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by Karl E. Johnson*

The racial rioting that flared up outside Samuel Tilden Junior High School in Southwest Philadelphia on 12 March 1946 between black and white youths was in many ways typical of the conflicts that occurred in postwar urban spaces throughout the United States. The fighting had been instigated by older white teenagers who attended the John Bartam High School that was adjacent to Tilden. According to local black leaders Rev. H. Hollis Hooks, pastor of St. John's AME Church and Rev. W. W. Robinson of the Church of God in Christ, the Elmwood and Paschall neighborhoods had long been a racial battleground, and white law enforcement officials from the 32nd Police District called to the scene also acted in typical fashion—they only arrested fourteen black youths and took them to the House of Detention. When black parents and members of the Philadelphia Crime Prevention Society complained about the situation, the police subsequently began to arrest white youth involved in the incidents, which continued to flare up for several days. Rev. Robinson was particularly incensed by the situation because he had personally witnessed white youths, some in military service uniforms, assaulting African American boys, but the police protected the white offenders, and made mass arrests among the black youth. Shortly after the racial incident at Tilden Junior High, black and white clergy came together to calm the situation and agreed to work to set up programs to improve interracial understanding among residents in the neighborhood.¹

Despite many advances in our understanding of the postwar urban conditions of African Americans, important lacuna remain.² One of these is the way urban social spaces were policed by white law enforcement officials. In Philadelphia, African American conflicts with white law enforcement officials were a persistent problem throughout most of the 20th century, and in the post–World War II era volatile incidents involving African American residents and white police officers were common and often made newspaper headlines.³ Philadelphia during World War II was a strategically important city because of its large population and industrial capacity, which made it a center of wartime activity; however, there have been few studies focusing on the city's African American community and race relations in the early postwar period.⁴ In the 1940s African Americans became a more visible and vital presence in Philadelphia. Right

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before the war began, African Americans numbered 250,907, making up 13 percent of Philadelphia's total population. Migration, however, pushed the city's African American population to 374,459 by 1950, to 18 percent of the total.\footnote{5}

This essay explores the relationship between African Americans and white law enforcement officials in Philadelphia's early postwar period, and the impact racial conflict had on restricting African Americans' full use of the city's social space before and during that period. Many recreational areas and social venues were often off limits to African Americans because of the threat of violence from white residents. White policemen often reinforced these limitations on African Americans' social movement. White residents' negative racial stereotypes about African Americans, combined with their xenophobic fears of competition over jobs and housing, made it acceptable for white police officials to abandon traditional law enforcement and turn to incarceration as a means to control the growing African American population. Thus this was the beginning of the modern, postwar criminalization of African Americans that preceded the formation of Philadelphia's "prison-industrial complex" that currently warehouses thousands of black residents.

Many white law enforcement officials viewed the social movement of African Americans as a threat and treated it as a criminal act. Their beliefs mirrored those of whites in the larger society who often viewed African Americans as social outcasts and criminals. As a consequence, black leaders in the postwar period became frustrated with a law enforcement system that resisted reform and increasingly used black incarceration as a way to deal with racial conflict.\footnote{6} The police officers' disregard for law encouraged de facto segregation, which contributed to racial misunderstanding, and often limited black and white civic and religious leaders' attempts to promote racial harmony. Conflicts between African Americans and whites over housing, jobs, education, and heath services were important issues in Philadelphia during this period, and have been documented by John F. Bauman, V. P. Franklin, and other scholars.\footnote{7} Most contacts between white policemen and African Americans involved social and racial conflict. Police officers were often called upon to referee or to intervene in the numerous misunderstandings between black and white residents over social and political issues in the city during and after the war. Policemen had to decide how to handle these situations, but in many cases involving African Americans they used discriminatory practices that helped to erode the black community's confidence in the law enforcement agencies.\footnote{8}

POLICE-BLACK COMMUNITY RELATIONS: A NATIONAL PROBLEM

The conflicts that African Americans experienced with white law enforcement officials in Philadelphia also occurred in other urban areas. In Chicago, black residents accused white police officers of being under the control of local political bosses who protected illegal gambling and prostitution operations at red-light districts in or around black neighborhoods. Meanwhile, African American civil rights and religious leaders often accused white police officers of harassing law-abiding black citizens and using excess force and violence with black youths.\footnote{9} Detroit's police force had a reputation among its black residents of being openly hostile to African Americans. Complaints from black Detroiters of rough and unfair treatment from police were commonplace. The hostility between African Americans and white law enforcement officials culminated in Detroit's
1943 race riot, where white policemen openly attacked African Americans. In Atlanta, white law enforcement officials strictly enforced segregation laws, and African Americans accused white police officers of ignoring black-on-black or white-on-black crime, while vigorously pursuing black residents when the incidents involved whites. Police protection for all classes of African Americans was minimal, and the small number of black police officers could not arrest whites who committed crimes against African Americans. New York City's law enforcement system provided the closest parallel to Philadelphia's, and overtly racist and often outrageous acts by white policemen against black residents were usually officially discouraged by city officials, unlike the situation in Detroit and Atlanta. However, white police officers in New York were regularly accused of harassing law-abiding black citizens and often had violent clashes with black youths. While African Americans could seek legal redress through local courts, there they usually faced prejudiced or overtly racist judicial officials. Corruption was an element in the New York City police department as in Philadelphia, but arguably it was not as deeply embedded as in Chicago's law enforcement system, where political patronage flourished. Law enforcement officials in New York City and Philadelphia reflected the prejudices of the white majority, and at times community leaders made attempts to improve African Americans' relations with the police, but these efforts did not lead to substantial changes.

In Philadelphia the problems for African Americans with law enforcement officials were not new. In 1926 social worker Anna J. Thompson conducted a survey of criminal activity among African Americans in Philadelphia and found that African American males numbered 67,132 (or 3.7 percent) of Philadelphia's total population of 1,823,779, but accounted for 20.5 percent of those arrested over a six-month period in 1924. African American females numbered 67,097 (3.7 percent) of Philadelphia's total population, and accounted for 3.8 percent of those arrested. However, African American women were extremely overrepresented in Philadelphia's penal institutions and county homes for women. For example, in 1926 black women inmates numbered 51, while white inmates numbered 55. Thompson, however, cautioned those who analyzed Philadelphia's arrest figures for African Americans because of "extreme prejudice among the law enforcement." As a result, one-third of all African Americans arrested by police were released and charged with no crime due to lack of evidence. She argued that unwarranted police arrests were based on suspicion alone, and that the antagonism between Irish policemen and the African American population was even the subject of many jokes in Philadelphia's City Hall. Thompson also questioned the arrest figures because they did not identify repeat offenders. In addition, false arrests often occurred in the heavily populated Seventh Ward where many African American residents shared common sanitation and other facilities. As a consequence, police raids often resulted in the arrest of innocent women and men who merely shared a residence with those being sought by the police for alleged criminal activity.

POLICE ATTITUDES TOWARD AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE POSTWAR ERA

Twenty years after the Thompson report, social scientist G. Gordon Brown conducted another survey of police-black community relations and found that strong racial prejudices existed among the Philadelphia police. Brown's survey of white law enforcement officers'
attitudes toward African Americans found that many expressed views that "implied that [they believed] there are racial differences in tendency to crime." One white senior police official declared, "Negro crime is the result of housing, employment, and heredity." A white detective told investigators, "You don't have too much trouble with the Negroes if you keep them in their place." In the wake of the 1944 Philadelphia transit strike in which white workers brought public transportation in the city to a halt over the hiring of African Americans as streetcar conductors, a white patrolman commented about African Americans, "Next time they try [something like that], we'll get them good." Another white detective was more sensitive, but still expressed prejudice: "They are not bad people, but they seem instinctively to be more likely to commit certain kinds of crime than whites are. Maybe it is their African ancestry."  

Not surprisingly, Brown found that African Americans' attitudes toward the police were generally negative. He believed this was a reflection of the views of Philadelphia's large southern migrant population: "This group was never treated justly either by the police or courts" in the South. As a result, most black migrants had little confidence in the police and expected neither justice nor protection in the courts. An unidentified black leader interviewed by Brown concluded that "this has reacted upon the police and in turn has affected the attitude of the police toward the older (long term) Negro inhabitants of the city." Another black official noted that black residents were distrustful of the white policemen and judges, and observed, "Police are dominated, first, by Irishmen who live in a racial no-man's land, and, second, by Southerners who have drifted in, and who got a job with the police because they could not do anything else." 

A black attorney who was asked about police conduct rendered a very critical assessment: "The police are a bad factor in prejudice. They have a pronounced idea that any Negro reported to them is guilty. Some are worse than others are. Many are fair, but the majorities are unfair." A black newspaper editor reported, "The police definitely discriminate against Negroes. The police have all the prejudices of their class, and these are intensified by their service." The editor also believed that white police officers arrested African Americans more often, used violence, and generally treated African Americans more harshly because poor black residents were not in a position to make effective protests. At the same time, however, "the police would not pick up an Irishman, except for a major crime." One black woman interviewed by Brown bluntly stated, "The police are all crooked, are not respected by Negroes, and are completely [dismissive] of citizens' rights where Negroes are concerned." 

Brown concluded that African American leaders and public officials' main complaint was the police's willingness to arrest African Americans without proper cause. The second most frequent complaint was that police used excessive force against African Americans. The third most cited charge was that the police generally disregarded black-on-black crime. Brown, however, found that the attitudes held by black residents were not monolithic. He believed that African American political leaders and officials sometimes hedged their statements about police, most likely for political reasons. One unnamed black politician went so far as to suggest, "There is no general belief among the Negroes that there is discrimination against them." And a black public school principal declared, "The police have some good men on the corners. Some of them lecture in the schools on respect for the law. Police cooperation with the school is very good."
Brown found that working-class black Philadelphians generally had a negative view of the police, but gave a variety of reasons. A black waitress commented, "The police are rougher on Negroes than on whites and beat them up more when they make arrests, but the police give Negroes the same help as whites." A black housewife said, "There isn't much difference in the way the police treat the different races. A white policeman might be inclined to knock a Negro about a little, but after all don't all white people do that?" A 21-year-old black male interviewee suggested that about 80 percent of the police treated African Americans differently from whites, and 20 percent showed no prejudice. He argued that "police have a tendency to take advantage of Negroes by not investigating as thoroughly as they might crimes for which Negroes are accused." A black worker employed as a molder's helper put it more succinctly: "The police treat the colored rougher than the whites because they think that all the crimes are committed by colored."19

ACCUSATIONS OF POLICE BRUTALITY AND CORRUPTION

In January 1950 black leaders in Philadelphia came together and declared publicly that the city's law enforcement practices were racially discriminatory. When Irvin Miller, a 39-year-old black man, was found dead in a steamed-filled cell at the House of Detention in Philadelphia, the black newspapers focused on the city's prison system. The black leaders pointed out that Philadelphia's prison officials practiced segregation, and that it was an "unfortunate fact that 40 percent of the prison population was Negro," while African Americans made up only 18 percent of the total population. Black and white prisoners lived, ate, and worked separately, and within the prisons, whites were assigned the better jobs, while black inmates were only given menial positions. The black leaders pointed out that at the three city prisons—Eastern Penitentiary at 21st Street and Fairmount Avenue, Moyamensing Prison at 10th and Reed Streets, and Holmesburg County Prison—there were no African American prison guards or administrators, and observed that the only way a "colored man or women gets to enter one of the prisons is as a prisoner or as a relative of a prisoner."20

Accusations from African Americans of police brutality and corruption further eroded the African Americans' confidence in law enforcement practices. Many black Philadelphians believed that the civil service examination taken by potential police recruits was fixed to favor white applicants. This helped to explain why there were so few black police officers in the city. Some black residents believed that "the police are crooked from beginning to end. The civil service examinations are crooked in advance so that, before they are written, everyone knew what their standing was going to be."21 Ward bosses often chose the police in their areas, and police officers changed locations with their ward leaders. One unidentified black man claimed that "the examinations are a farce," which accounted "for the low mentality of the police" because "the man was picked before he takes the examination."22 These accusations had a great deal of merit: Between 1940 and 1943, the civil service commissioner was indicted and put on trial for tampering with the examination ratings for potential police recruits.23 Moreover, an informant inside the police department revealed, "To become a policeman, one must first be a registered Republican, and must then be approved by the ward leader." The informant then claimed, "Even if so approved, the candidate is not sure of appointment because there is an attempt to
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apportion the police force among various wards so that there will be equality [in] the patronage system."²⁴

White law enforcement officials' failure to stem the flow of illegal drugs into the African American community led to complaints by black Philadelphians of inept policing. In 1950 Mark Hyman, a columnist for the Philadelphia Tribune, the leading black newspaper in the city, argued that illegal drugs and "dope" (cocaine and heroin) were having a negative impact on black families across class lines. Dope had found its way into the classrooms as well as poolrooms, which often served as distribution points. Found in the rowdiest and the classiest nightspots, drugs were also making their way into the respectable homes and social clubs.²⁵ Black residents were disturbed that only the "small fry" was being arrested, while those higher-ups in the "dope racket" seemed to elude law enforcement officials. The illegal drugs available in poor and working-class black neighborhoods increased drug-related crimes. Police officials seemed content on arresting the small-time dealers and users, mainly African Americans, but did little to stop the drug trade. The Philadelphia Tribune reported that 80 percent of those arrested on drug-related charges in the city in 1949 and 1950 were black youth. At that time the police narcotics unit had no black officers.²⁶

White policemen were known to look the other way when illegal activities took place in the African American neighborhoods and the red-light districts adjacent to them. Black and white Philadelphians acknowledged that some police officers even protected the illegal activities that took place in certain neighborhoods. An unnamed white social worker who participated in the G. Gordon Brown survey claimed that the police were mixed up in the "numbers racket" that flourished in several black wards, and was operated by former bootleggers and their families. The councilman for the ward, the local police officer, and city officials were paid off by racketeers. Under public pressure, police raids were often set up, but criminal bosses were tipped off in advance and generally escaped. An unnamed black minister in disgust charged that in his neighborhood, "there is a large numbers racket. When the numbers come out, the people sit up late and wait and hear the results. The police do nothing about it." G. Gordon Brown reported black and white Philadelphians' frustrations over police corruption and collusion in prostitution and gambling, particularly the numbers racket, in poor black and working-class neighborhoods.²⁷

At the same time, aggressive police enforcement tactics strained police–black community relations, and certain officers developed reputations for using strong-arm tactics with poor and working class black youths and adults. For example, Police Inspector (and future Mayor) Frank Rizzo cultivated a reputation as a tough guy by "cracking down" on street crime in South Philadelphia. These tactics earned him the moniker "the Cisco Kid" due to his frequent raids and roundups in black neighborhoods. While trying to apprehend alleged criminals, Rizzo often offended law-abiding residents by arresting innocent bystanders, who sometimes were even injured in the process. In one of these raids in 1952, Rizzo caused a near riot after he and his squad attempted to arrest three black women on the corner of 13th and South Streets. Rizzo later told reporters he was acting on complaints from naval officials about the unsavory conditions for sailors on leave in the city. When Rizzo spotted six sailors talking to the three women, he ordered a raid. A man watching the incident attempted to intervene to prevent the women's arrest, and a fight broke out. Then several residents in nearby houses began throwing bottles at Rizzo and his squad from their windows, and Rizzo's men fired several gunshots into the air to quell the violence.
Unfortunately, innocent bystander Shirley Hudson, a 17-year-old girl who lived at 16th and South Streets, was cut by flying glass. In the end, the three women and the man who tried to rescue them were arrested and held in jail on one thousand dollars bail.28

Complaints made by African Americans about police brutality and corruption in Philadelphia were often ignored because these were handled internally by the Police Trial Board. Critics of the Police Trial Board argued that only an independent agency such as a community review board could properly "police the police." Unfortunately, police and city officials were successful throughout the 1940s and 1950s in preventing the formation of a review board. In May 1956, Charles Shorter, Executive Secretary of the Philadelphia NAACP, described how complaints of police brutality were handled in a typical case when African Americans were involved. Shorter presented his Case of Police Mistreatment to the Philadelphia Fellowship Commission (PFC), a private interracial, social improvement organization. Shorter explained how police officers raided the home of an African American family looking for a crime suspect, but ended up terrorizing the family because they "dared to ask the policemen for a search warrant." After finding the suspect was not there, the police arrested his brother because, according to the officer, the family members "acted too smart." It did not matter that the individual arrested was a war veteran and held a regular job. He was taken down to the police station where his head was bloodied by a blow from a blackjack, and he eventually had to be taken to Presbyterian Hospital. Nevertheless, the man was charged with resisting arrest, assault, and interference with a police officer, and was jailed in lieu of $400 bail. Having little recourse, the victim's mother contacted the NAACP to bring charges of brutality against the police officers. The complaint was sent to the Police Trial Board for an investigation, but the board members quickly exonerated the officers of charges of brutality, even after a judge ruled that the charges against the black victim be dropped because of insufficient evidence.29

PHILADELPHIA POLICE AND WHITE PRIVILEGE

African Americans' frustration, disappointment, and fear of white law enforcement officers reinforced practices of segregation that severely restricted where African Americans could live and travel in Philadelphia. John F. Bauman's study of race and housing patterns described many of the problems African Americans faced when they tried to move out of the designated "Negro areas" and into "white" neighborhoods. Many times African Americans were greeted with hostility and stiff resistance from white residents, which sometimes turned into mini-race riots. The local police called to intervene in these incidents generally sided with the whites and failed to give African Americans adequate protection. As a result, African Americans had to rely on assistance from family members and private agencies and organizations, such as local churches, the NAACP, or the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).30

Black public school children encountered similar resistance when they attended public schools outside of black neighborhoods. Although officially sanctioned segregation in the city public schools ended in 1934 when the separate black and white lists for teacher appointments were merged, unofficial segregation was practiced in the student and teacher assignments, the drawing of school boundaries, and other areas.31 White police officers subscribed to and enforced white public sentiment on social issues and generally ignored
African Americans' civil rights when the law conflicted with maintaining white racial privilege and social distance between the races. This in turn limited African American movement and access to social welfare, housing, and educational, recreational, and other public services.

The police's role in maintaining social distance between African Americans and whites in recreational and other public spaces in Philadelphia and other northern cities has been examined by several scholars. Black youths seeking access to public recreational and athletic facilities were often the victims of threats, physical attack, subterfuge, and expulsion by whites in many sections of Philadelphia in the postwar era. More importantly, white police officers were often called upon to enforce these discriminatory practices. Some police officers even acted as part of the local "security force" that sought to maintain racial separation and to prevent African Americans from entering white areas. In 1948 G. Gordon Brown reported that the recreational facilities in Philadelphia's three main African American neighborhoods "tended to fall far below the achievements of the city as a whole in park and general recreation lands, tennis, baseball, swimming facilities, and athletics fields."

Public swimming pools became major sites of interracial conflicts and confrontations. Whites threatened black youths with physical violence if they attempted to gain access to "public" pools claimed by whites, even when the facility was located in a predominately black area. In some cases white residents had kept African Americans from using these pools for twenty-five or more years, and passed down the practice as a tradition from one generation to the next. In other instances African Americans were not excluded from public pools, but each group was given a specific time to use them, with black residents generally given fewer, or the least desirable, hours. White residents' threats of violence helped to enforce these rules.

The Philadelphia ACLU reported that blatant discrimination against African American youths using public swimming pools in the city was a common occurrence. Racial incidents occurred regularly at the Crystal Pool in Woodside Park and the Boulevard Pool on Roosevelt Boulevard and Princeton Avenue. The ACLU case file overflowed with complaints from African Americans who were rebuffed by white attendants at public pools throughout the city. Black residents turned to the ACLU and the NAACP for assistance because white police officials did little or nothing to enforce their right to use these public facilities. African Americans were also kept out of these pools through the use of "selective membership passes." When African Americans attempted to gain entrance, pool officials told them that only members could enter. If a black person attempted to pay the dollar membership fee, they would be told that the pool was full, and was turned away often in an aggressive manner. These black residents also reported seeing many whites gain entrance to the pool without any membership passes.

Although the discrimination and physical harassment of African Americans at swimming pools violated Philadelphia's and Pennsylvania's civil rights laws, African Americans were hesitant to call law enforcement officials when these incidents occurred because white policemen were known to be hostile. As a result, African Americans sometimes turned to unconventional methods, and sought the assistance of "Father Divine" (George Baker), a controversial black religious figure and social reformer. Father Divine and his interracial followers in the Peace Mission Movement mapped out a campaign...
against discrimination at swimming pools during the summer of 1952. When a black Korean War veteran and a group of his friends were denied entrance to the Boulevard Pool, Divine's followers became involved. Divine's interracial membership made it easier for him to document the discrimination practiced at the pool because his white and black followers worked together to expose it. Divine's white followers Kenneth Daire, F. Willingheart, and D. D. Peace were permitted to purchase memberships at the Boulevard Pool, while Divine's black members, led by Leon Jeter, Leo Everett, Marcel Watson, Joe Ford, and John Ford, were denied membership and admittance. Kenneth Daire took photographs of the African Americans being turned away, and they filed a complaint to the city's antidiscrimination agency, the Commission of Human Relations (CHR), formed in 1950. Milo Manley, a CHR staff member, contacted the pool's officials and warned them that they had violated the city's Federal Employment Practice Committee ordinance, which prohibited discrimination at public recreational and other facilities. The pool's manager, Martin J. Cunningham, argued that if black swimmers were admitted, it could cause a race riot. Pool officials, however, promised that every effort would be made to conform to the law. White sports teams also monopolized public baseball and softball fields, mainly through threats of violence. In predominantly black areas, however, they often decided to abandon these fields altogether. But G. Gordon Brown made it clear whites could call on policemen to protect their rights and privileges if they felt threatened, while African Americans could not.

Philadelphia's professional sports teams also practiced segregation in the early postwar period. Baseball was the most popular sport in the 1950s, and Philadelphia's Major League Baseball teams had no African American players until 1956. This was nine years after Jackie Robinson broke the color line in Major League Baseball when he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers. The Philadelphia Phillies was the last National League baseball team to recruit a black player. In the American League, the Philadelphia Athletics resisted bringing in black players until 1954, despite the achievements and box-office success of African Americans on other major league teams, such as the New York Giants, Cleveland Indians, Boston Braves, and Dodgers. Although the Philadelphia Stars, the Negro American League baseball team, was a source of pride for black Philadelphia, by 1952 the Negro leagues were in decline by 1952 because many of their stars were being signed by major league teams that offered more money and better facilities. Philadelphia's major league teams moved very slowly in recruiting black players, and maintained the practice of separating the races at social events. Major League Baseball in Philadelphia served as a positive social gathering for white ethnics, reducing intergroup tensions through support for the home team, but African Americans were often denied an opportunity to participate in this unifying social experience.

FURTHER DETERIORATION IN POLICE-BLACK COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Black Philadelphians' problems with the police force continued in the 1950s, and NAACP officials argued that firing shots at black residents had degenerated into a game of amusement for some police officers. In July 1952 the NAACP's Charles Shorter denounced the spate of shootings by white policemen at black residents and demanded that Police Commissioner Thomas J. Gibbons take immediate steps to investigate and intervene in the situation. Shorter called attention to two incidents that could not be justified. In one case, a
white officer shot at a black teenager in the 1300 block of Lombard Street. When the policeman apprehended the teenager, the officer laughed, released the teenager, and sauntered away. In another case, NAACP leaders believed that the breaking up of a "crap game" at 15th and South Streets did not warrant the officers' brandishing their guns. Shorter decried the bad blood that existed between black residents and white police officials: "We hope . . . that you will have police desist from the practice which wantonly endangers the lives of citizens and certainly does not contribute to better racial understanding." However, a week later two charges of police brutality were filed with the NAACP. Two white police officers were accused of beating Edward Dennis, a World War II veteran, and his stepfather, Frank Allen, over a minor traffic mishap. The NAACP was contacted, and a complaint was filed against the policemen for assault and battery, false arrest, and aggravated assault and battery. In the second incident, many black Philadelphians doubted the police's version of a shooting. According to police officials, a black man was allegedly trying to break into a gas station on Frankford Avenue, but was surprised by two police officers in a patrol car who followed the suspect in his car. A high-speed car chase ensued, and then the suspect stopped his car at Taskawanna and Magee Streets, and ran on foot. The two white officers pursued him, and one shot the suspect in the back. The wounded man was taken to Frankford Hospital where he was pronounced dead on arrival. The deceased man was a recent southern migrant, who four weeks earlier had obtained a job as a porter to support his wife and children in Ashville, North Carolina.

Philadelphia was not the only city facing conflicts between black residents and white police officers in the 1950s. In New York City, a grand jury failed to find sufficient evidence to hold a white police officer responsible for the controversial killing of an unarmed, black art student who was protesting a racist art exhibit at New York University. Oakland, California, became the first major city where state officials investigated the problematic relations between white law enforcement officials and minority groups. The California State Committee on Crime and Correction, with support from the legislature, subpoenaed Oakland's city officials to find out what had been done about the many complaints coming from African Americans and other minorities over police brutality. Oakland Mayor Clifford Rishell, along with the city manager and chief of police, were brought before the California state assembly and interrogated by the legislators. An independent report compiled by attorney Bertram Edises and the East Bay Civil Rights Congress concluded that the Oakland police had harassed, manhandled, and killed African Americans without just cause over a period of years.

RESPONSES TO POLICE BRUTALITY

Philadelphia's black leaders and white reformers worked together to reduce hostility between African Americans and the police. They feared a full-scale race riot if something was not done. At the end of 1955, a Subcommittee on Police-Community Relations (SPCR) was formed by the Philadelphia Fellowship Commission's Committee on Community Tensions to defuse the rising tensions between black residents and the police. Members of this subgroup believed that law enforcement and a reduction in tensions were the joint responsibilities of the police and public. They also believed that the chasm between police and minorities was based on ignorance, and created mistrust, prejudice, and hostility. The
SPCR's initial objective was to create a more personal, sensitive, informed, and positive relationship between the public and the police. Moreover, subcommittee members wanted to make the SPCR a permanent fixture in the community.45

Between 1955 and 1958, the SPCR evolved into a forum in which influential leaders from the African American community aired grievances about police tactics and brutality with police officials. Police Commissioner Thomas J. Gibbons, along with Deputy Commissioners Howard Leary and Albert Brown, represented the police officials at these meetings. African American journalists who attended the meetings included E. Washington Rhodes, publisher of the *Philadelphia Tribune*, and Eustace Gay, the newspaper's Managing Editor; Randy Dixon, owner of the *Philadelphia Independent*; Ruth Jenkins and Ruth Rolen from the *Afro-American*; and Robert Queen from the *Pittsburgh Courier*. Charles Shorter and James K. Baker represented the NAACP, and Revs. Leon H. Sullivan and H. J. Trapp were appointed by the Citizens Committee for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency. Judge Theodore Spaulding, the PFC Vice President; Maurice Fagan, PFC Executive Director; and lawyer Emile F. Goldhaber, Chairman of the SPCR, served as mediators.46

For African American leaders the Police Trial Board, which investigated charges of police misconduct, was considered problematic because it was not considered independent. Other concerns included the characterization of black criminals in the white media, and the inability of white policemen to distinguish between African American "hoodlums" and law-abiding citizens. Arguably, the debate reflected a class bias because many of the complaints centered on the treatment of upper-status black Philadelphians and how black leaders and those without criminal records were treated by white policemen.47 Moreover, African American leaders acknowledged that criminal activity was a problem in certain black neighborhoods. Publisher Rhodes spoke out against black-on-black crime and commented that "the behavior pattern of this one percent group of Negroes would be considered reprehensible in any part of the country in any time or any place." Rhodes believed that the criminal behavior of a few made the progress of law-abiding black residents difficult, if not impossible.48

SPCR's officials tried to convince Commissioner Gibbons to provide the police with the training needed to deal better with the city's racial and religious groups. PFC Director Fagan suggested to Gibbons that the "human relations training" given at the police academy was "almost meaningless," because it failed to educate the officers about dealing with other racial groups. Fagan pointed out that police officers at all levels needed to participate in a serious police-community relations program to counter "the deep distrust and ignorance which exist on the part of the average police officer and of the average citizen when it comes to the discussion of crime and race."49 In the end, Gibbons responded positively to this idea and did work with the PFC and the Commission on Human Relations to develop a training program in community relations for the police force.50

The attempts to challenge the Police Trial Board, however, were met with resistance from the police rank and file. The SPCR proposed that a special and permanent tribunal be created to investigate and act on disputes between police and citizens. In addition, the SPCR proposed that the membership be made up of two persons appointed by the Police Commissioner, two by the chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association, and two by the president of the PFC. The SPCR wanted complaints against police to be brought before the
tribunal first. In addition, SPCR members asked that the meetings be open to the public, and held within a reasonable time with the complainant having the right to bring in counsel to cross-examine police officers. The tribunal would be charged with researching the facts of the cases and submitting recommendations directly to the Police Commissioner. The Police Commissioner could act on the recommendations or submit it to the Police Trial Board for review, provided that the hearings were open to the public.51

Police officials reacted negatively to the SPCR proposal. Maurice Fagan wrote Commissioner Gibbons two weeks after submitting the proposal to ask why there had been little or no official discussion with the police rank and file.52 Gibbons knew that this proposal would not be acceptable to the police officers because most believed that civil rights and civic organizations interfered with "good police work." The leaders of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), a national brotherhood and union with a branch in Philadelphia, made no secret of their hostility toward the NAACP and ACLU because both groups often questioned the integrity of some police officers. FOP leaders also suggested that civil rights groups' attacks on police were "communist inspired."53

The issue of racial designations in the media also generated controversy. The SPCR wanted the elimination of the identification of criminals by race in magazine and newspaper reports. Thomas McBride, Chairman of the PFC's Committee on Community Tensions, attempted to persuade the editors of white and black newspapers to end the practice. Some SPCR members, however, believed that racial identification was perfectly proper when included with a list of other identifying characteristics of a criminal at large. Commissioner Gibbons questioned the SPCR's proposal to eliminate racial identifications, and the newspaper editors basically ignored the suggestion. Gibbons pointed out that when a criminal was at large, the police department sent out a complete description of the individual, including his skin color. According to Gibbons, white newspaper editors contended that this was public information and questioned whether the SPCR was asking the police to suppress relevant facts. Maurice Fagan responded that the SPCR recognized that the police must have full descriptions of criminals, but "publishing such material in the press does immeasurable harm."54

Philadelphia's black journalists were more receptive to the idea of eliminating race when discussing crime. E. Washington Rhodes had argued that the white dailies gave the readers the impression that all African Americans were criminals. He felt that it was important to end the racial designations in published crime statistics since there was no mention of religion. Rhodes pointed out that "comparatively few Jews committed crimes, while white Catholics committed many more crimes than white Protestants in Philadelphia, yet the religious category was not generally used in crime statistics." He felt that the great danger of crime statistics by race was that "too many of the wrong people use them" for the wrong purposes. Rhodes pointed out that white reporters for the Evening Bulletin identified a criminal as a "light-skinned Negro," whereas he might have just as well been a "dark-skinned white."55 The police and the white newspaper editors, however, rejected this contention, and there were no changes in practices.

Although the SPCR did opened up a dialogue between African American leaders and police officials and some misunderstandings were addressed, these actions were overshadowed by the continued rash of incidents between African Americans and the police. Racial, social, and political conflicts continually punctuated Philadelphia's
postwar environment. The SPCR reported in 1956 that police frequently came into conflict with black homeowners who were trying to move into white neighborhoods and were menaced by mob action or threats. Clashes between the police and minorities also occurred when hate groups issued racist propaganda during election campaigns, or when gang warfare flared up. Community tensions reached a high point in June 1957 when 1,000 angry African Americans attacked policemen at 12th and Diamond Streets over rumors that the officers had beaten a black motorist. Angry black residents threw bricks, bottles, and beer cans at policemen, injuring four and resulting in hundreds of dollars in damage to police cars and motorcycles.

Many police officers came from working-class backgrounds and displayed many of the same prejudices of other whites in that group. African American leaders and white reformers bombarded Police Commissioner Gibbons with complaints of police misconduct. African American leaders, their friends, and their families could not even protect themselves from police harassment. The police raided the homes of respectable black families on a regular basis during the period that the SPCR was most active. The police raids and searches were often made based upon flimsy evidence, and this enraged and frustrated black leaders who had been continually complaining about harassment and racial profiling.

CONCLUSION

The problems in Philadelphia between African American residents and white law enforcement officers were not isolated, but were part of the postwar urban landscape. Police–black community relations in Philadelphia lay somewhere between those in Oakland, California, and Atlanta, Georgia, during these years. In Oakland, city officials, including the mayor and police commissioner, were brought before the California legislature to address charges of police brutality against minorities. This signaled a step toward reform in these practices. In contrast, in Atlanta, racist police officers violated African American civil rights with impunity to maintain legal segregation and various Jim Crow practices. The police raid and searches were often made based upon flimsy evidence, and this enraged and frustrated black leaders who had been continually complaining about harassment and racial profiling.

It should be noted that Philadelphia's postwar police–black community relations were not connected to any increase or decrease of the city's crime rate. Even when black leaders and white reformers helped to reduce crime among teenagers in the 1940s and 1950s, police harassment of law-abiding black residents continued. The work of Sam Rymer at the West Philadelphia Boys Club and Operation Street Corner, a program to stem youth gang violence in North Philadelphia, were considered successful in reducing crime in those areas. Black churches and fraternal organizations also engaged in many activities to reduce juvenile delinquency and crime during the period. Interracial groups, such as the SPCR, also provided positive leadership in race relations between 1945 and 1958. Despite these activities, however, white policemen continued their harassment of law-
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abiding black residents, a segment of the community that would have been willing to support crime-reduction efforts.64

Unfortunately, white law enforcement officials continued to use incarceration as a means of urban social control. Throughout the postwar period, police–black community relations were threatened by the persistent practice among white police officers of denying black residents access to public social spaces reserved "for whites only," and of using excessive force, brutality, and incarceration in their dealings with African Americans. These practices in many ways help to explain the findings of the investigators of the urban insurrections in the 1960s.65 These investigations revealed that the major cause for the widespread urban rioting was police brutality.

NOTES

1Philadelphia Tribune, 23 March 1946, 1, 17.


3For example, the Philadelphia Tribune was filled with various allegations of police misconduct toward African Americans throughout the postwar period. Philadelphia Tribune, 17 July 1950, 12; 22 July 1952, 1; 22 July 1952, 3.

4Some of the few good studies that address early postwar black issues are Bauman, Public Housing, Race, and Renewal; and Bauman, Hummon, and Muller, "Public Housing, Isolation, and the Urban Under Class," 264–92; Carolyn Adams et al., Philadelphia: Neighborhoods, Division, and Conflict in a Postindustrial City (Philadelphia, 1991).


8Bauman, Public Housing, Race, and Renewal.


Brown, Law Administration and Negro-White Relations, 100-101. Army troops had to be brought to run the public transportation system when white workers went on strike. See Franklin, The Education of Black Philadelphia, 159-61.


Ibid., 103-4.

Ibid., 104-5.

Ibid., 110-11.

Philadelphia Tribune, 10 January 1950, 2nd ed., 9. Black leaders were upset because many prisoners, usually black, were sent to the penal institutions before they had a trial or had been found guilty, and frequently were forced to live in overcrowded conditions.


Brown, Law Administration and Negro-White Relations, 82.

Philadelphia Tribune, 28 January 1950, 1, 3.

Philadelphia Tribune, 5 August 1952, 2. The term "Cisco Kid" referred to a reckless and rough-and-tumble cowboy character portrayed in the popular culture at the time.


Bauman, Public Housing, Race, and Renewal.

Franklin, The Education of Black Philadelphia.

As far as I have been able to determine, G. Gordon Brown's study on African Americans and recreation in Philadelphia has been the only scholarly attempt on the subject in the early postwar period.


Ibid., 37-38.

Public Accommodation, Discrimination in Swimming Pools, 1949-1955," American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania (hereafter, ACLU), box 30, 7/III/234, URBA, PL-TU, Philadelphia. The ACLU in Philadelphia was a private organization that grew out of the Civil Liberties Committee, 1936-1940, and the Citizens' Council on Democratic Rights, 1948-1951. It became affiliated with the national ACLU in 1951. Its purpose was to defend the constitutionally guaranteed rights of freedom of expression, due process of law, and equality before the law through public education, and to assist those whose constitutional liberties had been violated.


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Connie Mack Stadium. The Philadelphia Athletics’ first black player was Vic Powell, who was actually a black Puerto Rican.

40 Ibid., 15 July 1952, 1.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., 22 July 1952, 1, 3.
43 Ibid., 12 July 1952, 8.
44 Ibid., 17 July 1950, 12.
51 Meeting of SPCR,” 18 July 1957, 2.
52 Maurice B. Fagan to Thomas J. Gibbons, personal letter, 1 August 1957, 2.
53 “Committee on Community Tensions,” meeting minutes, 9 April 1958, Philip Jenkins, The Cold War at Home: Red Scare in Pennsylvania, 1945–1960 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999). Jenkins points out the communist xenophobia that was evident among some white law enforcement officials in Pennsylvania during this Red Scare period.
54 Meeting of SPCR,” 18 July 1957, 2.
57 Meeting of SPCR,” 18 July 1957; Philadelphia Tribune, 25 June 1957, 1, 16. Seventy Policemen were called onto the scene, and several African American men spent up to thirty days in jails because they were unable to pay fines. Also, several African American teenagers were fined and charged with resisting arrest.
59 Meeting of SPCR,” meeting minutes, 12 September 1957, 2.

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Franklin, "Operation Street Corner," 210; Philadelphia Tribune, 9 December 1944, 10. There were many mini-race riots or racial conflicts that centered around white resistance to African Americans attaining better housing, education, jobs, and city services. Interracial cooperation did prevent a large-scale riot from happening earlier in the 1950s. The work by some postwar African American churches to reduce juvenile crime was substantial; see Philadelphia Afro-American, 25 January 1947, 14; and 25 January 1947, 20. St. Matthews AME church in West Philadelphia took over 500 teenagers from the juvenile court by itself, and offered programs and recreational activities to help to reduce crime.

Philadelphia Tribune, 14 May 1957, 1, 3; 25 June 1957, 1, 3; 29 June 1957, 1, 14; 2 July 1957, 1.