"Community Policing in Dayton: More Flash Than Substance?" Dayton Daily News (May 29, 1992)

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A community gathering was held on May 3 at College Hill Community Church to discuss the acquittal of Rodney King's assailants and its aftermath in Los Angeles. On that occasion, Mayor Clay Dixon acknowledged that Dayton has in the past had problems with police brutality. But he was reassured because, as he indicated, "Dayton now has in place community policing." Is community policing a promising development in the history of Dayton's troubled police department? Or is this just another weak reed -- like the earlier Civilian Review Board, with no real community-based component -- which will easily bend in the face of the next onslaught of official violence? It is worth recalling that the January 11, 1992 Los Angeles Times reported that Police Chief Daryl Gates had taken personal control of the Community Policing Project in Los Angeles. This project was one outcome of the Christopher Commission's inquiry into the Rodney King beating. It proved a weak reed, indeed. Rodney King was not the first victim of police brutality and blind justice, nor will he be the last. African-American communities are always at the brink of rebellion, and a spark of injustice can easily ignite an explosion of rage. The African-American community has been plagued with "Black on Black" crime that receives little attention until it spreads beyond African-American neighborhoods. Community policing has been offered as a remedy to this problem also.

Many cities have experimented with various forms of "community policing" -- by the end of 1990 it was estimated that there were more than 300 such programs across the nation. Dayton is one such city. Police Chief James Newby proposed a community policing project for Dayton as early as November 9, 1990. This followed the infamous "Iron-Gate Case" where David Greer was burned by several Dayton police officers on January 12, 1990. However, these Community Policing programs have yet to prove their effectiveness. As Hubert Williams of the Police Foundation put it on BET's "Lead Story" on February 2, 1992, "there is no documentation that community policing reduces crime." What evidence is there about the effectiveness of Dayton's project? After all, the test of effectiveness is to increase the sense of security of the citizens, the community. Let us first consider community need, and then the official response. We have just completed analysis of data from a telephone survey of Dayton residents which relates to both these issues. This survey was completed in early March 1992, randomly sampling more than 210 households -- some located inside and some outside the target neighborhoods of Dayton's Community Policing program as identified in the Dayton Daily News (January 29, 1992). Of the respondents, all were over 18 years of age, and 57% were female. 37% were African American, 60% White, and 3% other. 58% were married, of which 60% had been married for more than a decade. 53% had children in the home. 76% had lived at this address for five or more years.

Let us consider the community's need. It is axiomatic in police-community relations that citizens are less likely to resort to their own security measures, if the police are able to solve the citizens' problems. In Dayton, as in many cities around the nation, citizens
perceive their own community's security problems as fairly serious. In our study, for example, the majority of the respondents (62.5 %) said they considered the crime problem in their own Dayton neighborhood to be "somewhat serious." By contrast, 10 % responded "very serious," and 25 % responded "not very serious."

Furthermore, 48 % of the sample indicated their own Dayton household had been criminally victimized during the past three years -- the most prevalent crime reported was theft (37.8 %), followed by vandalism (20.9 %). Moreover, the citizens feared drug-related crime even more than vandalism, and assault even more than theft, even though their actual reportage of these crimes in Dayton was not as prevalent.

The citizens' behavior corresponds to their perceptions. In light of these experiences as victims, and these fears about crime, Dayton residents would be expected to resort to their own security measures. And indeed, a majority of our respondents indicated they had extra locks on doors (69 %), locks on windows (61 %), and had a gun (51 %). A minority of the respondents indicated they had an electronic home security system (35 %), door sensors (21 %), or a guard dog (17 %). These latter security measures are, of course, more expensive than locks or guns. Finally, two-thirds of the respondents stated that their neighbors also had some of these security measures. Thus a substantial portion of Dayton residents are incurring an additional expense on top of paying their local tax dollars, in an effort to ensure the security of their own homes.

Most disturbing, perhaps, is the finding that more than half of our respondents said they had a gun or guns in their home for protection. This availability of weapons is directly related to the incidence of violence involving weapons. And adults' sanctioning of weapons for protection is directly related to the prevalence of youth bearing weapons in school, etc. As we reflect back on the evidence we have presented here, we see that Dayton citizens' resorting to their own security measures can be traced back to the inability of the police to provide that security, to solve the citizens' problems.

Let us turn now to the issue of the official response to those needs. Clearly the traditional modes of policing have not proved effective in Dayton. What about Community Policing? The majority of our respondents (57 %) indicate they have not heard of the Community Policing program at all, regardless of where they live. This finding is in itself an important reflection of the ineffectiveness of the program's implementation. Even if the Community Policing program is poorly implemented, it may be differentially implemented, with greater impact in target areas than in other areas.

We compare the responses of two groups: those who reside inside the four target neighborhoods, and those who reside just outside the neighborhoods. A significantly larger portion of those who reside inside the target neighborhoods indicated that they had heard about the Community Policing program (48 %) than did those outside (33 %). There are three ways in which they could have heard about it.

We analyse the responses of those 89 Dayton residents who indicated that they had heard of the program, in terms of those who had read about the program in the newspaper (38 %), those who had seen it on TV (32 %), and those who had heard about it from a police officer (31 %). We find no statistically significant relationship between the three sets of
responses. Since the three sets are independent, we see that those respondents who indicated that they had heard of the Community Policing program tended to have received that information from the mass media -- the newspaper and TV -- rather than from personal interaction. This is suggestive that the public relations effort (or marketing effort) associated with the Community Policing program is more effective than the actual programmatic outreach.

But any community policing program must amount to more than publicity in the newspaper. It must actually enhance the interaction of citizens and police. What is the effectiveness of the Community Policing program's outreach effort? Of those 89 Dayton respondents who have heard about the Community Policing program, the majority (53 %) indicate that they have never seen a Community Policing officer. This finding is in itself an important reflection of the failure of the program's outreach effort. Even if the Community Policing programmatic outreach is largely ineffective, it may still be differentially effective, with lesser impact outside the target neighborhoods than within them. As we shall see, however, the data suggests otherwise. As a final step, then, we compare the responses of the 89 Daytonians who had heard about the Community Policing program, broken down into the groups inside and outside the target neighborhoods. Our findings here are the most striking of the entire study. There is no statistically significant difference in the portions of those residing inside (45 %) and those residing outside the target neighborhoods (50 %) who indicate they have ever seen a Community Policing officer.

As we turn to the analysis of the data, it will be useful to distinguish between city-initiated and neighborhood-initiated policing programs. To date, virtually all policing programs in Dayton, including the Civilian Review Board (headed by the Police Chief) and the Community Policing program, have been city-initiated, that is reflecting agendas and priorities which are set downtown, rather than those of the community.

In the case of the Community Policing program in Dayton, the means of undercutting neighborhood initiatives seem quite simple. There is a peculiar bureaucratic structure whereby the Community Policing officer is subject to a "dual reporting" relationship, responsible to one lieutenant in the program structure and at the same time to another lieutenant in the district chain of command. These officers have not yet discovered "how to serve both God and Mammon," hence end up serving only one superior. And that tends to be the lieutenant in the traditional line of command. In effect, this permits the subversion of any initiative, the overturning of any priority, which does not come from downtown. Little wonder Community Policing programmatic outreach is ineffective.

But it is the citizens' tax dollars which are funding this "dual structure," subsidizing this duplication of bureaucratic effort, this exercise in ineffectiveness. To what end? All this makes sense only if we understand that the Community Policing program was initiated as a community relations response to the "Iron-Gate Case." Our data suggest that this program may enhance the public relations of the police in Dayton. Improved policing, on the other hand? No!

There are many interpretations and models of community-based policing. One feature of any effective program, in our opinion, is the primacy of neighborhood initiatives. This
would insure that neighborhood residents set the agenda, the priorities, and the terms of recruitment and deployment of police personnel into the target neighborhoods. The primacy of neighborhood initiatives will go a long way toward ensuring that residents feel safe and secure in their own community.

In any case, our study findings reflect upon a comment Mayor Dixon made at College Hill: the Rodney King verdict amounts to a "wake up call." Dayton must wake up in time for a deep and allround policy discussion about policing in general, and community policing in particular.

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