

Pamela D. Mayhall

POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE



3rd Edition

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This book is dedicated to those men and women who work in one of the most complex and challenging of professions—law enforcement.

Preface

Relationships change as individuals, communities, and societies change. They change as the needs and responsibilities of each member in the relationship change. This book addresses a challenge that all criminal justice practitioners—police, courts, and corrections—must confront. It is the challenge of developing and maintaining meaningful relationships with each other and with the citizens they serve in an atmosphere of change.

The police are the edge, the most visible and, according to many citizens, the most approachable of these criminal justice practitioners. A police–citizen partnership is essential to reducing crime. Shaping the partnership in positive ways requires effective police–community relations practice. Many disciplines are involved: law, history, philosophy, psychology, communication, sociology, economics, and more.

In this book, we draw from all of these in order to help the reader better understand and practice positive police–community relations. To achieve our purpose, many topics, sometimes unlikely bedfellows, are addressed in the context of community relations. For example: What are the psychological processes that accompany the business of enforcing laws in America today? What is the relationship between crime prevention and community relations? How can systems principles be applied to police–community relations? What is the nature of the media link to the community? The reader is encouraged to explore the dynamics and problems of communication, to relate these to a variety of issues associated with discretion, and to discover ways in which the police and the community can interact more effectively.

This text is designed for use in a one- or two-semester course on Police–Community Relations or Police and Society. It represents an overview. Much more could be said about every topic included. We address these topics in the context of community relations and encourage the reader to pursue further study in areas of special interest.

This book already has many friends. To them, I'd like to say that every chapter in this third edition has been updated and expanded to reflect current research. Three chapters have been added. In Chapter 2, *The Justice Community*, systems principles are applied to community relations within and among justice community agencies. In Chapter 12, *Community Relations in the Context of Culture*, the concept of cultural context and its importance to positive community relations is

addressed. Chapter 5, Police Role Concepts in a Changing Society, combines Chapters 5 and 6 from the second edition.

I have tried to write in a manner designed to make the subject matter accessible to students. A number of pedagogical devices are included to ensure student comprehension. Each chapter begins with a summary overview and learning objectives. Each chapter ends with conclusions, a student checklist and questions for discussion. New to the third edition is a feature entitled "One Step Forward," designed to apply concepts, increase skills, and offer new learning opportunities. A very complete Instructor's Manual, including test questions and classroom projects, is available from the publisher.

Many people have offered time, support and expertise to this project. I am grateful to all of them. Special appreciation is reserved for those who so thoughtfully and carefully reviewed drafts of the manuscript: Moses A. Leon; Professor Vincent Alfaro, Fresno City College; Professor James Sheaff, Des Moines Area Community College; Professor Warren N. Cotter, Kings College; Professor Kenneth Ray Wagner, Southeastern Louisiana University; Professor Anne Thomas Sulton, Howard University; Professor Tim Hart, College of the Sequoias; Professor Robert K. Udclaire, San Antonio College; Professor Terry Fairbanks, Des Moines Area Community College; Professor Alvin J.T. Zumbrun, Catonsville Community College; and those who reviewed individual chapters: Rosa Herring, Michael Walsh, Katherine Norgard, Reba Grubb, Mark Pettit, Albert Seng, and Tammie Burkett.

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POLICE—COMMUNITY RELATIONS: AN OVERVIEW

In the last few years, American law enforcement has accepted (begrudgingly at times) the notion that community relations is an important and even indispensable part of police work. In so doing, it has recaptured the old belief that a police force can and should be “the people’s police”—an agency that is responsive to the public it serves.

Philosophically, not every officer agrees, and practically, the nature of community relations varies widely from agency to agency, community to community, but change has occurred. Awareness and acceptance of community relations—the process of developing and maintaining meaningful, two-way communication between the agency and specific populations served toward identifying, defining, and resolving problems of mutual concern—have increased.

STUDYING THIS CHAPTER WILL ENABLE YOU TO:

1. Provide an overview of police–community relations and its impact on the police system.
2. Define “the people’s police” and community.
3. Describe the evolution of police–community relations programs in the United States.
4. Identify the current status of and prospects for police–community relations.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF POLICE—COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Secrecy and institutional separation have ceased to be defensible positions for police agencies to take in relationship to the community they serve. Although secrecy and institutional separation have not totally disappeared, it is valid to state that in less than two decades the most

insular of all institutions in American society is becoming committed, at least in principle, to programs of ongoing exchanges with the community and with other agencies about its mandate and practices.

The concept of police–community relations has gained a secure level of acceptance in the law enforcement establishment and in urban government. “Acceptance,” in a working sense, means that proposals to establish and maintain such programs have a fair chance of success. There are no longer any organized factions publicly opposing police efforts to open and cultivate channels of communication with the public in general and with civic groups and social movements in particular. Whether those who were aligned against such attempts are now merely silent for the time being, or whether they have changed their views, is an open question. But there is no doubt that activities included under the heading of police–community relations are achieving respectability, and that a large and growing number of police officials in positions of responsibility have come to view them as indispensable for effective law enforcement and peacekeeping.

ACCEPTANCE AS A SIGN OF PROGRESS

This acceptance alone is a sign of progress, a remarkable achievement. It is, however, only a first step toward implementation. It is much easier to agree with the reasonableness and justice of a proposal than to implement it and live with the consequences of its implementation. Above all, when the task is to decide what must and can be done, it is important to measure aspirations against resistance, inertia, and regression. Thus, for example, despite the acceptance of the principle of police–community relations few, if any, actually functioning police–community relations programs are fully deserving of the name. Most have barely succeeded in laying the foundations for their own existence. A positive statement of present circumstances is that although newly functioning programs have been accepted in principle, the kinds of activities that total acceptance would lead one to expect have yet to be implemented.

TIGHT FINANCES AND THEIR EFFECTS

Today, in times of tight finances, new and existing programs must compete for reduced funding and human resources with other programs that meet long-established police obligations (e.g., crime, traffic, and vice control). In such circumstances it becomes necessary to demonstrate a high level of cost-effectiveness in meeting police goals.

Often community relations programs become locked into quick and relatively safe ways of demonstrating success: (1) “busy work” activities, which show that something is happening, and presumably goals are being accomplished; and (2) solving easy problems and postponing (sometimes indefinitely) the more difficult ones (e.g., maintaining contact with civic and political groups that are receptive to the police, and failing to reach out to those that are not receptive).

Such difficulties can arise with virtually any kind of program in which success is expected. The way police–community relations programs have developed seems to pose some unique difficulties, however, for these programs in particular.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Nineteenth-Century Origins

The concept of police–community relations is not a new one. When Sir Robert Peel undertook reform of the London police with the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829, he and the two key commissioners that he appointed, Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne, emphasized that the police should work in cooperation with the people and that members of the office should protect the rights, serve the needs, and earn the *trust* of the population they policed (Critchley, 1967; Reith, 1952).

Writing at the turn of the century, Melville Lee discussed Peel’s principles of law enforcement. The following excerpts from Lee’s text retain the flavor of the period in which they were written. They also reflect many of the concepts of police–community relations that are being proposed today. According to Lee, police officers are “public servants in the fullest sense of the term.”

It should be understood at the outset that the principal object to be attained is the prevention of crime. To this great end every effort of the police is to be directed.

The absence of crime will be considered the best proof of the complete efficiency of the police.

... There is no qualification more indispensable to a police officer than a perfect command of temper, never suffering himself to be moved in the slightest degree by any language or threats that may be used; if he do his duty in a quiet and determined manner, such conduct will probably induce well-disposed bystanders to assist him should he require it.

... What is wanted is the respect and approval of all good citizens.

The wisdom of fostering cordial relations between the people and the civil defenders of their lives and properties seems so obvious, that it is a source of wonder that so little attention has been given to the study of how best to promote this desirable *entente cordiale*.

The police . . . are simply a disciplined body of men, specially engaged in protecting “masses” as well as “classes,” from any infringement of their rights on the part of those who are not law-abiding.

. . . It is necessary also that they [the public] should be acquainted with the conditions that govern the mutual relationship.

We are well served by our police because we have wisely made them personally responsible for their actions.

. . . That is to say, the modern system rests, as the ancient one did, on the sure foundation of mutual reliance. (Lee, 1971)

These principles were imported into American police departments; in a way, they had to be. There was strenuous opposition to establishing organized police forces on the grounds that they would be the exclusive organ of executive government and indifferent to public influence. They would function against the people, resulting in a “police state.” Opposition was in part silenced by assurances that the new institution would be “the people’s police” (Astor, 1971).

In many ways the institution focused on the needs of the people. Engaging in community service activities is a part of the American police heritage (see Figure 1-1). As Zumbrun notes, “During the early part of the 20th century, the New York City Police Department engaged in such non-stereotyped activities as massive Christmas parties for poverty-stricken children and their families, engaging in job hunts for released prisoners from Sing Sing prison and other non-crime fighting endeavors” (Zumbrun, 1983).

The “police state” issue did not die. World War II (and many wars and cold war struggles before and since) have been waged against so-

FIGURE 1-1

Service is part of the American police heritage.



called “police states.” In many European countries and in the United States, the police worked hard to disassociate themselves from such a label in the aftermath of World War II. Still, many Americans found adequate evidence to support the view that during their first century of existence in the United States, the police were often corrupt agents of boss-dominated urban governments (Berkley, 1969).

Selling the Police to the People

The reformers of the 1950s felt that it was necessary to overcome the attitudes of contempt that middle-class citizens held toward police, and literally, to sell the police to the people. This was done by sending speakers to high schools, to business luncheons, to meetings of civil organizations, and so on. These speakers argued that the police are the “thin blue line,” the last bulwark of defense against the dark forces of crime and disorder.

Three key elements were notable in these efforts:

1. At their best, they employed highly sophisticated techniques of advertising, selling, and, of course, public relations.
2. To police the “public” in a public relations sense meant, essentially, middle-class adults and youth (“solid citizens” and their offspring).
3. No attempt was made to improve the “product”; the programs were designed solely to improve the police “image”; there was little or no provision to recommend or effect needed changes in departmental policy or procedures.

Although these police–community contacts were chosen very selectively, in the 1950s they did constitute a movement away from the exclusive dominance of police departments by city-hall bosses.

The 1960s: From Public Relations to Community Relations

At the beginning of the 1960s, the police had reason to believe their public relations programs had been a success. But then minorities, disaffected young people, the poor, recent immigrants, antiwar activists, and street people in general made with new claims and demands. Their quarrel was with the “system,” or with society as a whole, but their confrontations were often with the police, who usually responded with force. One lesson should have been clear: Public relations programs designed to appeal to “solid citizens” were ineffective in dealing with the disadvantaged and the aggrieved—many of whom were openly hostile to the police.

Something else was needed—police–community relations—where *community* was defined realistically to include, as one reviewer of this text stated: all of the “stratified, segmentalized, unintegrated, and differential environments where police work.” This focus includes precisely those segments of society ignored by the earlier public-rela-

tions approach. New police–community relations programs were built on the foundations of already existing public relations programs.

The San Francisco Community Relations Unit

In the mid-1950s, the Metropolitan Police Department of St. Louis, Missouri, established a public relations division that became known as one of the best functioning programs of its kind in the country, (A National Survey of Police and Community Relations). The division contained a speakers' bureau, published a newsletter, organized citizens' councils, and maintained school contacts, all of which were considered to be effective in accordance with their aims. There were also police and community relations committees in housing projects, which, in the department's own estimate, did not function well even as late as 1966. Nevertheless, the undertaking as a whole had an enviable reputation. In 1962, Chief Thomas Cahill of San Francisco visited St. Louis to help obtain answers to his own problems. Chief Cahill realized that it was important to use other resources, not just force, to deal with outbreaks of discontent. His department was faced with student protests against hearings being conducted by the House Un-American Activities Committee in the San Francisco City Hall. Chief Cahill took the new director of his community relations program, Lieutenant Dante Andreotti, to St. Louis to study their methods. Cahill and Andreotti went to St. Louis to learn because they had a problem on their hands; their problem, however, was quite different from the situation that had motivated the St. Louis department. The St. Louis program was formulated primarily to address the "solid citizens." No one considered the program seriously impaired by the fact that the project that was directed toward working with the disadvantaged and the aggrieved did not function.

In the ensuing years, Lieutenant Andreotti developed a program in San Francisco that was vastly different from the St. Louis program. The direction of work that was permitted to lie fallow in St. Louis became the central interest of the San Francisco community relations unit. While Andreotti commanded the unit, "community relations" meant working primarily with the disadvantaged and the aggrieved segments of the population. The unit's officers were attached to organizations such as the Youth Opportunity Center, which served ghetto youngsters, and the Office of Economic Opportunity. They also exerted themselves to meet with, talk and listen to, and help people living in the Tenderloin, the skid row, and the ghetto. The activities of the San Francisco unit are illustrated by the following example.

A robbery and beating of a white grocery store operator in a minority group neighborhood resulted in community-wide concern, and tension. As a result of the efforts of the police and the community relations unit, together with minority group leaders, a group of youngsters (many of whom had juvenile records) were organized into a picket line which

marched back and forth in front of the store carrying signs condemning violence and stating that they were ashamed of what had happened. Although the boys picketing were not involved in the robbery or the beating, they offered verbal apologies to the family of the victim for the act done by members of their race. The publicity given this parade by the various media communications resulted in an almost immediate lessening of tensions. (A National Survey, p. 49)

This incident should not be taken as indicating the scope of the unit's program nor even its focal concerns. The routine work of the officers assigned to the unit concentrated much more on everyday kinds of predicaments, such as protecting persons who were not resourceful on their own or helping persons with police records find employment or lodgings. The officers acted upon the realization that life in the city has many conditions, circumstances, and troubled people. They worked on the assumptions that ex-cons without jobs are likely to commit crimes again; intergroup tension may lead to violent confrontations; children without recreational facilities tend to get into mischief, and so on. When such potential is not checked, it leads to consequences that will sooner or later have to be handled by detectives, riot squads, or juvenile officers, depending on the specific situation.

Those in the San Francisco community relations unit were not the first police officers ever to help a former criminal find a job, nor were they the first to succeed in preventing a public disorder. Their innovation was in two additional aspects of their work: First, they did not simply go out to solve some problem; rather, they always dealt with problems in conjunction with other community resources. In the example cited earlier, they worked together with minority group leaders. Cooperation was not simply a convenient expedient; it involved an established and ongoing mutually cooperative arrangement between members of the police and members of the community. Second, persons in the unit felt that providing services to citizens was their *primary* job. In the past such services were rendered on rare occasions and only after the officers took care of more demanding crime control problems.

The establishment of the community relations unit in San Francisco meant that personnel resources were specifically assigned to the task of working cooperatively with the people. More important, the chief of the department referred to the existence of the unit with pride. He claimed credit for creating it, and gave weight to its importance by having its commanding officer report directly to the office of the chief, rather than through the chain of command. Nevertheless, some commanding officers and several line officers did not like the unit. Even without total acceptance within the department, the unit gained momentum. It soon was regarded locally and nationally as conspicuously successful.

Although others considered the unit to be a success, its commander, Lieutenant Andreotti, recognized the problems that still had to be faced. Speaking at a law enforcement conference in 1968, he said:

It is my belief that there isn't a successful police-community program anywhere in the country today, in terms of commitment by all members of the law enforcement agency. There have been successful police-community relations units, but practically all of them have been frustrated in their efforts to get the rank and file involved to the point of a genuine, personal interest and commitment (Andreotti, p. 120).

The Themes of the 1970s

The themes of the 1970s were Vietnam, the Watergate scandal of the Nixon administration, inflation, and the energy crisis. Compared with the 1960s the 1970s were relatively subdued—except for a notable and disturbing increase in violence. It was a period of “finding” oneself, or, as one author called it, the “Me Decade.”

Out of the turmoil of the 1960s, and based on the findings of several presidential commissions, funding was made available through the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration for research, education and training, and projects of criminal justice agencies designed to reduce crime. Law enforcement agencies had the opportunity to develop and implement new programs—and they did. Many were described as community relations projects and some of these were innovative and elaborate. Many, in practice, were simply public relations activities. Few were carefully evaluated.

As federal funding for them ended, many projects ended. Others, not necessarily as originally conceived, are still part of agency function today. Few receive the total commitment of the agency. Andreotti's concern voiced in 1968 continues to be a community relations concern of the 1980s. In terms of commitment by all members of the law enforcement agency, the status of police-community relations has not changed dramatically since 1968.

The Police and “Social Work”

Even under the best circumstances community relations programs suffer both from neglect and from being given low priority by police departments. Many police officers have little interest in community relations programs, and even resist and condemn them. Social problems, as the thinking in police circles sometimes goes, are best left to social workers; they are not “proper” police business, (i.e., they have little to do with preventing people from committing crimes and with bringing them to justice when they do). This view persists. Academy training often continues to focus predominantly on “crime fighting” behavior, even though it is generally known that the major portion of police work (some references note as high as 80 percent), is social service related rather than “crime fighting” behavior.

To say that only social workers should deal with these problems is similar to arguing that a champion swimmer should not pull a drowning person from the water unless the swimmer has a Red Cross Life Saving Certificate. Commitment to the principles of police–community relations means acting on the assumption that the police are a service organization dedicated to keeping the peace, to the defense of the rights of the people, and to the enforcement of laws. In all these fields they are not merely an independent instrument of government; rather, they must work with individuals, community groups, and community institutions to achieve the desired objectives.

It was this latter attitude that governed the intervention of the San Francisco community relations unit in the incident mentioned earlier. This incident is a good example of commitment to the principles of police–community relations on the level of departmental organization. It is not clear in this case at which point community leaders would be told to stay out of it and let the experts take over (and the community relations unit would move on to the next case). Typically that would be most likely to occur as procedures leading to the apprehension and trial of the assailants were set into motion.

Such a move may seem appropriate. Citizens are not expected to be involved in “catching criminals.” In fact, when they insist upon becoming involved, police believe that they are likely to cause more harm than good. This is also the view of many judges, public prosecutors, city council members, and citizens. Thinking in terms of isolated offenses, it is difficult to reason otherwise.

Thus, even those who are in favor of genuine police–community relations are forced to agree that the work must be assigned to special units that work independently while the rest of policing takes its ordinary course. In other words, progressive departments establish external units to deal with the community, but these units must follow the department’s conditions. In still different terms, it appears that accepting the principles of police–community relations in its present exclusively outward-oriented direction (somewhat in the way nations send envoys to other nations) does not mean that two-way police–community relations are the norm (or, to continue the analogy, that the other nations send them envoys).

This situation is not unique. The police are not alone in thinking that they can communicate adequately with the people by means of external ambassadors. Indeed, they have done better with this approach than other institutions. The educational system, for example, keeps parents at arm’s length while pretending to allow involvement by letting assistant principals of schools deal with the PTA. Similarly, institutions that deliver medical services often do not even pretend to communicate with the people they serve. In each of these cases, it is argued that lay people could not possibly contribute to solving the problem of a slow-learning child or a diabetic patient, just

as it is said that lay people could not be helpful in solving a robbery.

All communities have educational needs, health needs, and law enforcement and peacekeeping needs. It is neither proper nor efficient for the specialists alone to define the nature of these needs or the way in which they will be met. Specialists bring competence and skills to bear on meeting these needs, but they must communicate with lay citizens to determine what those needs are.

The Success of Police–Community Relations

The establishment of police–community relations units is a first, long step in recognition of the usefulness of bringing needs and special resources together in a harmonious relationship. Nevertheless, it is just that—a first step. The establishment of *community–police relations*, in a much broader sense, is a logical next step. An example might help in making clear what this involves. It is commonly accepted that the ghettos of our cities produce a disproportionately large number of people who are arrested for criminal activities and that people living in these ghettos are exposed to a far greater risk of being criminally victimized than other citizens. Finally, it is no secret that people living in these areas distrust the police and often are reluctant to help officers in their efforts to control crime. What would be more sensible than for the police to consider these three facts, together with their present ways of dealing with suspects and victims, as systematically related? Joint consideration of the larger problem suggests that a successful attack on the problem can come only from the establishment of a program of trusting and fully cooperative relations between ghetto communities and the police.

The reversal of terms for police–community relations to community–police relations was not done simply to coin a new term. It does not matter what the arrangement is called! What matters is that the full effectiveness of the program cannot be attained merely by having a special unit to implement it. At best, such units can only succeed in doing an occasional good deed and putting out an occasional fire, while leaving the rest of the police department's work unaffected by even these accomplishments.

Success of community–police relations requires a “people’s police” attitude. Rank-and-file officers need to recognize that the police are a service organization dedicated to keeping the peace, defending the rights of the people, and enforcing the laws. Community–police relations is a broad, two-way program that involves every officer.

INTERNALIZING COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Perhaps it would be easiest to explain the concept of incorporating community relations into police work by first discussing what it does not mean.