

OBSERVATION POINT

Citizens' Image Of Police Creates Problems

By Philip H. Power

Remember the good old days with the neighborhood cop walking his beat? He knew everybody. He was friendly. He helped out in all kinds of situations. He was liked and respected.

But now? Police throughout the country are increasingly concerned about the gap opening between them and the citizens.

It isn't only the college kids who scream "pig" and shout "oink" whenever a police officer shows his face. It's more that the average citizen is slowly coming to regard the police as "they," somehow separated as a group from society.

Livonia's new police chief, Robert Turner, explains the problem in this way: "For the average citizen, this main contact with the police is in a conflict situation. He is being arrested or told to stop doing something. Under these conditions it's natural for people to feel sore at the police."

The major cause for this, as usual, lack of money.

In the past, police departments could afford to have foot patrolmen walking beats. But men cost money, and it's more efficient to put a policeman in a squad car, driving around. He is more productive stopping crime in that way than when walking a beat, but he doesn't have much

day to day contact with the average guy.

IT'S FOR THAT reason that some police departments, especially in suburban communities, are taking their men out of the traditional uniform and putting them into civilian clothes like blazers and slacks. "We wanted to get away from the Gestapo look," said Dover Township, N.J. police chief Richard Clement.

"Since we've gone to civilian clothes, people regard us as friends. We've become respectable -- just like doctors, school teachers and the corner drug-gist," Clement added.

Farmington's director of public safety Robert Deadman has mixed reactions to the idea. "It might work for some of our officers," he said, "such as those in the youth office and investigators. But I would hate to see an officer on patrol try to make an arrest when his identity as a police officer was in question."

"We do have a gigantic educational problem, but just changing uniforms won't do it by itself," Deadman added.

Livonia's Turner agrees. "We've been studying the idea for a while. It won't work, probably, for the patrol force, but for

other officers it might be effective."

CLOTHES, it seems, do not make the man, even if he is a policeman. The problem of police alienation from the community will not be solved in itself by dressing policemen in blazers and slacks, even though this might help in some areas.

Deadman suggests that public education is important, especially about those areas where policemen help rather than arrest people.

"We do a lot of first aid, rescue and emergency work," he says. "A family conflict can be helped by a trained officer, and so can a man who puts his hand through a glass window. Policemen acting in this way can help change our overall image, but we need more money to adequately serve the community in these areas."

Turner agrees. He explained that the Livonia police department applied for federal money to pay 20 police cadets who would be assigned on a block-by-block basis to various neighborhoods in the city, much like the old policeman walking the beat system.

"We didn't get the money," Turner says, "because the people in Washington felt that because we were in the suburbs we didn't have as much of a problem as

people in the big cities. That may be true, but we know we're going to have a real problem here if the gap continues to widen, and we've got to do something about it soon."

A POLICEMAN'S job, especially in new, suburban communities is a hard one. He has to enforce the law, contribute to public

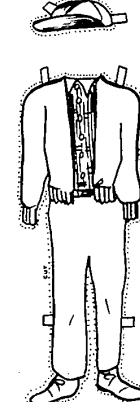
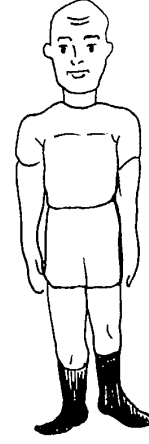
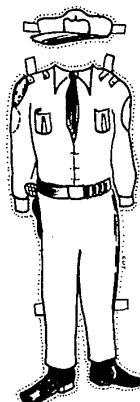
safety, educate the people, and maintain a close working relationship with the public.

But problems today -- from the youthful speeder in the shopping center parking lot to the complicated drug situation -- are more complex and harder to solve than they were 20 or 30 years ago. Correspondingly, we

need better trained policemen and more of them than in the past.

That takes money. And that means that communities have to make a choice: Either don't spend the money and accept problems with their police departments, or spend the money and get the kind of public safety they want.

PICK THE CLOTHES - WITH RESPECT



R.T. Thompson writes

This Example Should Be Enough

For the past several weeks, we have been hearing complaints about the slowness of ambulance service in the City of Livonia. There are many who believe the city should go into the ambulance business and handle all cases--it is being done at many of the smaller cities in the area.

Never was the need for quicker service more apparent than at the Franklin-Bentley football game Friday night when Mike Jinnett, a junior linebacker for Franklin, was injured on the opening kickoff.

There wasn't any question that Mike was hurt, and hurt seriously. He never budged a muscle once he hit the ground.

Mike was still immobile in the center of the field, on the muddy turf with a cold rain falling, when the Bentley team doctor raced out from the sidelines to examine the injured youth.

MEANWHILE, two student managers had to scamper back to the school building to get a stretcher, so he could be carried to the sidelines. That took almost 10 minutes. Mike was tied to the Franklin side, covered with rain jackets and then laid on the stretcher in the rain until 7:57 before an ambulance finally appeared.

Two cruisers from the Livonia Police Department were on the scene almost immediately, but

neither was equipped to move an injured person.

One wonders what would have happened had Mike suffered a broken neck or back. Fortunately, it was only a fracture and severe dislocation of the left arm near the shoulder.

Perhaps the city fathers will take another look at the ambulance situation and try to work out something that is more feasible.

WE CAN'T PLACE all of the blame on the ambulance company which is serving other communi-

Leonard Poger writes

Time For Two Suburbs To Think

Has sanity deserted our suburbs with lightning speed? It seems so if current actions in Westland and Plymouth are any indications.

The Plymouth City Commission has created a new committee to recommend "what literature should and should not be sold" in that community, which has apparently forgotten that there is a U.S. Constitution which clearly prohibits their intentions.

In Westland, numerous city council candidates, particularly

ties and also handling individual calls. We can blame the city fathers for not recognizing a problem and for not taking steps to correct a sad situation.

There were some 2,000 persons seated in the stands in the rains for the game. Every one of them knows that an injured footballer lay on a ground level stretcher in a driving rain for almost 27 minutes.

Is any more proof needed? Isn't it about time for positive action? We believe so and so do those who attended the game.

those in the American Independent Party, are suggesting that city ordinances be drafted to keep out retail outlets operated by the ultra-radical White Panthers Party.

THE PLYMOUTH situation is particularly disturbing because of the lack of common sense and disregard of federal laws concerning freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

Although the cries for "law and order" are loud, clear and understandable in the anti-dirty books campaign, the proponents of such a move are clearly violating the very laws they say they are protecting.

If a special committee is needed to censor what is to be read or not read in the community, then we feel sorry for those residents who cannot make decisions on their own.

If it is the teenagers the adults are trying to protect, we feel that proposed medicine is worse than the illness it is meant to cure.

Teenagers know what kind of literature they want to read and they know where to get those samples--good or bad.

The younger generation is also having a pretty good laugh at the actions of their so-called adult leaders who are busy putting alleged pornographic novels on the best-seller lists. The hypocrisy of the matter is too much to swallow.

THE WESTLAND MATTER concerns the White Panther Party, which operated a retail outlet

Sense And Nonsense

Butane has been added to the things that are dangerous to sniff. Besides butane, you shouldn't get hooked on whiffing glue, gasoline, plastic cements and so on. Some day soon, the guardians of public health will have to add to the list that commonest of all commodities -- our polluted air.

close to the front door of John Glenn High School and close to two elementary schools.

The store, which sold mostly clothes, posters and underground newspapers, was vacated by the Panthers six weeks after it opened because of community pressure from parents and students.

But the need to outlaw such stores in the future solely because of their revolutionary philosophies would be a violation of law in itself.

The Observer certainly doesn't endorse the Panthers' odd and extreme philosophy, just as we may not subscribe to the philosophies of many local politicians, liberal or conservative.

Merchants are only selling goods and services and can be bought or ignored by the general public as they see fit.

If the Panthers were making any converts among teenagers who walked into the retail outlet out of idle curiosity, then these teens were ripe for picking by any other group which caught their fancy.

After all, there was a church a few feet away from the White Panthers center, and no one was seen breaking down the doors trying to get in and get some religion.

But the idea of city ordinances to keep out persons or groups who don't agree with the majority in the community is ridiculous and should be seriously ignored.

Tim Richard writes

Syd Zigging When Should Be Zagging

Sydney J. Harris, the erudite syndicated columnist, is at home when dealing with words, their meanings, manners and morals. But when he gets into matters of state, Syd and his gigantic generalizations are -- shall we say -- out of date.

Take his recent broadside against state government: "The modern 'state' exists largely as a political dinosaur that has outlived its time and function ... Why should our political life be constricted in the iron corset of 19th century America?"

What stirs his ire is his alleged maltreatment of "big cities" by "rural" legislators. Harris has kind words, for example, for the suggestion that New York City -- and by inference other big cities -- separate from their state governments.

With a sword of verbal air, he smites dummies of straw.

TO BEGIN WITH, just what are the big cities?

Let's say Detroit were to be

separated from the rest of Michigan. What would you do about the suburbs that are part of the southeastern Michigan metropolitan area -- tie 'em to Detroit or let them ride with the rest of the state?

So Syd Harris' thinking is itself many decades out-of-date. He's still talking in terms of "cities," not metropolitan or megalopolitan areas which are what we have in 1969.

Then what if we did have Harris-style "new geo-economic units" to govern urban areas. What happens when those areas grow and people start to spill outside their borders? Syd Harris' concept of government is static, and the world of today is dynamic, so he has no answer.

THEN WHAT ABOUT these "rural" areas? To hear the literary man tell it, you'd get the impression that anyone outside the "big city" -- Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland -- is "rural."

Is State Sen. Gil Bursley of Ann Arbor a hick? He was sponsor of the bill that set up the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority.

What about Sen. Tony Stamm from Kalamazoo? The man is probably 10 times as progressive as some of the hacks in Detroit's City-County Building.

How about a guy from the sticks of Traverse City -- Bill Milliken? This is "rural?"

Want to see a place with race problems? You could go down to 12th Street, but you could also go to Jackson, Battle Creek, Pontiac, Muskegon, Grand Rapids, Big Rapids, Flint ...

Is air pollution a big city problem? Drive down I-75 from the Straits of Mackinac, and when you get to Clare you'll see the beginning of a haze that covers half the state.

This talk about "cities" and "rural" areas -- even about "suburbs" -- is obsolete. The central city covers a smaller and smaller part of the urbanized area. We're nearly all metropolitan dwellers, and we're all in this game together.

Editorial & Opinion

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

Philip H. Power, Publisher

The Livonia Observer • The Redford Observer • The Westland Observer  
The Garden City Observer • The Plymouth Mail & Observer  
The Farmington Enterprise & Observer



Published by Observer Newspapers, Inc.

271 S. Main Street, P.O. Box 200, Plymouth, Mich. 48170

Serving the communities of:  
Livonia, Plymouth, Plymouth Township, Chelsea, Township, Farmington,  
Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City, Westland