



WJBK-TV2
DETROIT

EDITORIAL

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THE POLICE AND THE BLACK COMMUNITY

CAMERA:
CARINO

It is not a subject easily talked about -- the present and disturbing state of police-community relations in Detroit. Specifically and frankly, we refer to police-black community relations.

They are, to say the least, marked at the moment by an unhealthy and even alarming degree of friction, bitterness, misunderstanding and mutual distrust. Conditions are such, to be blunt, that they can only improve, and improve they must.

Without apology, this station has unfailingly supported programs aimed at building a stronger, a more efficient and professional police department. The alternative, a city increasingly wracked by crime and violence -- with the old, the poor and the black the primary victims, is simply unthinkable.

We recognize, nevertheless, that policemen are human and fallible. Like all of us, they make mistakes. Under extreme provocation, they can overreact. Like society in general -- black or white -- any police department, despite the best screening efforts, has its share of hot-heads and worse.

Almost certainly, then, some of the current suspicions and outright accusations of at least isolated police misconduct have a basis in fact. There undoubtedly have been instances of harassment, of uncalled-for physical or verbal abuse of citizens, of unjust arrest or detention, of arbitrary invasion of private homes.

Those charging such abuses have an obligation to hold absolutely to the truth, to recognize and reject inflammatory rumor, to resist the temptation to smear 5,000 policemen for the misdeeds of a very few.

The police have an equal or even greater responsibility, however painful, to own up fully, honestly and promptly to clear-cut cases of wrongdoing or just plain poor judgment by any among them.

TV2 feels certain that no conscientious member of the Department -- from Commissioner Nichols to the newest beat patrolman -- really wants it...or believes it can be...any other way.

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