

CURRENTS

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READINGS IN RACE RELATIONS

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The Urban Alliance on Race Relations is an educational agency and an advocate and intermediary for racial minorities. It works towards encouraging better race relations, increased understanding and awareness among our multicultural, multiracial population through programs of education directed at both the private and public sectors of the community. It focuses its efforts on the institutions of our society including educational systems, employment, government, media, legislation, police, social service agencies, and human services, in order to reduce patterns of discrimination and inequality of opportunity which may exist within these institutions.

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Race Relations and Policing

Considerable attention has been given in Canada in recent years to the treatment of racial minorities by overwhelmingly white-dominated police forces. A number of incidents of conflict between racial minorities and the police have been highlighted by the media, and the causes of concern have been documented and confirmed in a number of government reports: in Toronto by such reports as *Now Is Not Too Late* (1977) chaired by Walter Pitman, and the *Report to the Civic Authorities of Metropolitan Toronto and its Citizens* (1979) by Cardinal G. Emmett Carter. In Ontario, the most recent report is that of the *Race Relations and Policing Task Force* (1989). Elsewhere in Canada in the criminal justice system, racism has been documented by the *Royal Commission on the Donald Marshall Jr. Prosecution* (1986), and the most recent report emanating from the *Halifax Race Riots* (1991), the *Harper Commission* (1991) in Manitoba, and the *Rolf and Cawsey* reviews of the criminal justice system in Alberta (1991).

The "symbolic reassurance" of these task forces and official reports in and of themselves might be regarded as important and successful in the immediate political sense. However, even if all the recommendations of these reports were implemented, if we don't at the same time address the wider economic, social and political aspects of racial inequality it is safe to predict that the state of police-race relations will continue to be an uneasy and volatile relationship for some time to come. If one were to succeed in eliminating the wider racial inequalities in our society, it would of course be much easier to attain a much healthier police-race relations climate.

Changing expectations and definitions of policing, demographic changes, the changing nature of crime, the economic situation, and many other factors are forcing a recognition of the need to link issues of policing

within a wider community social framework. The notion of community-based policing has become no longer simply a nice philosophy. Rather than a luxurious ideal, circumstances have created the imperative to implement community-based policing as the only method and practice that will allow policing to cope and respond effectively to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Recent incidents and all the government reports have certainly heightened the awareness and concern of decision-makers within the policing community of the realities of a racially diverse population and its impact on the way policing is carried out. Yet what are the practical, hands-on, results oriented initiatives that can be undertaken by the police that will have a measurable impact on improved relations with the minority communities? Beyond ad-hoc, tempo-

rary responses, the articles in this issue of *Currents* suggests that the groundwork is being laid for permanent, integrated strategies that will fundamentally alter the way in which policing services will be provided in the future.

Within this framework it is clear that police race relations is moving from a reactive, incident driven process to an agenda that focuses on a relationship that is based on cooperation and true partnership.

Race Relations and Policing: A Minority Perspective

Dan McIntyre

The dramatic revelations and condemnation of the inherently unfair and racist practices of the criminal justice system, including police practices, are coming to public attention across the country. Royal Commissions and public inquiries are regularly calling into question the credibility of police to effectively provide fair and just services in their contacts with Aboriginal people and racial minorities, in particular members of the Black community.

At the outset, it is important that the reader understands that this writer does not profess to be an expert in the field of race relations and policing nor would I necessarily recognize one if I met such a person. The perspective that I bring to this subject is based on a lifelong residency in Canada as a member of the Black community, and several years of work in the race relations and human rights field.

Recently I have had a remarkable opportunity to work on race relations and policing issues in Ontario with an exceptionally talented and committed group of people, including police and community leaders.

This article represents a "minority" perspective on race relations and policing.

Racism is not exclusively a "policing problem." It is a problem which has existed and does exist in all of our institutions and relations since the European explorers first came into contact with the First Nations of this land. The legacy of exploitation and genocide of the Aboriginal people in this country is at long last being acknowledged by non native Canadians.

We also know that others have been

victims of racism — subjected to slavery, economic exploitation and discrimination, exclusion and expulsion. Some, because of physical characteristics distinct from those of European descent, continue to be victims of discrimination in employment, housing, education, access to services and decision making structures. They are victims of discrimination regardless of how long they have been Canadians, and how well they speak the language and understand or adopt the customs. We are collectively referred to as racial minorities.

Having recognized that all institutions must change does not diminish the duty of the institution of policing to ensure that its house is clean, and not "lily white."

Demographic changes, as reflected

by the majority of newcomers to Canada who are from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, will continue to put pressure on police services to change the complexion of the police personnel as well as the way services are delivered to these communities.

The emerging strength and voices of the Aboriginal communities, as they assert their rights to self-government and empowerment, present a new challenge to the traditional ways that police have addressed the native people.

With respect to the Aboriginal communities, we have seen shocking evidence of racism as represented in the *Nova Scotia Royal Commission on the Donald Marshall Jr. Prosecution* (1990), *Policing and the Blood*

Reserve (Alberta, 1990), and the *Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba* (1991). The last study not only concluded that the "justice system has failed Manitoba's Aboriginal people on a massive scale" but has called for an Aboriginally controlled justice system including police services.

Concerning policing and racial minorities, in addition to the Donald Marshall Jr. Commission which addressed the issues of racism and the criminal justice system related to Black Nova Scotians, there have been several reports in Ontario including:

- The report of the late Arthur Maloney to the Metropolitan Toronto Police (1975);
- The *Royal Commission into Metropolitan Toronto Police Practices* conducted by the Honourable Mr. Justice Donald R. Morand (1976);
- The report by Walter Pitman, *Now is Not Too Late* conducted for the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto (1977);
- The *Report to the Civic Authorities of Metropolitan Toronto Council and its Citizens*, by Cardinal G. Emmett Carter, former Archbishop of Toronto (1979);
- The *Report of the Task Force on the Racial and Ethnic Implications of Police Hiring, Training, Promotion and Career Development*, chaired by Dr. Reva Gerstein for the Ontario Ministry of Solicitor General (1980); and
- The *Report of the Race Relations and Policing Task Force*, appointed by the Ontario Solicitor General and chaired by Clare Lewis, Police Complaints Commissioner (1989).

While the various reports prior to the Lewis Task Force provided useful recommendations, it was the Lewis Task Force that provided a comprehensive "blueprint" for change. It has been that report which has guided the work of the Ontario Ministry of Solicitor General in its race relations and policing change strategy.

In addition to the numerous reports in Ontario, there was a similar study by a task force chaired by J.

Bellemare, *Investigation into Relations Between Police Forces, Visible and Other Ethnic Minorities* (Montreal, 1988).

All of these task forces and reports were responses to high-profile incidents involving Aboriginal people and racial minorities, and in many instances, incidents which have implicated the police in the serious injury or death of members of the Aboriginal or Black communities.

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Notwithstanding the studies, the incidents continue with alarming frequency, as this excerpt from a column on Montreal by André Picard in *The Globe and Mail* (November 8, 1991), so poignantly illustrates:

"Why they (human rights activists) ask, do police so fear visible minorities? ... Why, when non-whites are alleged to have been involved in crimes, do police assume they will act violently?"

The pertinence of such questions and the need for answers was underscored last Friday when witnesses — in laudable Crime Prevention Week style — complained that a black youth was being subjected to racial taunts by three white men.

Police who arrived on the scene

ignored the men but pulled a gun on the boy and took him into custody. Had he run or struggled, he could easily have become another statistic.

"The question I'm asking myself ... is what's behind this, how is it that this officer's first reaction was to go toward a black?" said MUC Police Chief Alain St.-Germain.

Less than a week after that column appeared, yet another Black youth in Toronto was shot (in the head), allegedly by a Metro Toronto police officer as the youth was fleeing a crime scene involving a warehouse break-in (*Toronto Star*, November 10, 1991). The newspaper reported that investigators of the shooting did not believe that the fleeing suspects were armed.

What is Meant by Institutionalized or Systemic Racism?

In the midst of these charges of racism are a number of bewildered, angry, and defensive police officers who feel that they are the victims of injustice. They hotly deny any wrongdoing or racist practices. There are also police officers who admit that the institution as a reflection of Canadian society is de facto racist. It is racist, not necessarily because of ill will, but because the racism is built in (or "systemic") to policing.

The examples of how that racism is reflected in policing have been well documented elsewhere. However, one need only to review the employment practices of police services to get but one indication of the problem.

The challenge to bring about positive changes to policing starts with a recognition and a common understanding of the issues. While there has been some progress in this area, unfortunately when there is any suggestion that racism is an issue we have been conditioned in Canada to deny its existence, or to dismiss it as an isolated incident or aberration. This rationalization might be described as the "rotten apple" syndrome. In other

words, it is recognized that in any large workforce there will be the occasional bad apple who is racist.

While indeed there are the hard-core racists in any large segment of Canadian society, the concept of institutionalized racism does not denote any particular motive or explicit ideology about the superiority of one racial group over another.

Rather it refers to such institutional customs and procedures such as the "old boy's" network of hiring in which only Whites hear about the jobs, or are encouraged to apply, or get coaching on how to get selected.

It's the assumption (unconscious or otherwise), that if someone is of a different race, especially Aboriginal or Black, then they are to be viewed as a threat.

It's the conviction that turbans should not be allowed as part of the police uniform to accommodate Sikh officers. Such a position does not recognize that this denies an employment opportunity to a significant group of Canadians because of their religion. In other words in the name of tradition, notwithstanding that it is inherently racist, police should only accommodate those of predominately European and Christian background.

Whether intentional or not the outcome, as documented time and again, points to unequal, unfair and sometimes tragic consequences.

Consequently, there continues to be a need to raise the level of debate and understanding so that there is a level of commitment to address racism as an institutionalized part of Canadian society. There needs to be an understanding that even if all the "rotten apples" were removed, we would still have a profound problem because the same old assumptions, practices and policies would remain intact.

Fairness and Equality: Conflicting Views

As part of that debate there is and will continue to be a perspective shared by many police officers that current moves to address the institu-

tionalized racism in policing will result in lower standards, which will jeopardize the safety of officers. Much of the present focus on race relations and policing is viewed as a result of pandering to minority extremists by politicians who should be kept at arm's length.

There continues to be a need to raise the level of debate and understanding so that there is a level of commitment to address racism as an institutionalized part of Canadian society.

Perspectives from many in the minority and Aboriginal communities differ significantly from that view. There is a strong belief that police as well as other parts of the justice system do not in fact dispense justice. Therefore, special measures to improve the representation and service provided to address inequities and tensions between minorities and police are urgently needed. In summary, new initiatives are needed to enhance community confidence and empowerment, proportional representation and justice.

One perspective is that race relations initiatives are moving too far, too fast. The other is that there has been too little, too late.

Current Trends

I would agree that too little has been done in the area of race relations. However, it is not too late and there are positive developments in policing. That obviously does not mean that the changes can take place soon enough to

turn around an institution overnight. Unfortunately the inequities and perhaps tragedies will remain with us for some time to come but hopefully at a reduced rate.

There is no question that change is inevitable in policing. And it will continue at an ever accelerating rate for the next while. Some view this change as a serious threat to the integrity of policing, while others see it as an opportunity to improve it.

Some of those positive signs of change which can have an impact on improving race relations and policing include:

- The concept of community policing which embraces the principles of community partnership and empowerment;
- Employment equity to improve the representation of racial minorities and Aboriginal people in police services;
- New developments in training for police personnel to improve the service to minority and Aboriginal communities;
- First Nations policing agreements and services are being established in different parts of the country in recognition of the principles of self-government and that non Aboriginal police services have been inadequate;
- Civilian review and investigation mechanisms are being established in some jurisdictions to address the concern that these procedures must be at arm's length from the police to have any credibility with the public;
- The federal government recently announced the establishment of a Centre for Race Relations and Policing to provide support and information to police services to enhance their services to the racial minority and Aboriginal communities;

- The Municipality of Metro Toronto is currently doing a comprehensive race relations audit on the Metro Toronto Police Service, which is a first in the country and should provide valuable experience in addressing the accountability issue.

There is arguably no other sector in the public domain which is doing so much to address the race relations issues in Canada. That is the good news. The flip side to that assertion is the paucity of work that is being done in other sectors. In addition, there is an almost complete absence of evaluation or accountability for the work that is in process including policing.

While policing is doing more than others in race relations, almost none of it is being audited or evaluated.

Also, the race relations initiatives are for the most part ad hoc and disjointed. There is a general lack of a coherent and comprehensive change strategy in place to address the various employment, training, and service issues in race relations in an integrated way. For example, it is not of much use to put into place a race relations training program unless the police department at all levels is ready and supportive of the changes that the training requires of the police service.

At the risk of being chauvinistic, there is at least one exception to the above. While still very much in its infancy, that is the Ontario policing scene. Currently there is a comprehensive change strategy to address the issues raised by the *Lewis Task Force Report on Race Relations and Policing*. The strategy includes employment equity legislation, integration of race relations content in police training, development of police/community relations models through a grants program, and the development of a model race relations policy and guidelines. All of these initiatives are moving forward in a holistic and integrated fashion.

There is also a new Police Services Act which addresses a number of race relations issues including community

policing, civilian complaints review and civilian investigation of police action, which result in serious injury or death. This ensures that there is a legislative base to much of the race relations development.

Leadership and Accountability

Ensuring that these changes to improve policing in terms of race relations actually occur requires leadership. There is a need for leadership with the requisite commitment to bring about the change. There is a need for the strategic, financial and human resource skills to create an environment conducive to change, and the tenacity to follow it through over the long haul.

This leadership must be reflected in the top echelons in the organization including the chief and the police boards. Also, that leadership must be demonstrated by the police unions and associations.

One veteran police official commented, in reference to the need for police services to develop a comprehensive strategic plan on race relations, that most police chiefs do not develop strategic plans for anything so this is a foreign concept for which they are ill prepared.

Whether that comment is valid or not, unless the leadership and the mechanisms to monitor progress are in place, the change process will be characterized by tremendous resistance including misinformation, backlash and sabotage. The change may still occur but it will be largely cosmetic and ineffective. It is under these circumstances that minority and Aboriginal communities, especially the youth, throw their hands up in despair and the "too little too late" perception becomes reality.

Conclusion

There has been a number of developments across the country to address the very real problems of institutionalized racism and racial tensions between police and minorities. The extent to which these initiatives are

effective is still uncertain. However, we have come some distance in acknowledging the problem.

The challenges ahead of us are to place these race relations initiatives and others in the context of a comprehensive strategic plan. This plan must include short and long term initiatives, a financial plan, accountability mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation processes, and provision for rewards and sanctions.

It does not mean the development of special measures if or when there are surplus resources. It means using current resources in a different way. When that is understood and achieved, then we will have truly turned the corner in addressing the critical issue of institutionalized racism in policing.

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