

Flashpoint: The Church and Law Enforcement in Poor Black and White Communities

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to “connect-the-dots,” linking recent police shootings of African Americans, including several in suburban communities, with emerging research linking the migration to the suburbs of poor, mostly black and Latino urban dwellers with “suburban poverty” and crime. Also discussed are the increase in poverty, crime and incarceration among whites in rural communities. Contrary to popular belief, poor white communities contain the fastest growing segment of the U.S. prison population. Poor whites are also the victims of police violence more often than blacks. As one civil rights leader has written, “While African-Americans are at disproportionate risk from the structural and human biases of our criminal justice system, we should not forget that working and poor people of all races suffer from police excessive use of force. Police kill more whites than blacks.” (Jackson, 2015, para. 11)

In an age of draconian and (in the opinion of many) hate-filled reversals in criminal justice and immigration policy, due in large measure to these demographic shifts, the power and moral witness of the church are sorely needed to assist the poor, both black and white. This assistance must go beyond the “outreach ministries” typically seen in churches. Rather, as society’s principal moral voice, the church must see and understand the demographic and cultural changes happening around it, effectively seeing through a moral lens the changes law enforcement often finds threatening. And, within the context of providing pastoral care to the wealthy and the poor, the black and the white, the law enforcer and the ostensible law breaker, assist in brokering relationships that are beneficial to the individuals, families and communities it serves.

Keywords: suburban poverty, clergy-police partnerships, police-community relations

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of a rash of police shootings around the country in recent years, in which literally dozens of black citizens were killed, leading in some cases to violent confrontations between police and community (and

also giving rise to the aptly named Black Lives Matter movement), there developed a keen interest in establishing rapprochement between what amounted to warring factions in such cities. For example, in Ferguson, MO, as well as cities such as Baltimore, Seattle, and Cleveland, the U.S. Justice Department, under President Barack Obama, negotiated federal consent decrees to, among other provisions, stipulate strict guidelines governing police behavior with a view toward curbing abuses.

There was also a renewed interest in some communities in establishing partnerships between clergy (and, by extension, their congregations) and law enforcement agencies. Such collaborations between clergy and police were used to great effect in a number of cities in the 1990s and 2000s, and were often responsible for helping to increase police legitimacy and lower racial tensions on the one hand, while simultaneously helping to reduce youth-related violent crime, increase community safety awareness, and facilitate civic and inter-agency cooperation (Brunson et al., 2013; Trulear, 2000).

The clergy-police partnerships were particularly important because they addressed two core assumptions at play in poor, minority communities:

1. The perception that “the police officer is not your friend”; and
2. The notion that, based on their moral authority and – in particular – the services they provide through their ministries, clergy have credibility where the police do not (Brunson, et al, 2013).

With the election of Donald J. Trump as President in 2016, however, things began to change. In particular, the new Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, ordered a sweeping review of all Justice Department activities—including Obama-era consent decrees—under the aegis of ensuring that such activities “effectively promote a peaceful and lawful society, where the civil rights of all persons are valued and protected” (Sessions, 2017, p.1). At the same time, DOJ sought a 90-day delay (subsequently denied by a federal judge) in enacting a consent decree negotiated with the Baltimore Police Department. The proposed delay “came just days before a hearing. . .to solicit public comment on the agreement, which was reached in principle by the city and the Justice Department in the waning days of the Obama Administration” (Stolberg & Litchblau, 2017, para. 3). In addition, the FBI’s Counterterrorism Division issued a controversial Intelligence Assessment which stated that what it term termed “Black Identity Extremists” were likely motivated to attack law enforcement officers in response to the officer-involved shootings of black citizens (FBI, 2017).

The sweeping nature of these and other actions targeting minority and

immigrant communities have caused many to question whether there is indeed justice in the justice system. In so doing, it has widened, largely along racial lines, the rift between many who identify themselves as Christians, but who take opposing positions as to the morality of the Justice Department's decisions.

This researcher has recently completed a study examining the role of the church in police/community relations, including a discussion of the migratory patterns that are often used to justify these policy changes. Also explored are the "lenses" through which such demographic shifts are viewed by different stakeholders, and their implications for civil society.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

Racial tensions arising in recent years in Ferguson, MO and other communities in the wake of a rash of police shootings around the country – leading in some cases to violent confrontations between police and community – underscore the challenges facing many towns following a nearly two-decades-long migration of the urban poor to the suburbs. While there is substantial evidence that law enforcement agencies often engage in abusive and even deadly practices, the problem isn't as simple as it appears. Demographic shifts are occurring as a result of a variety of migratory movements around the country. These movements are having a significant effect on the racial and ethnic makeup and economies of local communities. Interviews with clergy, police and other officials indicate that, depending on the lenses through which such changes are viewed, their effects can be seen as either positive or negative.

Research has documented the migration of millions of poor inner-city residents to inner-ring suburbs, a development researchers have termed "suburban poverty" (Galster, 2003; Kneebone & Berube, 2013). According to the Brookings Institution (Berube et al., 2010), the largest poor population in the United States now lives in the suburbs. A breakdown of this demographic shift reveals that among the millions of people migrating the country, the following are included:

- The relocation of Hispanics/Latinos from Mexico and Central and South America, including members of so-called transnational gangs, including *Mara Salvatrucha (known as MS-13)* and *18th Street*. (Center for Immigration Studies, 2008)
- The migration of local youth gangs from large urban centers to their surrounding suburbs. Fifty percent of suburban counties report gang presence and/or activity within their jurisdictions. As

with the transnational gangs, members of local youth gangs generally relocate with their families, usually in pursuit of greater employment opportunities, lower housing prices, and higher performing public schools (National Gang Center, n.d.).

- More than 600,000 newly-released former prisoners annually reenter society from state and federal institutions around the country. Most returnees live in their communities of origin with a family member or intimate partner, while others end up either homeless or in temporary housing (Urban Institute, 2001). If employment and needed social services are not available, most returning citizens resort to the same criminal activities that led to their incarceration in the first place.
- An estimated 700,000 to 1.6 million homeless children are served by school districts around the country. Some of the largest caseloads are in the suburbs. Jefferson County, CO, for example, reports having twice as many homeless children as the nearby Denver public school district. According to one homeless advocate, “Suburban homelessness is among the most invisible because it doesn’t fit our stereotypes” (Deem, 2009, para. 3).

Taken together, poor urban transplants constitute a critical mass of society which, when living together in sufficient numbers, often reflect the same dysfunctional and even criminal behaviors often ascribed to inner city neighborhoods. Citing Galster’s research, Elizabeth Kneebone and Natalie Holmes argue that “the negative effects of concentrated poverty—like its influence on crime, school dropout rates, and the duration of poverty—actually begin to emerge once a neighborhood’s poverty rate exceeds 20 percent, and grow rapidly before leveling off around the 40 percent threshold” (Kneebone & Holmes, 2016, para. 23). Moreover, poor suburban communities generally lack the governmental infrastructure necessary to address the financial and social service needs of the community. According to Kneebone, “Like Ferguson, many of these changing suburban communities are home to out-of-step power structures, where the leadership class, including the police force, does not reflect the demographic changes that have reshaped these places” (Kneebone, 2014, para. 9). As a result, they also lack the ability to contextualize and interpret the cultural and other changes occurring within them.

This is because, as researcher Eric Hehman has noted, “The context in which police officers work is significantly associated with disproportionate use of lethal force.” (Hehman et al., 2017, p. 1). Stymied by the lack of

data on lethal force by police, Hehman and his colleagues sought to develop a predictive model of lethal force integrating and correlating a broad range of measures and information on bias from more than 2 million people. Though they were unwilling to draw conclusions from their findings, and cited a need for further research, they nonetheless found that the implicit biases and stereotypes that whites have toward blacks is the greatest predictor of lethal force by police. Moreover:

Though the implicit prejudice of Whites is sufficient to significantly predict disproportionate lethal force, the strongest predictor of lethal force was the regional implicit stereotypical association between Blacks and weapons (Hehman et al., 2017, p. 5).

That is, notwithstanding the real correlation between increased poverty and rising crime, the very perception in the minds of Whites that African Americans were associated with carrying weapons is the strongest predictor of the use of lethal force by the police. Hehman and his colleagues cautioned that their research “cannot describe effects associated with racially biased individuals.” Rather, the results show that “that racially biased contexts are related to disproportionate lethal force” (Hehman et al., 2017, p. 5).

SEEING THROUGH DIFFERENT LENSES

Analysis by this researcher has identified at least two (2) different societal lenses through which this demographic shift is viewed. On one hand, as reflected in law enforcement surveys (e.g., the U.S. Justice Department’s National Youth Gang Survey; the FBI’s National Gang Report), local police departments and other law enforcement agencies tend to see the newcomers as a threat to public safety – including police safety – and responsible for losses in property value, tax revenue and an overall reduction in the communities’ quality of life. One response to this, as suggested by the Justice Department’s investigative report on the Ferguson Police Department, has been to increase municipal revenues by racially profiling minorities, leading to illegal traffic stops and other forms of “unconstitutional policing” (DOJ, 2015a, p. 2). Conversely, religious congregations often see poor urban transplants through the prisms of morality, compassion, and redemption. For example, national faith-based programs such as Amachi, which provides mentors for the children of incarcerated adults; and Healing Communities, which trains congregations to serve the needs of their members who have been affected by crime and incarceration, are research-based and designed to serve as extensions of congregational minis-

try (Goode, Lewis & Trulear, 2011). Moreover, research by Trulear, Byron Johnson and others has demonstrated the importance of the faith community in developing strategies that help in reducing crime; facilitate lower recidivism rates; and help to stabilize local neighborhoods (Johnson, 2008 & 2011; Trulear, 2000). In addition, there is also evidence to suggest that crime reduction partnership strategies between clergy and police may have the benefit of increasing what is broadly termed “police legitimacy” in minority communities and reducing the number of citizen complaints alleging police abuse in those communities (Brunson, Braga, Hureau & Pegram, 2013).

MIGRATION, POVERTY, AND POLICE-COMMUNITY TENSIONS

Black Migration to the Suburbs

According to political scientist Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs (2016), the mass migration of African Americans to the suburbs began much the same way as that of whites – with the middle-class. In a study titled “Black Megachurches and the Paradox of Black Progress,” she writes:

Black mega-churches are . . . the result of an extensive Black migration – the 1980s and 1990s suburbanization of much of Black America. During the 1980s and 1990s the African American population declined in urban areas but increased in suburbia. In fact during this time period the African American suburban population doubled from 6 million to 12 million. . . . Black suburban migration is not only a geographical shift, but also reflects a ‘class migration’ – an expanded Black middle class that is clearly the result of the opening of society. . . . It is the result of the gains of the civil rights movement and is a manifestation of class upward mobility (Tucker-Worges, 2016, p. 190).

Yet, as my own study of the literature shows:

[T]his ‘class migration’ to the suburbs of the black middle class was followed a few years later by the migration of, among others, the black urban poor to many of the same suburban communities . . . Ironically, this relocation of a critical mass of both the poor and the middle class positioned black megachurches to leverage the diverse education and professional skills of their congregants and create innovative social service programs, many of which received public funds through the [Bush administration’s] faith-based initiative” (Atchison, 2017, pp. 2-3).

Still, notwithstanding the education and social service innovations of these congregations, research indicates that poverty in these communities

outstripped the efforts of service providers, leading to the “negative effects of concentrated poverty” that Galster (2003) and Kneebone & Holmes (2016) have documented.

Officer-Involved Homicides and Police-Community Tensions

Between 2014 and 2016, a series of officer-involved homicides of African Americans in such disparate places as Ferguson, MO; Staten Island, NY; Baltimore, MD; Baton Rouge, LA; Minneapolis, MN; Cleveland, OH; Chicago, IL; Charlotte, NC; Tulsa, OK; and North Charleston, SC led to demonstrations by angry citizens in each of those communities, some of them violent. While the circumstances leading to each incident were different, certain commonalities existed. For example, in each community where the deaths occurred there was a history of racial tension between local police and citizens of color, particularly African Americans. In particular, a series of Obama-era Justice Department reports on policing in Cleveland, Ferguson, Chicago and Baltimore found that racial profiling, illegal traffic stops, police intimidation and brutality were common occurrences (Department of Justice [DOJ], 2014; DOJ, 2015; DOJ, 2016; DOJ, 2017).

Several of the police-involved deaths occurred in communities that had undergone significant population shifts in recent years. For example, Ferguson, MO, a St. Louis suburb where 18 year-old Michael Brown was shot in August 2014, had undergone a dramatic racial, ethnic and economic change. As Kneebone (2014) notes, in 1990 nearly three out of four (73.8 percent) of Ferguson residents identified themselves as White, while one in four (25.1 percent) were Black. By 2000, the proportion of African Americans had more than doubled, to 52.4 percent, while the percentage of Whites had been reduced to 44.7 percent. The trend continued in the 2010 Census: 67.4 percent Black to 29.3 percent White. Those identifying as Hispanic or Latino of any race comprised 1.2 percent of the community (American Fact Finder, 2018). Equally as dramatic, there was a significant increase in the municipality’s poverty rate. As Brookings’ Kneebone noted in a blogpost the week after Brown’s death, “At the start of the 2000s, the five census tracts that fall within Ferguson’s border registered poverty rates ranging between 4 and 16 percent. However, by 2008-2012 almost all of Ferguson’s neighborhoods had poverty rates at or above the 20 percent threshold at which the negative effects of concentrated poverty begin to emerge” (Kneebone, 2014, para. 6).

A similar demographic shift occurred in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area where Philando Castile died, and which was once one of the most fully-integrated metropolitan areas in the country. Castile was actually shot in Falcon Heights, a suburb that “has seen its share of nonwhite residents grow

from 4 percent in 1980 to 22 percent in 2010. Neighboring Saint Anthony, on the other hand, the town where the police officer who shot him worked, is less than 5 percent nonwhite” (Covert, 2016, para. 14). At the same time, increasing re-segregation became associated with increasing poverty: By 2012, “19 percent of poor black Twin Cities residents lived in high poverty neighborhoods” (Covert, 2016, para. 9)

Baton Rouge, the Louisiana state capital where Alton Sterling died, is actually a consolidated city/parish – linking Baton Rouge with East Baton Rouge Parish, and surrounding three other incorporated cities – which is presided over by a mayor/president. Based on 2010 Census Bureau data, “the racial makeup of the city was 54 percent Black or African American, 39.4 percent White, 0.1 percent Native American/Alaskan Native, 3.3 percent Asian, and 1.3 percent from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino were 3.3 percent of the population” (American Fact Finder, 2018). Moreover, according to a Louisiana-based analytics and polling firm:

If we were to look at the demographic breakdown, we would see that in the 2000 Census, the racial breakdown of East Baton Rouge Parish was 56-40% white/black (2% were Asian, and 2% were Hispanic). The 2010 Census, however, showed that East Baton Rouge became a “majority minority” parish, as its white population dropped below 50%, and the black population increased to 45%. What this means in absolute numbers is that the white population decreased by 17K as its black population increased 34K. This demographic change was brought about both by Hurricane Katrina and continuing suburban migration to Livingston, Ascension, and (recently) West Baton Rouge Parishes (JMC, 2011, Population growth/demographic changes section, para. 2).

Eric Garner died on Staten Island, the only one of New York City’s five boroughs that has a non-Hispanic White majority. However, that majority has diminished, from 77 percent in 1990 to 72.9 percent by 2010. Though Blacks constitute a relatively small minority (roughly 10 percent), the number of nonwhite Hispanics and Latinos grew from 12.1 percent in 2000 to 17.3 percent in 2010 (American Fact Finder, 2018). Poverty on Staten Island rose 63 percent between 2008 and 2014, reaching a high of 15 percent before coming down to 13.2 percent in 2016 (NYC Coalition Against Hunger, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

ATTEMPTING TO HEAL THE BREACH

Federal Action

In the wake of angry public confrontations between police and community in response to the aforementioned incidents, the need for an authori-

tative third party to broker peace in those communities was deemed paramount. Thus, in Ferguson, as well as cities such as Baltimore, Seattle, and Cleveland, the U.S. Justice Department, under President Barack Obama, negotiated federal consent decrees to, among other provisions, stipulate strict guidelines governing police behavior with a view toward curbing abuses. President Obama also convened The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing as "part of the Administration's efforts to strengthen community policing and strengthen trust among law enforcement officers and the communities they serve" (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2014, para. 1). Comprised of 11 members from a broad array of law enforcement, education, service and advocacy groups, the mission of the task force was to examine ways of fostering strong, collaborative relationships between local law enforcement and the communities they protect and to make recommendations to the President on ways policing practices can promote effective crime reduction while building public trust. Charged with reporting its findings to the President within 90 days, the Task Force held a series of seven "listening sessions" and heard the testimonies of more than 100 witnesses in Washington, DC; Phoenix, AZ; and Cincinnati, OH. The end result of the group's efforts, the "Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing" (DOJ, 2015b), was research-based, with recommendations organized around six (6) "pillars" on which the group agreed that policing should be based: Building Legitimacy and Trust; Policy and Oversight; Technology and Social Media; Community Policing and Crime Reduction; Training and Education; and Officer Wellness and Safety.

Local Community Efforts

At the same time that the Task Force was fulfilling its mandate, there was also a renewed interest in some communities in establishing partnerships between clergy (and, by extension, their congregations) and law enforcement agencies. Such collaborations between clergy and police were used to great effect in a number of cities in the 1990s and 2000s, and were often responsible for helping to increase police legitimacy and lower racial tensions on the one hand, while simultaneously helping to reduce youth-related violent crime, increase community safety awareness, and facilitate civic and inter-agency cooperation (Brunson et al., 2013).

The best known example of a successful clergy-police collaboration was part of a project known as "Operation Ceasefire" (Braga et al., 2001; Braga & Weisburd, 2012; Leland, 1998). Developed and implemented first in the Dorchester section of Boston in the 1990s by a team of social scientists led by criminologist David Kennedy, Ceasefire was successful in

helping to reduce the number of gang-related and other youth homicides by nearly two-thirds, while reducing homicides citywide by 30 percent. Utilizing a strategy known as “focused deterrence,” police and a diverse group of community stakeholders – including clergy and lay leaders from local congregations, social service organizations, nonprofits and businesses – targeted gang members who were deemed the most troublesome to the community and raised the stakes associated with continued criminality by threatening them with arrest and imprisonment, while simultaneously providing incentives (educational opportunities, job training and placement, etc.) to provide alternatives to crime (Braga & Weisburd, 2012).

A key stakeholder in Operation Ceasefire was the Boston TenPoint Coalition (BTPC), “an ecumenical group of Christian clergy and lay leaders working to mobilize the Christian community around issues affecting black and Latino youth” (National Gang Center, n.d.). In an effort to gain trust with local youth BTPC made several commitments, including:

- To adopt youth gangs;
- To develop economic alternatives to the drug culture;
- To create partnerships between congregations and community health centers; and
- To create bridges between urban and suburban churches

Many factors were important to the operation of Operation Ceasefire, among them:

- The Dorchester community decided that it would no longer accept the violence.
- BTPC was already engaged on the front lines, interacting and dialoguing with young drug dealers and gang members. As a result, they had credibility with local youth.
- Moreover, as faith leaders, they likewise had the trust of the community.
- As a result, the clergy were equal partners with the police because they were in a position of strength: “We realized that preachers have tremendous credibility as leaders in the community and that having them working with us out in the streets would have a powerful impact. For their part, the clergy saw cops doing their best to

get inner-city kids into summer camps and to get them mentors. We both knew that what children need is an alternative to crime.” (Evans, 1998)

As my own research revealed, Evans’s opinion is underscored by officials in High Point, North Carolina, where several members of the faith community are part of a police-community partnership that is considered a national model. For nearly 20 years, the High Point Community Against Violence (HPCAV), a nonprofit organization that is led by a clergyman and includes a broad array of business leaders and service providers, has partnered with an array of police, prosecutors and researchers to reduce violence in the city. The result has been a 67 percent decrease in violent crime since 1998, even as the city’s increasingly diverse population has swollen by 44 percent over the same period. Implementing and adapting Kennedy’s “focused deterrence” strategy, HPCAV assists “in confronting offenders who are involved in violent crime, offering offenders help in turning their lives in a positive direction and supporting the prosecution process if the offenders re-offend and return to crime and violence” (HPCAV, n.d., para.1). Among the unique features of the High Point program is that the “focused deterrence” strategy was expanded beyond violence reduction, first to attempt to eliminate the city’s overt drug markets (known as the Drug Market Intervention Program), and then to address the often hidden issue of domestic violence (known as the Domestic Violence Initiative). The benefits of this strategy have been legion, with both programs proving enormously successful (HPCAV, n.d., NNSC, n.d.). The coalition has won numerous grant awards and meritorious citations, while simultaneously encouraging and facilitating the replication of what has become known as the “High Point model” in cities and towns across the country. As with Boston, one of the keys to the success of the partnership is the increase in “legitimacy” enjoyed by the police department as a result of working with HPCAV members – including a number of clergy (and by extension, their congregations), both black and white. According to Rev. Jim Summey, executive director of HPCAV, community stakeholders and police have worked together “intentionally” over a sustained period – 20 years – to affect the changes made in the community (Atchison, 2016).

Paradigm Shift: The “Hillbilly Elegy” Dynamic

Interestingly, successful models of cooperation between police and communities of color were being developed at the exact moment that the black vs. white gap on a range of measures, including drug arrests and incarceration, decreased dramatically. Citing data from the Bureau of Jus-

tice Statistics (BJS), The Marshall Project reported that, “From 2000 to 2009, the black imprisonment rate for drug offenses fell by 16 percent. For white people, it climbed by nearly 27 percent” (Hager, 2017, para. 16). While the report provided no definitive explanation for this phenomenon, experts believe it’s directly related to the decline of the crack epidemic—which primarily affected urban minority communities—and the dramatic increase in opioid use, which disproportionately affects rural white communities. Moreover,

Between 2000 and 2015, the imprisonment rate of black men dropped by more than 24 percent. At the same time, the white male rate increased slightly. . . Among women, the trend is even more dramatic. From 2000 to 2015, the black female imprisonment rate dropped by nearly 50 percent; during the same period, the white female rate shot upward by 53 percent. As the nonprofit Sentencing Project has pointed out, the racial disparity between black and white women’s incarceration was once 6 to 1. Now it’s 2 to 1 (Hager, 2017, para. 4-5).

The increase in white female incarceration is skewed largely in the direction of poor white women. According to Keith Humphreys, a professor of psychiatry and mental health policy at Stanford:

This stunning change in the racial makeup of the female inmate population mirrors and may well be at least partially caused by changes on other indicators of economic and physical well-being. Over recent decades, life expectancy among women without a college education has increased for blacks but decreased for whites. Problems with alcohol — the drug most closely linked to arrests, violence and incarceration — are up among white women but down among black women. White women have also been disproportionately affected by the methamphetamine and prescription opioid epidemics, both of which raise the risk of contact with the criminal justice system (Humphreys, 2017, para. 5).

Another factor to consider is that criminal justice reforms — as reflected in sentencing practices such as reductions in mandatory minimum sentences in some jurisdictions, as well as the creation of drug courts and other alternatives to incarceration — have been unequally applied, with their most frequent application seen in urban communities.

In big cities such as Los Angeles and Brooklyn, new prison admissions have plummeted thanks largely to sentencing and other criminal justice reforms. But in counties with fewer than 100,000 residents, the incarceration rate was going up even as crime went down. In fact, people from rural areas are 50 percent more likely to be sent to prison than city dwellers (Smith, 2017, para. 20).

The net effect is what could be termed the “Hillbilly Elegy” dynamic: White men and women from rural communities constitute the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. prison population (Caniglia, 2013; Yurkanin, 2017). Mirroring author J.D. Vance’s memoir of growing up poor and white in rural Ohio, and underscoring the despair he describes of his Appalachian migrant compatriots in rust- and farm-belt states, researchers Ann Case and Angus Deaton offer what they describe as a “preliminary but plausible account of what is happening” vis-à-vis the decline in the physical, mental and emotional health of poor whites, often leading to incarceration and death:

[A]ccording to this, deaths of despair come from a long-standing process of cumulative disadvantage for those with less than a college degree. The story is rooted in the labor market, but involves many aspects of life, including health in childhood, marriage, childrearing, and religion. Although we do not see the supply of opioids as the fundamental factor, the prescription of opioids for chronic pain added fuel to the flames, making the epidemic much worse than it otherwise would have been. If our overall account is correct, the epidemic will not be easily or quickly reversed by policy, nor can those in mid-life today be expected to do as well after age 65 as do the current elderly.

This does not mean that nothing can be done. Controlling opioids is an obvious priority, as is trying to counter the negative effects of a poor labor market on marriage, perhaps through better safety nets for mothers with children (Case & Deaton, 2017, pp. 3-4).

In the wake of the success of the Black Lives Matter movement, police shootings of whites generally do not garner national headlines. Nor do they appear to garner much research and analysis as a subset of police violence. Nevertheless, while blacks—and in particular, black men—are at disproportionate risk of being shot by police—in terms of pure numbers whites are killed more often than Blacks. Studies done in 2015 and 2016 by *The Washington Post* (Lowery, 2016) and *The Guardian* (n.d.) indicate that approximately half of the people shot and killed by police were white. For example, according to *The Guardian*, 1093 people were killed by police in 2016. Of these 574 (52.5 percent) were white (*The Guardian*, n.d.). A further examination of the data suggests that “[t]he system has a class bias as well as a race bias.” (Jackson, 2015, para. 13). A 2015 study by journalist and research fellow Zaid Jilani found that of 441 police killings that occurred in the first 5 months of that year, 95 percent occurred in neighborhoods where the median family income was less than \$100,000. The median family income of all those examined was \$52,907. “Just over five percent of the killings were in neighborhoods with over \$100,000 median

family income” (Jilani, 2015, para. 7). The correlation linking police violence with lower income victims impacts even some whites, according to Rev. Jesse Jackson, founder of Rainbow/Push, a civil rights organization. “Not surprisingly,” he writes, “lower-income whites are more likely to say police abuse of authority is on the rise than middle- or upper-income whites” (Jackson, 2015, para. 14). The Cato Institute supports this assertion:

Households making less than \$30,000 a year are also about 11-14 points more likely than those making more than \$60,000 a year to believe that police too easily resort to lethal force (52% vs. 38%) and that police use harsh tactics (36% vs. 25%). Whites are primarily driving this shift by age and income. (Ekins, 2016, para. 135).

Ironically, the community partnerships that have provided models of cooperation and collaboration in a number of disadvantaged urban neighborhoods seem to be missing in many parts of rural America. In the minds of some observers, the problem lies squarely with the church. For example, in an interview with *The Christian Post*, an online Christian newspaper, pastor and religion scholar Kevin Shrum argued that many rural churches have not kept pace with the changes that have occurred in their communities (Smith, 2016).

I think there is a challenge in churches abandoning transitional neighborhoods. A transitional neighborhood can mean either a transition up or a transition down. . [Churches need to] come to terms with the actual reality of their neighborhood. A lot of times in churches, we get into a cocoon. We are not even aware of what is going in our community (para. 7).

In addition, writes evangelical scholar Anthony Bradley in *World* magazine,

While the city church planting emphasis emerged as a needed corrective to the suburban focus of evangelicals in the 1980s and '90s, today's 'missional' efforts tend to neither encourage future leaders nor raise money to reach the white underclass, people from Rustbelt towns, and working-class white populations in metropolitan areas. Why? Because those people don't live in urban centers, and there won't be much 'multiplication' due to low population density. These communities, however, are the very communities where we get America's white police officers, construction workers, truck drivers, mechanics, teachers, and active voters (Bradley, 2016, para. 8).

Among the effects of this “abandonment” by the church: among white,

working class individuals, fewer than one in four (23 percent) attends church on even a monthly basis (Pappas, 2011).

In sum, then, poor rural whites are struggling with many of the same issues traditionally associated with poor urban and suburban blacks: inadequate education, high unemployment, drug and alcohol dependency, dysfunctional families, rising crime, and incarceration. The fact is that while the public face of poverty, drug addiction and crime may be black, the reality is increasingly white. In addition, both the criminal justice system and even the church often appear unsympathetic to this reality. Among other things, this presents a challenge to the Christian church, which often appears morally and theologically divided along racial lines.

[There] is the need for many in the suburbs to rethink their congregation's mission, vision and role. This may require soul searching on the part of church leaders as they begin to reassess such issues as crime, punishment and poverty within the theological framework of sin and redemption. It may also cause a reexamination of the church's role in . . . civil society, particularly as it relates to advocacy on behalf of those whom Jesus referred to as 'the least of these' (Atchison, 2014, para. 6).

Moreover, given the above research on the faith community's value in both serving the poor and keeping the peace, "it would seem prudent to include the religious community in various partnership strategies to prevent crime" (Johnson, 2008, pg. 10). Nevertheless, the fact is that relatively few houses of worship engage in congregationally-based strategies designed to facilitate community stability and reconciliation (Atchison, 2017). My own research found Greensboro, North Carolina to be a case in point.

GREENSBORO: A MICROCOSM OF AMERICA

In October 2015, amid longstanding allegations by local citizens of police abuse, the *New York Times* published a report alleging racial profiling of African Americans through traffic stops conducted by the Greensboro Police Department (LaFraniere and Lehren, 2015). Specifically, according to the report, police "used their discretion to search black drivers or their cars more than twice as often as white motorists – even though they found drugs and weapons significantly more often when the driver was white." In addition, "they were more likely to use force if the driver was black, even when they did not encounter physical resistance" (LaFraniere and Lehren, 2015, para. 9-10).

The report amplified existing fears that Greensboro would erupt in violence in the wake of long-simmering tensions over what has become known as the "Greensboro massacre" on November 3, 1979. Code-named

“GREENKIL” in a subsequent FBI investigation, the basic facts are that five people were killed and nine others injured after members of the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party opened fire on members of the Communist Workers Party during a CWP-led march through a predominantly black housing project, protesting working conditions at a local textile plant.

A key point of contention over the years has been the allegation – persistent to this day among many in the city’s African American community – that Greensboro police colluded with the Klan by failing to provide protection for the marchers. To be sure, the police presence during the march was woefully insufficient despite existing tensions between the communists and the Klan. Yet, despite the presence of videotaped evidence of the subsequent carnage because of live news media coverage of the march, juries in two subsequent criminal cases – one state and one federal – found the defendants not guilty. Moreover, a \$48 million civil suit filed in federal court against members of the Klan and Nazis, the police department, and two federal law enforcement agencies awarded only token damages: “less than \$400,000 for the death of one of the five slain demonstrators and the injuries of two of the ten wounded plaintiffs. They found five Klan-Nazis, a police informant and two police officers liable” (Wheaton, 2009, p. 4).

For more than a generation, efforts by survivors and their next-of-kin to get the police and the city to accept responsibility for the shootings and issue an apology proved fruitless. In 2009, for example, the Greensboro City Council issued a statement of regret about the shootings that fell short of an apology.

Thus, in the opinion of many, the 2015 *New York Times* article further complicated an already delicate situation. It also added a heightened sense of urgency to an array of initiatives that had already been developed by police, clergy and citizens groups to reduce racial tensions in the city. The two most prominent groups were the Community/City Working Group (CCWG) – which featured the city’s mayor, several leading clergy, and representatives of several citizen’s organizations – and a police task force charged with the responsibility of facilitating improved relations through dialogue with community residents.

It was within this charged atmosphere that this researcher entered, however unwittingly, into the fray. Originally titled “Ministry to the Poor in Changing Times” and proposed in 2014 as an examination of urban and suburban ministries in the region surrounding my former hometown of Trenton, New Jersey, the geographical focus and methodological framework of the project changed when this researcher and his family relocated for personal reasons to Greensboro, North Carolina in late June 2015. Leveraging my position as the president of a small ecumenical ministry, the

original project envisioned the use of an equally ecumenical focus group, including the heads of several religious judicatories, to assist in the development and widespread distribution to urban and suburban pastors of a survey questionnaire examining their congregations' ministry in the wake of changing demographics.

With the change in venue from New Jersey to North Carolina, however, the aforementioned approach was not viable. Simply put, I didn't know anyone except for a few family members. Nevertheless, leveraging my experience as a former Religion News Service columnist, I reached out to Nancy McLaughlin, the religion writer of the local Greensboro *News & Record*. Ms. McLaughlin graciously responded by sending me a list of five prominent local clergy, two of whom, Rev. Julie Peebles, who served on the CCWG, and Rev. Odell Cleveland, Administrative Pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, were crucial to my research. Rev. Cleveland, in particular, was indispensable in introducing me to many key people, as well the culture of Greensboro (McLaughlin, 2015, August 4, Personal Communication).

As a result, during the course of the current project, I met with representatives of CCWG and the police task force, interviewing and even establishing relationships with local clergy and police officials. Also included in formal interviews and informal discussions were other community stakeholders, including staff and board members of the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro (CFGG); and the executive director of FaithAction International House (FaithAction), a faith-based organization that works with documented and undocumented immigrants.

Demographics

With a population currently in excess of 290,000, Greensboro is emblematic of what the Brookings Institution has called "Metropolitan America." (Berube, et al, 2010)

- The city's population has grown by an average of approximately 20 percent during each of the last three U.S. Census periods.
- Per the 2010 Census, Greensboro's population is 48.4% White and 40.6% Black. (American Fact Finder, 2018)
- Research also indicates that the city and surrounding Triad region (Greensboro - High Point - Winston-Salem) is home to an increasing number of immigrants – many of them undocumented – from a variety of Asian and Latin American countries.

- According to the Guilford County Schools (GCS), which includes Greensboro and High Point in its catchment area:
 - 104 world languages and dialects are spoken among the county's students
 - 67 percent of GCS students live below the poverty line
 - Overall, roughly 20 percent of Greensboro residents live below the poverty line; the figure is 18.1% countywide. (Guilford County Schools, 2015)
- Significantly, nearly half (approx. 48%) of Guilford County residents claim a formal religious affiliation (down from 65% in 2000), with more than 90 percent of these identifying with a Christian denomination. (City-data.com, 2012)
- There are more than 40 active gangs in Guilford County. ("Gangs in North Carolina," 2018)
- Located on a major interstate corridor (I-40, I-73, I-74 and I-85), Greensboro is a significant thoroughfare for drug and gun trafficking, according to interviews with police. (Atchison, 2016)
- Greensboro's violent crime rate for 2015 was more than 55% higher than the national average. (CityRating, n.d.)

Moreover, Greensboro is a city of contrasts: Its history is steeped in racial tension, but its population is becoming increasingly diverse. The city's police-community relations are stymied by mistrust, but it boasts an ethnically sensitive clergy-police partnership that could be considered a model for the nation.

As I sat in on meetings – with clergy groups, with the police task force, with members of the CCWG – and engaged in individual discussions with police officers, pastors and lay people alike it became abundantly clear that the events of 1979 still hung over the city. Indeed, "1979" was almost a buzz word; to mention it was to be on common ground with the person with whom I was speaking. Yet I discovered, as Elizabeth Wheaton has noted, that each side was locked in its own version of events:

It is as though we were looking through a kaleidoscope and the events fell into one pattern when looking through the CWP's perspective, another through that of the Klan and Nazis, and yet another through that of the police and federal agents. Each pattern has its own logic, but when they are superimposed, the image becomes a jumble of contradictions and

conflict. One can only see that there are no heroes in this story; there are many, many fools (Wheaton, 2009, pg. 4).

Given the long shadow cast by Greenkil, the resultant lack of trust between the GPD and the city's Black community, and the city's rapidly changing demographics, what became apparent to this researcher was the need to identify local congregations/faith-based organizations that brokered relationships between at-risk people of color and the Greensboro Police Department, thus providing a model to reduce community tensions. This objective was informed by the aforementioned literature, as well as this researcher's many years of experience as a Christian pastor whose ministry has been at the intersection of religious faith and criminal justice.

The FaithAction ID Initiative proved to be such a model. A partnership between FaithAction and the GPD, the ID Initiative provides verifiable identification to any resident (perhaps especially new immigrants with limited or no status, as well as those recently returning from prison, homeless and low-income individuals) that may have limited access to government issued forms of ID. The cards can be used as a tool by law enforcement, as well as some health and social service agencies, to better identify, serve, and protect their neighbors in need, reducing the need to jail someone or turn someone away from receiving a crucial service for simply not having reliable identification. By the spring of 2019, the ID Initiative had issued more than 20,000 ID cards "in partnership with law enforcement, health agencies, faith communities [and] congregations, and alongside our FaithAction ID Network partners . . . to individuals representing over 60 different nations, and over 100 cities throughout North and South Carolina, Virginia, Florida and Ohio . . ." (FaithAction, n.d., para. 4).

Among the replicable features of the FaithAction ID Initiative: It establishes a non-hostile, even amiable dialogue between the law enforcement and (largely undocumented) immigrant communities while humanizing the police and the city's bureaucracy in the eyes of racial, ethnic and linguistic minorities. For example, in one session a tall, tow-headed, bilingual, Scandinavian officer coordinated the session with self-deprecating humor and grace. He was joined by several bilingual, Hispanic officers whose presence and participation put the clients even more at ease. The presence of service providers – including staff from the city's Human Relations Commission – was another welcoming feature, helping new arrivals to more easily navigate the city's bureaucratic morass. With the advent of the Trump Administration, however, changes in federal policy threatening the status and security of immigrants – particularly those who are undocumented – have threatened to destabilize this partnership. Federal law enforcement officers, identifying themselves only as "police" in their

efforts to gain entry into immigrant homes, have arrested and detained some, chilling relations between local residents and the GPD. Officials from both FaithAction and the GPD agree that while local police remain committed to the partnership, forces beyond their control may ultimately render their efforts null and void.

For now, however, the ID Initiative – which is spearheaded by FaithAction, funded in part by local congregations, and features monthly orientation seminars that are hosted by a local church and run by bilingual police officers – is a vehicle by which the faith community (1) serves as a liaison between the police and the mostly Hispanic immigrant community; and (2) brokers healthy relations between at-risk persons (e.g., undocumented immigrants) and the police.

Curiously, however, the lessons of this model partnership are not reflected in the Greensboro Police Department's strained relationship with the African American community. As the Rev. David Fraccaro, FaithAction's executive director told this researcher in 2016, when it comes to the larger discussion of police/community tensions, "We're often not on the radar, some don't even know the program and its impact exists."

Another fact to consider is that, in Greensboro and around the country, there is a dichotomy between how Blacks are viewed on the one hand, and how Hispanics, Asians and other minorities are regarded on the other. For example, according to the "State of the Latino Family" survey: Sixty-eight percent of Latinos "worry authorities will use excessive force against Latinos; only 26 percent believe they treat Latinos fairly most of the time; 18 percent have Latino friends or family who were victims of police brutality; and 59 percent said there are things they would change about their local police" (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2014, para. 11).

Yet, "[w]hen it comes to Latinos — American media still only thinks of them as immigrants. They can't think of them as victims of police brutality or anything else but immigrants" (Planas, 2015, para. 11). Moreover, according to a 2014 report published by Columbia University's Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, "Stories about Latinos constitute less than 1% of news media coverage, and the majority of these stories feature Latinos as lawbreakers" (Negron-Mutaner, 2014, pg. 3). Similarly, according to a blog on the website of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), many Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders feel left out of the national conversation on racial and ethnic equality (Guillermo, 2015, para. 2).

In sum, at a time when many are shouting that "Latino/Hispanic Lives Matter" and "Asian American/Pacific Islander Lives Matter," the fact, as attorney Raul Reyes wrote in a 2015 CNN.com op-ed, is that "our country is used to thinking of police brutality in terms of a black versus white narra-

tive, which leaves Latinos [and other minority groups] out” (Reyes, 2015, para. 10).

All of which begs the question: If white-versus-black racism remains the dominant narrative in discussions of police abuse, why haven’t the city’s religious and law enforcement communities developed a broad collaborative approach to address the GPD’s strained relationship with the black community? One possible answer: Perhaps because it *is* the dominant narrative. Perhaps the FaithAction-GPD partnership works because, notwithstanding the presence of crime and violence in the Hispanic/Latino community, the issues there can be framed in terms of immigration and law enforcement, and not race. Indeed, to date, despite changes in federal policy regarding the interdiction and deportation of undocumented immigrants, the FaithAction-GPD partnership has continued to hold together in large part because the local police value the hard-won relationship they’ve developed with the local immigrant community.

Yet, discussions with people in both High Point – a city which borders Greensboro and has a similarly evolving demographic profile – and Greensboro indicate that the events of the “Greenkil” incident in 1979 continue to cast a long shadow over police-community relations in Greensboro. While the Greensboro City Council finally issued a formal, public apology in late 2017 – nearly 40 years after the original incident – trust and rapprochement between police and the black community remain tenuous at best.

As a result, while the Greensboro Police Department has implemented some elements of the High Point crime reduction model – significantly reducing its overall crime rating, according to statistics—the continuing tensions between the GPD and the city’s African American community – including some of its most influential clergy – have prevented the rapprochement necessary to implement the entire strategy. As a consequence, according to HPCAV executive director Rev. Jim Summey, failure to implement the entire model means that “you don’t get the same results” (Summey, 2016, October 20, Personal communication).

A particular concern is the issue of “police legitimacy,” which is a key to High Point’s success and a blight on Greensboro’s outcomes. According to the National Institute of Justice, “The public’s perceptions about the lawfulness and legitimacy of law enforcement are an important criterion for judging policing in a democratic society. Lawfulness means that police comply with constitutional, statutory and professional norms. Legitimacy is linked to the public’s belief about the police and its willingness to recognize police authority.” (NIJ, 2016, para. 2)

Specifically, according to former Pittsburgh police chief Cameron McLay, “Police must work with the active engagement of community residents, to become partners in creating safe neighborhoods. Without the

engagement of those living in the impacted areas, perceptions of predatory motivations for police actions can result, further diminishing trust between police and those receiving police service. At a time when crime is a near 20 year low point, studies have shown little if any increases in public trust, and dramatic differences in beliefs about police between white and non-white respondents.” (McLay, 2017, para. 14)

Therein lies the challenge for the police and the black community in Greensboro. Longitudinal analyses of the crime data for Greensboro (over 14 years) and High Point (over 15 years) show that while vastly different in size (Greensboro’s population is nearly three times that of High Point), each city reflects an overall downward trend in crime and their crime indexes are similar (CityRating.com, n.d.; City-data.com, n.d.).

Yet the levels of trust between police and community in the two cities are vastly different. In High Point, the relationship between HPD and HPCAV is formal, intentional, long-term and strategic. Police officers and private citizens tour crime-ridden neighborhoods distributing and soliciting information regarding recent crimes, while actively engaging with community residents about their concerns. Within the citizens group, community needs and services are mapped and a broad range of community stakeholders – including business and civic leaders, service providers and educational institutions – work collaboratively and with the police department to address specific needs. Within the police department, the culture has evolved to the point where the partnership with HPCAV is seen as necessary to effective law enforcement in the city. In the 20 years since the partnership began, several police chiefs have come and gone but each has been committed to maintaining the partnership. Still, the partnership has its challenges. Among them is a need for “new blood” within HPCAV to maintain its viability. The pace and grind of the work are grueling; the core leaders, now in their 60s, have remained in place since the beginning; and a number of clergy, in particular, are no longer active. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the partnership model is undeniable.

In Greensboro, however, police and black community leaders generally work along separate tracks. For its part, the GPD has recently expanded its community engagement efforts through a project known as the Safer Cities Initiative, which targets neighborhood crime “hot spots” in an effort to remove guns and drugs from the streets. Community involvement is encouraged through resident participation in one of four working groups, covering employment, youth, housing and gangs. The police department “oversees the working groups, and helps connect them to other City resources or stakeholders to get the groups resources they may need” (GPD, n.d., para. 4)

Among community leaders perhaps the most ambitious undertaking

has been the creation, in 2017, of City Help of the Triad, a project of the multi-racial, multiethnic Triad Pastors Partnership. A vision of TPP founder Rev. Reginald Holiday, City Help of the Triad aims to “meet the immediate needs of communities in three distinct areas: Education, Economic Development and [C]ommunity Engagement” (City Help, n.d., para. 1). Among its accomplishments during its brief existence has been the development of an Adopt-A-School initiative, linking local churches with area schools. Additional plans include programs promoting economic development, community engagement and outreach, and educational and vocational support. Encouragingly, TPP has developed relationships with individual police officers, both white and black, who have walked and prayed with them in prayer marches through neighborhoods where homicides have been committed. The officers, some of whom are people of faith themselves, have sent a clear message of reconciliation and hope to those neighborhoods as they joined hand-in-hand with church leaders of all races.

As yet, however, no formal partnership has been established and no memorandum of understanding written to link the GPD with TPP, City Help or any other African American religious group. This is important because a formal agreement would itemize the responsibilities of each partner—and on a level playing field—within a mutually agreed upon framework identifying the partnership’s goals and objectives. As with the relational dynamics seen in the collaborations in Boston and High Point, such a partnership would be based on mutual accountability, thus affording an opportunity to build trust. In Greensboro, however, trust remains at a premium. Indeed, several of the city’s black clergy were linked, either directly or indirectly, with a “truth and reconciliation” effort that sought to hold the GPD and the city accountable for the Greensboro Massacre (Wheaton, 2009). Thus does the specter of “1979” remain.

Nor is Greensboro an isolated case. The fact is that many communities around the country have histories that are rife with tension between police and the communities’ poorest citizens, many (though not all) of whom are black. As with Greensboro, these histories are linked to incidents – flashpoints – that cast long shadows, effectively freezing (as in amber) those hostilities in a single moment of time, such as “1979.” Thus, as new challenges arise – changing demographics, an economic downturn, a rise in crime – community stakeholders can be hamstrung in their ability to respond effectively because they are stuck in the enmity of the past. For example, one colleague who works for the North Carolina Network for Safe Communities and brokers working relationships between police, clergy and other community stakeholders on a broad range of social service and criminal justice issues, told me that in some locations he has labored for months – even years – to break the impasse between police and community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To break this impasse, the faith community needs to reframe its approach to ministry to include:

- 1) An understanding of changing demographics and the impact of those demographics on the issues of race, ethnicity, poverty and crime; and
- 2) A clear delineation of the lenses through which various stakeholders – especially law enforcement and the faith community – see those changes.

To be sure, the faith community, in particular, is not monolithic in terms of its perspectives and values. However, at a minimum, faith leaders need to be aware of the changes occurring in the communities they serve. They should also be aware that with increasingly diverse demographics the issue of racism is a much broader issue than in the past, and must necessarily be incorporated into a larger economic, social, political, and cultural discussion that should be reflected, first, in their understanding of theology (e.g., “What does a God of grace and justice require of us?”), and second, in the development of community-serving ministries that address the changing needs of the neighborhoods they serve.

At the same time, faith leaders must serve as “moral brokers” in the process of community reconciliation. As pastors they often serve as spiritual leaders to a broad range of community stakeholders within their own congregations, and in some cases, to those outside the congregation as well. Thus, in the aggregate the local clergy should be the logical facilitators of community dialogue.

However, such dialogue needs to go beyond the issues of diversity and inclusion, *per se*, to a discussion of changing demographics and their implications for individual communities, including: changes to local culture, economics, perceptions and stereotypes, and public safety concerns.

For example, one of the outgrowths of my research has been the development of a curricular framework to facilitate discussion with, and stimulate dialogue among, local community leaders. Though still in the development stage, the curriculum uses real-life examples to illustrate challenges facing law enforcement, church and community, while simultaneously examining data that undermine common stereotypes. While certainly not a solution, the framework provides an approach to clarify local issues and facilitate discussion with a view toward developing sustained relation-

ships between stakeholders committed to working together intentionally to address community concerns.

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