

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Rebuilding the Damaged Relationship Between
Law Enforcement and The Minority Community**

**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

**By
Brett Schilhab**

**Richwood Police Department
Richwood, Texas
June 2017**

ABSTRACT

Tensions between law enforcement and the minority community are at an all-time high. This has become one of the major problems law enforcement has encountered in the past and is still a major problem to this day. Mann (1998) stated that one of the biggest problems facing law enforcement since its inception is conflict between the minority community and the police (as cited by Conti & Doreian, 2014). Twenty-four-hour news channels and social media are now helping keep a spotlight on events involving law enforcement. Recent events between police and the minority community have started protests and riots, and as the minority population grows, this problem will continue, as the minority population becomes the majority. Law enforcement should take measures to ease tensions between police and the minority community.

Lack of trust between law enforcement and the minority community is causing police officers to lose their lives. Some people do not trust the police and perceive them as murderers of the minority community. Some of those people who do not trust law enforcement have started attacking and murdering police officers with no provocation and no warning. Police should become less transparent and improve perception to rebuild the trust. Law enforcement now has tools available, such as social media, to help spread their side of the story and interact with citizens.

The damaged relationship caused by racial tensions between police and the minority need to be rebuilt, and law enforcement must take the first step. Law enforcement must learn from the mistakes made in the past on its side and not repeat them. If law enforcement continues to work on this issue and come up with new ideas, it could save lives on both sides.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Position	3
Counter Position	5
Recommendation	10
References	14

INTRODUCTION

A major issue effecting law enforcement today is the tension between police and the minority community. Mann stated that one of the biggest problems facing law enforcement since its inception is conflict between the minority community and the police (as cited by Conti & Doreian, 2014). There is a dark past in law enforcement when it comes to the subject of racism, racial profiling, and police brutality against minorities. For decades, law enforcement has been labeled as being racist towards any other ethnicity than white.

There are many examples over the years of police racism and brutality against minorities. Some of the high-profile events that have shaped the world law enforcement lives in now is the police brutality during 1960's civil rights protests and the 1991 beating of Rodney King and the riots that ensued. Almost daily, one can see on the news or read an article about a problem between minorities and the police. In recent years, many new movements have started in the minority community stemming from police interaction with minorities. The tension between the minority community and law enforcement continues to grow despite the positive steps that have been taken over the last few decades.

Recently, three more high profile cases have raised the tension to an extremely high level. On July 17, 2014, Eric Garner was being arrested for selling cigarettes in New York City, New York. An officer put Garner in a chokehold, and he later died. Garner's death started the Black Lives Matter movement and protests across the nation used the slogan, "I can't breathe" (Sanburn, n.d.). Then, on August 9, 2014, Michael Brown was shot by Ferguson Missouri Officer Darren Wilson. After the shooting,

peaceful protests, looting, and violence ensued, and these same behaviors appeared again after Officer Wilson was not indicted. During the riots, “Hands up, don’t shoot” became the protestors’ slogan (Ye Hee Lee, 2015). Then on April 12, 2015, Freddie Gray, Jr. was arrested by Baltimore, Maryland police and later died in custody from injuries received while being transported in a van (Fantz & Botelo, 2015). After Gray’s death, protests and riots occurred on the streets of Baltimore. Physical abuse is not the only kind of brutality though; the NAACP’s 1995 report and Locke stated in 1996 that any abusive practices, slurs, and unnecessary searches are conceived as police brutality by many citizens in the community (as cited by Holmes & Smith, 2008).

It seems that in today’s age of technology and social media, the tension is growing faster than it ever has before and something must be done before it reaches a boiling point. Since the advent of social media, word has spread more easily than it ever has before about any police misconduct, whether it is true, fictionalized, or it lies somewhere in the middle. Some of the public perception is that some members of the media will dramatize situations just to get ratings. All of the above listed protests and movements were fueled by social media and the media. With these factors, the law enforcement community is looking at more protests, more riots, and more scrutiny in the future. To regain the trust of the minority community, law enforcement should continue working and find new ways to ease the tensions between police and the minority community. Something must be done so that law enforcement and the minority community can build trust and have a working relationship. Unless law enforcement takes the first step to improve the relationship with the minority community, the relationship will continue to get worse.

POSITION

One reason the racial tension between law enforcement and the minority community is a concern is that the minority population will soon become the majority population. No longer is this just a Black and White issue either. Alba and Nee (2003) found that increasing immigration from countries all over the world has fueled the diversity of the community in recent years (as cited in Holmes & Smith, 2008). Per the US Census Bureau in 2014, Whites made up 62.1% of the American population, meaning that 37.9% of the population are minorities, and that number is increasing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Minority children under five now make up almost half of all children under five. That number shows how the racial demographic will change over the next three decades, and the White population will become a minority group (Yen, 2013). Not only should every voice be heard and every person be treated fairly, but these numbers show that soon whites will not be the majority, and if law enforcement still has a barrier and tension between the minority community today, then in the future, law enforcement will have the same problems as today with the majority.

Another problem is that the lack of trust between law enforcement and the minority community is causing police officers to lose their lives. Some of the people in the minority community believe that law enforcement is killing minorities for no reason. Some of those people who believe that are now killing police officers. Those who are killing police officers, who they see as oppressive government figures, believe that if police can kill minorities, then the police should be killed. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's data showed that in 2014, 51 law enforcement officers died from

felonious incidents. The data shows that at least 16 of the offenders were minorities (“2014 law enforcement,” n.d.). There is no data to show if any of the incidents of officers being killed by minorities was racially motivated, but even if one officer was killed because of the racial problems between law enforcement and minorities, it is one too many. If law enforcement can work towards breaking down the barriers, it may save police officer’s lives. Law enforcement has started to take steps in the right direction, but it needs to learn that earning back the trust of the minority community is important.

Tyler stated in 2005 that trust in law enforcement is persuaded by judgment of the community about the fairness of procedures that police must adhere to when using the authority given to them to do their job (as cited by Boateng, Lee, & Marenin, 2015). Tyler found in 2003 and 2007 that studies showed that to influence the community’s confidence in the police, procedural fairness and positive contacts are necessary (as cited by Boateng, Lee, & Marenin, 2015). Trust is not something that law enforcement can merely ask for and get; it must be earned through words and actions (Jackson, 2015). The community will not trust the police if police disregard fair treatment of the public, even if the police are effectively doing their job. Public perceptions of the police with fairness of procedures and positive citizen contact can help the community believe that the police are being effective.

It is important for police to earn trust in the community because it determines how the community perceives the police. Community perception will decide if the community complies with police, the law, and their willingness to participate in police programs (Boateng, Lee, & Marenin, 2015). Research has shown that when an individual feels they were treated fairly and the decision was appropriate, individuals are more likely to

accept the outcome even though they do not like it (Boateng, Lee, & Marenin, 2015). Views on how an individual was treated effects how they view the whole police department and can show a significant effect on crime. Public trust of the police starts with the community knowing why the police take the actions that they do and what they seek to accomplish by taking those actions. Knowing that information is the start of a fair assessment and evaluation of the police. Trust with the community that the police serve and protect can affect how people will respond to an officer can either support or undermine their job. That trust can also give law enforcement broader power and discretion. The community's willingness to comply with instructions or to help the police in their jobs is more effective than the threat or use of force to gain compliance (Jackson, 2015)

COUNTER POSITION

One reason there is tension is the subculture of police. In general, the whole community does not understand the subculture as to why police do the things that they do or act the way they do. There are multitudes of factors that create this subculture, and it isolates law enforcement from the whole community. A popular phrase used to describe the comradery of law enforcement is the "thin blue line," which conveys that law enforcement is the line that separates the public from criminals. To some in the entire community, they believe the thin blue line means that law enforcement stands together and turns a blind eye to any wrongdoing.

There are many reasons that law enforcement has its own subculture; law enforcement is a job like no other. It is public knowledge that law enforcement has a bond and an "us-versus-them" mentality in general. Those who study police have

observed that law enforcement shares a bond with each other (Holmes & Smith, 2008). With this bond is the sharing of common beliefs, attitudes about each other, the job they do, and the entire community. Police acknowledge that they are part of a subculture of society. Police even accept and describe themselves with terms such as a brotherhood or family. Even though there is this bond and a general knowledge that law enforcement shares the same beliefs and goals, it does not mean that every police officer thinks the same and has the same feelings. Crank found in 1998 that every department develops its own unique culture, sometimes even a department within a department (as cited by Holmes & Smith, 2008).

One example how law enforcement shows its comradery is police funerals. Police funerals are ceremonial events and will bring hundreds or thousands of police officers from other departments and states together who had no connection with the fallen officer, but they attend out of respect and the bond that they share. Crank stated in 1998 that "Police funerals publicly display the loyalty and solidarity of the group" (cited by Holmes & Smith, 2008, p. 45). There are other theories why police have this bond, such as shift work. Policing requires around the clock coverage every day, every weekend, and every holiday. Working abnormal hours, weekends, and holidays makes it harder for an officer to establish a new relationship outside of law enforcement or maintain an old one that was made before law enforcement. After time, the easiest relationships to maintain become ones with other police officers who work the same shift work (Holmes & Smith, 2008). Over time, officers start to drift away from the general community and isolate themselves.

Even when off duty, officers face problems at social gatherings with citizens. At a gathering involving alcohol, an officer may consider that they are held to a higher standard than others are, before they decide to drink themselves. If the officer drinks an alcoholic beverage, they may fear that the others will consider the officer a hypocrite for drinking and driving, making the social gathering an awkward experience for the officer. Whereas if it was a gathering of all police officers, those issues would not arise, thus making the officer feel more comfortable around his peers than others (Holmes & Smith, 2008).

While it is true that there is a law enforcement subculture that the entire community does not understand, there are steps being taken to improve the transparency between the police and the minority community to disprove lies being told by both sides; this can be seen with the increased use of cameras. Minorities claiming that they were the victim of racial profiling is one of the reasons law enforcement started using in car cameras. After cameras were standard in law enforcement vehicles, most claims that police were being racist and that racial profiling was the cause of the stop were proven to be lies under oath (Mac Donald, 2003). Law enforcement has now even taken it a step further with officers all over the country wearing body cameras. When an officer is wearing a body camera, it helps protect the good people on both sides of the camera. This is beneficial to the law enforcement community because when the video from body cameras are released to the public after an incident, it not only lets the story be seen from the officer's point of view but it will also either clear an officer of wrong doing or be used as evidence against him in the case of wrong doing. That

transparency can help law enforcement by showing that not all police officers are bad or showing that the ones who are will be held accountable.

It is important that the community know what the police are doing, and it is law enforcement's responsibility to get that information to them. The community needs information to make a fair assessment of what the police are doing, and they can only do that with the information given to them (Jackson, 2015). Another way that law enforcement has started to improve transparency is by using social media as an information source to the public. Law enforcement agencies make crime data available to the public, but those numbers do not tell the whole story of what is going on in the whole community. Many law enforcement agencies are now posting critical information on their websites and on social media about disasters, crimes in the area, pictures of wanted subjects, and the good deeds that police officers do every day. Having a presence on social media can help law enforcement by building a trustworthy relationship with the community and giving control to the department for maintaining its reputation; it also allows the community to ask questions and it spreads information quickly (Burger, 2013).

Another reason believed by many that there is tension between law enforcement and the minority community is the lack of training for police officers in regards to shootings. Researchers Geller (1982), Brown and Langan (2001), and Smith (2004) all agreed that concerns about law enforcement's racial and ethnic bias is warranted because research showed that minorities are more likely to be shot by police than whites (as cited in James, Klinger, & Vila, 2014). Two theories that attempt to explain why minorities are more likely to be shot are that minorities more often engage in

activities that lead to police gunfire and that police officers hold a racial bias that leads them to perceive minorities as more threatening (James, Klinger, & Vila, 2014).

Advancements in training are already happening in law enforcement. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division stated in 2006 recently that a group of Washington state researchers developed a study on use of deadly force decision making that was based on 30 years of data from police shootings in the United States (as cited by James, Klinger, & Vila, 2014). Sixty real world, realistic, high definition law enforcement shooting scenarios using actors were developed using Black, White, Hispanic and Asian suspects, whereas before there was only Black and White subjects used in the scenarios. Studies are also being done on whether racial bias plays any part in a shooting. In these studies, subjects, not law enforcement officers, are put into situations where they must determine if a subject has a weapon in their hand and if they should shoot or not. Before being shown a shooting scenario, the subjects are primed with an image of a Black face or a White face and then must determine if a subject was holding a weapon or another object (James, Klinger, & Vila, 2014). Plant (2005) conducted experiments with racial bias in shooting situations and whether or not decisions could be mitigated by the number of times subjects completed a task (as cited in James, Klinger, & Vila, 2014). This study was the same as previously stated but with police and non-police participants. The findings suggested that training that shows race is not associated with danger can overcome any officer's association between race and crime (James, Klinger, & Vila, 2014). Though the data from the study showed that there is a natural bias in people, it also shows that this is a subject that is being looked into and can be used as a training tool.

Numbers for officer-involved shootings do not tell the whole story either. The statistics for police shootings change every year. This change is due to the fact that the total number of police shootings each year are different and the amounts of each race shot by police are different. Current statistics provided show the percentage of a particular race that was shot by police. For example, if 1,000 Whites were shot compared to 500 Native Americans shot, the current information provided would show that a larger percentage of Native Americans are shot than the percentage of Whites because it is a larger population even though more Whites were shot total. The percentage of race in America is changing all the time. The amount of people in certain races are rising and the amount of some races are lowering, thus changing the percentage they are in the total population. In 2015, 1,139 people were shot and killed by police. Of those, 578 were white, 302 were black, 194 were Hispanic, 28 were unknown, 24 were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 13 were Native American ("The Counted," 2015). Using the numbers above, it shows that 50.75% of people shot and killed by police in 2015 were White and 49.25% were minorities. Furthermore, to claim that the shooting had anything to do with race, one would need to know the race of the officer who shot the subject.

RECOMMENDATION

Law enforcement needs to work on fixing the racial tensions between themselves and the minority community, and law enforcement must be the one to take the first step. Law enforcement must continue to take steps forward in earning trust and creating a relationship with the minority community and make them realize that what was done in the past will not be repeated. In order to regain the trust of the minority community, law

enforcement should continue working and finding new ways to ease the tensions between police and the minority community. Soon the minority will become the majority and law enforcement needs to have a good relationship with those they serve and protect. Police officer's lives are being lost and there is civil unrest because of the lack of trust the police have from the minority community. Law enforcement needs to continue to improve transparency within police departments and provide information to the public. Additional training for police officers can also help overcome any biases and save lives.

There are many things that the law enforcement community could do try and reduce the tension between police and the minority community. One example being is the data provided by racial profiling needs to be improved to tell a better story of exactly what is happening. With the current data that is acquired after a traffic stop, it could appear that law enforcement is racially profiling but, in truth, law enforcement is just doing its job.

The logging of racial profiling data has been around the United States for many years. This profiling data shows the race of a subject being stopped, if that subject was arrested, given a warning or given a citation, if the subject, their vehicle, or their property was searched, and if the officer knew the race of the driver prior to the stop. Those numbers alone cannot tell the whole story of why one race is stopped for traffic infractions in comparison to another race. There are too many factors involved when an officer stops a vehicle as to the reason the decision was made to stop the vehicle and the why they made the decision to arrest, cite, or give a warning to the driver.

Racial profiling reports are not sophisticated enough to provide true, accurate results. Most racial profiling reports examine the number of minorities stopped for traffic infractions compared against a population number. To get adequate numbers, much more thorough statistical data would need to be compiled. An example of more data would be that one would need to know if one particular race drove more or less on average per year than another race did. With that data, one could compile traffic stops per race and per mile (Mac Donald, 2003).

Another factor that could come into play on police searches could be information obtained and used for criminal profiling. Law enforcement needs to let the minority community know that there is a difference between criminal profiling and racial profiling as well. Heumann and Cassak, (2003) stated that criminal profiling differs from racial profiling because it is “limited to certain crimes and is scientific and practiced by highly trained special units; and reactive” (as cited in Arp, 2014, p. 196). However, racial profiling is not reactive and is limited to finding those committing crime based solely on race. Schott (2001) stated that if a person is questioned by police because race was given as a descriptor of a suspect, that person is not considered a victim of racial profiling (as cited in Arp, 2014).

One example would be if a bulletin came out saying that on a particular highway, two Hispanic males driving a certain type of vehicle of a certain color at a certain time of the day headed northbound have been found in possession of drugs. An officer later legally stops a vehicle with all those matching descriptors after receiving that bulletin and finds probable cause to search the vehicle. Law enforcement needs to make it

clear in such situations that there was no racial profiling on that stop but instead criminal profiling.

Law enforcement also needs further training for officers on the subject of race. That training needs to apply not only to officers on the street but also to those in police academies before they even get on the street. People have biases from many aspects of their life such as personal experiences, parents, or the people around them. Teaching officers to overcome any bias, known or unknown, that they may have, will help fairness in any decision that is made. Once the minority community can see the fairness in law enforcement's decision-making, it will help build trust.

Law enforcement needs to continue to diversify its own population to match that of the community. Minority numbers in population are going up every year, and law enforcement needs to continue to hire minorities to mirror the racially diverse community they serve. White and Escobar stated that research showed that a lack of diversity may lead to poor community relations and misconduct by officers (as cited in Binns, 2011). Binns (2011) stated, "Police departments should use targeted recruitment strategies to bring in more minority applicants. Some suggested strategies include the use of minority recruiters, contacts with minority community leaders, and recruiting drives that specifically target minority applicants" (para. 3).

Law enforcement must acknowledge and understand the racial tension between themselves and the minority community. Police must continue to say and do the right things and know that trust is earned and not given. It will not happen overnight, but if law enforcement continues to take steps and work to correct mistakes, the relationship can be mended. Law enforcement's motto is to protect and serve, and the police need

to make minorities feel protected and let them know that law enforcement will serve them with fairness and without any racial prejudice.

REFERENCES

- 2014 Law enforcement officers killed and assaulted. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/leoka/2014/officers-feloniously-killed>
- Arp, D. (2014, September). Forced perspective: police officers' personal opinions and racial data collection in Nebraska. *Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles*, 87(3), 195-200.
- Binns, J. (2011, February 17). *Recruiting the 21st century police officer*. Retrieved from <https://www.policeone.com/police-jobs-and-careers/articles/3225363-Recruiting-the-21st-Century-police-officer-part-3/>
- Boateng, F. D., Lee, H. D., & Marenin, O. (2015). Trust in and legitimacy of police among American college students: A preliminary assessment. *The Police Journal: Theory, Practice, and Principles*, 88(4), 299-314.
- Burger, L. (2013, May 28). *4 ways social media can help police departments*. Retrieved from <https://www.policeone.com/social-media-for-cops/articles/6250205-4-ways-social-media-can-help-police-departments/>
- Conti, N., & Doreian, P. (2014, December). From here on out, we're all blue: Interaction order, social infrastructure and race in police socialization. *Police Quarterly*, 17(4), 414-447. doi:10.1177/1098611114552726
- Fantz, A., & Botelo, G. (2015, April 29). *What we know, don't know about Freddie Gray's death*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/22/us/baltimore-freddie-gray-what-we-know/>

- Holmes, M. D., & Smith, B. W. (2008). *Race and police brutality*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Jackson, B. A. (2015). *Respect and legitimacy — a two-way street*. Retrieved from <http://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE154.html>
- James, L., Klinger, D., & Vila, B. (2014, September). Racial and ethnic bias in decisions to shoot seen through a stronger lense: Experimental results from high-fidelity laboratory simulations. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 10(3), 323-340. doi:10.1007/s11292-014-9204-9
- Mac Donald, H. (2003). *Are cops racist?* Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee.
- Sanburn, J. (n.d.). *The witness*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/ramsey-orta-eric-garner-video/>
- The counted. (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database#>
- United States Census Bureau. (2015, December 2). *Projections of the size and composition of the U.S. population: 2014 to 2060*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1143.pdf>
- Ye Hee Lee, M. (2015, March 19). *Hands up, don't shoot' did not happen in Ferguson*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/03/19/hands-up-dont-shoot-did-not-happen-in-ferguson/>
- Yen, H. (2013, June 13). *Census: White majority in U.S. gone by 2043*. Retrieved from http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/06/13/18934111-census-white-majority-in-us-gone-by-2043