

# CRRF facts about...

## RACISM AND POLICING

### OVERVIEW

During the 1970s, there was not as much awareness in Canadian mainstream society of problems in relations between the police and racialized groups and this was matched by a laissez-faire attitude toward racism in police services. New perspectives arose in the '80s. Racism in police ranks became a subject of study for sociologists and criminologists, as a shocking realization took hold: Canadian police were capable of acts that were racist and sometimes had violent and even deadly consequences.

All these cases made headlines and fed the public imagination. They forced governments (federal, provincial and municipal) and many of the country's larger police forces (including those in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver) to take steps to assess the situation. It had become obvious that relations were not always harmonious between police and racialized minorities.

### Reports and

#### Commissions of Inquiry

We can say, notwithstanding the media sensationalism that tends to focus attention on every case of this type, that racism toward racialized groups and other minorities clearly exists. An attempt to quantify the problem would be practically impossible and not really necessary, because one racist act by

a police officer is one too many. Racism is not measured in numbers, but judged through perceptions, attitudes and behaviour.

A study conducted by the Quebec Human Rights Commission (Commission des droits de la personne du Québec, CDPQ), following up on a public opinion poll, examined the following basic hypothesis: that citizens from

racialized groups and ethnic minorities are subjected to more suspicion by police (and treated accordingly). They were also thought to be given less protection.

### Did you know:

- A survey showed that more Black Toronto residents (28%) than white (18%) or Chinese (15%) report being stopped by the police between 1993 and 1995.
- In Toronto, 8 young people of Caribbean origin were killed by police between 1988 and 1992.
- According to the African Canadian Legal Clinic in Toronto, even before the provincial Conservatives eliminated the independent Police Complaints Commission in 1997, only 1% of the 5,629 complaints filed against Metro Toronto police between 1992 and 1996 resulted in any form of discipline against an officer. (Eye Magazine, August 8, 2000)

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### **What causes racism in police forces?**

Racism in police forces may arise from a number of factors:

- The strong police identity gives police officers a feeling of power; they are protective of one another and may sometimes abuse this power;
- Training to prepare police for work in a society with a large immigrant population remains inadequate;
- The real or perceived existence of a very wide social, economic and cultural gap between the origins and lifestyles of police men and women and the multi-ethnic neighbourhoods they patrol;
- The lack of effective mechanisms for identifying racist incidents, attitudes and behaviours in institutions.
- The lack of appropriate corrective and disciplinary measures for abuses of a racist nature.
- Condescending treatment of complaints from racialized groups alleging racism.

"A study of a combination of sources confirmed that certain police officers showed discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. We discovered that one of the problems was officers' seeing the only legitimate source of their mandate as being the majority to which they belonged, as opposed to minorities. A relative insulation from social and ethno-cultural development is a severe handicap to the establishment of healthy relations between the police and a multi-ethnic public. In addition, the ambiguity of the police in a democratic society may cause their struggle against crime to slide into areas beyond their pro-per jurisdiction, causing serious and uncontrollable social repercussions." (CDPQ, 1988 : 63)

This general finding is shared by Ungerleider (1993:29) and Jacob (1993:56). Both of these researchers concluded that although the majority of police officers are fairly open to coexistence with people of diverse origins, some officers, when dealing with racialized individuals or groups, exhibit perceptions and behaviour that are biased by racist ideas. Some of the language used by officers illustrates this tendency: "Blacks are always exaggerating. They see racism everywhere... The Blacks try to provoke us... Why would Black youths always hang around in

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### **Defining Racism**

Can such statements be described as racist? Certainly. But this comment calls for a definition of the nature of racism, because there is a danger that they will be considered simply as inappropriate – but not very important – perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. First, such perceptions based on mistrust lead police officers to blame victims as being the cause of the problems. This sophism does not stand up to analysis.

Philip Stenning, in a report prepared for the Solicitor General of Canada in 1994, clearly defined this problem, which is experienced not only by the racialized minorities, but also by members of Aboriginal communities:

"Certain features of the organization (the Montreal police), made it more likely for non-White offenders to be the object of police attention in that city than White offenders, and less likely for non-White victims to receive adequate services from the police than White victims."

Stenning also noted that the same type of observation could apply to individuals from the various Aboriginal communities :

"The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry in Manitoba (Manitoba Public Inquiry,

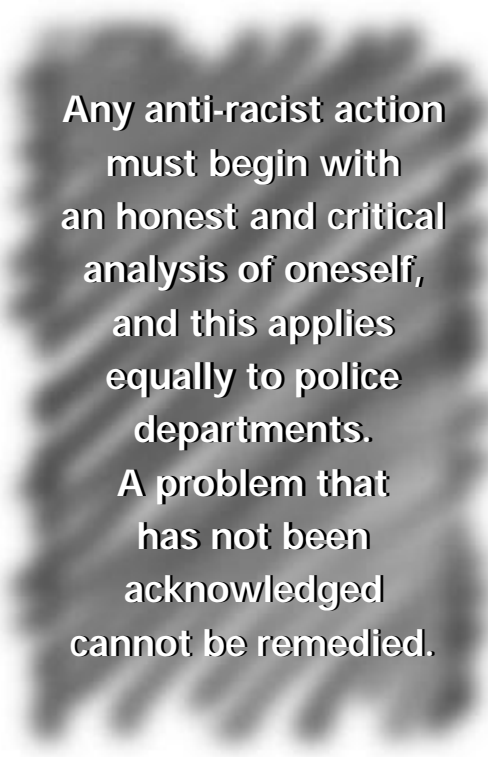
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1991) reached similar conclusions with respect to relations between the police and Aboriginal people in that province". (Stenning, 1994 :1-13)

Whether it is experienced in the police service or elsewhere, in any society or any institution, racism is fundamentally the same. Generally speaking, racism as a system of thought expressed in ideological positions and in social and political action is present in many social groups. It is pernicious and damaging, because it leads to exclusion and discrimination and rests essentially on a lack of respect for other human beings and their specific characteristics.

Stenning makes the following distinctions with respect to racism:

"It is, in this author's view, important to keep in mind the distinction between these two senses in which the term 'racism' is now used. In its former sense, the term implies deliberate, and typically malevolent, discriminatory behaviour. In its latter sense, it implies behaviour (or its results) which not only may not be intended as discriminatory, but the discriminatory effects of which may not even be known or understood by the actors, or within their control." (Stenning, 1994 - 1-13)



**The Varying Manifestations of Racism in the Police Services**

Racism in the police force can be fatal. A number of studies and commissions of inquiry have demonstrated this, particularly in cases of death by gunshot. Some police organizations still show a deep-seated tendency to deny any racial problem, especially when the issue is not receiving media attention. Various signs of racism in police services often are ignored or go unmentioned because they are less spectacular than the deaths of individuals shot by police. Yet they should receive regular attention. Beyond violent deaths with racist overtones, racist practices by police are part of day-to-day experience, taking various forms, and have deplorable, lasting and unjust effects on individual victims.

There is a variety of differential police practices. (see table 1). Even if these practices are not consistent, they create negative public perceptions of police services and contribute to maintaining an insidious racist mentality within police departments.

To address this situation, various studies and commissions of inquiry over the past two decades have proposed paths toward solutions. Various policies, training programs, more precise guidelines for police response to situations, and programs to

**Did you know:**

- Among men aged 25 to 40, black men (48%) are much more likely than White (29%) or Chinese (19%) ,men to report being stopped by the police between 1993 and 1995.
- In Montreal, between 1988 and 1993, police killed 5 youths of Haitian or other West Indian origin and 3 of Latin America origin.

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hire police officers from racialized groups, are helping to change the situation and to prevent racist practices and attitudes.

### **The basis for change: self-diagnosis**

Certainly, the presence of racialized minorities at all echelons of police forces is a first step toward eradicating racism from these institutions. But hiring people of diverse origins is not the magic solution that some people believe.

First of all, the most fundamental strategy would be for each police force to set up mechanisms for diagnosing its own internal problems in this area, identifying reprehensible racist attitudes and behaviours and finding genuine and appropriate remedies. Too often, police forces as institutions, as well as police unions, tend to justify and defend themselves, refusing to be self-critical and to take strong measures to eradicate racism.

Any anti-racist action must begin with an honest and critical analysis of oneself, and this applies equally to police departments. A problem that has not been acknowledged cannot be remedied.

**Racism in police departments: fundamentally a question of power dynamics**  
The issue of racism in police forces poses

many problems of both knowledge and policy. The factors that create racism are multiple and complex, and the policies and programs of action against it are not always sufficient. Indeed, they are often totally non-existent. This is particularly true of small towns.

Racism is a part of power relationships and part of a society's dominant institutions. The police, who by their very essence are an integral component of the political regime and thus of the dominant

power, must be subjected to special scrutiny in their relations with all citizens.

Because police forces are an institution in a position of social, political, legal and ideological domination, the racist behaviours and attitudes of some of their members require special scrutiny. Explicit or covert racism by police officers is an unjustifiable form of abuse of power. Realistic, effective and radical corrective action

could change the situation. Is policing without racism a possibility? The answer is up to the police. One thing is certain, though: every police officer must be responsible for his or her actions as a professional, and must be accountable to the authorities and institutions that represent the citizens in the exercise of their democratic rights.

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Table 1

DIFFERENTIAL POLICE PRACTICES : AN OVERVIEW	
▪ Tolerance of racist comments and jokes at the expense of racialized groups among police officers in the workplace;	
▪ Ostracism of colleagues with origins in a racialized group;	
▪ Ostracism of colleagues seen as too sympathetic to racialized groups ;	
▪ Perception that the racialized groups are more inclined than others to commit crimes;	
▪ Excessive mistrust of racialized groups;	
▪ Use of coarse epithets for individuals from racialized groups;	
▪ More frequent arrests of individuals from racialized groups;	
▪ Tendency to use more force than necessary when arresting some suspects from racialized groups;	
▪ Excessive harassment of youths from racialized groups;	
▪ Remarks about inappropriate behaviour because the person is "Black";	
▪ Bias in favour of citizens from majority groups;	
▪ More systematic, more frequent accusations of members of racialized groups;	
▪ False or unjustified imprisonment of members of racialized groups;	
▪ More frequent objections to bail requests from members of racialized groups;	
▪ Racial profiling, or the practice of routinely stopping racialized minorities – particularly Black men	
▪ Higher frequency of searches without a warrant of racialized groups;	
▪ Omission of services commonly offered to the public for members of racialized groups;	

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### Positive Steps:

- The Ontario Provincial Police has an anti-racism policy and anti-racism is an integral part of all officer training.
- In Ottawa-Carleton, the Diversity and Race Relations Unit provides direct support to police officers, acting as a source of information, mediation and conflict resolution.
- In the Montreal Urban Community Police Department, a community relations unit handles roughly the same duties.

In a study comparing the situation in France with that in England, Michel Wievorka asks basically the same questions and reaches conclusions similar to ours:

"It is commonplace to speak of racism in the police. But what is the nature of it? Is this a phenomenon that condenses and expresses prejudices and attitudes that go far beyond the police institution? Or is it specific and if so, what is it based on? Recruiting methods and officers' personalities? A sub-culture and a profession, the history of their organization, the environment they work in?"

Granted, the police complain about the bureaucracy, red tape and administrative rules that set boundaries on their work, and about the weight of hierarchy or any other power; but they are also actors, individually and collectively, acting subjectively and with a degree of freedom in which they contribute, if only modestly, to defining the focus and methods of their work. They are neither cogs in some machine that shapes them into racists, nor completely autonomous individuals, free of any

determinism or institutional constraints, whose racism or powerlessness to oppose racism could be said to come entirely from their own social background and education

outside the police institution. They are actors defined by their belonging to systems of action, and this is how we have defined them".

(Wievorka, 1992 : 222)

Clear disciplinary measures, instead of an almost systematic cover-up of abuses and thinly veiled discriminatory practices, would contribute to changing the atmosphere within police departments and to making police officers more aware of their responsibilities and choices.

### TOWARD SOLUTIONS The State's responsibility: Political and semantic choices that matter

We have already emphasized that racism is not limited to police services. But it is perhaps more visible and more marked in this institution, considered the armed servant of governments. Police officers are in

positions of power and direct action every day. It is up to the State, first and foremost, to take action to prevent and counteract racism, because police forces are directly dependent on the various levels of government (federal, provincial, regional and municipal). It must be remembered that the police officer has a mandate to protect the safety of each individual, independent of colour, "race", religion, sex, or any other biological or cultural difference.

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### **Suggestions for preventive and corrective action**

*Ongoing Programs to Evaluate Police Practices:* Several studies have shown that arrest rates are higher in areas with high ethnic concentrations. This is not necessarily the result of a higher crime rate, but may be caused by a different approach to the community and by negative attitudes on the part of some police officers toward racialized citizens.

The situation appears more positive today, but constant vigilance is required. Clear disciplinary measures, instead of an almost systematic cover-up of abuses and thinly veiled discriminatory practices, would contribute to changing the atmosphere within police departments and to making police officers more aware of their responsibilities and choices.

*Hiring Programs:* Hiring police officers of diverse ethnic origins through employment equity programs may be a useful tool, but it is not the answer to all problems, though it can be a lever to force changes within police organizations. Hiring programs can open the door to major changes in the attitudes of police officers. Daily association with colleagues of different origins can create a

change in attitudes that leads toward greater acceptance of others and to treating others equitably in police work, without harassment or discrimination.

In this sense, employment equity (and equal access programs in Québec) have contributed to significant progress in police forces.

According to Friday (1999 - Appendix 6), diversity programs for police recruit-

ment are in effect in a number of Canadian cities, but are far from achieving all expectations.

Here is the portrait outlined by Friday:

Table 2 illustrates, without explanation, that racialized minority representation in police forces remains a utopian goal. There is still much to be done.

These programs do not always meet their quotas, and the number of officers from racialized groups remains below a representative level.

*Decentralization of services:* The "community policing" initiatives (sometimes called "neighbourhood policing", or "co-operative police services"), are in place or being developed in a number of Canadian cities. They provide police offi-

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cers with new capabilities for acting with a more complete, nuanced and critical understanding of a neighbourhood's residents and their community lifestyles and cultural characteristics, as well as community institutions and the kinds of criminal organizations active in the area. These measures make it possible to bridge the gulf between citizens of diverse cultures and the police.

Community action and prevention programs are easier to carry out when the police have put down roots in the neighbourhood.

*Police training programs:* A number of community colleges, universities, and specialized institutes now offer training programs adapted to policing in a diverse society like Canada's.

In addition to basic and technical training, the charters of human rights should have a central place in police training, for they serve as focal points for managing diversity in modern society. Teaching strategies, including a narrative approach, should enable future police officers to think criti-

Table 2

Racialized recruits out of total number of Police Officers Hired (1998 data)	
Toronto	371 of 5,262
Montreal	97 of 4,062
Vancouver	73 of 1,084
Victoria	73 of 1,084
Calgary	51 of 1,250
Edmonton	64 of 1,150
Regina	13 of 319
Saskatoon	6 of 387
Winnipeg	40 of 1,176
Halifax	15 of 403
Peel Regional (Ontario)	81 of 1,144

cally about the development of their own identities. Students should think about their own life stories, using themes such as experiences of migration, ideas about immigrants earned from their families, perceptions of racialized groups, etc. This kind of activity will enable students to become conscious of their roots, their prejudices, their identity struggles, etc.

*Diversity management policies:* Every police force should adopt a policy on managing diversity. This policy should affect all practices within the organization, from hiring to responding to calls. Such a policy would also help to define actions that can be taken to prevent racist behaviour or to deal with it when it occurs.

The diversity management policy must be tied into the Code of Conduct and must be implemented vigorously by senior management of the institutions in order to have real impact. Federal, provincial and large city police forces must be models for those in smaller towns, though the latter are often less exposed to ethnic and cultural diversity.

### Communications policies

Over the years, the media have learned to work with police departments. On too many occasions, with a certain complicity, descriptions of suspects or known criminals highlight their ethnic and/or national origin, skin colour, mother tongue or religion. For example, a Sikh has been arrested... a Chilean gang... a network of Blacks... a Hispanic suspect... etc.

In practice, the media do not use this kind of identification for Canadians belonging to the majority group. This kind of reporting develops, crystallizes and/or perpetuates a negative percep-



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tion of *racialized* groups in public opinion. The result may be that people come to believe in the erroneous stereotype that criminality is a sort of common characteristic that applies to all Canadians who come from certain countries.

It is also appropriate to emphasize the importance of the interpretation of statistics on crime, such as profiles of neighbourhoods. Partial, simplistic or inaccurate interpretations create a negative image of neighbourhoods with a large multi-ethnic component. For example, it is all too often forgotten that criminality correlates much more closely with poverty than with skin colour. It is thus important that analyses take into account the entire picture, not only the most visible elements such as skin colour. Both the police and the media need to be aware of the considerable influence they exert on the formation of perceptions, images, and often the preconceived ideas of the majority of people.

Communications policies must be clear and updated constantly in order to prevent police information and news reports from conveying stereotypes.

### Community policing

New community policing practices help to prevent abuses and provide the oppor-

tunity to adopt a direct preventive approach. In some cases, the police may help to improve neighbourhood residents' awareness of one law or another, negotiate strategies for peaceful resolution of conflicts, circumscribe activities that could potentially cause racist conflicts, etc. (Fleras & Elliott, 1996 : 390)

Police relations with non-profit or non-governmental organizations can be improved by various exchange programs.

### Language Training

Some municipalities promote the learning of a second language by police officers.

Given the increase in the Hispanic population, for example, a certain number of officers are learning Spanish.

## CONCLUSION

The need for policies and action plans to prevent and combat racism in police services challenges all levels of government and police institutions to live up to their responsibilities. Despite the progress achieved in the last twenty years or so, much still remains to be done. Every city's police force should take a long, serious look at the situation and take the required action.

### Examples of community policing:

- In Winnipeg, Manitoba, a community organizer works with police on a diversity awareness program.
- In Chatham, Ontario, a special liaison committee has brought about an improvement in relations between the police department and aboriginal people.
- In Halifax, Nova Scotia, a liaison officer is responsible for relations with racialized groups in the city.

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## **RACISM AND POLICING**

### **Leading the way**

The box at the right shows how an Aboriginal peoples policing service was established. This is the First Nations Police Service Profile of the Anishinabek Police Service (APS).

#### ANISHINABEK POLICE SERVICE MISSION STATEMENT

"To provide a community based peacekeeping service in the spirit of partnership with all nations, honoring each one's uniqueness and the creator's gifts with dignity and respect."

On March 30, 1992, a five-year Ontario First Nations Policing Agreement was signed by Grand Council Treaty #3, Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians, Anishinabek Nation, Six Nations and the Provincial and Federal Government.

In 1994, a separate two-year agreement under the umbrella of the Ontario First Nations Policing Agreement called the Anishinabek Police Service agreement was endorsed by the Chiefs of Curve Lake, Garden River, Sagamok and Saugeen First Nations.

A new three-year agreement was endorsed in October 1996 to include twelve more First Nations (Christian Island, Dokis, Fort William, Long Lake #58, Magnetawan, Nipissing, Pic River, Pic Mobert, Rocky Bay, Shawanaga, Wasauksing and Wahnapiatae). An MOU was endorsed on October 3, 1996 to provide policing services to Henvey Inlet. In April 1997, Ginoogaming became part of the Anishinabek Police Service. The Chippewas of Stony & Kettle Point First Nation joined the police service on October 1, 1997, bringing the total to nineteen First Nations. The Anishinabek Police Service currently provides policing service to seventeen First Nations throughout the province of Ontario.

The primary goal of the Anishinabek Police Service is to provide an effective and efficient policing service that is culturally sensitive and appropriate for First Nations communities. An effective policing service includes keeping the peace, providing protection to both persons and property through prevention, community education and enforcement of Federal, Provincial and First Nations laws and rendering assistance to the public in emergency and non-emergency situations. The objective is to provide a level and standard of police service at least equivalent to that provided in non-aboriginal communities with the equivalent police workload, population and location. A further objective is to eventually provide 24-hour police coverage to each First Nation Territory under the Anishinabek Police Service's jurisdiction.

The roles and responsibilities of the Police Governing Authority include:

- Act as the employer of the members of the APS;
- Restructure itself to reflect the expansion and increased responsibility of the APS;
- Select a Police Chief and set standards of performance and monitor that performance yearly;
- Recruit and hire employees;
- Set the objectives of the APS;
- Select members from the Police Governing Authority to sit on the Operational, Financial and Discipline Committees;
- Develop policy and procedures for the APS including but not limited to such areas as recruitment, training, promotion, and community-based policing;
- Maintain a Code of Conduct to deal with disciplinary matters and a process for dealing with Public Complaints;
- Provide the necessary supplies and equipment to operate an effective and efficient police service;
- Obtain and maintain liability insurance coverage for the APS, the Police Council, the PGA and Local Policing Committees for actions undertaken by such members acting in the execution of their duties as members or agents of the APS;
- Select a Chair from among its members and meet not less than quarterly; and,
- Consider recommendations from Local Policing Committees and the Police Chief on matters which, by the Agreement, are under the jurisdiction of the PGA.

For more information, please see the First Nation Chiefs of Police Association newsletter, Volume 3 - Edition 1, Spring 2000 at <http://www.soonet.ca/fncpa/newsletters/vol3ed1/apsprofile.htm>

For more information on Chiefs of Police Associations and their activities, you can also refer to:

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, at <http://www.sass.ca/cacppage.htm>

The Ontario Chiefs of Police Association, at <http://www.oacp.on.ca/>

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