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## Police Brutality and Its Effect on Society

Police brutality is a complex phenomenon, which has widespread effects on today's society. In recent years, the police have come under serious scrutiny for police brutality, and this has been underscored by the presence of video camcorders. Accompanying this issue, I will provide several examples and recent cases, as well as the related decision making process. Similar emphasis shall be placed upon the understanding, role, and participation of the individual in public policy making. To begin with, I should like to first offer my understanding of police brutality, and as well, as it is expressed in the literature. In recent years, police brutality has become an issue, and in some instances, one which has been spotlighted as being greater than the (instances). For example, the riots in Los Angeles would probably be representative of some of these actions, as would the salient case of one Rodney King. This case, of course, was given much publicity, while, unlike the communal riots, the selection riots did not involve clashes between white and black civilians - - suburban flight by then had created segregation in the inner cities.

Rather, they involved black ghetto residents and police. Particularly ignited by real or perceived acts of police brutality, but were generally confined to the ghettos. The primary activities of these riots were looting and destruction aimed at white-owned businesses. The first major insurrection riot took place in Harlem in the summer of 1964. Reacting to the killing of an unarmed black teenager by an off-duty white policeman, thousands of Harlem residents went on a rampage, pillaging white-owned businesses and hurling rocks and bottles at New York's riot police. Other major riots followed, in the Watts section of Los Angeles (1965) and Chicago (1966). In 1967 the country experienced 164 racial disorders in 128 cities, including Detroit, where 32 blacks and 10 whites died in the violence, and damage was estimated at more than \$40 million dollars. Some 69,000 National Guard and Federal Troops were called in to restore order in these cities in 1967, a number eclipsed by the 76,000 required the next year to quell the disorders following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Major riots occurred in Memphis, Cleveland, Washington, D.C. Chicago, and Baltimore. The incidents of race riots declined after 1968, but upheavals in Miami in 1980 and Los Angeles in 1992, indicated the potential for grave future trouble. The Los Angeles riot, in particular, cast an ominous pale over the future of American race relations. Sparked by the acquittal of four white policemen charged with police brutality, the Los Angeles riot was the largest, deadliest, and most recent since the turn of the century. By the time 13,000 local and federal law enforcement personnel had restored order, 60 persons were dead and 2,383 injured. Property damage was estimated at \$800 million dollars.

(Baskin, p. 12) There is little doubt that the problem of police brutality exists, and I might also

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add, that the age of the video camera, wherein it seems that almost everyone owns one, much of these ominous incidence have been recorded on video tape. How, the, and where does the role and decision making aspect of the average citizen come into play? It seems to me, that this problem, not only is it that it exists, but also provides a fertile area for 'participation in government,' or public policy. At the same time, other hate crimes of racial and brutality significantly involves other groups, i.e. Asians, etc. For example, one Thien Minh Ly was skating on a tennis court in Tuscin, California, when he suddenly was attacked by two young white supremacists.

Ly, a 24 year old Vietnamese American and a recent graduate of U.C.L.A. and Georgetown University, was stomped on, then stabbed more than a dozen times. The brutality and racial overtones of Ly's murder in January 1996 drew national media attention. But more than 10,000 other hate crimes occurred in the United States that year with almost no public notice. That is part of the problem with hate crimes in America, experts say. For the most part, they go unnoticed, sometimes even by law enforcement agencies. Consequently, President Clinton will lead a conference at the White House to raise public awareness of the problem and to spotlight state and local successes in combating it. Some participants, such as Michael Lieberman, associate director of the Anti-Defamation League, also will try to promote stiffer punishments for crimes motivated by hate. There is significant agreement among the experts that swifter penalties could help curb such crimes. "The unique harm caused by bias crimes not only justifies their enhanced punishment, it compels it," said Frederick Lawrence, a Boston

University law professor whose book "Punishing Hate," is scheduled for publication by the Harvard University Press next year. Lieberman also wants to use the White House conference to impress upon local police that the intimidation and psychological damage to victims of hate crimes often live longer than that of other crime victims. It is a more personal crime if it is motivated by hate," Lieberman said. "It is important for police to take it seriously, because failure to respond could lead a community to think that they have the right to take the law into their own hands." Not all hate crimes are as brutal as Ly's murder, of course. The most frequently reported incidences usually fall under the very category of "intimidation." Vandalism is next. Even so, if the President is to have success in his efforts at racial reconciliation, experts say, he needs to help the country understand the uniquely harmful nature of crimes motivated solely by racial, ethnic, religious or sexual bias. "Hate crimes are the embodiment of intolerance - - acts intended to create tension and fear," said Attorney General Janet Reno, who will head a conference on coordinating federal and state police efforts. "Hate crimes tear us apart when we should be moving closer together." Senator Robert Torricelli (D-NJ) recently introduced such a bill.

The White House Conference also comes amid growing concerns for possible links between white supremacists and militia groups and complaints of increasing attacks on Asian Americans,

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Gays, and Lesbians. "We can't say that the militia groups and supremacist groups are the same thing, but there appears to be some overlap," said Arthur Jipson, a sociology professor at Miami University in Ohio, who studies hate groups. More troubling to Jipson are the white supremacists known as "Skin-Heads," who view themselves as "the front line troops in the coming racial apocalypse," and those in the so-called "Christian Identity" movement, white supremacists who mix Christian theology and racial politics. Loretta Ross, director of the Center For Human Rights Education in Atlanta, said her seven years of research suggests that there also may be links between white supremacists and abortion clinic demonstrations, though "more research is needed." Ly's murder was cited in research submitted to the U.S. Justice Department in September by Asian American public interest groups submitting a complaint that hate crimes against Asian Americans are growing. They report that such crimes increased 17% in 1996. "They blame the rise on "scape goating" and the "racial decisive rhetoric" of politicians. These were especially virulent in 1996 in the context of immigration, welfare, affirmative action, and campaign finance controversies," the report says (Shepard, p. A-14)

The following narrative of the chasing and factual shooting of a young black man is based on reports and further investigation by the newspaper:

3:50 p.m.: Lorenzo Collins, 25, with a history of mental problems, escapes from a locked ward at the Cincinnati University Hospital, where he was held for observation after his arrest for theft.

3:54 p.m.: Police officers located Collins running on the street. They call for more help.

3:55-56 p.m.: Collins enters an apartment complex and asks a tenant to help by hiding him. Tenant refuses and Collins continues to run. He is cornered by one officer who calls for canine help. Collins breaks away and runs through bushes, jumps over an air conditioner and a fence. Police are following close behind.

3:57-58 p.m.: Collins evades police briefly but is sighted as pedestrians watch police chase him and notice now that he is carrying a brick. Police yell to him to drop the brick and surrender. Police then call headquarters to get a stun gun. Collins continues to try to escape.

3:58 p.m.: From outside her car in the street, a woman watches police surround and spray him with mace or a chemical irritant. She counts eight police officers closing in on Collins with their pistols raised, some at close range.

3:59 p.m.: Police continue to demand that Collins drop the brick and surrender.

Police said Collins told them that they would have to shoot him. Immediately, a city police officer and a Cincinnati University security officer fire four shots at Collins from eight feet away or less.

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Collins received three of the four shots and died five minutes later.

Police said Collins did not advance towards the police. He was cornered. Police said Collins shouted, "You'll have to kill me." A black female witness said she asked police not to shoot Collins, for he was only carrying a brick. The officers had their guns drawn. Police had repeated that they fired because they thought their lives were in danger. Citizens ask why an armed task force consisting of some 8 to 14 cops could not disarm one man carrying only a brick? With the Cincinnati area aroused and united against police brutality, and with black ministers, the NAACP, Urban League and other black organizations in agreement on this issue, Cincinnati leaders expressed optimism that the police policies will change and will force police officers and other law enforcement agencies to show greater respect for the lives of young black men and all other citizens. (Minority Report, p. 11)

Incidents such as these, highlight the need for the vocal participation of the citizen in public policy decision making. Similarly, I believe and have concluded that such incidents enable students to make informed judgments concerning public policy issues. At the same time, I do not wish to be misunderstood. Certainly, police officers put their lives on the line every day for the average citizen. When speaking of police brutality, we are speaking of a small minority. However, it does appear that in recent years, the issue has gotten an inordinate amount of press. Ultimately, it is the belief of this author that police (as well as other organizations throughout the United States who are responsible for the welfare of the citizenry) must work hand-in-hand with the parameters of prevailing public policy. Similarly, within a democratic government, as in the U.S.A., it is the responsibility of everyone to involve themselves in public policy making. This is to be understood from the highest level of government, i.e., the federal government, as well as the election of the President of the United States, to those policies which are carried out within respective states' local communities.

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