

## “Police-Community Relations”

In the very early hours of April 17, 2010, Seattle Police got a call that a robbery had occurred and encountered a person they suspected may have been involved. As it turns out he was not, but the turmoil that it created underscores big problems in police-community relations. Part of the contact was caught on video, what it shows is not pretty.

A decorated Seattle Gang Unit Detective is heard on tape telling a suspect he was going to "beat the f\*\*\*ing Mexican piss" out him during the robbery investigation. The video shows him hitting the suspect's head with his foot and stomping on the suspect's arm. A woman patrol officer is also seen stepping on the man. When the woman patrol officer stepped on the man, the cameraman said "Nice!" out of shock and disbelief, not out of disapproval. He claims after his statement about the officer's action, police clearly noticed him and their demeanor changed. Regardless, we should always do the right thing, even when nobody is looking...

It just so happened that the video was later released on YouTube and picked up by the mainstream news media almost three weeks after the incident. The public was outraged:

*“It's difficult to trust \*anyone\* in uniform at this point because we have seen this pattern over and over and over again. How are we supposed to tell the good cops from the dirty ones when the dirty ones are almost never disciplined or fired no matter what they do?”*

Other people were willing to give the office the benefit of the doubt and minimized it:

*“To call this a "beating" is absurd. Rodney King was a beating. There are a lot of other videos of police misconduct that show a "beating". It didn't even look like the cop meant to hit him in the head, and yes I have watched the video numerous times. It looked like the cop was going to pin the guys hand down, kicked out, hit his head and slid back onto the guy's hand.”*

I posted the video on my Facebook page, and the controversy continued on there too!

Both Police Officers and Latino Community I know chimed in, some felt the Officer should be fired, no questions asked. I pleaded for calm and to wait for more info...

It just so happened that the City of Seattle was looking for a new Police Chief. The Interim Chief was John Diaz, a military veteran, and Latino. A community hiring recommendation board put heavy emphasis on community relations in light of the incident. Another panel in Burlington, WA, had set up a town hall meeting to collect evidence on racial profiling. Other victims of alleged police abuse reacted to the tape.

"It has a very detrimental effect on the confidence the community has in law enforcement," said Judge Steven Gonzalez who was part of the profiling panel and is a friend of mine. "We have some very good candidates, including one or two that are already part of the department," said Roberto Maestas, co-founder of Seattle's El Centro de la Raza, and a member of Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn's 26-person selection

committee. The committee was comprised of leaders from various neighborhoods, city departments, activist groups and police-related organizations.

The Seattle Office of Professional Accountability (OPA) fast-tracked the investigation. The OPA handles police complaints, both internal and external, certifies their findings, and makes recommendations to the Chief of Police on possible disciplinary action. Now, I have heard some Police Officers state that they are not “Social Workers”, and these outsiders inhibit them from doing their jobs. I disagree!

Officers are often judged on their involvement in helping the community at large understand the police function and the citizen’s role. They are hired by “The People” (tax payers) to “Protect and Serve”! The truth of the matter is Police Unions often protect guys that probably should be fired. So as a former TAC Officer, I believe early on in the Academy there should be a way to weed overly aggressive officers and even racists out.

Acting Chief Diaz added that he was concerned about the impact this will have on police relations with Seattle's Latino community. "Is that going to damage relationships that we've tried really hard to continue to build in any community? Yeah, absolutely!"

Poor relations between community members and police can lead to feelings of distrust, anger and fear. Citizens may think all police are prejudiced and have unfair policies. When levies and funding come up for more police and better equipment it is an issue!

At the same time, I wonder how many of these people who protest police brutality also come out and support police when one of us is hurt or gunned down by criminals? Police often feel blame for all kinds of social problems, and don't get credit for doing their jobs.

The officer at the center of the controversy made an emotional apology soon after the video aired. I have to give him credit for manning up and accepting that his behavior was unprofessional. Others said it did not matter, “Fire him!” But, I don’t think it’s that easy?

I often bring this subject up at my Gang Prevention Services trainings. I am no bleeding heart liberal, I feel politics and incidents like these often polarize us as Americans. But we must talk about it and be open minded. We should speak with documented facts as well as speak with our hearts. I feel more dialogue and progressive action to change police culture and hiring is needed to help people build the trusting relationships necessary for long-term change. People from diverse backgrounds and experiences develop trust, understand each other's experiences, and work together on better solutions.

I feel more training to deescalate tension between Police and the Community is needed...

Take Care Out There!

Sincerely,

**Gabe Morales**  
**Seattle, WA**

# **POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

## **What Hurts:**

- **Poor Media Reporting**
- **Media Confusing the Public**
- **Spread of Fear Via Media**
- **Unrealistic Views/Pressures by Media/Movies/TV**
  - **Not Enough Diversity in Police Ranks**
    - **Politics**
- **“Bad Apples” (Can Stereotype All as Bad Cops)**
  - **Negative Attitudes by Police**
  - **Racial Profiling/Stereotypes**
- **Problem Focused Instead of Solution Focused**
  - **Lack of Funding/Resources/Volunteers**
    - **No “2nd Chances” (Labeled)**
  - **Public Too Quick to Make Assumptions**
    - **Lack of Confidentiality/Trust**

# **POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

## **What Helps:**

- **Community Engagement**
  - **Reminders of Sacrifice**
- **Seeing Human Factors of Law Enforcement**
- **Better Media Presentation of Law Enforcement**
- **Public Awareness of Law Enforcement Procedures**
  - **Community Cultural Diversity Training**
  - **Show Positive Side of Law Enforcement**
- **More Links Between Police & Community**
  - **Collaboration & Partnership**
  - **Community Mobilization**
    - **Honoring Police**
  - **Engagement in Schools**
- **X-Offenders Involved in Police Training/Crime Awareness**
  - **Better Training/Equipment for Police**

## **DOJ Community Relations Service**

The Community Relations Service is the Department of Justice "peacemaker" for community conflicts and tensions arising from differences of race, color, and national origin. Created by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, CRS is the only Federal agency dedicated to assist State and local units of government, private and public organizations, and community groups with preventing and resolving racial and ethnic tensions, incidents, and civil disorders, and in restoring racial stability and harmony. CRS facilitates the development of viable, mutual understandings and agreements as alternatives to coercion, violence, or litigation. It also assists communities in developing local mechanisms, conducting training, and other proactive measures to prevent or reduce racial/ethnic tension. CRS does not take sides among disputing parties and, in promoting the principles and ideals of non-discrimination, applies skills that allow parties to come to their own agreement. In performing this mission, CRS deploys highly skilled professional conciliators, who are able to assist people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds.

For more info see: <http://www.justice.gov/crs/>