

Police Fraternity and the Politics of Race and Class in New York City, 1941-1960

by Andrew Darien

The Police Department of the City of New York is an organization composed of real Americans. So far as the individual member is concerned, whether he be Catholic, Protestant or Jew, Republican or Democrat, Negro or white, matters not at all. We are working together in harmony.

--NY City Police Commissioner Lewis J. Valentine, 1945 ¹

Police executives in the second half of the twentieth century have embraced police fraternity and an ideology of neutrality, objectivity, and "color-blindness" as a response to the pressure brought to bear upon them by the modern civil rights movement and the Policemen's Benevolent Association (PBA). Commissioner Valentine's appeal to patriotism reflected his anxiety over, and effort to, combat the troubling divisions among his ranks, rather than an accurate portrayal of police solidarity. As the United States consummated a war against Nazi racism and planned for a showdown with Soviet communism, black civil rights activists would compel the nation to come to terms with racial segregation and the oppressive practices of municipal police departments. At the same time, the mostly white rank-and-file officers in the PBA would challenge police management's prerogative to dictate their pay and hours as well as their political and social affiliations. Nevertheless, as would be the case well into the late twentieth century, the PBA would fail to make the connection between the struggles of black citizens and officers of color and its own victimization at the hands of management.

Exploring the historical underpinnings of police fraternity as it relates to the politics of race and class can help shed light on the contemporary conflict between white urbanites who revere the NYPD as an meritocracy and communities of color who understand the ways in which the department operates to privilege certain groups over others. This chapter will illustrate how the democratic creed of equal opportunity and fair employment practices became a public relations tool wielded by police management rather than an operative principle in shaping department organization. As union issues, racial strife, brutality, corruption and ethnic conflict continued to riddle the department in the postwar period, Valentine and subsequent commissioners would propound an ideology of objectivity and neutrality by labeling rogue officers and social movements threatening to their power as political and therefore inappropriately unprofessional. In terms of race, this meant that black politics was subjective, biased, and menacing. While white officers were willing to violate police neutrality when it came to class issues, they would rally around management's calls for objectivity when black officers and other citizens threatened to put racial questions on the NYPD agenda

Rank-and-file officers had good reason to be upset by the ways in which the department's brass controlled the organization, pace, and assignment of their work. Connected to the idea that police work was objective and neutral was the notion that police workers were not to think for themselves. For example, in 1946, Commissioner Arthur Wallander attempted to rewrite the patrolman's exam as a means of stripping patrol work of its intellectual components. Wallander claimed that in the "modern business world," tasks could be "efficiently assigned and memorized," and thus patrolmen's success need not depend on the elements of luck that came with his own critical thinking. ² Just as Frederick Taylor, the infamous champion of "scientific management," instructed corporations to "take the manager's brain and put it under

the workman's cap," so too did police executives try to strip patrolmen of as much decision making as possible.³

But, police work helped to construct the identity of rank-and-file patrolmen in ways that management could not always control. Rather than reducing their identities to objective and neutral law enforcement automatons, the police uniform endowed the predominately white, Irish force with a sense of their privileged working-class status. For many New Yorkers, New York's finest--the bluest of blue collars--conjured up notions of sturdiness, devotion, virility, and working-class machismo. Police managers fostered this pride as a means of promoting police unity, but discovered that it worked best in terms of race. Nevertheless, officers of all backgrounds very much brought their identities to the workplace. Similarly, the purportedly apolitical prerogatives of management often reflected their own racialized conceptions of crime and law enforcement.

An incident at the Hotel Braddock in Harlem on August 1, 1943 would ignite a riot that highlighted the uneasy place of black men and women amidst wartime patriotism. That evening, Marjorie Polite registered at the Braddock, which for some time had been under police surveillance as a "raided premises." Because Polite was a black woman without a male companion--conventionally thought by most officers to be grounds for suspicion--police assumed she was a prostitute. After complaining of unsatisfactory accommodations, she demanded a refund. The hotel clerk claimed that when she did not receive it in full, she became "boisterous, disorderly, and profane." Patrolman James Collins, assigned to raided premises duty inside the hotel, tried to escort Polite out of the building. Collins claimed that she refused to leave and instead became verbally abusive. Witnessing the altercation, Florine Roberts, a domestic servant from Middletown, Connecticut, demanded Polite's release. Roberts had been staying at the Braddock while she visited her son, Robert Bandy, who was on leave from the Army's 703rd Military Police Battalion in Jersey City. In turn, Bandy intervened on his mother's behalf and ended up in a scuffle with Patrolman Collins. During the fight Bandy got hold of the nightstick and Collins responded by shooting him in the shoulder. Within minutes of the shooting, rumors swept through Harlem that a white policeman had killed a black soldier who had been protecting his mother. This widely circulated version of the story sparked twelve hours of rioting. In response, angry black Harlemites congregated at the Braddock Hotel, Harlem's 28th Precinct, and at Sydenham Hospital, where Bandy was brought after being shot. The targets of the riots were mostly white-owned businesses and buildings. However all six people killed were black, as were most of the hundreds of others who were injured.

The official police report contends that Bandy threatened Collins and ran; when he refused to halt, the patrolman drew and fired his revolver, wounding Bandy. Bandy, however, claimed that he had the officer's nightstick only because it was thrown at him; when he refused to relinquish the weapon, Collins shot him. For the purpose of this narrative, the truth about whether Collins or Bandy instigated the violence is less important than the potency of the story of police brutality to black New Yorkers. That such a story *could* be true--and so often *was* in the lives of black New Yorkers--speaks to the history of harassment of black soldiers, mistreatment of black women, and general abuse of black citizens by white police officers. Single black women, like Marjorie Polite in 1943, were accused of prostitution without cause. Robert Bandy's uniform afforded him no extra latitude in coming to his mother's defense. James Collins's uniform and white skin, however, gave him the right to harass Marjorie Polite, verbally abuse Florine Roberts, and shoot Robert Bandy. Even the Office of War Information, which had no stake in defending the riots, noted the symbolic importance of such a confrontation: "The resentment of Negroes has been mounting with reports of Negro servicemen. Showing disrespect for one's mother is a grievous insult in any man's language. To this must be linked the widely held belief that white men refuse to 'respect' Negro women. White police are often brutal and carelessly abusive in their dealings with Negroes."⁴

The press also advanced the view that the typical rioter was a young black male, or "hoodlum," seeking to loot, bum, and steal. Press accounts neatly contrasted their vision of demonic black men with the "peaceful" Harlemite. For example, *Newsweek* was quick to note that, while "most of the 300,000 inhabitants, despite economic handicaps and overcrowding, are law abiding citizens," Harlem contained, "a jungle of cheap, poisonous liquor, marijuana, and muggings which are the source of the city's major

sociological problem." ⁵ The *New York Times* reported that "Gangs of young hoodlums formed in the streets," identifying rioters as being "in their late teens or early twenties, wearing zoot suits." A white police officer lambasted the rioters: "Looting is just a natural instinct. They [blacks] just don't know better. They're just like savages. Don't belong in a civilized country in my estimation. They belong back in a tree. The only thing missing is a tail." Another officer put it more bluntly: "They should have brought in a couple of machine guns and mowed them down." ⁶ Such views of the riot as the product of wild young black men served to deny any possibility that Harlem's diverse black community--even the "respectable middle class,"-- harbored resentment toward white privilege.

Instead of legitimizing the grievances borne out in the rioting, uneasy white politicians and police officers chose to cast all civil rights protests as ominous. They invoked the idea of a thin blue line which stood as a precarious barrier between the law-abiding and the rabble. Without an empowered police department, police officials contended, New York would fall prey to thugs and delinquents. At the center of that problem, they argued, were black and Puerto Rican males. U. S. Attorney General, Francis Biddle, went so far as to suggest that President Roosevelt take steps to halt black migration to northern cities. ⁷ Ironically, it was the perceived virtues of black southern labor that seem to have been at the heart of his statement. Biddle's recommendation was consistent with the wishes of southern plantation owners and Dixie industrial employers, who were alarmed over the large numbers of black workers leaving the South.

The Bureau of Special Services in the U.S. Office of War Information attempted to reveal the "real story" of the riots. Immediately following the uprising, the Bureau sent one white and two black military police officers to interview Harlem's white and black residents, respectively. In contrast to the press accounts, differences in the narratives of local citizens recorded by the Bureau reveal the ways in which black and white New Yorkers imagined black Harlem. For example, white New Yorkers, who could only envision rioters as ominous, young black men, attributed the riots to "hoodlums and gangs of youngsters in their teens." Blacks, though, attributed the riots to people "of all ages, including children, women, and members of the well-dressed middle class." Another important difference among the interviewees was that whites tended to see the riot as a "rampage against law and order," while blacks saw it as an expression of racial conflict. Whites interviewed saw the riots as an illustration of blacks' natural lawlessness and "the primitive traits of Negroes. Conversely, blacks identified the shooting of a black soldier as an extension of hated southern practices and violence at the hands of the police. From the point-of-view of black Harlemites, the riots were racially motivated, political acts.

Regardless of the reason, New York's ability to avoid the massive, bloody confrontations of blacks and whites a few months earlier in Detroit became an occasion for self-congratulation. In a remarkable inversion of the spirit of the riots, the NYPD used this opportunity to celebrate its role as "New York's Finest." *Spring 3100*, a departmental publication, released a series of uncritical articles that disregarded the fact that it was the actions of a police officer which incited the riot. The magazine even quoted Adam Clayton Powell as saying, "We the citizens of Harlem, Negro and white, have noticed with satisfaction the conduct and action of the officers, detectives, and patrolmen under your direction. We express our appreciation for law and order."

But black New Yorkers would not let the NYPD disregard the implicit message of the riots. Hoping to bring the pressure of the White House to bear on the La Guardia Administration and Commissioner Valentine, black New Yorkers wrote to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. They explained to her that poor police-community relations and future riots could be prevented by increasing the number of black policemen and their opportunities for advancement. The President's wife, known as a champion of black civil rights, urged that the NYPD hire more black police officers, advising Mayor La Guardia, that "there might be fewer such instances as the past regrettable one." ⁸

In 1943 the NYPD was a predominately white institution. Of the sixteen-thousand police officers in the department, only 155 were black--including only six sergeants, one parole commissioner and one surgeon. La Guardia blamed the shortage of black policemen on the restraints of war and the lack of black applicants to the police force, disregarding how the police reputation among blacks was an important

impediment to their taking police recruitment seriously. He also pointed to earlier remarks by some Harlem residents that black police officers were too rough. As historian Dominic Capeci notes, La Guardia found it easier to attribute the shortage of black policemen to inadequate funds and manpower shortages due to the war than to racism.⁹ La Guardia's biographer, Thomas Kessner, sees the mayor as underestimating the race problem, and that "like every other mayor before and after him, responded to racial problems when they became too dangerous to ignore, but offered no direct programs to solve them."¹⁰ In sum, Mayor La Guardia and Commissioner Valentine excused their poor record in hiring black police, but planned to prevent future rioting by finding a place for blacks in police work.

Valentine attempted to deflect criticisms of black exclusion from police work by denying discrimination outright while calling for New Yorkers to opt for patriotism instead of division. Valentine laid out a utopian vision of New York as a city free of racial, ethnic, religious and class conflict; New Yorkers were simply united by their identity as Americans.¹¹ For Valentine, crime and law enforcement were color-blind. While privately making excuses to Eleanor Roosevelt about the difficulty of finding blacks to hire as police officers, Valentine publicly praised them for their service and encouraged their further participation: "We need colored men. We welcome them. I have had to dismiss only one Negro from the department in more than nine and a half years on disciplinary charges. I say to the colored boys throughout the city, come join us. We need you!"¹² Indeed, Valentine did need "colored" men to help refurbish the image of the police department and smooth over tensions in black communities. For Commissioner Valentine and his successors, one of the key means of preventing future riots was to recruit more black police officers. "The recruitment of Negroes and members of other minority groups as police," argued *Spring 3100*, "is more effective than having white police in troublesome Negro neighborhoods.

Harlemites' responses to street patrol spoke loudly about who they wanted policing their community. On the Monday after the riots, the rioting crowds paused and cheered when a contingent of black military police appeared on the scene. Conversely, when a group of white military police arrived they were jeered and bombarded with rocks and bottles. The next day, the U.S. Army and NYPD agreed to add a force of 1,500, mostly black, civilian volunteers. City authorities recruited the black volunteers and equipped them with nightsticks and armbands to help 6,000 members of the NYPD and the Military Police. Among the civilian volunteers who patrolled the Harlem streets were 300 black women, armed with clubs and wearing armbands to identify them as upholders of law and order. Although La Guardia and Valentine were reluctant to hire black police officers, they could find a place for black men and women in police work by assigning them temporary status as upholders of law and order. Rather than incorporate blacks as regular, fully paid members of the NYPD, they included them as "special units," specifically designed for riot control.

New York's black communities repeatedly complained about the dearth of blacks in the police department. Furthermore, a Housing Department survey found that police bias was the single biggest obstacle to a healthy relationship between blacks and city authorities. The report suggested that the police assigned to Harlem were often men from outside the community who took no real interest in the residents. So strained were relations between the community and the police that Harlemites likened the NYPD to a racist army of occupation.¹³ Residents complained of police breaking into their apartments without warrants, conducting illegal searches of persons and property, and employing gratuitous violence. Most white police considered Harlem the "Siberia" of the department--a place where one would be banished for bad behavior. Police officers who were believed to be "drunkards" or of "doubtful character" would often be punished by an assignment to the 28th Precinct. The Office of War Information's report on the riots found that "officers accused of viciousness, brutality, or graft, are often assigned to the Harlem precinct."

Black police officers were profoundly ambivalent about their place in patrol work. The few black police officers in the NYPD shared many of the goals of those in the black community, but had a somewhat more conflicted position regarding their sole assignments in "ghetto beats." The NYPD hired its first black police officer in 1891, and placed almost every subsequent officer in Harlem's 28th and 32nd precincts, or Bedford-Stuyvesant's 79th.¹⁴ Because police officials viewed these precincts with disdain and often contributed little manpower and resources to them, black police officers understood that these were less

desirable posts. They also knew the clustering of black police officers in these three precincts meant that blacks would have fewer opportunities for promotion. Departments which excluded blacks, like the detective's bureau and police headquarters, were the prime areas for advancement.

Black officers were aware of their complicity in controlling the black community, bargaining with black criminals, and taking the pressure off white cops. They understood the terms under which NYPD brought them into the department. One such officer, Robert Magnum began organizing fellow officers from Harlem's 28th Precinct into a Guardian Association in 1943 because he thought the NYPD was oblivious to the concerns of the black officer and unresponsive to ghetto unrest. But recruitment for Magnum's association initially proved difficult. Some black officers criticized Magnum for creating a divisive issue in wartime, while others feared recrimination from supervisors in the NYPD who saw the group as a challenge to police fraternity.¹⁵ Because of these fears, Magnum and his supporters met secretly at the Harlem YMCA until the late forties. After the war, with the support of Harlem congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., the Guardians pressured the city for recognition of their organization. After initial opposition, Commissioner William O'Brien acknowledged the charter of the Guardians in 1949.

Ethnic fraternal associations were a long established part of the department before the Guardians began their organizing drive in the early forties. Jewish police officers in the Shomrin Society in 1924, and Italian officers in the Columbia Association in 1932, had formed their organizations to represent the special needs of their ethnic groups. With the establishment of the Guardians, Irish officers also began to think about an explicit ethnic identity within the department. Previously, Irish identity was "normalized" in the NYPD: so many police officers were Irish, it did not make sense to any of them to form a fraternal organization. Furthermore, as exemplified by the cartoon below, Irish officers had little difficulty getting white officers of other ethnic backgrounds to join the "Irish parade." Commissioner O'Brien, himself Irish, complained that the formation of a black Guardian organization was a political act, and subsequently would interfere with black officers' ability to objectively enforce the law. However, he remained quiet when Irish patrolmen and officers joined the newly formed Emerald Society in 1953. It was, they claimed, merely a "fraternal" organization. Many Hispanic police officers immediately joined the Guardians; when the Hispanic Society was formed in 1957, many of its members retained their affiliation with the Guardians, thus refusing to reduce their identities to one ethnic or racial category.

New York's black community challenged not only their under-representation in police work, but the brutal practices of officers themselves, which remained a cogent issue throughout the forties and fifties. For some black leaders, hiring black police officers was the key to preventing brutality. Representative Powell became a major player in agitating for more black police officers and holding the department accountable for its brutality. Black and Puerto Rican political groups in Harlem, the Lower East Side, and Bedford-Stuyvesant put similar pressure on Mayor O'Dwyer. The mayor's response ultimately left the black community further alienated. He appointed Franklin Delano Roosevelt Jr. to head a commission of "respected" citizens who would investigate allegations of police brutality against black citizens. During the formation of the commission, however, three blacks were killed under circumstances which seemed to involve white police. The commission promised to get to the bottom of the crimes, but came up empty. This left black New Yorkers increasingly distrustful of the NYPD.

Further alienating blacks' faith in the NYPD was the discovery in the early fifties of a covert deal between the NYPD and the FBI, exempting New York policemen from routine questioning by FBI agents in civil rights cases involving charges of police brutality. Despite substantial evidence confirming the clandestine agreement, Mayor Impellitteri and Commissioner Monaghan emphatically denied that such a deal existed. Shortly after their stalwart defense, the department immediately appointed the first black deputy commissioner--a tacit acknowledgment of their guilt. In 1952, Assistant Attorney General James McInerney conceded that such an agreement had been in effect.¹⁶

Likewise, organizing activity could make an officer vulnerable to discipline by police management. The mostly white, rank-and-file members of the Policemen's Benevolent Association (PBA) were as vulnerable to similar intrusions into their politics as black police officers. Rank-and-file policemen

had become increasingly distraught over their declining status and impotence relative to poverty, segregation, welfare enrollment, and employment patterns. As historian Robert Fogelson illustrates in his survey of municipal police departments, prior to World War II most police were fairly well-off. "For men who had little education and few skills, they received a decent salary which could be supplemented by regular payoffs, and if they put in their twenty or twenty-five years, could receive a modest pension. Most had a means of improving their lot."¹⁷ Yet this avenue of upward mobility was less a reality in the postwar period. Between 1939 and 1950, police salaries declined relative to the cost of living. "It became clear," argues Fogelson, "that only a labor union could mobilize the political, economic and other resources to make an impression on city councilmen and state legislature."

Politicians and police officials became increasingly worried about dissatisfaction among rank-and-file patrolmen. Following the lead of their peers in industry, police executives in the forties and fifties sought to overturn the gains made by labor in the New Deal. One of their strategies was to delegitimize union activity by casting it as anti-American. New York City law barred police officers from joining unions like other municipal employees. Police commissioners further attacked patrolmen's efforts to unionize by charging that it threatened their objectivity, neutrality, and patriotism. Certain political affiliations exposed officers to charges of bias or even treachery. In the forties the NYPD became obsessed with infiltration of fascists and communists among its ranks. Thus, in 1940, Commissioner Valentine compelled his officers to complete information forms, attesting to their allegiances. The forms asked the men four questions: "Are you a member of the Christian Front? Have you ever been a member of the above organization? Are you a member of any subversive, Communist bund, or Fascist club or organization? Which one?"¹⁸

For La Guardia and Valentine, overt political affiliations made an officer incapable of "objectively" fulfilling his duties. "There is nothing to prevent any man from joining any communist, bund, or fascist club or organization," conceded La Guardia, "but the police officer has to remain neutral. By joining any one of these organizations he ceases to be neutral."¹⁹ In particular, La Guardia worried about police officers who followed groups like the Christian Front, which served "an armed and fascist nucleus of political violence." The intrusion into officers' private lives instigated a revolt by the PBA against the Commissioner and Mayor La Guardia. Officers rebelled by refusing to fill out their loyalty cards; only twenty percent of them were returned. Ultimately, the PBA was able to defeat the "front queries," by convincing Valentine of the futility of coercing officers into divulging their affiliations. Likewise, La Guardia did not see it as politically shrewd to press the issue. However, this episode is instructive because it shows the degree to which the ideology of a "politically neutral" police department was elastic for its rank-and-file members, their leaders, and ultimately the commissioner and mayor. Police officers' political identities could not be disentangled from their sense of themselves as cops. Furthermore, those identities--as was the case with the Christian Front--could often be founded on a bedrock of prejudice and exclusion.

By the end of the forties, in the minds of police officials, fears of Communist infiltration became far more cogent a concern than fascism or racism. As in other places of employment, police management tried to block union activity through "red smears." In 1948, Mayor William O'Dwyer cautioned police to make plans for a depression that would cause general unrest and give Communists an opportunity to foment trouble in America's cities. "Not only do Communist countries aim at the destruction by force of our form of government," warned O'Dwyer, "but their police forces are designed not for the protection of individual rights and freedoms but for the enforcement of state policy."²⁰ Rank-and-file officers were not only victims of anti-Communist propaganda, but ironically employed it themselves to deflect claims of brutality. PBA President, John E. Carton, for example, asserted that New York policemen were "the target of communistic and radical groups as can be easily demonstrated by the present hue and cry over alleged violations of human rights."²¹

Of greatest concern to Police Commissioners and Mayors in New York were two infamous icons of the American labor movement--Mike Quill and James Hoffa--each mounting challenges to the autonomy of the NYPD in the fifties. Quill, the fiery leader of the Transportation Workers Union (TWU), first tried to organize patrolmen into a union in the summer of 1951. Police Commissioner George Monaghan immediately forbade members of the force from joining the union and ordered those who did to withdraw

the applications or face disciplinary action. Some policemen appeared to resent the directive as an infringement of their constitutional rights. But for Monaghan, independent thinking was not even on the table. "In my judgement," he argued, "the police department is very much like the armed forces of this nation. No one should be in a position to have his loyalty divided. It would be just as sensible to unionize the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps of our great country."²² Thus, for Monaghan, unionization threatened to divide the unity of his men, as well as their allegiance to one another. To Monaghan, a successful police department required a fraternity of men with unquestioned loyalty to one another and their superiors. Monaghan failed to appreciate the ways in which officers intended the union to be a collective organization which would help foster such unity.

Quill kept the pressure on the department, arguing that the state constitution laid down the general principle that employees had the right to organize and bargain collectively through an organization of their own choosing; what was at issue was whether the State Labor Relations Board was open to use by municipal employees. Quill pointed out that New York City firefighters, as part of the Uniformed Fireman's Association of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), set a precedent for unionization of municipal employees.

Monaghan responded that the two institutions were completely different because "the Police Department deals with and directs human beings, while the fire department deals with physical fact." Mayor Impellitetti agreed, contending that he had no objection to police department line organizations like the Policemen's Benevolent Association, but that unions sought redress of grievances without the right to strike. Quill retorted sharply, "While you pretend to take this action in the interests of public policy and compare policemen with the Army and Navy, you actually are no different from any other anti-union employer who says unions are fine, but not in my industry!"²³ Finally, fed up with debating what he saw as a matter of his prerogative, Monaghan issued an order which simply forbade officers from unionization: "A policeman, like a soldier may not strike, cannot give even part of his loyalty to a union." Monaghan threatened disciplinary action for any officer who signed with the TWU. Ultimately, however, Quill's drive for unionization was rejected by PBA leadership as well, fearful of reprisals under the Condon-Wadlin law which forbade strikes by public employees. Despite Monaghan's outright rejection of unionization, he was able to win over some rank-and-file police officers by his opposition to delaying policemen's pensions as well as his effort to continue increasing the size of the force. Immediately following TWU's organizing drive, NYPD officials amended the Police Department's Rules & Regulations to specifically bar police officers from unionization.²⁴

Yet seven years later, the PBA was once again courted for union affiliation. This time, however, it was by Jimmy Hoffa and his Teamsters Union. Best known for being tossed out of the AFL-CIO for "corruption and gangsterism," Jimmy Hoffa represented a nightmarish threat to police officials and many New Yorkers. By September of that year, organizers claimed to have signed up six hundred patrolmen for City Employees Local 237 of the Teamsters. Howard Feinstein, president of Local 237, reported that policemen came to him complaining that they were intimidated in their work, afraid of losing their jobs, without recourse for grievance procedures, and disempowered when it came to disciplinary cases, Hoffa argued that strong police unions would allow officers to win better wages and working conditions, thus boosting police morale and making it possible for police departments to attract higher caliber applicants.

Commissioner Stephen Kennedy, like his predecessor, fought against labor unionization for police officers by resurrecting the old argument that the police department was "a quasi-military organization which did not intend to have any pressure groups--no matter how well intentioned they claim to be." Hoffa contended that the Teamsters had no intention of fighting for policemen's right to strike. When Hoffa and Feinstein organized a picket line around police headquarters in an effort to cut off deliveries of oil, gas and other supplies, Kennedy decided he had to act decisively to derail the union. Kennedy and the newly elected mayor, Robert Wagner, issued an ultimatum to Feinstein, threatening him with expulsion from Local 237 if he did not withdraw his campaign to organize police. Hoffa blinked first. In a rare concession of defeat, Hoffa quipped that "he was sorry he ever thought about organizing the police."²⁵

The decline of American labor power relative to management in the 1950s led some rank-and-file police officers to rethink their apolitical and neutral roles as enforcers of the law. Through their refusal to sign loyalty cards, union organizing activities, embracing of ethnic fraternal organizations, and increasing disenchantment and resistance to police management, the predominantly white, rank- and-file officers of the NYPD made it clear that their identities as workers and individuals could not be shed once they put on the police uniform. Indeed, John Cassese, president of the PBA, concluded that Kennedy's actions would further alienate men from the department and that such "totalitarian tactics" did not eliminate opposition to the paltry grievance procedure. Moreover, by the mid-fifties, declining wages and a poor grievance system made patrol work, traditionally an avenue of upward mobility for scores of "white ethnic" immigrant men, a more insecure place of affirming one's manly American identity. Similar to their African American peers in the department, the "blacks in blue," some white police officers began to insist that politics had a place in patrol work. Yet each group had a very different sense of what qualified as appropriately political. For most white police officers, class issues dictated a violation of previous boundaries against political involvement. But when black officers threatened to put racial questions on the NYPD agenda, most white cops identified with management by rallying around an ideology of objectivity and neutrality.

The racial makeup and policing practices of law enforcement institutions witnessed further changes following the clashes between urban communities of color and municipal police departments in the 1960s. Rising crime rates, urban riots, and antiwar violence would lead politicians, academics, and a few police executives to interrogate the role of police as crime fighters. President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1967 Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice and 1968 Kerner Commission Report challenged the longstanding impediments to blacks, Latinos, and women in police work. Yet the department's self-representation as an institution of fair play, neutrality, and objectivity remained intact, thus allowing it to resist personnel changes when fiscal crisis demanded a restructuring of the department in the early 1970s. Hundreds of newly employed officers of color and women lost their jobs under the seemingly fair rule of "last hired, first fired." The PBA did nothing to challenge the overwhelming attrition rates for these groups and even fought against their presence as an example of pernicious affirmative action. Its white male members protested the employment of women and racial minorities as an example of preferential treatment while framing their own work as skilled, heroic, and honorable.

Despite profound changes in the department over the past two decades—including legal victories on behalf of black and Latino officers, the nomination of two black commissioners, and a series of publicity campaigns to recruit racial minorities—the NYPD, much like the city as a whole, continues to be divided by the politics of race and class. The backlash against black and Latino officers continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, while the department did little to improve working conditions of officers as a whole. After a decade of record expansion, the NYPD remains among the least racially diverse of the forces in the nation's ten largest cities, with black and Latino representation most pronounced at the higher levels. The department does not come close to reflecting the diversity of the city it serves. Despite the remarkable success of the Giuliani and Safir tandem in reducing crime, black and Latino officers still question the department's policing practices. The brutality cases against Abner Louima, Amadou Diallo, Anthony Baez, Eleanore Bumpers, and the everyday harassment of citizens of color have ensured a polarized city and a divided department. Civil rights advocates and Giuliani supporters continue to hold starkly divergent visions of how the NYPD treats black and Hispanic citizens. At the same time, the PBA—no friend of civil rights groups—finds itself in perpetual struggle with police and city managers who put inordinate pressure on them to reduce crime without substantially improving pay and working conditions. For such reasons, the PBA issued a vote of "no-confidence" in Police Commissioner Howard Safir as recently as April, 1999. Despite the reassurances of public officials and police propagandists regarding police fraternity and city-wide unity, the constant theme over the past fifty years in the department has been its inability to address the needs of disgruntled officers and civil rights groups. Rudolph Giuliani's noble credo of "one city, one standard," probably rings as hollow for officers and educated citizens at the turn-of-the century as commissioner Valentine's 1945 proclamation of a "department working together in harmony."

NOTES

¹ "2,000 Attend St. George Breakfast," *Spring 3100*, (May, 1945): 1.

² Arthur Wallander, "Comments Relative to the Written Exam for Patrolmen," William O'Dwyer Papers, Box #13, (June 6, 1946).

³ F. Richardson argues that citizens and scholars became most concerned about the degree to which particular departments fit the model of impartial, efficient crime control in the 1930s. Political interference was considered inherently vicious and almost guaranteed an inadequate and biased level of law enforcement. This study suggests that the model of police efficiency through neutrality and objectivity did not become solidified until World War II. See J.F. Richardson, "Police in America: Functions and Control," *History and Crime: Implications for Criminal Justice Policy*, Eds. J. Inciardi and C. Faupel (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980): 218.

⁴ Bureau of Special Services, Office of War Information, "Report of the Harlem Riot of 1943," (August 21, 1943): 5. Several accounts corroborate this version of the riots as primarily a response to mistreatment of black soldiers and harassment by white policemen. See "NAACP Informs War Department that Riot Occurred Because of Soldier Brutality," *The New York Age*, August 14, 1943, p. 1; "The Harlem Outbreak," *Militant*, August 7, 1943, p. 1.

⁵ "Harlem Hoodlums," *Newsweek*, August 9, 1943, p. 48.

⁶ Both of these officers were quoted in: Bureau of Special Services, Office of War Information, "Report of the Harlem Riot of 1943," (August 21, 1943): 2.

⁷ "Keep Negro in the Southland, Attorney General Urges," *Amsterdam News*, August 14, 1943, p. 1.

⁸ Joseph Burns to LaGuardia, August 3, 1943, in La Guardia Papers, Box #752. Quoted in T. Kessner, *Fiorello H. La Guardia and the Making of New York* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), 375.

⁹ Dominic Capeci, *The Harlem Riot of 1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977).

¹⁰ Kessner, 536.

¹¹ The term "ethnic" is used here to describe those "whites" who identified with a particular European national origin. While the term is problematic because of its presumption of non-ethnicity regarding other "whites," as well as its troublesome connotations about race, it is instructive because it illustrates the ways in which urbanites understood themselves and their communities. The NYPD remained a bastion for Irish patronage well into the late 20th century, but began incorporating Italians & Jews in the 1920s and 1930s. See Alex Nicholas, *Black in Blue: A Study of the Negro Policeman*, (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1969): xvii.

¹² "Valentine Wants More Negro Police," *New York Times*, May 1, 1944, p. 23.

¹³ "Fragment of Harlem Survey," La Guardia Papers, Box #2550, n.d. Quoted in Kessner, 374.

¹⁴ The black population of Bedford-Stuyvesant increased fivefold from 30,000 in 1930 to 155,000 in 1955. Between 1940 and 1957, the black population of New York increased 315 percent.

¹⁵ Marvin Dulanev, *Black Police in America* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996): 70-71.

¹⁶ See "Monaghan Denies Accord Existed," *New York Times*, February 18, 1953, p. 1; "Brutality Charges Against Police Under U.S. Inquiry," *New York Times*, February 17, 1953, p. 1; "Representatives of 19 Organizations Seek to Oust Monaghan," *New York Times*, February 20, 1953, p. 1.

¹⁷ Robert M. Fogelson, *Big City Police*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977): 200-217.

¹⁸ "Police Questioned on Ties to Front," *New York Times*, February 9, 1940, p. 1. On anti-communism and labor unions see Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions* (Princeton University Press, 1977).

¹⁹ "Police Neutrality," *The Nation*, February 17, 1940, p. 249.

²⁰ Police Chief Gets Warnings of Peril," *New York Times*, October 12, 1948, p. 12.

²¹ Monaghan Backed by 5 Police Groups," *New York Times*, March 2, 1953, p. 1.

²² Monaghan Forbids City's Policemen to Join any Union," *New York Times*, August 8, 1951, p. 1.

²³ "TWU Sue to Void Police Union Ban," *New York Times*, August 10, 1951, p. 1. See also: L.H. Whitmore, *The Man Who Ran the Subways: The Story of Mike Quill* (New York, Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1968): 175-8.

²⁴ New York City Department of Labor, "Report on the Recognition and Organization of Unionized Police in New York City," p. 3. Quoted in Allen Z. Gammage and Stanley L. Sachs, *Police Unions* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1972): 55.

²⁵ "Teamster Leader Drops Drive Here to Enroll Police," *New York Times*, January 3, 1959, p. 1.; and Gammage and Sachs, *ibid.*, 50-51.

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