

5

Report of an open meeting on

POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

in

PEORIA, ILLINOIS

By the Illinois State Advisory Committee

to the

United States Commission on Civil Rights

February 1966

ILLINOIS STATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
TO THE  
UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

CHAIRMAN

Samuel Belfer  
Peoria

VICE CHAIRMAN

Mrs. Jewel R. Lafontant  
Chicago

SECRETARY

Herman W. Stein, Jr.  
Chicago

MEMBERS

\*Rev. Arthur M. Brazier,  
Chicago

Patrick F. Crowley  
Chicago

Mrs. Orville N. Foreman  
Jacksonville

Hon. Robert L. Lansden  
Cairo

Robert Marks  
Chicago

Mitchell R. Meisner  
Chicago

Milton Rakove  
Evanston

William H. Robinson  
Chicago

Louis Schwartz  
Springfield

\*Appointed to the Advisory  
Committee 1/66

## FOREWORD

This report has been submitted to the United States Commission on Civil Rights by the Illinois State Advisory Committee to the Commission and is made public at its request.. The Commission has not had occasion to evaluate or act upon information contained in this report.

The primary role of the voluntary Advisory Committees to the Commission is to apprise the Commission of the status of civil rights throughout the United States as seen by these groups of interested citizens residing in each of the 50 States and the District of Columbia. The views expressed, of course, are their own.

## PREFACE

### The United States Commission on Civil Rights

The United States Commission on Civil Rights is an independent agency of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government created by the Civil Rights Act of 1957. By the terms of that Act, as amended by the Civil Rights Acts of 1960 and 1964, the Commission is charged with the following duties: investigation of individual discriminatory denials of the right to vote; study of legal developments with respect to denials of the equal protection of the law; appraisal of the laws and policies of the United States with respect to denials of equal protection of the law; maintenance of a national clearing-house for information respecting denials of the equal protection of the law; and investigation of patterns or practices of fraud or discrimination in the conduct of Federal elections. The Commission is also required to submit reports to the President and the Congress at such times as the Commission, the Congress, or the President shall deem desirable.

### The State Advisory Committees

An Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights has been established in each of the 50 States and the District of Columbia pursuant to section 105 (c) of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 as amended. The Committees are made up of responsible persons who serve without compensation. Their functions under their mandate from the Commission are to: advise the Commission of all relevant information concerning their respective States on matters within the jurisdiction of the Commission; advise the Commission upon matters of mutual concern in the preparation of reports of the Commission to the President and the Congress; receive reports, suggestions, and recommendations from individuals, public and private organizations, and public officials upon matters pertinent to inquiries conducted by the State Committee; initiate and forward advice and recommendations to the Commission upon matters which the State Committee has studied; assist the Commission in matters in which the Commission shall request the assistance of the State Committee; and attend, as observers, any open hearing or conference which the Commission may hold within the State.

On November 17, 1965, the Illinois Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights held a day-long open meeting in Peoria, Illinois to discuss that community's police-minority group relations. During the meeting the Committee sought to gather information regarding:

1. The attitudes of Negro citizens toward the police;
2. The experiences of Negro citizens with the police; and
3. Government programs and plans that affect police-minority group relations.

The Committee heard statements presented by eighteen persons including Mayor Robert Lenhausen; Leonard H. Carc, City Manager; Bernard Kennedy, Director of Public Safety; George Kennedy, State's Attorney; and Mrs. Robert Hinton, Executive Secretary, Commission on Human Relations.

Statements were also presented by representatives of various civil rights and community organizations and citizens active in various governmental, youth, and women's groups. Among those appearing were:

Rev. L. A. Albert, Star Hope Baptist Church;

Mrs. T. R. Bonds;

Rev. McKinley Calhoun, Zion Baptist Church;

Frank Campbell, Executive Director, Tri-County Urban League;

John Gwynn, President, Peoria NAACP;

Mrs. Allen Irving;

Rev. W. L. Johnson, Ward Chapel AME Church;

Mrs. Bertrand Mitchell;

Samuel Polk, Vice President, Peoria Branch, NAACP;

Thomas Pugh, Associate Editor, Peoria Journal Star;

Dr. James Stafford;

Rev. John B. Story, Executive Secretary, Council of Churches; and

Rev. Leon Sullivan, Catholic Chaplain, Peoria State Hospital.

On November 17, 1965, the Illinois Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights held a day-long open meeting in Peoria, Illinois to discuss that community's police-minority group relations. During the meeting the Committee sought to gather information regarding:

1. The attitudes of Negro citizens toward the police;
2. The experiences of Negro citizens with the police; and
3. Government programs and plans that affect police-minority group relations.

The Committee heard statements presented by eighteen persons including Mayor Robert Lenhausen; Leonard H. Caro, City Manager; Bernard Kennedy, Director of Public Safety; George Kennedy, State's Attorney; and Mrs. Robert Hinton, Executive Secretary, Commission on Human Relations.

Statements were also presented by representatives of various civil rights and community organizations and citizens active in various governmental, youth, and women's groups. Among those appearing were:

Rev. L. A. Albert, Star Hope Baptist Church;

Mrs. T. R. Bonds;

Rev. McKinley Calhoun, Zion Baptist Church;

Frank Campbell, Executive Director, Tri-County Urban League;

John Gwynn, President, Peoria NAACP;

Mrs. Allen Irving;

Rev. W. L. Johnson, Ward Chapel AME Church;

Mrs. Bertrand Mitchell;

Samuel Polk, Vice President, Peoria Branch, NAACP;

Thomas Pugh, Associate Editor, Peoria Journal Star;

Dr. James Stafford;

Rev. John B. Story, Executive Secretary, Council of Churches; and

Rev. Leon Sullivan, Catholic Chaplain, Peoria State Hospital.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It was evident at the meeting that there is a wide disparity of viewpoint between city officials and Negro citizens regarding the state of police-minority group relations in Peoria.

While official statements conceded some need for intensified police training in human relations, they basically emphasized the existence of positive relationships. In contrast, the Negro participants viewed police-minority group relations as a serious community problem. They charged that some police officers are arrogant and discourteous in their relationships with Negroes. Charges were also made that the police have discriminatory standards of arrest, fail to enforce civil rights laws, and on occasion use unnecessary force in making arrests and have been brutal in their treatment of Negroes.

While officials indicated that there are adequate lines of communication with the Negro community, most Negro participants stated that there was total absence of communication. In reply to Committee questions, Negro participants consistently indicated a lack of information regarding police plans and programs that could have a positive effect on police-minority group relations. Officials indicated that charges of police misconduct have been thoroughly investigated and disciplinary action taken where appropriate. They stated that charges of police misconduct are investigated or reviewed by the Police and Fire Commission, the State Attorney, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Many Negro participants had no knowledge of the procedures for investigating charges of police misconduct. Those individuals who were aware of the process, or had used it, stated that they had no faith in the procedure. Several individuals stated that

their complaints had not produced any response from Federal, State or local officials.

On the basis of the information presented at the open meeting, it is the Committee's conclusion that:

1. There is a widespread attitude among Negro Peorians that they are discriminated against by the police.
2. Negro Peorians believe that the remedies available to them are inadequate or unjust.

### SUGGESTIONS

The widespread belief among Negro Peorians that there is a serious problem of discriminatory and abusive police action is conclusive evidence of a poor relationship between the police and the Negro community. This relationship feeds upon itself, shaping and often hardening police attitudes, thus reinforcing distrust in the Negro community. It is vital that this pattern be broken if Peoria's police-minority group relations are to be improved. Indeed, we would be remiss if we did not note that several Negro citizens stated police-minority group relations are now at such a critical point that the peace of the city may be threatened. The Committee suggests that the following areas are essential elements of a program to improve police-minority group relations in Peoria:

1. Nondiscrimination Policy

A public statement should be issued by city officials clarifying the official policy regarding nondiscrimination in hiring, upgrading, and law enforcement. This declaration should be implemented through specific regulations which will provide guidance for police officers regarding effective minority group relations.

2. Complaint Investigation Procedure

Central to the widespread frustration voiced by Negro citizens is the belief that police are not held accountable for official misconduct.



Officials responsible for law enforcement should review their present procedures and develop a system that will assure Peoria's Negro citizens that those who enforce the law must rigorously abide by the law.

### 3. Police Training

Statements presented by city officials and Negro citizens universally noted the need for more intensive police training. An ongoing police training program for all members of the force should be promptly inaugurated. The program should include training in minority group relations and the enforcement of civil rights laws. The program could be strengthened by utilizing the resources made available through State and Federal police training legislation.

### 4. Channels of Communication

Officials of the Police Department and/or the Police and Fire Commission should initiate a series of regularly scheduled meetings with individuals selected by organizations and groups from all segments of the Negro community. Particular emphasis should be placed upon gaining the participation of individuals from groups that are furthest from the center of power and prestige. These meetings should provide a means for open and frank discussion of problems and grievances faced by both local citizens and the police.