

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

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NAACP PROPOSALS FOR EFFECTIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CRIME PREVENTION

Introduction

The NAACP wants to emphasize its unalterable opposition to crime. As the leading voice of the Negro community, it points out that the Negro is especially victimized by the hoodlum, the punk, and the criminal. The Negro citizen is often forced to live in high crime neighborhoods which are poorly and inadequately policed. He often especially lacks that security in his home and neighborhood which is the prerogative of all citizens. His desire is not that the police should coddle criminals of any color, but that all should benefit from equal and effective law enforcement. He complains that prejudiced police officers too often ignores trouble calls from Negro citizens, do not adequately police Negro neighborhoods, operate under the bigoted misapprehension that most Negroes are criminal and, above all, do not take steps to discipline and root out those police officers who subject Negro citizens to insulting abuse ranging from verbal epithets to incredible brutality.

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The NAACP believes that the community at large does not understand the magnitude of this problem because it is obscured by a conspiracy of silence in the news media. As a result, the great majority of white citizens are not informed enough to join with the NAACP in effective protest. The NAACP has personally investigated and protested numerous episodes of police brutality to Negro citizens which, even when verified by the Courts or the Civil Rights Commission, has never yet resulted in any effective action against the guilty police officer.

These investigated incidents are only the tip of an iceberg which generate deep suspicion among the Negro community about the motives of the police force. Consequently, we now have a tremendous gulf between the police department and the Negro community. The police are alienated from one-half of the City and the Mayor's suggested "stop and frisk" ordinance is inevitably perceived as yet another move to harass and oppress Negro citizens.

Proposals should aim to bridge, not widen, the gulf that exists. At this time the NAACP offers seven constructive proposals in a sincere effort to solve this problem for the benefit of all citizens and within the framework of our Constitution.

1. City Council Hearings.

The NAACP urges the City Council to begin immediate open hearings on the problem of police-community relations. Testimony of peace officers, Civil Rights groups, and af-

frieved citizens, should be heard and evaluated publicly. All citizens should have an opportunity to hear the legitimate grievances of these groups so that new solutions can be examined in the real context of the problems. The hearings should be concerned with discovering the facts as to whether there is any legitimacy to the complaints of police misuse of citizens. They should also take testimony on the frequently repeated complaint that the request of Negro citizens for police help are often ignored or delayed.

2. Public Review Board.

The Negro community presently lacks confidence in the ability of the Police Department to discipline those of its men who discredit the police force by sadistic excesses. Proven and flagrant examples of brutality against Negro citizens by some police officers have been consistently overlooked or handled by merely token disciplinary action. Some few police officers have been repetitively involved in brutal incidents against Negro citizens. The NAACP believes that the police themselves should prefer some mechanism which insures that the entire police force is not discredited by a handful of sadistic bullies. Mistaken group loyalty should not permit the rotten apples to contaminate the barrel. A Public Review Board consisting of citizens of integrity would be a protection to the reputation of the police and a reassurance to the total community. This Public Review Board should have its own

investigating staff, and should be entirely separate from the Police Department.

The extent, or even the existence, of police brutality is irrelevant to the need for a Public Review Board. Opponents of the plan deny the existence of police brutality exists. Their suspicions alone justify the creation of such an impartial tribunal. The police, moreover, should welcome any opportunity to clear themselves from allegations of improper conduct particularly if they claim that such allegations are totally unfounded.

3. Emphasis on neighborhood police.

In recent years, the police force has been increasingly mechanized with emphasis on the use of the big four cruiser and the tactical mobile unit as trouble shooters. Such developments are necessary to handle the problems for which they were originally designed. However, the NAACP believes we should also return to the concept of the neighborhood policeman who patrols a regular beat, knows his territory, and has an opportunity to develop human relationships with the citizens he serves. The Negro community is especially sensitive to the image of the policeman as part of a highly mechanized army invading alien and hostile territory. The policeman who knows his beat is much more alert to suspicious incidents, can earn the trust of the community and can more effectively prevent and detect criminal behavior. The citizen who knows his policeman will share information with him that will aid in the

success of his work.

4. Stepped up recruitment of Negro police.

The NAACP acknowledges that the Police Department has recently made a sincere effort to recruit more Negro police officers. It believes that the recruitment of more Negroes is essential to good police-community relations. Because of long-standing roadblocks designed to discourage and reject Negro applicants, there are now only 160 Negro police officers in the total police force of over 4,500 officers.

The removal of these roadblocks is welcome, but their long-time effects remain. The Negro citizen is often reluctant to join the police force because of the alienation between the police and his own community. He feels like a Quisling joining a hostile group with alien loyalties. If the Police Department would punish its prejudiced members and establish a Public Review Board, this negative image of the Police Department would change. With this development, the Police Department would become an enviable career for the Negro, as well as the white citizen. The NAACP is convinced that such a policy would enable the Police Department to recruit many Negroes who would welcome the opportunity to join a truly integrated Police Department.

5. Increased professionalization of the Police force.

Increased professionalization should not be accom-

plished by raising existing educational standards for admission to the Police Department at the expense of otherwise qualified Negro applicants who have often lacked the opportunity for higher education.

Increased professionalization will be assisted by firm disciplinary measures against those police who infringe constitutional limits. The NAACP recommends upgrading the force by programs of intensive in-service training on such subjects as constitutional law, community and intercultural relations, scientific techniques of law enforcement, etc. The NAACP strongly supports increased pay scales for an upgraded and integrated police department. It believes that pay scales and promotions should provide an inducement for police officers to attend in-service training programs. It recognizes and deplores the frustrations of the poorly paid and understaffed police department in meeting the law enforcement needs of our complex urban society.

6. Citizens Task Forces.

The NAACP proposes the establishment of a high level Citizens Committee on Crime. This committee would consist of citizens of irreproachable integrity, and acceptability. This committee would bring together within local communities (target areas consisting of three or four blocks) many local citizens who are concerned about the crime problem, and are willing to help solve it. The parent committee would establish local task forces of citizens in the

target communities. It would bring these task force committees together with the police. Liaison between the police and the task force would be through the Citizens' Committee. This combination of police and citizens working together assures that the police and law enforcement objective will be operating within and under citizen supervision and control so that it functions in a manner consistent with generally accepted standards of behavior and also will not be able to ignore the visible crime, such as prostitution and blind pigs, which often appear to be tolerated or ignored by the Police Department.

The NAACP believes that such a parent committee entrusted with these tasks will go a long way towards establishing bridges between the citizens of the community and will develop an entirely new approach towards law enforcement which will have beneficial effect on the total problem of police-community relations, the deterrence of crime and the apprehension of criminals.

7. Street lighting.

Crime flourishes in darkness. The mugger, the rapist, the "John", and the prostitute all shun the light of day. Nevertheless, our city streets, despite our prosperity and our advanced technology, remain dark and gloomy. The NAACP proposes that the Public Lighting Commission should immediately secure cost estimates for an extraordinary program to light up our city. This program could be conducted on an experimental basis in high crime areas. The cooperation

of Detroit Edison in providing favorable cost estimates on this plan should be solicited.

Conclusions.

The NAACP recognizes that crime, in any society, is closely related to poverty, deprivation and demoralization. A war on crime is also war on poverty and its attendant evils. In the meantime, it proposes seven concrete steps which it believes will go far to reduce crime and also eliminate tension between the police and the Negro community. The NAACP reiterates its unwavering opposition to the proposed stop and frisk ordinance which would only seriously aggravate existing tensions.

The NAACP recognizes that these proposals would be expensive. However, it believes that if the public sincerely wants to reduce crime, it must be prepared to pay the price. If general funds of the City are not adequate for this program, a referendum of the people should be held to determine whether there is popular support to finance such a positive program to defeat crime.

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