

February 1, 1968

MEMORANDUM TO: Mr. Richard V. Marks
FROM: Ovander Stoner
SUBJECT: Police Harassment of Teenagers

Commissioner Winkelman asked the Director to prepare a report evaluating community charges of "police harassment of teenagers", as indicated by Mrs. Lena Bivens during a meeting of the New Detroit Committee. He asked that the report include suggestions for Commission action.

PROBLEM

We contacted Mrs. Bivens of New Detroit who related to us the type of incidents that teenagers in the inner-city are subjected to. She stated that teenagers are picked up on suspicion, held for several hours without being able to contact their parents, and finger printed, in which case attorneys have been engaged to retrieve the prints labeled criminals without having been convicted of any crime. Mrs. Bivens stated that the incidents are too numerous to list, but that any teenager who lives in the inner-city can relate incidents that have happened to him. She stated that teenagers had told her that they have no respect for the police, as the police have no respect for them and their rights.

PLAN OF WORK

Investigation:

Regarding recent complaints: We have received several complaints involving police harassment of teenagers in the Northwest section of Detroit. Controversy surrounds a group of teenagers called the Infernos. There have been complaints of police harassment and of police brutality against these teenagers. People in the area seem to feel that there is a conspiracy on the part of the Detroit Police Department to spark an incident. We received one specific complaint from Miss Gwen Warren, President of the Infernos. She indicated that about 10:30 P.M. January 22, 1968, after having attended a meeting at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Garrett of the Fitzgerald Community Council, she was attacked by two policemen who had pulled up along side of her in a scout car. Miss Warren alleged that the officers had used profanity and one of them had struck her in the stomach with his nightstick. We attempted to investigate the allegation by contacting Inspector Werner at No. 12.

On January 24, 1968, we went to the 12th Precinct and talked to Inspector Werner about the alleged by Miss Warren. Inspector Werner indicated that he had heard something about the incident, but that the Warren girl had refused to talk to the Police Department regarding a complaint. He also indicated that he was skeptical of the complaint, as the girl had failed to obtain any corroborating evidence, like a badge number or a police car number. He had not investigated from the police side at this point, but promised to do so. He attempted to obtain the squad car run sheets for the night in question, but had an appointment and could not do so at this time. He suggested that we return on 1-25-68.

On January 25, 1968, we went to the 12th Precinct and talked to Inspector Werner. He had been expecting us and had the run sheets on his desk. He explained that any one of three squad cars could have been at the scene in question. He went over the run sheets for these three squad cars and found that the officers were busy on runs in other areas at the time in question. Inspector Werner indicated that at this point, he is accepting the run sheets as evidence of the officers' innocence, but that if a formal complaint is filed, he will check with the communications bureau to get the tapes for the time and night in question.

We discussed with Inspector Werner the possibility of a precinct support car or a juvenile unit being in the area. Inspector Werner stated that he had no knowledge of either of these type units being in the area.

ANALYSIS AND/OR RECOMMENDATION

1. We must have better evidence if charges are to be proven or disproven regarding any specific activities of police officers or allegations regarding their performance if actions are to be taken by the Commission and/or responsible policy officials in the Police Department.
2. We have been receiving complaints from this group since about October 12 of last year. The problem was first characterized as being one of lack of recreational facilities for the Infernos. Mr. Williams of our staff had attempted to work with Miss Warren to start a drama club in the area, but nothing ever came of it. Even though we have been unable to offer any definite solutions to the problem, we feel that it is one of the utmost importance.
3. In most of the riots which have occurred in the past few years, the spark has been some type of police action. It hasn't mattered whether the action was justified or unjustified, but only that it has been a police action. It seems that the police authorities should recognize this and if they genuinely want to minimize chances that their actions might spark an incident, they should instruct the officers on proper courtesy and procedures.
4. A possible long-range solution to problems of this type would be the institution of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is a peoples representative who is charged with the responsibility of receiving and investigating complaints and carrying forth proceedings in court against public officials or employees who have acted illegally in the exercise of their duties or who have acted inappropriately in the performance of their duties.
5. We also feel that a concerted effort should be made to add, by this summer, at least 800 Negro police officers; report should also be developed regarding the plans for use of civilian auxiliary police aids.