

The needs of american cities for policing policy

[Government](#), [Military](#)



In analyzing the needs of American cities for policing policy for the future, race has to be considered in the equation. Researchers note that it is not possible to ignore the variable of race when describing the nature of policing in the United States. This includes efforts to develop a community policing concept, and race enters both for policing in the minority community and for the way policing does or does not use racial profiling so as to antagonize the minority community. In much of America, relations between the police and the African-American community have long been tense.

In some regions, the police are viewed as an occupying army present not to protect the people but to control them and to keep them in their place.

Numerous civil disturbances in recent decades can be traced to tensions between the police and the black community, from the riots of the summer of 1965 to the riot in Los Angeles after the first Rodney King verdict, from the problems in Crown Heights in New York to any number of disputed police shooting incidents in cities across the country.

Even without a specific incident to set off a disturbance, there is often an underlying tension between poor black communities and the surrounding society, with the police serving as a symbol of that society: The very complex, diffuse, interrelated, but still independent nature of the social, political, and economic institutions within American society, supported by layers and layers of public and private bureaucracies often manipulated by elusive, anonymous power brokers, perpetually frustrate the attempts of Black Americans to modify and reorder societal arrangements in their favor.

Therefore, the " system" is identified as the culprit (Wintersmith, 1974, p. 2). The fact that the police are the most likely target for black hostility and aggression, however, does not mean blacks do not have a real reason to fear the police or the rallying cry of " law and order": For Black Americans this slogan connotes oppression, police occupation of Black communities, inequitable and selective police treatment, disregard for human and constitutional rights of Black citizens, and continued denial of equitable opportunity (Wintersmith, 1974, p.).

Community Policing is a program that links the actions of the police with citizen participation as part of an overall effort to solve the problems of the community by involving the community, and such an approach can help inform the public and gain public acceptance for the minority hire program as well. The community policing model is based on that sort of assumption and on the view that crime has many complex causes and that police departments cannot keep the streets safe by themselves.

If crime is to be controlled, police must reach out to other local institutions, and indeed to the broader community at large, and create partnerships. Among the features of such a program are integrated investigations, team and neighborhood rather than a shift and divisional basis for officer deployment, foot patrols, and community service as a focus along with problem-oriented policing instead of mere crime-fighting.

Programs of this sort mean a different structure for the police as well as altered functions, allocations of resources, and general attitude. This can be a challenge to traditional police department structures because the

traditional method is to respond to citizen demand rather than to try to ascertain the underlying forces creating patterns of problems. The community policing method is proactive rather than responsive. The approach also calls attention to the degree to which the police are dependent on the public for support, information, and cooperation.

A recent study suggests that the benefits of community policing may have been oversold to the public, but there are also indications that community policing needs to be given time to work and that the police and the community must become more comfortable with one another to create a better atmosphere (Moran & Bucqueroux, 1995, p. 1057). One way for the police to learn more about the neighborhood and the residents is to be residents themselves. Requiring officers to live in the community is seen as a way of enhancing the community policing effort in a variety of ways and of adding to the comfort level on both sides.

Police and citizens should see themselves as part of the same community. Informal and casual contact between police officers and the public occurs at different rates in different communities. Often, members of the public keep their distance from police officers out of concern that they will be investigated or somehow drawn into police activity or because of a general distrust of the police: " American studies show high social isolation of police officers in comparison with people in other occupations (Guyot, 1991, p. 279).

Some see the police as having isolated themselves intentionally, leaving them open to charges of abusing their authority by coming into

neighborhoods in which they have no stake and using their power unwisely. Community policing is seen as a way of reversing this. Wilson and Kelling (1989) note of crime, " Most crime in most neighborhoods is local: the offenders live near their victims" (Wilson & Kelling, 1989, p. 46). This makes people in these neighborhoods feel less safe, just as they can be made to feel more safe if police offices live in the neighborhood.

The officers need to be comfortable with the victims and to understand the perpetrators, and living in the community they serve. Bringing more minorities into the police department is also often emphasized as a way to reach and include the black community. The proper model for bringing new hires into the department and for finding more qualified minorities is recruitment rather than hiring. Most departments emphasize hiring, which means that applicants come in on their own and ask to join the department, after which they are evaluated.

Recruitment involves seeking out qualified applicants and selling the idea and the department to them. This is a practice approach that can be conducted throughout the community, for individuals of all backgrounds, and this also avoids the quota stigma while including more minorities by identifying those who would fit the needs of the department. This still leaves a barrier in the form of the requirements for qualification, which need to be more flexible in order to emphasize training after acceptance rather than having the skills needed before applying.

This idea would also extend the reach of the recruiter more deeply into minority groups (Carter & Radelet, 1999, p. 173). The development of a

proper plan for implementing recruiting means determining need on several bases, including short-term needs, medium-term needs, and long-term needs. For all, the department needs to develop " a marketing plan for recruiting that includes operational, tactical, and strategic objectives" (Carter & Radelet, 1999, pp. 174-175).

Developing a plan for hiring more minority officers can begin with analyzing what other departments have done to address the same issue, and some of what is found in a survey on the subject includes good recommendations for an approach to take. For instance, an Action Plan offered by the department in the Canadian city of Brantford includes noting that the minorities already in the department can be a great help in recruiting new minority hires by serving as the face of the department in certain communities.

For instance, these officers can be depicted in recruitment materials in the law enforcement role whenever possible to encourage potential female and visible minority candidates. These officers can also be used to give active encouragement for the recruitment of potential candidates. They can also represent the department at high schools, colleges, and universities to attract potential candidates through continued participation in such things as the student co-op placement program, anti-vandalism program, and the High School Resource Officer program.

These officers can also work with groups in the community representing the community diversity to build relationships and encourage potential candidates, which will also involve sitting on police liaison committees and hosting Citizenship Court (Recruiting Process, 2004). Allen (2003) suggests

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that the only way to keep police departments focused on minority hiring is by instituting an affirmative action program, but given recent court rulings and public attitudes, that is not a viable solution. Allen does note that keeping up with minority hiring is a problem because what is required always changes, as noted with reference to mesa, Arizona:

The minority population is slowly yet steadily increasing. Both the increase in population and changes in ethnic demographics have affected the city's public safety needs and contribute to the department's difficulty in becoming more diverse (Allen, 2003). Among the problems noted for programs to hire more minorities are resistance from within from officers who feel threatened by change, community resistance, suits from those who believe they have been the target of reversediscrimination, and simple difficulties in finding qualified applicants.

Programs useful in police hiring can be adapted to the specific needs of minority hiring. In order to improve the quality of police recruits in general, programs have been set up at the college and university levels in order to recruit better-educated officers. Such programs can be used effectively at traditionally back colleges and universities in order to garner attention and attract minority recruits from that population. Such an approach would also be key to bringing in more recruits who would be good candidates for advancement in order to improve the mix in managerial roles.

One of the complaints leveled at some departments when they use affirmative action for minority hiring is that the level of recruits goes down, but this would not be the case with recruits attracted from minority colleges.

Within the department, a mentor program can be created to empower existing minority officers to give assistance, training, and advice to new recruits, a program that would help all officers and the department as a whole and that would also be especially useful for keeping new minority hires on track so they do not get discouraged and resign, as often happens.

The mentors also serve as role models of what advancement brings. Once the department is on its way to a more varied and advanced status, it can offer incentives to minority officers from other departments to transfer. This can be another way of gaining qualified recruits, especially for the management level, as such a move up can be offered as the incentive that attracts them in the first place. They can then serve as mentors to other minority applicants and help expand the reach of the department.

Their experience can also be invaluable. Once these programs are in place, they must be maintained in order to keep the department fresh, at a proper level of minority employment, and at a high level of community involvement and service and a high level of overall competence. The degree of change in the department in terms of the makeup of the force will show how well the program is working, just as normal evaluations of the work performance of new hires and old will show that the change is beneficial to the department.

This analysis shows that there is a need to consider race first in terms of the community and second in terms of the make-up of the police force. In both cases, this is because race remains a dividing issue and one that is exacerbated by most policing programs. Community policing offers at least

the chance of improving the system and reducing both the threat to the community and antipathy from the community.