—nor is it as slight as city officials maintain.

Somewhere, between the two extremes must be an area of agreement.

One extreme is represented by the Rev. James E. Wadsworth, the tall, articulate president of the Detroit branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

"The Negroes in Detroit feel they are part of an occupied country," he said. "The Negroes have no rights which the police have to respect. It would appear that the average patrolman looks upon the Negro as being a criminal type."

WADSWORTH believes this attitude has been nurtured in the department down through the years, and that young policemen must adopt the attitude or face the scorn of older officers.

"There are a few real vi-



Commissioner Ray Girardin, right, and Supt. Eugene Reuter
Detroit's top cop and right-hand man are targets of Negro criticism

rious bigots in the department who give the whole system a bad name," the minister continued, "and they are more concerned with protecting the individual officer than investigating the complaint a Negro citizen might bring against him."

To the civil rights leaders, the villains in the Police Department are Superintendent Eugene Reuter and Deputy Superintendent James Lupton. They manage the day-to-day operation, and Wadsworth charges that both are men of very biased attitudes.

"And Detroit has a white Police Department," he added. "We believe there has been a systematic program of excluding Negroes."

"Out of 4,421 Police Department employees, 146 or 3 percent are Negroes. Civil Services estimates that throughout all city departments Negroes constitute about 35 per cent of the work force."

BESIDES the alleged negative attitude and the discriminatory hiring practices, Wadsworth has a third grievance: The persistence of organized crime in Negro neighborhoods.

Police Frustrated

"I think some police have entered into an allegiance with criminal elements in the Negro Community," he said. "Look at the prostitution. Why isn't it stopped?"

The police reaction to these charges is usually one of frustrated anger.

"Our job is law enforcement regardless of who is involved," said Lupton. "We don't look upon every Negro as a potential lawbreaker. I'm as much interested in brutality as Wadsworth or anyone has been."

"I want my men to have respect. Without it, law enforcement is in trouble. There is no difference in a policeman's reaction to a white criminal or a Negro criminal."

"HE IS a criminal and that's all we care about. The problem they talk about doesn't exist in Detroit."

Commissioner Girardin agrees.

"Our relationship with the Negro community is good," the Cavanagh appointee said. "The number of complaints (voiced by the Negro leaders) is not indicative. We make over 10,000,000 contacts a year with the public and we can't please everyone."

"If there's a bad policeman I want to know about it and I want to see the evidence."

Frederick F. Wright is director of personnel for the department, and he attributes the lack of Negro interest in police careers to the good economic conditions in Detroit. "They make more outside," he said, noting that the starting salary for patrolmen is only \$6,115.

The city has initiated an



Mayor Cavanagh
Rejects charges

intensive drive to recruit Negroes, but the results have been limited. Of 44 recent graduates from the Police Academy, only one is a Negro.

THE DEPARTMENT does not keep a racial census on recruitment, but at the request of former Commissioner George Edwards, an analysis was made of applications, testing and hiring during a nine-month period in 1963. "It gives an inaccurate picture," Wright says, and the document is not made public.

Wadsworth finds it ironic that the department is now "sincerely attempting to recruit Negroes—but no one wants to join. The Negroes feel that you can't go anywhere in the department, and that if you do join, you are a sellout to your own community."

The Detroit Urban League observed last year that the "overall philosophy of many white superiors in reference to Negroes" results in unequal assignments and promotions for Negro policemen.

Ten local organizations concerned with civil rights have recently been discussing these problems with the police administration, but toward the end of December they gave up and took their case to the mayor.

MOST representatives felt they received an unresponsive hearing from Girardin and Cavanagh.

The group was led by Congressman John Conyers, Jr., and Wadsworth served as its spokesman. The group told Cavanagh that a policeman can verbally or physically abuse a prisoner with impunity, and then get protection from the department if the Negro complains.

The immediate goal of the Negro leadership is some change that will halt what they consider to be brutality. They think this can be accomplished in one of three ways:

—a new commissioner who will be strong enough to make his influence felt down through the police ranks to

the patrolman on the street.—the naming of a Negro superintendent or deputy superintendent. This would give a Negro a voice on the police trial board.

—a revamping of the existing trial board to give it a civilian majority. A plan to this effect was presented by the Urban League but batted down by the mayor on legal grounds.

THE TRADE Union Leadership Council TULC, an organization whose leadership has been closely identified with Mayor Cavanagh, has proposed civilian participation on the Board of Inquiry and an enlargement of the board's scope.

The Inquiry Board, now composed of officers appointed by the commissioner, would investigate "serious police problems" and make reports to the commissioner, who sits on the police trial board.

A similar role is now performed by the Citizens Complaint Bureau of the department. The TULC was not among the coalition of 10 groups concerned with civil rights that have been pressing Mayor Cavanagh on police problems.

The pressure is now centered on the trial board, which is composed of the commissioner, the superintendent or the deputy, and the chief of detectives or his assistant.

James Del Rio, a prosperous, retired businessman now attending law school, last year brought an unsuccessful legal action against the department seeking public disclosure of files pertaining to trial board action and related matters.

FOLLOWING Del Rio's lead, and using contacts within the department, some of the civil rights organizations acquired what they describe as "official documents." One pertains to 35 recent trial board actions.

Police 'Protected'

The officers involved, according to the document, were charged with a variety of offenses, ranging from brutality to discourtesy. In 25 of the 35 cases the board found for the civilian complainant, but no action was taken against the policeman involved.

One high-ranking officer said that Reuter and Lupton consistently protect these officers guilty of misconduct. "They do it to keep up the morale," he said, "but actually it is tearing the morale down."

"The good policemen know the bad eggs can get away with anything," Reuter dismisses any such charge as erroneous. "We have a tough trial board," he said, "and our records are open to the public."

BUT THE difference in opinions over the trial board are illustrated by the Barbara Jackson case.

Being Negro and a high school dropout, it seems likely that Barbara Jackson would be earning \$50 a week as a dime store clerk. But she is pretty and likes good clothes so she went to work on the corner of John R and Montcalm.

Now she is a \$350-a-week prostitute with no past and no future, and her life centers around a pimp who drives a large convertible with a sign on the window warning that the car is protected by a burglar alarm.

On a humid night in August, Barbara Jackson and a white customer from Canada—all her "johns" are white—entered a building on that corner and went into a shabby

apartment rented to neighborhood prostitutes.

Two policemen were only a few steps behind, and they arrested Barbara Jackson.

For the 200 prostitutes who work along John R and Brush, arrest, like disease, is an occupational hazard.

BUT THE JOHN began to complain that the girl had stolen his money. "I'm a whore but I'm no thief," Barbara Jackson shouted, and she kicked the man.

In spite of the hassle it was still a routine arrest, a sordid episode on the fringe of society involving two bored policemen, an indignant prostitute and a frightened man who feared his wife would read about it in the newspapers.

But a few minutes later, in the garage of police headquarters, the arrest of Barbara Jackson took on much larger proportions. For somehow, with her arms handcuffed behind her and two policemen alongside, Barbara Jackson dropped to the pavement and her face slammed into the grimy cement.

Did a policeman intentionally shove her to the pavement?

Or did she lose her balance and fall while attempting to kick the john, who minutes later found the "stolen" money in his shirt pocket.

THE TRIAL board said she fell while trying to kick the john. The policeman who arrested her was reprimanded and transferred to a less desirable assignment because he failed to "protect" the prisoner.

Quiz Is Called

This interpretation of the events in the police garage has not satisfied the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, which in the next few months may turn the whole review board matter into a moot question.

The commission, which conducted its own investigation of the case, will probably hold a public hearing on the charge that police brutalized Barbara Jackson and in doing so failed to honor her civil rights.

The commission is also preparing to hold hearings on some of the 63 other charges of violations of civil rights that have been alleged against Detroit police.

"The Civil Rights Commission will function as a public review board," Commissioner Girardin contends.

THE CONFRONTATION of the commission and the Police Department will be one of the most significant events in the history of Detroit race relations.

If the Negro leadership determines the commission is effective in investigating and prosecuting violators of civil rights, it may withdraw the demand for a change in the current review board structure.

The commission is methodically preparing for these cases, which will be followed with interest across the country by law enforcement officials and civil rights leaders.

"It would be presumptions for the Civil Rights Commission to tell the Police Department how to do its job," said Burton I. Gordin, commission director, "but it is clear that there is a problem in Detroit."

"There isn't any question that there is a deep feeling within the Negro community that a double standard is exercised by some police officers," he continued.

"HOW MUCH of this is based on actual fact, nobody,



Rev. James Wadsworth



Rep. John Conyers



James Del Rio

They lead in the Negroes' battle with the police department

including the commission, can say at this time.

"But some are undeniably based on fact. Our usual finding of probable cause (which in effect means substantiation of charges by the complainant) runs to about one-third of the cases brought to us."

"The fact that we've gotten 64 complaints is an indication that this feeling (of distrust and animosity) is widely held in the Negro community. It is tension-producing and destructive to good relations in our community."

"The commission can be the most effective machinery that we've ever had for the resolution of this problem," Gordin continued, "if we can demonstrate that through the commission individual citizens have an objective and fair mechanism to remedy these complaints."

The commission is legally empowered to hold public hearings on the charges if a settlement cannot be worked out privately between the complainant and the Police Department.

FOLLOWING the public hearing, the commission rules on the validity of the allegation, and if the finding is against the policeman, an order is issued to prevent the offending officer from repeating the misconduct.

"The commission will be an escape valve for some of the tension," one Negro leader said, "and it will provide an impartial hearing for the complainant. But something must be done to change the attitude the average policeman has toward the Negro he passes on the street."

One veteran policeman has his own answer for that: "Tell the Negroes to stay the hell out of so much trouble."

He threw onto his desk a copy of the department's 1963 annual report, and opened it to page 33. It contains data about the number of prosecutions brought by the department, and the only real breakdown according to race in the report.

In 1963 the department brought prosecution against 36,420 persons. Non-whites accounted for 23,094.

"AND LOOK at this," he said, holding up a report on major crime in Detroit during a 24-hour period last week. "All Negroes. Not one white. It's like that every morning. Five Negroes and one white. Eight Negroes and two whites."

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"If you walk a beat and you have three blocks where the kids are hellions and two blocks where they're not, what do you do? You lean on those three blocks because that's where the trouble is. It's no different for a whole city."

A Negro educator, who has observed police-community relations in Detroit closely for many years, agrees that the Negro community must show a greater sense of responsibility, but he also feels the average policeman needs better training.

He has two proposals: An upgrading of the present Police Academy, where cadets receive a 10-week, 400-hour preparation for police work. The majority of this time is spent in learning the mechanics of police work. Thirty hours are devoted to civil rights and human relations.

THE EDUCATOR would like to see the academy associated with a local university, and the school period lengthened to provide a programmed education in such courses as psychology, sociology and urban problems.

A continuing educational program for Detroit policemen. The educator said the City should provide the tuition for policemen who want to take college-level courses in subjects that will improve their capabilities as policemen.

This would be tied into promotion grading and pay scales, so there is an incentive for furthering one's education.

The controversy continues, and so does the problem.

A short time ago two Ne-

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Where Complaints Go

One of the key issues in the police-Negro controversy is the manner in which complaints of police brutality are handled. Jurisdiction over such cases now belongs to the mayor and high police officials.

Here is the way it works:

The mayor (Cavanagh) appoints a civilian police commissioner (Girardin) who, in turn, appoints the top police officers.

Two of the career policemen—the superintendent (Reuter) and the chief of detectives (Cochill)—sit with Girardin on the police review (trial) board.

The police review board hears all complaints against the City's police, from sleeping on the job to taking graft.

A police board of inquiry—consisting of

three high-ranking police officers not on the trial board—was established under former Commissioner George Edwards to review shootings by policemen and other police matters.

Ten civil rights groups recently asked the Mayor to establish a citizen board of review in police matters and an Urban League official suggested two civilians be added to the existing police board of review. The corporation counsel ruled that both suggestions would violate the City Charter.

Another proposal, made Friday by the Trade Union Leadership Council, asks that the board of review be expanded to include civilians. This now is being studied by City officials.

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