

# BAKER INSTITUTE STUDY

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## POLICE AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY BUILDING BRIDGES FOR THE FUTURE

On Thursday, September 26, 1996, the James A. Baker, III Institute for Public Policy convened a summit on the campus of Rice University in Houston, Texas. Conceptualized by Dr. Lee P. Brown, Senior Scholar at the Baker Institute, the purpose was to bring together leaders from the African-American community and police chiefs from cities across America to formulate strategies addressing the ever-growing issue of polarization between the police and the African-American community.

The summit's objective was to develop a strategy to help close that gap that has been widening between the police and the African-American community.

"Many of us have observed for some time what is best described as a growing polarization between the police and the African-American community," Brown said. "This has occurred for a variety of reasons—some that we see publicly, some we don't see publicly—starting with the televised broadcast of Rodney King's incident, the Fuhrman tapes, and other highly publicized incidents. If those of us in leadership positions saw this polarization happening and did not do something about it, then we would not be serving those that we represent very well."

Brown continued, "We wanted to discuss the nature of the problem, the extent of the problem, and what must be done to address the problem. Ultimately we wanted the outcome to be an identification of the factors that account for the growing polarization between the police and the African-American community; and we want to outline a national strategy for correcting that problem; one that can be taken back and shared with our colleagues all over this country with the ultimate objective being to enhance the posi-

tive relationship between the police and the community."

The conference opened with Baker Institute Director Edward Djerejian, who stated that based upon his own experiences in the Middle East, "the United States is not immune from the growth of extremist groups, be they religious or secular, because of the issues of social justice and injustice."

Djerejian then introduced Dr. Malcolm Gillis, President of Rice University. Gillis observed that "It has been 30 years since the Kerner Commission issued its historic report on civil disorder in American; and as you well recall, that report outlined in some specific detail the steps that might be taken to address the societal divisions that existed then and, unfortunately to a great extent, even now. Our society has yet to fully respond satisfactorily to the challenges set forth in the Kerner report."

After several hours of intense deliberations the summit participants came up with a number of recommendations. Brown articulated the groups recommendations to the gathered press at the summit's conclusion.

"First, a national commission should be appointed by President Clinton to address the issue of race in America. We feel that of all of the commissions we have ever had in this country, we have never had a commission to address just the issue of race. It would be two-tier to ensure that the issues at the local level in the communities and their police officers and police chiefs would be addressed.

"Next, we feel that police agencies must address the issue of training. There is a need to educate and not just train with the focus on adult education.

Because of the diversity of our country and our cities, the training must deal with cultural awareness designed to make sure that our police officers have an appreciation for the great diversity and culture in our country.

"We want to make sure, also, that the field training officers reflect the value that we want seen in our police officers; indeed, we want to use other organizations, to help develop training materials for us. And, we find that the first-line supervisors, our sergeants, are critically important in bringing about any changes; and, therefore, we have to make sure that they are properly trained.

"Another recommendation deals with advancing the philosophy of community policing. It involves the community in the planning process. It means implementing creative and effective programs to involve the community, such as a citizens' academy or implementing programs to empower police officers to solve problems that have a negative impact on the people they serve.

"We spent a lot of time on a recommendation that calls for working with young people. This is critically important because a great deal of the conflict between the police occur when they are involved with African-American youth. It is important that we involve our youth, that we listen to our youth, and that we develop programs such as a youth citizen academy and a youth police commission.

"The next recommendation deals with developing a communications plan. We feel it is important for the police and for the African-American community leaders to insure that the media accurately portray both the police and African-Americans in both the print and electronic media. We think that is very critical to making sure that there is an accurate portrayal of the reality of both the police, what police work is all about, and the African-American community.

"The next recommendation deals with developing out of this summit a generational plan. Clearly, we feel we cannot forget our history, things that have transpired impact where we are now, and we must have both a long-range and a short-range agenda. We must also revisit things that have already been done, such as the Kerner Commission Report, the Eisenhower Report, the Katzenbach Report, to learn from the lessons that came out of those experiences a few

years back.

"Our next recommendation is dealing with the police chief serving as a leader in his or her community. That means that the police chief must engage others to join what we have started here today. The police chief must use the bully pulpit of the chief's office to get the message out in his or her community. The police chief must be an advocate for justice in America.

"And, equally important, the police chief and the police department must reach out to the alienated groups, not just those who are friendly with what police chief agencies do, but those who are even hostile toward police groups.

"I think the key thing we are saying here is that the police chief must speak out in the interest of democracy. It must involve police employee groups, such as the labor movement, and must be sensitive to African-American women. We often talk about the problems associated with African-American males; but we are reminded, we certainly cannot overlook the African-American female.

"The next recommendation deals with recruitment and hiring; and that calls for new hiring requirements. For example, we need to explore whether we should have college requirements - two-year, four-year college requirements. Should we have residential requirements so that officers are required to live in the cities in which they work? Do we need to have Civil Service reform, implementing programs like a cadet program where the police chief has more flexibility in selecting people that he or she would want to serve in their agencies?

"Clearly, we must screen out those officers who are not tolerant of racial differences. If they cannot function with all different races in an objective way, they should not serve as police officers in our country.

"We felt that the police department should hire what we call the spirit of service and not the spirit of adventure. We should have advanced recruitment procedures to seek out those candidates that we are not presently attracting. We need to make sure that our police departments look like America.

"We also included as another recommendation that it is critical that we monitor officers' performance. We find officers who are operating to the detriment of the police department and to the detriment

of the community. There must be prescribed methods of identifying those officers and removing them from service.

“And, finally, we suggest that the police establishment must communicate greater knowledge about the police code of ethics and make sure that all police officers live up to the principles of that code of ethics; and, clearly, the code of ethics is based upon the principles inherent in our U. S. Constitution.”

AT&T Government Markets was the underwriter for the one-day event.

Serving as spokespersons for the African American community were National Bar Association President Lawrence Bose; Keith Branch of the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice; National Urban Coalition President Ramona Ederlin; Jewell Jackson McCabe of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women; National Urban League President Hugh Price; and Leon West of the Congress of National Black Churches.

Expressing the views of law enforcement were Chief Dean Esserman, New York State, MTA, Metro North; Commissioner, Paul Evans, Boston, MA; Commissioner Tom Frazier, Baltimore, MD; Commissioner Gil Kerlikowske, Buffalo, NY; Chief Sam Nuchia, Houston, TX; Chief Robert Olson, Minneapolis, MN; Chief Nick Pastore, New Haven, CN; Director of Police, Joseph Santiago, Newark, NJ; Chief Dave Walchak, Concord, NH; and Chief Betsy Watson, Austin, TX.

Represented also were Jan Peters and John Cohen

of AT&T; Ira Harris, Executive Director, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives; Dan Rosenblatt, Executive Director, International Association of Chiefs of Police; Atkins Warren, Regional Director, Department of Justice, Community Relations Service, Region 7; Chuck Wexler, Executive Director, Police Executive Research Forum; and Hurbet Williams, President, Police Foundation.

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Please view our website through <[riceinfo.edu](http://riceinfo.edu)> for further information about the Baker Institute. For other inquiries and address changes, we may be reached at 713-527-4683, fax 713-285-5993, or e-mail <[bipp@ruf.rice.edu](mailto:bipp@ruf.rice.edu)>.



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