

POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN TAMPA

--- The Beginning or End ---

**A Report of the Florida
State Advisory Committee
to the
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights**

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INTRODUCTION

The 1960's will be remembered as an era of urban violence in the United States. During this time the socioeconomic problems of our cities were dramatically brought to the attention of the American public. The sensitive and explosive nature of police-minority group relationships which have been documented, triggered many of the open conflicts in our Nation's cities. In the summer of 1967 Tampa was no exception.

The so-called Tampa riot occurred in early June 1967. The conditions that caused the riot were recognized as those shared by most riot torn cities in the 1960's: inadequate housing, poor quality education, unemployment, and insufficient recreational areas for minority groups. The event that triggered the riot in Tampa was the death of Martin Chambers, a 19 year old black youth. The circumstances surrounding his death were described as follows in the Kerner Commission Report:

On Sunday, June 11, 1967, Tampa, Florida sweltered in the 94 degree heat. At 5:30 p.m. a photo supply warehouse was broken into. Forty-five minutes later two police officers spotted three Negro youths as they walked near the State Building. When the youths caught sight of the officers, they ducked into an alley. The officers gave chase. As they ran, the suspects left a trail of photographic equipment scattered from yellow paper bags they were carrying.

The officers transmitted a general broadcast over the police radio. As other officers arrived on the scene, a chase began through and around the streets, houses, and alleys of the neighborhood. When Negro residents of the area adjacent to the Central Park Village Housing Project became aware of the

chase, they began to participate. Some attempted to help the officers in locating the suspects.

R. C. Oates, a Negro on the Tampa police force, spotted Martin Chambers, bare to the waist, wriggling away beneath one of the houses. Oates called for Chambers to surrender. Ignoring him, Chambers emerged running from beneath the house. A white officer, J. L. Calvert, took up the pursuit. Pursuing Calvert, in turn, were three young Negroes, all spectators.

Behind one of the houses a high cyclone fence created a two-foot wide alley twenty-five feet in length. As Chambers darted along the fence, Officer Calvert rounded the corner of the house. Calvert yelled to him to halt. Chambers ignored him. Calvert pointed his .38 revolver and fired. The slug entered the back of Chambers and passed completely through his body. Raising his hands over his head, he clutched at the cyclone fence.

When the three youths running behind Officer Calvert came upon the scene, they assumed Chambers had been shot standing in the position in which they saw him. Rumor quickly spread through the neighborhood that a white police officer had shot a Negro youth who had his hands over his head and was trying to surrender.

Two days of burning, looting, and rioting followed. White owned business establishments were broken into, looted, and vandalized. Some were burned. A white couple, innocently entering the area, was attacked, the man was badly beaten. A white woman, homeward bound, had her car stoned by a group of young black men.

Hours after the rioting started, the city of Tampa Police Department, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Department, and the Florida National Guard were mobilized to curb the riot. In addition, human relations group leaders within the city, well-known and respected black athletic coaches, and a group of young men, some of whom had participated in the initial rioting, made positive efforts to restore and keep the peace. After the official inquiry into the death of Martin Chambers was concluded and the verdict was delivered that

Officer Calvert had fired justifiably and in the line of duty, these persons were able to forestall additional violence.

Following the riot the City of Tampa took positive steps to improve employment opportunities and recreational facilities for blacks. However, the relative peace which followed did not last. Since that time the precarious relationship between the Tampa law enforcement agencies and ethnic and racial minority communities has not significantly improved. Many contend that the situation has worsened.

It was against this background that the Florida State Advisory Committee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights held a two-day open hearing in May 1971. The purpose of the open meeting was to investigate generally deteriorating relations between the city of Tampa Police Department, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Department, and Tampa's black community and to find ways of developing better relations. Special attention was given the increasingly pervasive attitude of hostility and fear of the police in the black community. This attitude was reflected in the initial request for the hearing, made in February 1971, as the result of allegations of police entrapment procedures in two incidents -- one in Tampa, another in St. Petersburg -- and as a result of incidents of alleged police brutality.

During the 2 days of meetings the Committee heard law enforcement officials, local attorneys and court officials, human rights officials, representatives of the media, and individual citizen's allegations of police misconduct.

Tampa, in Hillsborough County, is the center of the fruit canning, preserving, and tobacco industries. It is also an important port city with large wholesaling activities. Tampa, with St. Petersburg in adjoining Pinellas County, form the second largest metropolitan area in Florida. In 1970 the population of the two-county area was 1,012,594, a 31 percent increase since 1960.

The population of Tampa grew from 274,970 in 1960 to 277,767 in 1970, or one percent. Hillsborough County, however, grew from 397,788 in 1960 to 449,265 in 1970, or 23.2 percent. The following statistics clearly show the heavy concentration of blacks within the central city:

<u>Hillsborough County</u>		<u>Tampa</u>	
White	422,119	White	222,082
Black	66,648	Black	54,720
Other	1,498	Other	965
Total	490,265	Total	277,767

The black community is plagued by problems of housing, sanitation, health and education. It is this community and its relations with the law enforcement officials in the city of Tampa and Hillsborough County which is the focus of this study.*

*Tampa, the only sizable city in the county has its own municipal police department which handles problems within the city limits. The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Department patrols the area outside the city limits. Technically of course, it has jurisdiction over the entire county, but usually the sheriff's officers would only become involved in the city limits if requested by the Tampa police chief.

FINDINGS

The general consensus of witnesses testifying before the Florida State Advisory Committee was that an aura of tension, distrust, and fear exists between the police and the black residents of Tampa. One witness stated that black people generally -- "from little old ladies to boys on the block" -- feel that they are dealt with unfairly by the police. Many persons who had agreed to testify about personal encounters with police did not appear because they feared reprisal. A vivid example of fear was given by one witness who described a young child who hid in a closet for 3 hours after a policeman had entered his home.

The degree of hostility felt by many black people, especially young black men, is demonstrated by the statement that if the status of police-community relations is not significantly improved, the "sniping of white policemen will become one of the most famous pastimes in the city". In an attempt to avoid this, a petition signed by 1,025 individuals was submitted to the mayor and the chief of police imploring that all necessary action be taken to prevent both physical and verbal abuse of black citizens by police. This petition followed more than 50 official complaints filed with the Tampa Commission of Community Relations over a 2 year period concerning police treatment of minority persons.

Witnesses at the meeting described several instances of police behavior which they believed contributed to continuing tensions. These included excessive use of force; verbal abuse; insulting gestures; overtly prejudiced individuals assigned to work in inner-city areas; poor utilization of minority-group officers in tense situations; lack

of sensitivity in dealing with nonwhites; unwillingness to reevaluate and broaden police-community relations efforts; failure to discipline policemen whose actions are discriminatory; failure to act on brutality complaints; failure to employ minority group officers; unwillingness to outline a formal and effective procedure for handling citizen complaints; selective use of charges against nonwhite persons; and an unwillingness to communicate with those persons who feel aggrieved by police actions.

It was not possible at the meeting to determine the validity of the complaints. However, the fact that such beliefs are held by minority group leaders, many residents, and those who have day-to-day contact with these communities, augers ill for the establishment of a police-community relationship which will facilitate police performance in the entire city. On the other hand, it was noted by police that while the department was often subject to criticism, commendable activities were seldom mentioned. Active recognition of the department's positive actions must be made if police-community relations are to improve.

There are several factors working for positive change in Tampa's law enforcement agencies. One of which is the stated desire of Tampa's Deputy Police Chief to increase the number of black policemen.

At present about 3 percent or 16 of 560 officers in the Tampa Police Department are black. Two are sergeants. Two are detectives (one has since been promoted to lieutenant). Of the sheriff's total staff of 300, including all levels from civil deputies, bailiffs to clerical staff, approximately 5 percent or 14 are black employees scattered in various departments. Of this 14, eight are deputy sheriffs.

The sheriff's department has also stated its desire to hire more qualified black law enforcement officers. Recruitment has been difficult. Many blacks do not want to be a part of a governmental structure which they find oppressive. The failure of black officers to be promoted within the police department may also discourage young black persons from joining the Tampa police force. Also, black officers often face intense personal pressures because they are not accepted, and sometimes even resented, by the black community. The possible assets of employment, such as high income and fringe benefits are not available to prospective black officers. It should be noted that of all cities in the county in the same population category, there is only one city, Jackson, Mississippi, in which the police receive lower salaries than in Tampa. Therefore, in the eyes of many black persons the disadvantages of becoming police officers far outweigh the advantages.

Thus, the initial process of becoming a law enforcement officer may be prohibitively difficult for minority group members. Due to inadequate staff and order of priorities, the Tampa Police Department and the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Department do not have an active minority recruitment program. In addition, the testing and evaluation procedures used by these departments may be considered culturally and racially biased.

There are still young blacks who desire to become affiliated with the law enforcement agencies in Tampa. This is evidenced by the presence of blacks in the police auxiliaries of the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Department. Members of the three police auxiliaries receive no compensation. They must buy their own uniforms and equipment which

may cost over \$100. The willingness of individuals to make a personal investment of money, time, and service through police auxiliaries indicates they are excellent prospects for police service. The participation of blacks in police auxiliaries and the applications of blacks to the police forces in Tampa can be contrasted with other cities in the United States which have had no minority group applicants in the past few years. At least in Tampa all minority group members are not totally disillusioned with law enforcement.

The city of Tampa Police Department has established a number of community relations programs. Through its film library the department has exposed over 70,000 to films that deal with police-community relations. A community service program of the Tampa Police Department is designed for residents in low-income areas. Community service officers conduct educational and crime prevention programs in schools, churches, and civic organizations. Specific programs are geared to meet the needs and interests of all age groups from preschool children to the elderly. In the areas of recreation and athletics, the Tampa police have also assumed an important role. The summer program is highlighted by street dances and films. The Police Athletic League provides organized recreational activities in various popular sports-- football, basketball, baseball, boxing, etc.

The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Department also established a police community relations section in July 1970. This division has undertaken a number of substantive and creative projects. In cooperation with the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the community relations section has worked on curriculum development and has conducted

institutes in police-community relations. Seminar series have been conducted for police officers at a local junior college, and during one 6 month period approximately 60,000 county citizens were exposed to crime prevention and community relations programs. The department also sponsors a weekly column by a black police officer for one of the black newspapers and a weekly radio broadcast by a black officer to the minority community.

Police officials have expressed a desire to be innovative in modernizing their departments. One activity being considered is the establishment of police academy boards and identifying police-community relations program. Such boards would be made up of representatives of all groups within the community. Both the city police department and the sheriff's department have expressed a willingness to cooperate with such an advisory committee.

The judicial system in the city of Tampa and in Hillsborough County may be indicted for unequal treatment received by all poor, and especially nonwhites. There are built-in problems due to substantive law. It appears that persons in the lower socioeconomic classes are those most adversely affected by the legal system. The fact that city ordinances hold a penalty of a fine or imprisonment illustrates this situation.* Clearly, it is the poor, regardless of race, who go to jail. Of course, notice should be given to the income and unemployment statistics which clearly indicate that a large proportion of the black population falls in the category of the poor. Many poor people who need legal assistance cannot afford it. This situation induces a disproportionate number of

guilty pleas among this group (even if the services of public defenders are provided), it also reinforces the fears of the poor that they are being discriminated against. Specific examples of the disproportionate allocation of justice to white and nonwhite defendants in Tampa would substantiate this fear of discrimination on the part of minority group members. The need for reform in the administration of justice is vividly apparent. Only when the judicial system has been purged of its inequities can it contribute to the respect for law that is essential for favorable police-community relations.

Unquestionably, institutions and groups other than law enforcement agencies and the courts contribute to police-community relations. The news media, for example, have tremendous resources that could be utilized toward improving police-community relations. All Tampa newspapers have staff assigned to cover police matters. One newspaper has displayed special interest in law enforcement and the administration of justice. It can be hoped that the newspapers, radio, and television stations will develop an orientation that will result not only in objective reporting of news events involving the police, but also a sensitivity and awareness of the role they can play as a channel of communication between the minority community and the police.

At least two organizations are dedicated to cultivating harmonious, peaceful relations, fair treatment, and equal opportunity for all people. However, neither the Tampa Commission on Community Relations nor the Florida Commission on Human Relations had adequate staff or housing resources to combat the social and economic problems that lead to dissatisfaction and confrontation of minority groups with "the establishment". In fact, their efforts in the area of police-community relations are limited.

CONCLUSION

In Tampa there are signs that police-community relations can be improved. The city of Tampa Police Department and the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Department profess a willingness to evaluate programs, policies, and practices to develop good relations with minority communities. At an open meeting all the media expressed an awareness of their responsibility to help improve relationships between law enforcement officials and minority group members. The concerns and efforts of groups such as Tampa's Commission of Community Relations should also be noted. However, lack of staff and shortage of funds limit their efforts.

In spite of these hopeful signs, several stark realities exist: the riot of the summer of 1967 and the fact that many of the situations which prompted that riot still exist; the pervasion fear, distrust, and hostility of much of the black community toward the police; continuing complaints of verbal and physical abuse filed with the Tampa Commission on Community Relations; and a petition containing more than a thousand signatures imploring city officials to take immediate affirmative action to better police-community relations in Tampa. The significance of these events must be recognized and positive responses must be made to them now.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations, proposals, and suggestions are made to the Commission on Civil Rights, and to those interested in improving police-community relations in Tampa:

The Mayor and City Council

1. A city ordinance should be passed adopting a policy of non-discrimination and an affirmative action program in every department of the city government, with appropriate enforcement procedures.
2. The mayor and city council should review the purpose and activities of the Tampa Commission on Community Relations and give it the needed powers, responsibilities, and staff to enable it to play a maximum effective role in both majority and minority communities.
3. The position of an ombudsman, filled by a person acceptable to all major groups, should be established. The ombudsman's function should be to review complaints filed by citizens against any city department or agency.

The Police Department and the Sheriff's Department

1. The city of Tampa Police Department and the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Department should develop an aggressive recruitment program designed to attract a greater number of minority persons to the police field. Programs such as the Neighborhood Youth Corps and the New Careers Program should be involved in this effort.
2. Law enforcement agencies in Tampa should review their present qualifications and eliminate those which may not be job related and which may discriminate against nonwhites.
3. Affirmative steps should be taken to upgrade minority group officers. If necessary, a compensatory program should be established to increase the ability of minorities to obtain promotion to supervisory positions in law enforcement agencies.
4. The police and sheriff's departments should appoint minority persons to top policy-making positions. Minority group policemen should play a major role in police-community relations and in police recruitment.
5. Police officials should meet on a regular basis with interested citizens to discuss problems affecting police-community relations. These discussions should be held on an area basis and should develop into regular committees under a city-wide umbrella. These Committees should develop recommendations to improve citizen-police cooperation.

6. Disciplinary action taken against law enforcement officers by their respective departments should be made public. Likewise, commendatory activities of the police departments should get full publicity. An expanded budget for public information on police activities should be considered.
7. Publicity should be given the existence of the present internal mechanism for handling complaints against policemen. This mechanism should be strengthened by making periodic reports to the public of the number of cases handled, the substance of the complaint, and the findings.
8. An accountable external mechanism to handle complaints against the police should be established at the earliest possible date. This mechanism should represent all segments of the community.
9. Steps should be taken within the police department and the sheriff's department to see that police actions are neither provocative, discriminatory, nor expressive of prejudice, and that a climate is established whereby accusations of such actions would not have credence. Strict enforcement of department regulations prohibiting the use of racial slurs and insults should be carried out and publicized.
10. Regulations governing the use of deadly weapons should be publicized.
11. The public should be made aware of human relations training given to the police. Local minority group individuals should be utilized in such training.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The role of the Florida Civil Service in the employment and upgrading of minority group law enforcement officers should be explored. This inquiry should consider any obstacles that might exist to implementing innovative ideas in the community service area and also any obstacles to the proper discipline of policemen.
2. Efforts should be made to increase minority representation in the entire justice system in the Tampa area, as well as to improve the functioning of the judicial system for minority group persons.
3. The religious, civic, and business leaders, especially those in newspaper, radio, and television media, should give high priority to efforts to improve the climate of opinion in Tampa and to establish a city where all citizens can work together on the basis of true equality.