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TO: Local Mayors, Managers, Supervisors, Police Chiefs
or Other Principal Officers

SUBJECT: Police-Community Relations

DATE: August 24, 1964

Recent outbreaks of racial violence involving Negroes and the police in the Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvestant sections of New York City, Rochester and Buffalo, New York, and Jersey City and Patterson, New Jersey, have pointed up the grave and basic unrest in the Negro communities of those cities. On a smaller scale, Lansing and Jackson, Michigan, have had similar conflicts. Competent observers believe that other cities in Michigan are possible places for violence this Summer.

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide community officials in Michigan with some background information and reasons for the violence that has occurred between the police and the Negro community, and to offer guidelines which will help correct some of the basic causes of these conflicts.

THE BACKGROUND

Nation-wide prejudice and discrimination against Negro-Americans during the past one hundred years has resulted in what is called the current "Negro Revolution in America." Daily newspaper accounts show how the organized Negro community is attempting to overcome the barriers of discrimination in order that individual Negroes will be able to share fully in the American dream. The need for a resolution of these injustices has been recognized in the Michigan Constitution by the establishment of the Civil Rights Commission. Similarly, many local communities in Michigan have established local human relations commissions.

The overwhelming majority of Negro citizens have not been involved in the recent outbreaks of violence in New York, New Jersey, and Chicago. All of the major Negro community organizations, such as NAACP, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Urban League have soundly condemned such violations while calling the attention of public officials and the community at large to the basic social cause of Negro unrest. The organized Negro community has always used the weapons of a non-violent direct action, legislation, and the courts to accomplish their goals.

The rioters in Rochester and Jersey City are young people who have been cut off from the mainstream of American life. The living conditions in some of the Negro ghettos in many of the cities place the residents under severe physical and psychological pressures. Poverty, disease, unemployment and crime are many times the rate of the rest of our society. These are people without hope or faith in the American dream, men and women and boys and girls who feel that they have nothing to lose.

Our society has been responsible for permitting the conditions which have produced the hopelessness, the despair, the hostility and the violence which has occurred. While it must be recognized that police departments are obviously not responsible for a situation that the total society has produced, the fact is that many of the riots have been touched off by a police incident. The police do represent to Negroes the historical effort of the white "power structure" to keep the Negro in an inferior position. In communities having a Negro ghetto, frequent contact with the policeman on the beat often makes the policeman the most convenient symbol of the total oppression.

While the police may not have created these total problems, police do have a responsibility to try to resolve the specific tensions existing between the departments and the Negro community. The Civil Rights Commission has received a total of 30 complaints alleging various types of police mistreatment of Negroes since the Commission was established on January 1. The Commission's records and investigations of these complaints, as well as its conferences with representatives of the Negro community, indicate the following police-community relations problems.

First, police officers often do not recognize the dignity and right to equal treatment of Negro citizens. Negroes walking down the street at night are often stopped for no apparent reason, except that being Negro itself is "suspicious." Negro citizens driving at night are also stopped and searched for no apparent reason. The recent experience of a judge in Detroit indicates that even Negro business and professional persons sometimes receive degrading treatment. Negroes as a group are regarded by many police officers as being inferior to white people and therefore subject to "special treatment." Specific complaints of Negroes allege illegal and unreasonable arrest, open searching of their person on the public streets, derogatory references to their race and color, and violent and intimidating physical abuse.

Another factor building tension between the police and the Negro community is in the employment, promotion and assignment of Negro police officers. All too often, police departments either refuse to hire Negro applicants or else establish a token quota system.

GUIDELINES

No one can say that a racial explosion will not occur in your community. It is urged that the best protection is preventive action, and that the time for action is now. The following guidelines have been prepared by the Civil Rights Commission.

1. An unequivocal public statement by the Mayor and the Police Chief respecting the rights of all citizens to equal protection and treatment under the law should be made. Further, every police officer should know that he is expected to conduct himself in a professional manner free of racial bias and that any officer found guilty of sadism or brutality will be dismissed immediately from the service.
2. The Police Department must recognize that investigations by police officers of police officers accused of misconduct or brutality does not satisfy, under most circumstances, the test of impartial and objective determination. Each community should seriously consider the establishment of a Police Review Board which includes respected citizens representative of the total community. Further, the police department and city officials should know that the Michigan Civil Rights Commission is also receiving and investigating complaints regarding police and the denial of civil rights and/or the equal protection of the laws. It is anticipated that some complaints may result in public hearings.

3. The Police Department's hiring, placement and promotion policies and practices must be free of racial discrimination at all levels. The Police Department should actively encourage members of minority groups to seek employment with the Department.
4. Each Police Department must recruit, place and promote officers who are mature in their judgment and actions, and responsible in their conduct toward all citizens. Higher standards, particularly in psychological attitudes, may be required at initial recruitment.
5. Each Police Department should have an in-service training program that emphasizes good human relations. Officers must understand and examine prejudice and discrimination and their own attitudes. One of the national agencies which will provide local police departments with advice and assistance in the establishment of such programs is the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Michigan State University has a department which specializes in police-community relations.
6. Maximum communications and cooperation must be established between the Police Department (on all levels) and the community, especially with the leadership in neighborhoods occupied predominantly by Negro citizens. Negro citizens and the police representatives should meet often at the local precinct level to discuss specific police-community problems in the area. It must be continually explained to both the Negro citizens and the police officers that police work will be carried out with complete fairness to all citizens. The avoidance of riots and/or riot control can only be accomplished when there is maximum communications and trust between the police and the citizenry.