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Gresham M. Sykes

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RIOTS AND THE POLICE

BY GRESHAM M. SYKES*

Drawing largely upon his varied experiences with the police and their operations and upon his studies of riots in another self-contained community—the prison—Dr. Sykes provides sobering insight into the much discussed role of the police in creating the tensions which lead to race riots. He suggests that the problem of the police and riots is not just a matter of inadequate personnel—that favorite whipping boy in the analysis of social problems. The situation involves broader questions of political power, community structure and the institutionalized functions of the police in the ghetto—questions which are not easily resolved by simplistic formulas.

I

The problems of the police in dealing with crime and the threat of civil disorder in our cities have taken on a new urgency in this era of drastic social change. And despite the variety we can observe in the organization of the police and the special circumstances of some cities, it is still possible to analyse the police and cities in general. Many people in police work, it is true, are apt to think that their police force is something quite special, that the problems they confront are unique. But the similarity of police forces throughout the country is probably more striking than any dissimilarity, and it is certainly true that every major city in the United States is now confronted with a roughly similar set of social problems, so that it makes sense to speak of *the* American urban crisis in which the police are involved.

II

We can begin by pointing out that the social organization of the police in the United States has certain basic features which pose serious difficulties for the effective performance of police functions even under normal or routine conditions.

In the first place, a police force—unlike most social organizations—is scattered in space, fragmented into a thousand pieces. Policemen do not do their work in one building or in one area; instead, they are dispersed throughout the community as individuals or as small, relatively autonomous units. In this respect, of course, they are somewhat like a military organization in combat, but even the military usually operates with units of at least squad or platoon size. As a result, the police have severe and persistent problems of

*Director, Administration of Justice Program College of Law, University of Denver.

supervision, communication, and control, all of which serve to complicate their job.¹

In the second place, the police are scattered in time as well as in space, for the police, unlike the great majority of social organizations, are in continuous operation on a three shift basis. Observers of such round-the-clock enterprises (mainly in the area of industrial organizations) indicate that there are severe managerial problems of maintaining discipline, standards of performance, and so on.²

In the third place, in terms of social organization, police forces have become monolithic structures,³ resisting the outside pressures and the inward scrutiny which would increase efficiency. The police, in this sense, are a solid, impenetrable object, presenting an almost impervious surface to criticism of any sort.⁴ Most social organizations — or at least most of the ones which are centered on the performance of crucial social functions — are *divided* in that there are major cleavages or breaks within the organization itself which act as a kind of control mechanism. In the Army, for example, we have officers and enlisted men; in the business world we have labor and management; in the university we have faculty and students. Each of these segments, each of these parts of the organization, watches the other. There is a system of surveillance within the organization, a system of checks and balances, which helps to make the organization more responsive to criticism, to the public airing of mismanagement, and so on. Each of these organizational parts is quick to point out the faults of the other — they help to keep one another honest. But all this is largely lacking for the police. There is a division of sorts, it is true, for there is of course a system of ranks; but if attacks come from the outside, the police close ranks. "Never squeal on a fellow officer" becomes all too often an overriding principle.⁵

One important consequence of all this is that much of the public believes that any complaint against the police which is investigated

¹ Reiss & Bordua, *Environment and Organization: A Perspective on the Police*, in THE POLICE: SIX SOCIOLOGICAL ESSAYS 25, 50 (D. Bordua ed. 1967).

² W. MOORE, MAN, TIME, & SOCIETY 95 (1963).

³ On police organization generally, see Reiss and Bordua, *Environment and Organization: A Perspective on the Police*, in THE POLICE: SIX SOCIOLOGICAL ESSAYS 25; P. JACOBS, PRELUDE TO RIOT, A VIEW OF URBAN AMERICA FROM THE BOTTOM 50-51 (1968). On the related question of police solidarity, see J. SKOLNICK, JUSTICE WITHOUT TRIAL 52-54 (1966); Westley, *Violence and the Police*, 59 AM. J. SOCIOLOGY 34 (1953); Wilson, *The Police and Their Problems: A Theory*, 12 PUBLIC POLICY 189 (1963).

⁴ See, e.g., Clark, *A Study of Police Isolation*, 56 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 307 (1965); M. BANTON, THE POLICEMAN IN THE COMMUNITY, chs. 7,8 (1965) on the isolation of the British police; Levy, *Cops in the Ghetto, A Problem of the Police System*, in RIOTS AND REBELLION, CIVIL VIOLENCE IN THE URBAN COMMUNITY 353-54 (L. Masotti & D. Bowen eds. 1968); P. JACOBS, *supra* note 3, at 31, 36-46; D. BAYLEY & J. MENDELSON, MINORITIES AND THE POLICE, CONFRONTATION IN AMERICA 51, 135 (1969).

⁵ P. JACOBS, *supra* note 3, at 31, 36-46.

by the police will turn out to be a whitewash — and sometimes the public is right, as evidenced by the disclosures of police corruption in the 1950's and 1960's. Corruption can exist in a police department and go on for a long time because of extreme loyalty among policemen at all levels. Furthermore, management reforms which would make the police more efficient are frequently resisted, since this would mean bringing in "outside" experts or accepting the concept of lateral entry.⁶ Almost every top-ranking police official in a police force must come from the bottom rank of that police force, never from somewhere else — a most ancient and archaic notion that ties an organization to a geographical area and has many unfortunate consequences.

III

All of this is obvious enough, I think, although it is often forgotten when people ask why the police don't function more effectively. But in addition to the organizational problems which plague the police, there are the problems which spring from the very nature of police work itself.

Now it is possible to think of the police as having two main functions. First, there is the task that most people think about, the task of *law enforcement* — apprehending persons who have violated the law and turning them over to the courts. And second, there is the job of *order maintenance* — handling disputes and providing information, responding to complaints and handling crowds, and so on.⁷

There are a number of writers, such as Professor James Q. Wilson, who argue that no matter what the police might do in the next 5 or 10 years, it is very unlikely that they could become much more effective than they are now in their job of law enforcement.⁸ Only about 25 percent of all major crimes known to the police are cleared by arrest,⁹ and it seems doubtful whether a great deal could be done to raise that percentage. The largest number of crimes are

⁶ See, for instance, the overwhelming and successful objections of the Denver police to a proposed reorganization plan reported in *The Denver Post*, Sept. 24, 1968, at 1, col. 8. One of the proposed changes was to permit persons to "enter the departments at levels suiting their special skills." *Id.*, Sept. 17, 1968, at 18, col. 4.

⁷ See, J. WILSON, *VARIETIES OF POLICE BEHAVIOR* 16 n.1 (1968). For a further development of Wilson's ideas regarding the distinction between "law enforcement" and "order maintenance" and its significance, see Wilson, *Dilemmas of Police Administration*, 18 *PUB. AD. REV.* 407 (1968). Michael Banton originally suggested that the police may be said to function in the first instance as "law officers" and in the second instance as "peace officers." M. BANTON, *supra* note 5, at 6-7, 127. See also, Bittner, *The Police on Skid-row: A Study of Peace Keeping*, 32 *AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV.* 699 (1967).

⁸ Wilson, *supra* note 7, at 407.

⁹ See, e.g., FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, *CRIME IN THE UNITED STATES: UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS — 1965*, Table 8 at 97. A total clearance rate of 26.3 percent is reported for seven major crimes. Clearance rates varied from 90.5 percent for murder to 19.6 percent for larceny. *Id.* at 97.

in the area of crimes against property,¹⁰ such as larceny, and these are typically offenses which pose serious difficulties of detecting the offender, no matter what resources are available. Pouring more police into a given area may decrease the crime rate, but criminals are likely to go elsewhere to commit their crimes, the decrease is likely to be temporary, and it is simply too expensive a procedure, in any case, to keep up for a prolonged period of time.

To a very large extent, then, changes in the crime rate appear to have little or no relationship with what the police do or do not do. The absence of police might indeed mean chaos, but a major expansion of the police would probably have small consequences at best — and any such consequence would be far overshadowed by changes in the crime rate flowing from changes in social structure. For instance, the proportion of the population aged 15 to 20 has increased greatly in recent years, due to the high birth rates during and after World War II,¹¹ and it is this segment of the population that contributes by far the largest share of crime.¹² Similarly, urban populations tend to commit more crimes than rural populations,¹³ and the percentage of the population living in cities (or in metropolitan areas) in the United States increases every year.¹⁴ And then, perhaps most importantly, there is the question of just how much effect the detection, apprehension, and punishment of the offender really has. A number of studies suggest that at least 60 percent of men who have been in prison keep on committing crimes when they get out.¹⁵ And there is little evidence that more severe sentences would be a more effective deterrent¹⁶ — in England, 200 years ago, thieves took a public execution not as a warning but as a welcome opportunity to pick more pockets.¹⁷

When we turn to the task of *order maintenance*, the picture is no more reassuring. This is a task which does not really involve crime,

¹⁰ D. TAFT & R. ENGLAND, *CRIMINOLOGY* 57 (1964).

¹¹ R. THOMLINSON, *POPULATION DYNAMICS, CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF WORLD DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE* 436-37 (1965).

¹² See discussion and qualification of this assertion in G. SYKES, *CRIME AND SOCIETY* 89-92 (2d ed. 1967). See also, Cressey, *Crime*, in *CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEMS* 136, 146 (2d ed. R. Merton & R. Nisbet eds. 1961).

¹³ Cressey, *supra* note 12, at 155.

¹⁴ H. SHRYOCK, JR., *POPULATION MOBILITY WITHIN THE UNITED STATES*, 295-334 (1964).

¹⁵ D. GLASER, *THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A PRISON AND PAROLE SYSTEM* 13-35 (1964).

¹⁶ For an excellent and brief summary and analysis of the evidence of the deterrent effects of punishment, see W. CHAMBLISS, *CRIME AND THE LEGAL PROCESS* 360-72 (1969). Chambliss suggests that punishment or threat of punishment is likely to deter only instrumental criminal acts (as opposed to expressive criminal acts such as murder, rape, drunkenness, etc.) or acts performed by persons who have a high commitment to a criminal mode of behavior.

¹⁷ L. RADZINOWICZ, *A HISTORY OF ENGLISH CRIMINAL LAW: THE MOVEMENT FOR REFORM, 1750-1833*, at 178 (1948). See also, M. D'ARCHENHOLZ, *A PICTURE OF ENGLAND* 187-88 (1790).

as I indicated earlier, but instead is concerned with family disputes, controlling demonstrations, handling drunken quarrels, and so on. As it turns out, this work is often more time-consuming for the police than trying to combat crime and absorbs a large share of their resources.¹⁸ The difficulty is that this work brings the police directly into conflict with large segments of the presumably law-abiding public, most notably the poor and members of minority groups. When the police start intervening in these areas, there's bound to be somebody who feels outraged or harassed. The Negro, for example, has suffered from racial discrimination for so long that he's like a man who has been flayed. He's sensitive to the slightest hint of an insult, and, unfortunately, policemen are sometimes inexcusably heavy-handed and insulting, even when they do not intend to be. The police, rightfully or wrongfully, come to be seen as a symbol of the Establishment, as a symbol of all the forces that have worked against the Negro and the Spanish-American in this country for so long. The policemen stand as representatives of a conquering army; and a large number of the people in the ghetto view their efforts to maintain order with fear and hostility.

All of this presents a basic question — Can the police cure this situation? Can they significantly reduce crime and maintain order without community tension? I think it can be argued that the answer is probably no, at least in the immediate years ahead. To a large extent, I think these matters are beyond the control of the police.

We can put the matter another way. There are a number of writers today who argue that the police are unqualified, unintelligent, rude, brutal, and intolerant. And, it is argued, if police departments were filled with college graduates, if there were more Negroes on the police force, and if police departments were under greater control of the neighborhoods where the police are carrying out their tasks, most of our problems in police-community relationships would disappear.¹⁹ It is quite possible, however, that this argument is wrong. The problems would probably not disappear and they just might get worse. The police might intervene more strictly than they do now and increase community tensions. Negro officers might lean over

¹⁸ TASK FORCE ON THE POLICE, THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON LAW ENFORCEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE, TASK FORCE REPORT: THE POLICE 13 (1967). See also, Bittner, *The Police on Skid-row: A Study of Peace Keeping*, 32 AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. (1967).

¹⁹ See, e.g., Levy, *Cops in the Ghetto, A Problem of the Police System*, in RIOTS AND REBELLION, CIVIL VIOLENCE IN THE URBAN COMMUNITY 347 (L. Masotti and D. Bowen eds. 1968). James Q. Wilson characterizes these arguments as some variation on the "bad men" theme. Wilson, *Dilemmas of Police Administration*, 18 PUB. ADMIN. REV. 407, 409 (1968). See also, A. NEIDERHOFFER, *BEHIND THE SHIELD: THE POLICE IN URBAN SOCIETY* (1967), reviewed, Newman, 34 AM. SOCIOLOGICAL REV. 129 (1969) (Newman is somewhat critical of the "bad men" theme he sees in Neiderhoffer's book).

backwards and be rougher on Negro offenders who were giving the Negro community a bad name than would white officers. And the conflict between neighborhood residents who want more police protection (small businessmen, home-owners, older people) and those who want less (teenagers, young men hanging around on street corners, black militants) would not go away.

This does *not* mean that there is nothing to be done to help the situation. In fact, there are a great many things that can be done by the police and should be done. But I think we have to be realistic about just how much can be accomplished by the police themselves; and we must begin to understand that the problem of the police is not just a matter of inadequate personnel — that favorite whipping boy in the analysis of social problems — but involves questions of political power and community structure.

IV

This leads to the major topic to be discussed — that is, the problem of riots and civil disorders. And I think we can come to a better understanding of riots, of why they occur and what can and should be done about them, if we examine an analogous attempt to maintain law and order in a dangerous and perplexing situation.

Now for this we need a theory— although, unfortunately, the social sciences do not have an explicit, definite, thoroughly proven theory at the present time. But we can present the beginnings of a theory for consideration and discussion, drawing on some ideas that have been developed by studying prisons and prison riots.²⁰ The important thing is that for many people living in the ghetto, the ghetto *is* a prison. The two situations are not so dissimilar and I think we can learn from some of the similarities.

The starting point for the analysis of prison riots is just after a riot has occurred. The rioters are subdued, the guards win back control, the damage gets repaired, the broken glass is swept up — and the prison administration is determined to enforce all the rules and regulations, to follow a "tough" line. Men are to be in their cells when they are supposed to be, there will be no loitering in the passageways, there will be no gambling, and the passes needed to move from one part of the institution to another will be examined with care. There will be no illegal extras in the cells, there will be no back talk from the inmates, and so on.

The prison administration then finds that it cannot run the prison with this sort of a strict regime. They cannot use force or the threat

²⁰ G. SYKES, *THE SOCIETY OF CAPTIVES, A STUDY OF A MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON* (1958). See also, Hartung and Floch, *A Social-Psychological Analysis of Prison Riots: An Hypothesis*, 47 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 51 (1956).

of force to accomplish all the tasks that must be performed within the prison walls. They cannot use force to move 2,000 men through a mess hall, just as they cannot use force — one guard with a gun behind each inmate — to run the prison's machinery. Somehow, they must *persuade* inmates to do what they are supposed to do; and this means using some kind of a system of rewards and punishments.

But the rewards — the legal rewards — in the prison are very few. It is hard to use the maximum daily wage (often in the neighborhood of thirty cents a day) as a meaningful motivating drive. There are very few extra privileges which can legitimately be given. There is Good Time (time off a sentence for good behavior), but all that lies far in the future so that it is like a pension plan with all the concomitant difficulties of motivating people in the immediate present. There is Work Time (time off a sentence for appearing on the job), but it hardly assures conscientious work. And the punishments, too, are sharply limited — these men are already being punished close to the limits permitted by society. So in this sense the inmates in the prison and the Negro and the Spanish-American in the ghetto have a good deal in common — they all live in a world of reduced incentives, both positive and negative.

How, then, can men be induced to keep the cellblock clean, to keep out of fights, to do the sweeping, the cooking, the barbering, etc.? The answer in the prison is frequently a system of small favors, of letting an inmate leader know when a search for stolen goods is about to take place, for example, so that he can pass the word on to his friends much in the manner of a ward boss dispensing patronage. The guards ignore minor infractions, such as gambling, minor theft, and so on; and in return, the inmates help to keep things running smoothly.²¹ The prisoners, no less than their guards, want to "pull their own time," to "pull an easy bit."

In short, the prison is made more tolerable, the frustrations reduced by not enforcing all the rules too strictly — and, most importantly, *a group of inmate leaders is allowed to come into existence who has an important stake in maintaining a quiet and orderly institution and who has access to a set of rewards to buttress their position of leadership.*

This situation, however, tends to be unstable in the prison. Inmates may gain so much power that in reality *they* run the prison, not the guards or the prison administrative staff. There inevitably comes a demand for a crack-down, for a get-tough policy. A guard

²¹ Compare the use of "small favors" in enhancing administrative control in a bureaucratic organization described in P. BLAU, *THE DYNAMICS OF BUREAUCRACY, A STUDY OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS IN TWO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES* 169 (1955). See also, P. BLAU, *EXCHANGE AND POWER IN SOCIAL LIFE* 16 (1964).

may be killed or a guard may be fired and go to the newspapers with lurid stories of prison scandals. "Reforming the prison" or some other version of "law and order" may become a part of a political campaign.

In any event, the prison authorities will frequently find themselves pushed to regain control of the prison, to enforce the rules more strictly — and they are then driven to do away with the whole system of compromises, of informal arrangements of a favor for a favor which has helped to keep the prison on an even keel. The inmate leaders are discredited, and their privileges (which are an important basis of their power) are taken away. The result, very often, is a disaster.

The destruction of the usual inmate leaders leaves a vacuum of power, of leadership. All the frustrations of prison life begin to bite more sharply on the general inmate population; and into the vacuum of leadership there rush the wildest, most violent inmates who fan the sparks of unrest. The inevitable discontents of prison life crystalize around these new, bitterly hostile spokesmen and the prison explodes into a riot.

The prisoners, of course, cannot really win — and they know this in some fundamental sense. The prison authorities have far greater resources at their command and they can always call on the National Guard or the Army if things get too serious. But usually they can keep the rioting inmates confined to one part of the prison where they can be starved into submission. Hostages, of course, pose another problem — a problem, incidentally, which has not yet occurred in the civil disorders in the cities.

So the riot gets broken. The guards win back control, the damage gets repaired, the broken glass is swept up, the ringleaders get locked into solitary confinement or consigned to the hospital for the criminally insane. *And the whole cycle starts all over again.* The inmates are much the way they were before, the prison rules and regulations are much the same — and the future holds little more than a promise of endless frustration, disturbances, and repression.

As I have suggested, many of our cities today present something of the same picture — similar enough, at any rate, to point to some possible conclusions.

In the first place, no community, whether it is a prison or a city, can be run by force alone over any prolonged period of time, in any sort of stable fashion. The fact that such an arrangement runs counter to our democratic values is important, but so too is the fact that the continued existence of a government based on force alone is virtually impossible. To some extent — probably to a very large extent — people in a community must agree to the rules and be willing to cooperate with the agencies of government.²² This is a proposition,

incidentally, which I think can be shown to be true even for a concentration camp.²³

In the second place, this cooperation and acceptance of the governing powers requires the development of leadership within the ghetto — that is, within the Black community and, in some cities, the Spanish-American community as well. We are familiar with the concept from the viewpoint of a theory of administration in terms of span of control.²⁴ We are perfectly aware that there must be some kind of a pyramid-like structure in an organization; and something of the same thing must be true, in a political sense, in a community — at least, in a democratic society. There must be centers of control and of power and influence down at the neighborhood level, if the system is to cohere. Voluntary associations of all sorts have traditionally served part of this role in American society — churches and political groups, clubs and lodges, unions, occupational associations, and so on. If these are destroyed we are left with a handful of rulers and the great mass of the ruled — essentially a vacuum of leadership into which can rush the most unstable and most dangerous elements in the community.²⁵

In the third place, it appears quite possible that a lack of accepted, trusted leaders in the minority group community was — and is — an important element in the disturbances that are racking the cities in this country.²⁶ All too often it would appear that the White community — the Establishment — has had very little knowledge of, or interest in, the structure of leadership in the Black community or the Spanish-American community. In fact, it sometimes seems as if the so-called Establishment were deliberately trying to smash flat any such structure coming into existence, in the most short-sighted, self-defeating manner imaginable.

There is a great deal of loose talk, for example, about "militants," "extremists," and so on, in newspapers throughout the country. We are all guilty of using such words, because they are a convenient sort of shorthand. But very few people try to tie those words down precisely and see what they mean — and the police, I think, are about as bad as anybody about this. The rhetoric, the speech-making of the

²² G. LENSKI, *POWER AND PRIVILEGE, A THEORY OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION* 51-58 (1966). See also, Becker, *Who Makes the Rules?* in *LAW AND THE LAWLESS, A READER IN CRIMINOLOGY* 113 (G. Sykes & T. Drabek eds. 1969).

²³ See generally, E. KOGON, *THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF HELL* (Berkeley ed. 1958).

²⁴ See, W. MOORE, *THE CONDUCT OF THE CORPORATION* 48 (1962).

²⁵ W. KORNHAUSER, *THE POLITICS OF MASS SOCIETY* 236-37 (1959). See also, N. BABCHUK & C. GORDON, *THE VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION IN THE SLUM* (1962).

²⁶ Harry Scoble has suggested that the Watts Riot of 1965 constituted the "accelerated completion of an age-generational revolution peacefully initiated against 'traditional' Negro leadership (during 1962-1963)." Scoble, *Effects of Riots on Negro Leadership, in RIOTS AND REBELLION, CIVIL VIOLENCE IN THE URBAN COMMUNITY* 329, 330 (L. Masotti & D. Bowen eds. 1968).

Black Panthers, for example, is often taken completely at face value, with few attempts to understand why the speeches are being made and what they really mean. It reminds me of the psychiatrist, Dr. Wertham, in his work with children and comic books. Dr. Wertham said that the comic books were obviously bad because one small reader, when asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, told Dr. Wertham he wanted to be a sex maniac. But all that proves, as the critic Warshow pointed out, is that Dr. Wertham will believe what any 6-year-old boy will tell him.²⁷

What is really needed is a great deal more knowledge about what is going on in our community, both Black and White, and *we must use this knowledge to support a strong and vigorous leadership in the ghetto*, if we are not to leave a vacuum of leadership which will explode into mob action. And "supporting leadership" does *not* simply mean picking people you like or who happen to agree with you right down the line.

There is a question of the extent to which Black Panthers or any other group is a leadership element in the community — and just what kind of leadership it is likely to provide. Actually, I think that is strictly an empirical question and the answer is going to vary from one particular community to another — and probably from one point in time to another. In general, however, I think the striking thing is the hostility which a great many policemen direct against the Black Power movement in its various forms and against militant Black spokesmen.²⁸

A number of explanations have been offered for this hostility, such as the lower middle class origin of the policeman and a pervasive racial prejudice.²⁹ There is the resentment against the attempts to aid the Negro economically on the part of those who have not been notably successful in this affluent society but who are still not below the poverty line — the sort of thing which was supposed to be so much behind the support of Wallace and with whom, it has been claimed, so many policemen identified themselves. And, of course, there is the fact that the police believe — sometimes correctly — that it is the Black militants who are sniping at them.³⁰ I think we can take it as a rather basic principle that people do not like people who shoot at them or who are thought to be doing so.

²⁷ See, F. WERTHAM, *SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT* (1954); Warshow, PAUL, *THE HORROR COMICS, AND DR. WERTHAM*, 17 COMMENTARY 596 (1954).

²⁸ See generally, *The Police and the Rest of Us, An Atlantic Supplement*, THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY, March 1969, at 74.

²⁹ See Lipset, *Why Cops Hate Liberals — and Vice Versa*, THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY, March 1969, at 76-83.

³⁰ *Id.* at 82.

The fact that these are rather glib and easy explanations should not blind us to the strong probability that there is some truth in them — but they are not enough. I do not think it is enough to explain the depth of the hostility or its nature. Shortly after lecturing in a one-week training institute for the police on police and minority group relationships, I spoke to one of the policemen in the hall about the breakdown in communications between the police and the Black militants. I asked him how the police could keep order in such a polarized community; and he said, with a bitter and quiet anger, "We can always lock 'em up for treason."

A large share of the explanation, I think, must look to the fact that the police are tremendously concerned with their position as agents of legitimate authority. If they use force in the control of crime, they really do believe that the force must represent the impersonal and just control of the state — and not a kind of scuffling between two contending mobs. It must be clear to the police that they uphold the public definition of "right" (or what they think is the public definition) and that the criminal is "wrong." And that is to say that the police see themselves engaged in a *moral* combat to a much greater extent than most people realize. The police cannot simply be the professional users of force for any end that happens to be announced by community officials — the police, I am arguing, must believe that the end is legitimate, that the end is morally correct. This does not mean that the use of force cannot get brutally out of hand, as in Chicago. But it does mean that the police tend to see the victims of that force as "wrong" — and that this is not merely a rationalization for brutal behavior.³¹

The same need is found, I think, in what I have called the maintenance of order. The police believe that they must rely on maintaining a position of impersonal authority which does not carry a partisan taint. Firm, fair, just — and above all representative of the community's standards of proper behavior; that is what police so frequently believe they must appear to be.

Now I would suggest that when the police are asked to reach out to so-called militant elements in the ghetto, they often feel that they are being asked to compromise their position of moral supremacy. To work out *any* kind of a *modus vivendi* with vehement, lower class Black leaders is, in effect, to bring what they define as a criminal class into a position of legitimacy — and, for the police, this is fre-

³¹ John Q. Wilson writes: "In order to maintain morale the officer may have to rely increasingly on police doctrine, a perhaps exaggerated conception of the rightness of what he is doing, and a contempt for both the criminal and hypocritical noncriminal elements of the population." Wilson, *Police Morale, Reform, and Citizen Respect: The Chicago Case*, in *THE POLICE: SIX SOCIOLOGICAL ESSAYS* 137, 161 (D. Bordua ed. 1967).

quently intolerable. It is like asking a man who has been cuckolded to sit down with his wife's lover and discuss how to bring up children. The adulterer may indeed know a good deal about it, but the husband is not inclined to listen to him.

V

In conclusion, I think it is possible to argue that police harrassment is not the cause of urban unrest any more than the reform of the police is a quick and easy answer for our problems. What *is* important, I think, is the political relationship and the power relationship between the white, affluent society and the poor, minority-group community. I have suggested that if anyone tries to make that relationship one of harsh and complete repression, they will create a situation which is far more explosive, far more pregnant with violence, than anything we have seen so far. And the crucial thing, it seems to me, is that the country must learn that in its present concern for law and order, the police are only one small part of a larger set of problems which cannot be solved by coercion.