

POLICE - COMMUNITY RELATIONS:

MINORITY COMPLAINTS

FILED WITH THE  
CITY OF FLINT OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE

by

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the Master of Public Administration Degree.

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## ABSTRACT

Do minority communities receive inferior police services? Are minorities subjected to police abuse more frequently than non-minorities? Although the literature addressing this topic seems to indicate such to be the case, little empirical evidence is presented to support such a position. In an attempt to identify some evidence in hopes of providing some insight to the questions posed earlier, this project reviewed complaints about police. For the years 1981 through 1985, the City of Flint Ombudsman's Office received nearly 2,000 complaints about police and police services. An analysis of those complaints indicates that although the data contained in the Ombudsman's Office was somewhat inadequate in answering the questions posed earlier, the data was consistent with the literature in that residents of predominantly minority communities do register more complaints against the police than do residents of a predominantly white community.

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Master of Public Administration  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my sons - Matthew, Justin and Chad.

And to my best friend, Barb.

## INTRODUCTION

"If you are a black New Yorker, you automatically read indelibly but invisibly written 'caution' when you pick up the phone to call the police. Calling a police officer can be hazardous to your health. It can result in death, serious physical injury, and almost certain spiritual abuse of your person and your dignity" (U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary, 1980, p. 153).

This statement of caution was made before a congressional subcommittee empaneled to hear testimony about the state of affairs involving the New York City Police Department and the black community in that city. The statement characterizes assertions made by several speakers as they addressed the topic of police-minority community relations.

Although various authors present several different perspectives, their works raise questions:

- Do blacks complain more or less about police services?
- Are complaints by blacks against police valid?
- Do white residents get better police service or do they just complain less?
- Are there significant differences between the type of police complaints registered by residents of black or minority communities and police complaints by residents of white communities?

In March, 1980 and in October, 1984 hearings were held by the United States House of Representatives Subcommittee on Crime and Criminal Justice of the Committee on the Judiciary. Both hearings were chaired by Representative John Conyers, Jr. The March, 1980 hearing occurred in Los Angeles, California while the October, 1984 hearing took place in New York City. Many groups were represented before the panel. Among those represented were blacks and hispanics, police agencies, federal criminal justice agencies and civil rights organizations.

Some disagreement existed as to the cause of the poor relationship between police agencies and minority communities. One point of view presented at the 1980 U.S. House Committee hearing indicated that;

"Cold statistics in Los Angeles will tell you that more policemen are assaulted in minority communities than in dominant communities" . . . and . . . "Whether his perceptions are valid perceptions or not, the policeman believes there's more hostility in minority communities than in dominant communities" (p. 8).

At the same hearing, a contrary point of view was presented in these terms:

"I think in part it is because victims of the police department are the people who are, for the most part, powerless in this society. They are minority. They are very young people" (p. 100).

". . . a general feeling of dissatisfaction and frustration among a growing number of blacks and latinos with the quality of police services in their communities . . . stems from what they perceive as officers' demeaning, self-righteous, insensitive, and racist attitudes" (p. 218).

What the subcommittee heard most often was that, invariably, police services are of a lesser quality and the chances for physical abuse are greater in minority communities than in majority communities. Furthermore, minority citizens were described as reluctant to call for police assistance because of fear that they would become the focus of any police follow-up activities instead of the original issue that prompted the call. Further, witnesses maintained that minority citizens believe strongly that police agencies do not review complaints against police officers thoroughly and, more often than not, merely try to cover up any incidents of police abuse.

Upon completing the hearings, the subcommittee filed a report and concluded that the New York City leadership had not taken the problem of police misconduct as seriously as is necessary and that racism appeared to be a major factor underlying allegations of police misconduct.

Although the congressional hearings indicated that there exists a fear and hostility on the part of minority communities towards

police and police agencies, and that the existence of that fear is evident throughout the country, there is a limitation in interpreting these conclusions. Little empirical evidence was presented at the hearings that would identify overall police complaints and the percentages of those complaints that are registered by minorities. Although one cannot dismiss the specific circumstances and allegations offered at the hearings, and one must be mindful that the number of complaints would not, standing alone, validate (or invalidate) the assertions made before the subcommittee, there still seems to be a need for better documentation of the extent of the problem that exists between police and minorities.

A review of the literature addressing the topic of police-community relations indicates a consistent theme. The literature indicates that minority communities, particularly black and hispanic communities and to a lesser extent poorer white communities, have complained historically about the quality of police services provided to their community and about the manner in which the police treat minority individuals while in police custody (Trojanowicz, 1974 and Ostrom, 1985).

Although the literature indicated general agreement as to the status of the relationship between police and the community, a wide disparity existed with respect to the cause of that relationship. Quite naturally, the points of view expounded upon in the

literature tended to reflect the background of those addressing this topic.

Irrespective of the background of those authors addressing the topic of police and the minority community, all agree in the sense that the relationship between the police and minority communities is not harmonious. Authors representing the point of view of police agencies, as well as authors representing the interests of blacks and black communities acknowledge historical problems between the police and minorities. These problems manifest themselves in various forms. Lack of trust, adversarial co-existence, tension, poor cooperation, abuse - both physical and verbal are but a few of the characteristics of the relationship that exists between minorities and police agencies (Ellis, 1981 and Fogelson, 1970 and Staples, 1975 and Trojanowicz, 1974).

However, the similarities between the points of view of the various authors comes to a screeching halt when they explore the cause of the poor relationship between minorities and police agencies. Some of the causes explored range from institutional (attempts by the white ruling class to suppress blacks and minorities), to individual (racism), to a general lack of knowledge of one another on the part of police and minority community residents. It is at this point in discussing the cause of the poor relationship between minorities and police agencies that the point of view of the various authors reflects, quite apparently so, their background.

Irrespective of one's particular point of view as to the cause of the poor relationship between police agencies and minority communities, there simply is no disputing the existence of the problem, and as previously indicated, the vast majority of the literature seems to point out two general reasons for the problem. The first reason, best summarized by Trojanowicz (1974), is the clashing of different and dissonant cultures. As more and more immigrants came into the United States, in conjunction with the country changing from a predominantly rural society to an urban society, many different ethnic and racial groups intermingled in metropolitan areas. As each of these groups sought to assimilate into society and attempted to achieve economic well-being, misunderstandings occurred and hatred and hostility resulted. Some of these problems, particularly with blacks, have accumulated over many decades.

Trojanowicz concludes by indicating that, "In viewing past police relationships with minority groups, blacks and Spanish-speaking Americans . . . have both historically and presently been the recipients of the greatest amount of negative police behavior and community reaction" (p. 84).

A second reason for police-minority community relations problems entails both the value systems of individual police officers and the organizational and cultural makeup of police agencies. Many authors have written of the bias by individual police officers as they interact with individuals of different or unknown cultural backgrounds (Stotland and Williams, 1975

and Teaham, 1975 and Lefkowitz, 1975).

Much has also been written on the historical organization of police agencies and their emphasis on certain procedures and policies. One of the more interesting articles dealing with individual and organizational bias on the part of police officers and police agencies towards communities was written by Walker and Kratcoski (1985). The authors attempted to measure the value of police officers from Detroit, Michigan and Toronto, Ontario, Canada. They hypothesized that since Toronto has a history of sound police-community relations and since Detroit's history has been one of periods of tension, and if police-community tension is a basic matter of the values of individual police officers, then one would expect significant value differences between Toronto officers and Detroit officers. Instead, the authors found similar value systems among the officers of both cities. They concluded that,

". . . any analysis of police-community relations must pay special attention to the organizational-cultural milieu of the department since their findings suggest that differences in police-community relations be attributed more to organizational and cultural variables than to value systems of individual police officers" (p. 17).

Although the literature seems rather clear with respect to the existence of a problem between police agencies and minority

communities, the same drawback that existed with the congressional hearings also exists with the literature. That drawback is that few, if any, of the authors drew upon empirical research to support their theories. Staples writes that much more, ". . . theoretical and empirical research is necessary before the structural forms characteristic of classic colonialism may be mechanically applied to the complexities of crime in America" (p. 15).

Some empirical research has been conducted with respect to the subject of police-minority community relations. A 1967\* national survey prepared by Michigan State University under a grant by the Office of Law Enforcement Assistance dealt with the subject of citizen complaints against the police department or against one or more police officers and how the police agency handles these matters. The survey report introduced the subject of police-community relations by including the results of a poll conducted by Louis Harris.

\* Although the survey cited is twenty years old and, as such, is not contemporary with other evidence or the current social climate, the survey was one of the few that presented its findings in an empirical fashion. Therefore, these findings are offered in an historical context.

Two of the many questions posed to the respondents were answered as follows:

QUESTION: "How would you rate the job the Federal (state, local) Government does on law enforcement -- excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?"

RESPONSE: Ratings of Law Enforcement

Good - Excellent Rating:

<u>Race</u>	<u>Federal</u> <u>%</u>	<u>State</u> <u>%</u>	<u>Local</u> <u>%</u>
White	75	71	67
Negro	81	63	51

(National Survey, 1967, p. 10)

QUESTION: "On the basis of your knowledge of American police departments, how does your police department compare with others?"

RESPONSE: 

<u>Excellent</u> <u>%</u>	<u>Above</u> <u>Average</u> <u>%</u>	<u>Average</u> <u>%</u>	<u>Below</u> <u>Average</u> <u>%</u>	<u>Poor</u> <u>%</u>
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Race

White	20	50	25	5	0
Negro	2	26	43	23	6

(National Survey, 1967, p. 11)

The responses indicate that there exists (or at least existed) a difference of opinion, based upon the ethnicity of the respondent, as to the performance of police agencies. White

respondents generally rated police performance higher than did black respondents.

The poll was consistent with other localized attitude studies that found that, ". . . the amount of support received from the Negro community is significantly less (than among white communities) with relatively large proportions expressing their dissatisfaction. Indeed, around 60% of San Diego Negroes indicated reservations about the service they received from the police." (National Survey, 1967, p. 12)

More recently, opinion research conducted in Genesee County, Michigan found that with respect to neighborhood safety, ". . . while overall only 9% of County Residents are dissatisfied with the police protection they receive, the minorities voice a greater dissatisfaction (23%)." (Survey of Attitudes, 1986, p. 88)

This issue of the quality of municipal services provided to minority communities has been addressed by several authors.

Feiock analyzed the benefits and tax burdens for elementary school services, relating those service benefits and burdens to the socioeconomic status of various neighborhoods. The underlying theme of the article is to test the "underclass hypothesis". As defined by Feiock (1986), and others cited in

his work, the "underclass hypothesis" theory entails the,

". . . belief that municipal governments deliver superior bundles of services at lower tax rates to 'advantaged' neighborhoods. In other words, neighborhoods that are poorer, or have large shares of minority residents, or are politically weak, receive less services for their tax dollars" (p. 31).

In his discussion, Feiock indicated that past research regarding the service distribution process has suggested that inequalities generally did not exist when comparing areas of differing race or income or location. However, he also indicated that those studies have not thoroughly addressed the underclass hypothesis. Feiock's research concluded that the benefits of education seem to be related to the socioeconomic status of a neighborhood. Feiock also concluded that although service inputs were not related to neighborhood status, there was a moderately positive relationship between service outputs and service outcomes.

On the other hand, O'Brien and Lange (1986) found no support for the notion that the racial composition of a neighborhood affected the quality of the services provided by a municipal government. The study attempted to explore the relationship of residents' level of satisfaction with municipal services to the racial composition of neighborhoods. They concluded that, ". . . individual blacks perceive public services to be of a

lower quality when they live in neighborhoods with large numbers of black residents . . ." (p. 57).

In contrast, Lineberry (1977) found just the opposite in addressing police services provided to nine separate sectors of San Antonio, Texas. Making a distinction between fixed urban services (parks, libraries, etc.) and mobile urban services (police patrol), Lineberry found that there existed little variation among the areas with respect to the allocation or distribution of manpower. Lineberry contended that because of the remarkable equivalence from area to area, whether one was measuring based upon population, crime rates or calls for service, there existed very little inequality in resources expended for services. His findings did not provide support for an underclass hypothesis.

Although Lineberry's research attempts to test, empirically, the relationship between police and minority communities, little of the data addresses specific complaints from the minority community about police and police services. Such an attempt is made by Robert Worden (1984).

Worden's findings were contained in a collection of writings on the manner of assessing patrol activities. Because police patrol activities consume more local police resources than any other set of police services or activities, the emphasis in this

compendium was on assessment of patrol performance. Worden attempted to differentiate between "personal rules" utilized by officers and "professional" or "agency rules" employed by officers. He defined an agency rule as a quick response to "in-progress" calls (p. 45) and a personal rule as what an officer conveys to a citizen while providing service (p. 47). He cited a conclusion by Mladenka and Hill (p. 51) that, "None of the relationships (between a police officer and a citizen) in any city can be considered even moderately strong . . . and . . . the application of this professional decision-rule results in no bias across neighborhoods of different socioeconomic characters".

However, Ostrom and Whitaker (1985) cited several studies in which resentment was found among black Americans towards the quality of police service received, as well as the treatment received at the hands of police officers (p. 305). More specifically, they cite a study conducted in Denver, Colorado which measured police responsiveness and found that,

"Ethnicity is a primary determinant of the amount and kind of contact people have with the police. Within ethnic groups, there is by and large no association between age, sex and class and whether an individual has been stopped and arrested or has called the police for help or talked over difficulties with them" (p. 306).

Ostrom and Whitaker also cite other studies conducted in Denver, Colorado; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Seattle, Washington; and Detroit, Michigan and concluded that,

"The phenomenon which these authors identify as 'neighborhood culture' and 'contextual effect' appears to be a reflection of the lower levels and poorer quality of service provided to citizens living in black neighborhoods" (p. 306).

In still another publication, Ostrom (1985) found that, "Black respondents living in predominantly black neighborhoods in center cities are the least likely to rate police performance as outstanding" (p. 254).

What is clearly evident from the congressional hearings, literature and survey data is that there exists a vast difference between spokespeople and authors as to the status of the relationship between police and police agencies and black and minority communities. Furthermore, the cause of that relationship is equally in dispute.

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Do minority communities, in fact, receive inferior police services? Are minorities subjected to police abuse more frequently than non-minorities? Although the literature mentioned earlier seems to indicate such to be the case, little, and more frequently none, of the literature presents empirical evidence to support such a position. Therefore, the task of this project will be to determine the extent to which the conclusions posed in the literature can be tested.

In an attempt to achieve such a task, this project will review complaints against police in a particular city; Flint, Michigan. The governmental structure in Flint includes an Ombudsman's Office. The purpose of the Ombudsman's Office is to provide citizens with a mechanism to file complaints or grievances against the city, its employees or agents acting on its behalf.

Included in the various complaints registered with the Flint Ombudsman's Office are complaints against police. The data included in the police complaints will be reviewed to determine the extent to which the questions about police - minority relations and police services in minority areas can be tested.

Prior to analyzing the data contained in the records maintained

by the Ombudsman's Office, some background information about Flint, Michigan and the City of Flint Ombudsman's Office is provided.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF FLINT, MICHIGAN

According to the 1980 census, the population for Flint was 159,000. That total has declined in 1987 to approximately 149,000. The pattern of decline is not a recent development, as the population was approximately 182,000 in the early 1970's. As the total population has declined, the minority proportion has increased. The city's black population has increased from 25 percent in 1970 to 41 percent in 1980. Flint's Spanish population was approximately 2.5 percent in 1980 and other minorities accounted for about 1.2 percent of the population. More recent estimates place the overall minority population of Flint at approximately 49 percent of the total population.

According to a city profile published by the City of Flint Department of Community Development (1983), Flint has a high proportion of manufacturing jobs compared to other cities in the state and nation, as it serves as the headquarters for three divisions of the General Motors Corporation. Despite that fact, the Flint area experienced record unemployment levels in the early 1980's. Although the unemployment level seemed to have peaked at 21 percent in 1982, and dropped since then, recent plant closings have aggravated the situation.

Although household income for Flint averaged \$17,000.00 in 1980, nearly 17 percent of the city's population was below the

poverty level.

Since 1975 the City of Flint has operated under the strong mayor form of government. Such a form of government provides for the election of the mayor from voters throughout the city. In contrast, the city council is a nine-member body that functions as the legislative branch of the Flint government, and each member is elected from a specific portion of the city. Flint is divided into nine wards. Ward boundaries have changed through the years to accomodate population shifts, but the general location of each ward within the city has remained stable.

Ward information is necessary because records maintained by the Ombudsman's Office are based, in part, by ward. Recordkeeping by ward is necessary to gauge the racial composition of each ward in order to analyze the relationship of an area's racial/ethnic composition to the frequency and type of complaints made about the police. Although the ward boundaries do not coincide with the census tracts within the city limits, it was possible to identify each of the census blocks by ward and then compute the population totals. This exercise allowed for the computation of the black population by ward and allowed for a fairly accurate estimation of the white population in each ward. The exercise revealed a highly segregated community.

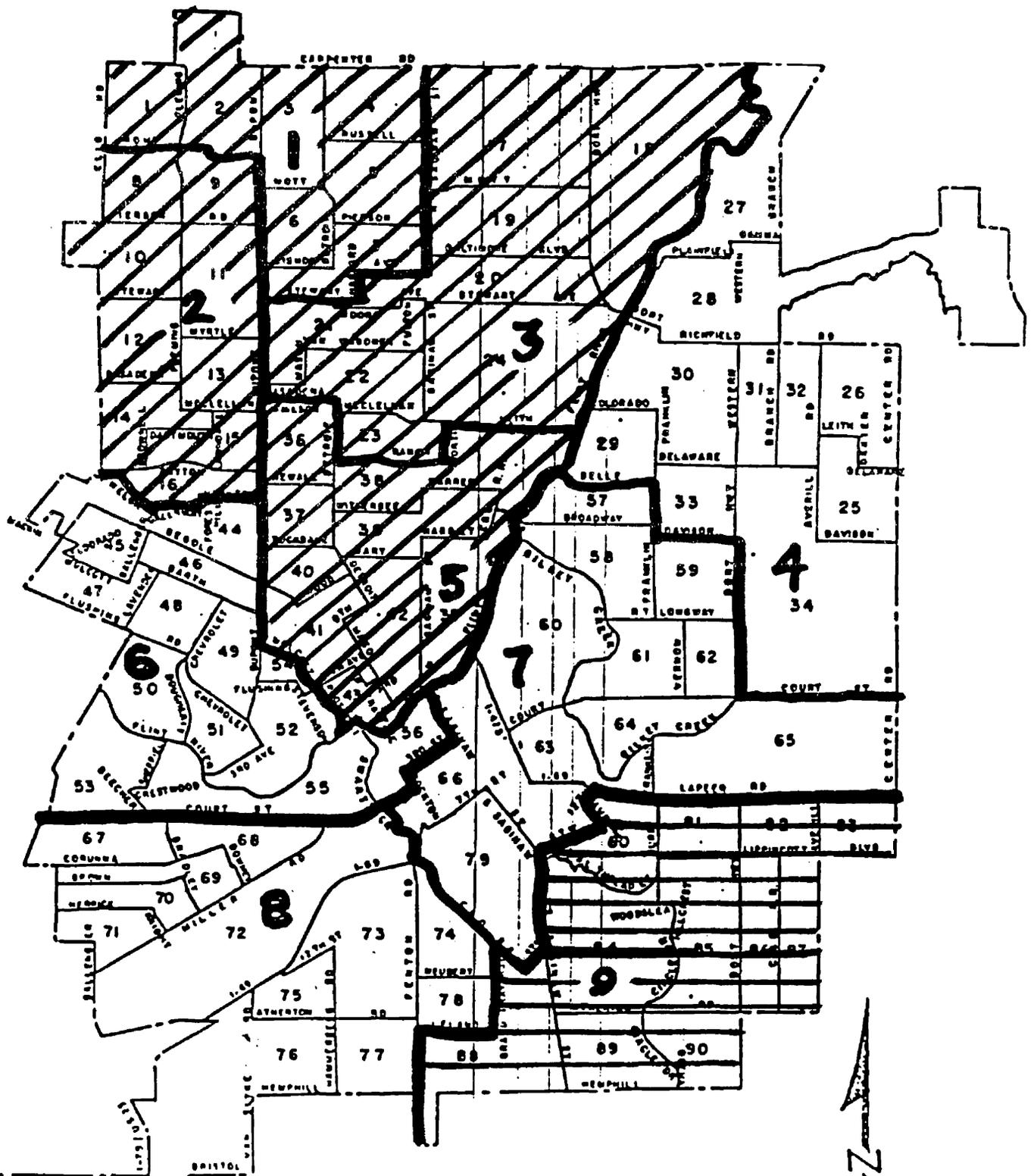
Table 1 indicates that the black population exceeds 80 percent

in two wards and 65 percent in four wards. Those four wards (wards 1, 2, 3 and 5) make up the northwest quadrant of the city. Black population is 18 percent or less in four other wards. Two of those four wards (ward 4 and ward 8) have literally no blacks residing in the areas. The vast majority of the black citizens reside in the northwest quadrant of the city (wards 1, 2 and 3). The following table identifies the racial makeup of each ward.

**TABLE 1**  
**RACIAL POPULATION BY WARD**

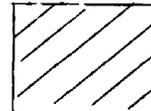
RACE	WARD 1	WARD 2	WARD 3	WARD 4	WARD 5	WARD 6	WARD 7	WARD 8	WARD 9
TOTAL	17,785	17,731	17,530	17,828	17,790	17,824	17,380	17,767	17,843
% BLACK	86	65	83	02	69	09	18	0	42
# BLACK	15,290	11,494	14,515	303	12,180	1,524	3,036	85	7,746
% WHITE	14	35	17	98	31	91	82	100	58
# WHITE	2,495	6,237	3,015	17,525	5,610	16,300	14,344	17,682	10,367

The distribution of race by ward is illustrated by the following map.

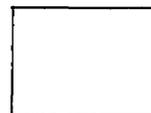


BISHOP AIRPORT

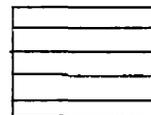
WARDS WITH A BLACK POPULATION  
OF 65 PERCENT OR MORE



WARDS WITH A BLACK POPULATION  
OF 20 PERCENT OR LESS



WARDS WITH A BLACK POPULATION  
BETWEEN 20 PERCENT AND  
65 PERCENT



CITY OF FLINT  
OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE:

A HISTORY

The Ombudsman's Office was created by City Ordinance in 1969 and operated under the direction of the city manager. Investigations at that time were limited to complaints against the Flint Police Department, and a police sergeant was appointed Ombudsman in that capacity.

Three years after the office was established, its jurisdiction was broadened to cover all types of complaints against the City of Flint. The Ombudsman had little power beyond submitting his findings in the form of reports to the city manager.

In November of 1974, Flint citizens voted to enact a new city charter creating a "strong mayor" form of government, and simultaneously, a more powerful and independent Ombudsman's Office.

In accordance with the new city charter, a voter referendum was held in November of 1980 to determine whether or not the Ombudsman's Office would become a permanent department in Flint city government. The voters decided to retain the office.

In a nutshell, the Flint City Ombudsman is established in accord with the City Charter; is appointed by the City Council;

and is a politically independent public official. The role of the Ombudsman is to investigate official acts of any city government agency which aggrieve any persons. The Ombudsman's investigative power extends equally to all city agencies, elected officials, and appointed officials. Since the formal inception of the Ombudsman's Office in 1974, the office has investigated thousands of complaints alleging acts ranging from simple oversight, to rudeness, to misfeasance and malfeasance on the part of city employees, departments and contractors hired by the city. Throughout those years, the agency that has been the target of the greatest number of complaints has been the police department.

**ANALYSIS OF POLICE  
COMPLAINTS REGISTERED WITH  
THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE**

The number of complaints made to the Ombudsman's Office ranged from 282 to 442 in the years 1977 through 1982. A less formalized recording procedure utilized in 1975 and 1976 does not allow for an accurate or thorough tabulation of those complaints. A sharp increase was registered in 1983 and 1984, with more than 1200 complaints each year. This increase, at least in 1983, can be attributed, for the most part, to a public awareness campaign by the Ombudsman's Office. Slide-tape presentations were made to community groups, radio and television announcements were made and billboards were leased throughout the city to increase the community's awareness of the office and its purpose.

Another sharp increase occurred in 1985 when the number of complaints rose to 1,775. This increase may have resulted from an increase in publicity resulting from several investigations involving flooding, excessive water billings and overall administration of the police department.

The following table reflects the number of complaints registered with the Ombudsman's Office on an annual basis.

**TABLE 2**  
**ANNUAL COMPLAINT TOTALS -**  
**OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE**

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>COMPLAINTS</u>
1977	282
1978	482
1979	421
1980	423
1981	337
1982	442
1983	1,241
1984	1,216
1985	1,775

Of the above totals, police complaints accounted for nearly half (on the average) of the total complaints registered with the Ombudsman's Office from 1977 to 1982. The number of complaints about police increased sharply in 1983 and again in 1985, although the percentage of police complaints fell. The number of complaints about other services more than tripled from 1982 to 1983, and grew almost fifty percent from 1983 to 1985. The increase in complaints about other services can be attributed to the public awareness campaign and increased publicity resulting from investigative reports issued by the Ombudsman's Office.

Table 3 reflects that pattern.

TABLE 3  
POLICE COMPLAINT TOTALS -  
OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE

YEAR	TOTAL COMPLAINTS	COMPLAINTS ABOUT OTHER SERVICES	COMPLAINTS ABOUT POLICE	PERCENTAGE OF ALL COMPLAINTS - POLICE
1977	282	147	135	48%
1978	482	252	230	48%
1979	421	211	210	50%
1980	423	199	224	53%
1981	337	186	151	45%
1982	442	224	218	49%
1983	1,241	782	459	37%
1984	1,216	718	498	41%
1985	1,775	1,156	619	35%

To attempt to test assertions made to the Conyers sub-committee and in the literature on police-community relations, the complaint files of the Flint Ombudsman's Office have been examined to compare complaints about the police originating in black and white areas of the city. For the purpose of this analysis, complaints about police registered with the Ombudsman's Office were reviewed for the five-year period 1981 - 1985.

Because the Ombudsman's Office does not identify complainants by race, direct comparison of complaints about police by blacks, whites and other racial or ethnic group members is not feasible. However, the office does record the area of the city in which the complainant resides. As indicated earlier, the city is highly segregated racially, as evidenced by the table and map that were

presented above. Comparison of complaints by ward provides a reasonable basis for examination of the similarities or differences in complaints made by minority group members. Recognizing the potential for distortion in use of group data to describe individual behavior, the degree of racial segregation in Flint is sufficiently sharp to make such analysis plausible.

In four of Flint's nine wards, the proportion of black population ranged from 65 to 86 percent, based on census data. In the four wards combined (first, second, third and fifth), almost 76 percent of the population were black, and in two of the wards (first and third), more than 84 percent were black. By contrast, in three wards combined (fourth, sixth and eighth), less than four percent of the population was black, and in the most segregated wards (fourth and eighth), only one percent was black. The difference between the first and third wards, on the one hand, and the fourth and sixth, on the other, can be attributed to race with some confidence (albeit with the reservations one is compelled to observe in drawing inferences about individual behavior from aggregate data).

Complaints about police, tabulated by ward over the five-year period 1981 - 1985, are presented in Table 4. Excluded from the table are those complaints registered by individuals residing outside of the city limits and those complaints for which no

address was determined (usually anonymous complaints).

Table 4 also includes a tabulation of complaints, by ward, against the Department of Public Works. The Department of Public Works consists primarily of the Building Inspection Division, Traffic Engineering, sewer and street maintenance, garbage collection and the Water Office. Because complaints against the Department of Public Works rank second to police complaints registered with the Ombudsman's Office, it is included for the purpose of making comparisons based upon ward.

**TABLE 4**  
**POLICE & PUBLIC WORKS COMPLAINTS**  
RECEIVED BY AREA OF THE CITY

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	TOTAL
TOTAL COMPLAINTS	337	442	1,241	1,216	1,775	5,011
POLICE COMPLAINTS	128	186	371	413	519	1,617
DPW COMPLAINTS	103	88	292	282	328	1,093
OTHER COMPLAINTS	106	168	578	521	928	2,301
WARD 1						
% POLICE	14.1 (18)	10.2 (19)	7.8 (29)	10.4 (43)	10.0 (52)	10.0 (161)
% DPW	7.8 (8)	9.0 (8)	11.3 (33)	8.5 (24)	6.1 (20)	8.5 (93)
WARD 2						
% POLICE	12.5 (16)	12.4 (23)	9.4 (35)	9.9 (41)	10.2 (53)	10.4 (168)
% DPW	10.7 (11)	12.5 (11)	11.6 (34)	9.2 (26)	7.0 (23)	9.6 (105)
WARD 3						
% POLICE	10.0 (13)	12.9 (24)	13.7 (51)	13.6 (56)	13.7 (71)	13.3 (215)
% DPW	10.7 (11)	12.5 (11)	10.9 (32)	9.6 (27)	12.2 (40)	11.1 (121)
WARD 4						
% POLICE	12.5 (16)	9.1 (17)	13.2 (49)	12.6 (52)	13.9 (72)	12.7 (206)
% DPW	8.7 (9)	6.8 (6)	8.9 (26)	13.1 (37)	10.1 (35)	10.3 (113)
WARD 5						
% POLICE	14.8 (19)	17.2 (32)	19.7 (73)	15.0 (62)	12.3 (64)	15.5 (250)
% DPW	8.7 (9)	15.9 (14)	15.8 (46)	12.8 (36)	12.2 (40)	13.3 (145)
WARD 6						
% POLICE	10.0 (13)	9.7 (18)	6.5 (24)	11.0 (46)	7.3 (38)	8.6 (139)
% DPW	14.5 (15)	7.9 (7)	12.0 (35)	14.5 (41)	10.1 (35)	12.2 (133)
WARD 7						
% POLICE	8.6 (11)	14.5 (27)	11.3 (42)	9.2 (38)	16.8 (87)	12.7 (205)
% DPW	14.5 (15)	20.5 (18)	10.3 (30)	14.5 (41)	16.5 (54)	14.5 (158)
WARD 8						
% POLICE	5.5 (7)	6.5 (12)	8.1 (30)	7.0 (29)	7.1 (37)	7.1 (115)
% DPW	8.7 (9)	7.9 (7)	7.8 (23)	10.6 (30)	12.5 (41)	10.1 (110)
WARD 9						
% POLICE	11.7 (15)	7.5 (14)	10.2 (38)	11.1 (46)	8.8 (45)	9.8 (158)
% DPW	15.5 (16)	6.8 (6)	11.3 (33)	7.1 (20)	12.2 (40)	10.5 (115)

\* (actual number of complaints)

The data show that the frequency of complaints about police are greater, percentage-wise, in predominantly minority areas. Wards 1, 2, 3 and 5 account for nearly 50 percent of the police complaints. In contrast, the predominantly white wards (wards 4, 6, 7 and 8) account for 41 percent. A similar difference exists when comparing the ward with the greatest percentage of minorities (ward 1) to the ward with the greatest percentage of white residents (ward 8). Ward 1 accounts for 10 percent of the police complaints while ward 8 accounts for 7 percent.

The data also show that the frequency of other complaints - complaints about the Department of Public Works - changes despite utilizing the same groupings of wards. Wards 1, 2, 3 and 5 account for 42 percent of the complaints against the Department of Public Works while wards 4, 6, 7 and 8 account for 47 percent. With respect to the ward with the greatest minority population (ward 1), complaints about the Department of Public Works total 8 percent. On the other hand, 10 percent of the complaints originating from ward 8 are against the Department of Public Works. Clearly a reversal occurs with respect to the percentage of police complaints, and the area from which they originate, and complaints about the Department of Public Works, and the areas from which they originate.

The data show that predominantly minority areas provide more complaints about police than do generally white areas, but such is not true when considering other services such as those provided by the Department of Public Works.

Of course, such tabulations are not without certain concerns. One cannot automatically assume that a complaint registered by an individual residing in either a predominantly black or predominantly white ward is a member of the predominant ethnicity of that ward. Therefore, staff members of the Ombudsman's Office determined the ethnicity of complainants for the period between October 5, 1986 and December 31, 1986. Such a determination was made by actually seeing the complainant, reviewing police documents which indicated the ethnicity of the complainant, or, on those occasions, when the complainant identified their ethnicity. That information was then cross-referenced by ward. The totals are summarized in Table 5.

**TABLE 5**  
**ETHNICITY OF COMPLAINANT**  
**BY WARD**

RACE	WARDS								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
WHITE									
Percentage	19	15	18	100	33	30	50	100	33
Actual total	3	2	2	9	4	3	7	6	1
BLACK									
Percentage	81	77	82	0	58	70	36	0	67
Actual total	13	10	9	0	7	7	5	0	2
UNDETERMINED									
Actual total	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0

\*These totals are derived from police complaints registered with the Ombudsman's Office between October 5 and December 31, 1986.

The table provides more meaningful data when a more direct comparison is made with the larger base of police complaint data that was provided earlier.

As indicated earlier, the larger base of police complaint data indicated that minority wards (wards 1, 2, 3 and 5) accounted for nearly 50 percent of the complaints while white wards (wards 4, 6, 7 and 8) accounted for 41 percent. In contrast, the data in Table 5 show that black residents of the same minority wards (wards 1, 2, 3 and 5) accounted for nearly 75 percent of the police complaints originating from those wards. Conversely, white residents of the white wards (wards 4, 6, 7 and 8) accounted for 70 percent of the police complaints originating from those wards.

The data also suggests a more drastic difference in that blacks may account for about 80 percent of the police complaints in wards 1 and 3, with whites accounting for all of the complaints in wards 4 and 8. Caution is mandated, of course, in analyzing this particular data because of the small number of cases.

However, a more thorough analysis is necessary to determine adequately if the data contained in the files of the Ombudsman's Office can address the questions posed in the literature. Therefore, each police complaint registered with the

Ombudsman's Office was reviewed and analyzed. The information contained in each police complaint consists of:

- the date of the complaint
- the time of day that the complainant contacted the Ombudsman's Office
- whether or not the complainant first contacted the police department to resolve the complaint
- the length of time needed by the Ombudsman's Office to complete a review of the complaint
- the nature of the complaint
- the evaluation of the complaint
- the resolution of the complaint

Each of the seven items listed above were reviewed and tabulated from all police complaints registered with the Ombudsman's Office during the initial (1981) and final year (1985) of the five-year period 1981 through 1985. Comparisons of each of the factors were then made on the basis of ward. Instead of tabulating each of the factors for each ward, one ward representing the highest population percentage of white individuals was tabulated, as well as the ward with the highest proportion of black individuals. The wards chosen were ward 1 (black population of 86 percent) and ward 8 (white population of 100 percent).

This allowed for the analysis of ward by ward differences in the factors listed earlier; providing some indication of differences relative to race.

The resulting tables follow.

**TABLE 6**  
**MONTH OF CONTACT**  
**OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE**

MONTH	WARD 1		WARD 8	
	1981	1985	1981	1985
January	3	3	1	2
February	2	4	1	2
March	1	1	0	4
April	0	10	0	5
May	1	6	0	2
June	2	5	2	6
July	2	2	1	4
August	1	3	0	0
September	1	5	0	5
October	1	8	2	4
November	2	2	0	0
December	0	3	0	3
TOTALS	16	52	7	37

**TABLE 7**  
**TIME OF DAY**  
**COMPLAINT IS FILED**  
**OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE**

TIME	WARD 1		WARD 8	
	1981	1985	1981	1985
A. M.	1	0	0	0
7:00 - 8:00	0	0	0	0
8:00 - 9:00	0	4	0	2
9:00 - 10:00	2	5	1	6
10:00 - 11:00	0	6	2	2
11:00 - 12:00	1	5	1	6
P. M.	0	0	0	0
12:00 - 1:00	2	9	0	5
1:00 - 2:00	3	5	1	6
2:00 - 3:00	4	4	0	3
3:00 - 4:00	2	5	1	3
4:00 - 5:00	0	7	0	4
After 5:00	0	1	0	0
Blank	1	1	1	0
TOTALS	16	52	7	37

TABLE 8A  
 CONTACT WITH POLICE DEPARTMENT  
 PRIOR TO CONTACTING  
OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE

PRIOR CONTACT WITH POLICE DEPARTMENT	WARD 1		WARD 8	
	1981	1985	1981	1985
YES	11	22	05	10
NO	01	13	01	18
NO INFORMATION	04	17	01	09
TOTALS	16	52	07	37

TABLE 8B  
 RECONTACTED OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE  
AFTER REFERRED TO POLICE DEPARTMENT

	WARD 1		WARD 8	
	1981	1985	1981	1985
REFERRED TO POLICE DEPARTMENT *"No" or "No information" from Table 8a	5	30	2	27
RECONTACTED OMBUDSMAN *after referral to police department	1	13	2	18

TABLE 9  
 LENGTH OF TIME  
TO RESOLVE COMPLAINT

DAYS	WARD 1		WARD 8	
	1981	1985	1981	1985
00 - 10	7	4	2	1
11 - 20	2	8	2	3
21 - 30	3	19	2	15
31 - 40	1	8	0	4
41 - 50	1	2	0	2
51 - 60	1	3	0	1
61 or More	1	8	1	11
TOTALS	16	52	7	37

**TABLE 10**  
**ALLEGATIONS**

ALLEGATIONS	WARD 1		WARD 8	
	1981	1985	1981	1985
Lack of Service	8 (50%)	29 (56%)	4 (57%)	25 (68%)
Physical Abuse	2	4	3	3
Verbal Abuse	1	1	0	0
Loss, Confiscation or Destruction of Property	1	5	0	0
Discourtesy	1	4	0	7
Harassment	0	6	0	2
Illegal Arrest	1	2	0	0
Illegal Search	2	1	0	0
TOTALS	16	52	7	37

**TABLE 11**  
**EVALUATION**

EVALUATION	WARD 1		WARD 8	
	1981	1985	1981	1985
Unable to Prove/ Disprove	0	14	1	9
No Jurisdiction	1	0	0	0
Inactive	3	23	3	15
Sustained	3 38%	5 19%	0 29%	8 32%
Partially Sustained	3	5	2	4
Not Sustained	3	2	1	1
Not Ascertainable	3	3	0	0
TOTALS	16	52	7	37

**TABLE 12**  
**RESOLUTION**

RESOLUTION	WARD 1		WARD 8	
	1981	1985	1981	1985
Appropriate Action Taken	6	6	0	3
	63%	17%	14%	16%
Mediated to Satisfaction of Complainant	4	3	1	3
Future Evaluation	0	14	1	6
Withdrawn	3	0	2	1
Report Issued	1	1	0	1
Not Ascertainable	2	28	3	23
TOTALS	16	52	7	37

Table 5 clearly indicates that the predominantly minority ward had more than double the number of complaints against police in 1981 as did the predominantly white ward. This trend varied slightly in 1985, but clearly the ward with a predominantly minority population tended to complain more about police services.

Tables 6 and 7 offer no discernable patterns with respect to ward differences nor do they offer any particular insight in this analysis.

In analyzing whether or not the complainant first contacted the police department to resolve the complaint, the data contained in the Ombudsman's Office was best summarized into two categories. The first, Table 8A, was whether or not contact was made with the police department by the complainant prior to contacting the Ombudsman's Office. If contact had been made, the complaint was immediately accepted by the Ombudsman's Office. If no contact had been made with the police department, the complainant was referred to make such contact, and the complaint was not actively pursued by the Ombudsman's Office at that time. At a later date, the Ombudsman's Office would recontact the referred complainant to determine if the complaint had been resolved. The second category, Table 8B, deals with whether or not the referred complainant recontacted the Ombudsman's Office.

Table 8A indicates that in 1981, most complainants in both wards contacted the police department before contacting the Ombudsman's Office. However, 1985 indicates a complete reversal. Almost half in ward 1 and more than two-thirds in ward 8 did not contact the police department first. The data causes one to wonder why both, black and white complainants were highly likely to complain to the police department first in 1981, but much less likely to do so in 1985. One explanation for this switch may be that complainants, irrespective of ethnicity, may have lost or lacked confidence in the police department to adequately review and address the issue raised in the complaint. People who contacted the Ombudsman's Office regarding the police often expressed a concern about the objectivity of police officers investigating fellow officers. Another explanation may involve the use of a statement read by internal investigative police officers to a complainant warning him or her about the consequences of making false or misleading accusations against a police officer. People contacting the Ombudsman's Office complained that such a warning made them feel as if the officers assigned to investigate police complaints automatically assumed they were making a false complaint.

Table 8B indicates that almost half in ward 1 and two-thirds in ward 8 recontacted the Ombudsman's Office after having been referred to the police department. This data seems to reinforce the explanation offered earlier that individuals, white or black, seem to lack confidence in the police to investigate fellow

officers.

Table 9 reflects the length of time needed by the Ombudsman's Office to investigate each of the police complaints. Both the minority ward and the white ward follow the same pattern. In 1981, police complaints were generally resolved within 30 days, and more than half in less than three weeks. However, in 1985 the time needed to resolve complaints increased substantially. Eighty percent in ward 1 and 89 percent in ward 8 required three weeks or longer; 15 percent in ward 1 and 30 percent in ward 8 required more than two months. The increased length of time needed to investigate police complaints may be a result of the increase in the number of complaints about police from 1981 to 1985. Another explanation for the larger percentage of "61 or more" day cases in 1985 may be the increasing complexity of the allegations against police. Investigations of police conduct by the Ombudsman's Office no longer entailed only rudeness or false arrest complaints, but also included conflict of interest allegations and allegations requiring legal assistance in interpreting applicable laws as they applied to the conduct of police and police agencies.

Allegations registered by complainants are reflected in Table 10. Clearly there exists no ward difference with respect to the most common allegation - lack of service. Such an allegation entails slow response time by a police cruiser, dissatisfaction with a

police investigation, or a general lack of follow-up by the police to a call for service. However, a difference seems apparent when all other allegations (omitting "lack of service" allegations) are analyzed. The minority ward tends to focus on harassment (i.e. stopping and/or questioning, requesting to see identification without an apparent reason, etc. . .) and loss/confiscation/destruction of property (which is often viewed as a form of harassment), while the predominantly white ward tends to focus on discourtesy. It is of particular interest that the alleged instances of physical abuse are relatively the same between the two wards.

Data pertinent to evaluation of complaints is presented in Table 11. With respect to both wards, nearly half of all of the complaints are closed as inactive. Such an evaluation means that the complaining party didn't maintain contact with the Ombudsman's Office or provide the office with certain necessary information as promised. Of those cases not evaluated as inactive, nearly 25 percent of the allegations are determined to be unable to be proven or disproven. This is true for both wards. The only obvious difference that exists between the two wards is that, proportionally, ward 8 has a slightly higher percentage of sustained or partially sustained allegations. On the average for both wards, about 30 percent of the cases are sustained or partially sustained. If you omit those cases evaluated as "inactive" or "not ascertainable", approximately 50 percent of the balance of the cases are sustained.

With respect to the validity or partial validity of the complaints against police, the ethnicity of the complainant does not seem to be a significant factor.

Because over half of the complaints filed against police from these two wards are not categorized with respect to a resolution, Table 12, there are limits to the conclusions that can be drawn regarding case outcomes. Proportionally, a drastic decrease occurred (63 percent to 17 percent) in the minority ward with respect to those cases with satisfactory resolution or appropriate action while the white ward remained the same (14 percent to 16 percent) despite the fact that complaints from both wards more than tripled from 1981 to 1985.

## CONCLUSIONS/IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this exercise was two-fold. The first task was to identify the information or data that existed in the City of Flint Ombudsman's Office with respect to complaints against police. The second, and more important task, was to analyze the data contained in the Ombudsman's Office to determine the extent to which the conclusions posed in the literature can be tested.

With respect to the information contained in the Ombudsman's Office, data that identifies the area of the city that a complainant resides provides some valuable information. However, only two of the seven items of information pertinent to each case seems of any value.

Clearly, residents in areas of the city with a predominantly black or minority population account for nearly half of all of the complaints registered against police. These complaints against police originating from a minority ward entail four of the nine wards within the city. Additionally, isolating the two wards most representative of a predominantly black or minority population and of a predominantly white population indicates a wider gap between the number of complaints received by the Ombudsman's Office. The minority ward - ward 1 - filed nearly twice as many complaints against the

police as did the white ward - ward 8.

Secondly, information as to whether or not the complaining party contacted the police department prior to complaining to the Ombudsman's Office revealed a similar pattern. Both black and white ward residents tended to contact the police prior to the Ombudsman's Office in 1981. In 1985 the trend was completely the opposite in that residents of black wards as well as residents of white wards tended to contact the Ombudsman's Office prior to contacting the police department. Most interesting, however, was the fact that race did not seem to be a factor with respect to the allegations posed by the complaining party. The primary allegation raised by residents of a minority ward, as well as residents of a white ward, was lack of service. This finding is consistent with a finding contained in an earlier study conducted in the Flint area. In that study, Perlman and others (1970) concluded that the most pressing concern on the part of residents with respect to crime problems was the, ". . . insufficient police protection and laxity of enforcement . . ." (p. 20). However, a discernable difference does exist along racial lines when exploring other allegations against police. Residents of the minority ward alleged harassment second to lack of service, while residents of the white ward cited discourtesy on the part of police.

With respect to the main focus of this research, the information relative to police complaints filed with the City of Flint Ombudsman's Office is inadequate in testing the conclusions

posed in the literature. The information contained in the Ombudsman's Office is consistent with the literature in that minority, or at least residents of a predominantly minority community, do, in fact, register more complaints against police than do residents of a predominantly white community.

However, the information contained in the Ombudsman's Office does not help to explain the cause for the higher number of complaints registered by minorities. Furthermore, the nature of the allegations leveled against Flint police are essentially the same irrespective of the ethnicity of the complaining individual. The only variation with respect to allegations and the race of the complaining individual exists when exploring the second most cited allegation. Minority individuals tended to complain about various forms of harassment by members of the police department, while white individuals tended to cite discourtesy by police.

These conclusions are offered while being mindful of a significant drawback that exists with the methodology of this research. Few of the actual cases reviewed between 1981 and 1985 identified the ethnicity of the complaining individual. In other words, the ethnicity of the complaining individual is assumed based upon the location of the city in which the complainant resided. With very few exceptions, none of the records contained in the Ombudsman's

Office identified a complainant as white, black, Hispanic, Asian, etcetera. That shortcoming qualifies any conclusions drawn from this work,

However significant the shortcoming of the methodology utilized in this research, there still exists some value in the data contained in the Ombudsman's Office, as well as the very tentative conclusions of this research. Clearly, the information contained in the Ombudsman's Office indicates that there does exist some differences between police complaints filed by minority individuals and white individuals. And these differences need to be explored. However, the records contained in the Ombudsman's Office are not, in and of themselves, adequate enough to explore the cause of the few differences that were found to exist. Attempting to explore these differences would entail the following:

- 1) Refining the data collected by the Ombudsman's Office. This would include a more specific description of the allegations as well as developing a mechanism for consistent categorization of circumstances surrounding the allegations. Such a mechanism might include the complainant's previous contacts with police, as well as previous complaints leveled against police officers involved in an incident.

An additional act of refining the records

contained in the Ombudsman's Office would be to identify the ethnicity of each complainant. This would provide a means for determining exactly complaints and allegations along racial lines. However, such an act is extremely problematic and, in all reality, probably cannot be done without causing more serious problems than it would be worth.

- 2) Develop a survey instrument for all individuals filing a complaint with the Ombudsman's Office. The instrument should emphasize income levels and demographic information, as well as attitudes towards police and police agencies.
- 3) Develop a survey instrument for those police officers and officials who are the subject of a complaint filed with the Ombudsman's Office. Again, the instrument should include personal background information, attitudes towards minorities, as well as others, and attitudes about their role as officers. Although this is likely to raise problems, particularly regarding asking an accused officer to provide information that might strengthen a case against him or her, it needs to be explored.

The data contained in the Ombudsman's Office with respect to minority complaints against a police agency does coincide with literature addressing this topic in that a minority community seems to complain about police and police services more so than does a white community. However, the Ombudsman's Office data, in its present form, is inadequate in exposing the cause for such a finding. However, the data does provide an initial step in developing a mechanism for a more in-depth analysis to determine who complains about police and what is the cause for those complaints.

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