

The use of Lawrence Sherman's testimony and research, and other criminology, in the Interim Report of the Presidential Task Force on 21st Century Policing

On the day after yet another US police killing--when LAPD officers killed an unarmed man while wearing body-worn video cameras (see link below) , President Obama accepted the attached report in the Cabinet Office of the White House. The report softly endorses a new standard I recommended for police use of deadly force in the US:

2.2.1. Law enforcement agency policies for training on use of force should emphasize de-escalation and alternatives to arrest or summons in situations where appropriate

It also endorsed, in part, my recommendation for independent investigation of police actions beyond the boundaries of each local force:

2.2.2 These policies should also mandate external and independent criminal investigations in cases of police use of force resulting in death, officer-involved shootings resulting in injury or death, or in-custody deaths

Perhaps more important, the Task Force adopted my recommendation to them of (and credited me by name for) the US Department of Justice creating a national program of training and certification for all police chiefs via a new institution that would function much like the UK's College of Policing programs for the Police National Assessment Center and the Strategic Command Course:

5.4 Recommendation: **The U.S. Department of Justice should develop, in partnership with institutions of higher education, a national postgraduate institute of policing for senior executives with a standardized curriculum preparing them to lead agencies in the 21st century.** To advance American law enforcement, we must advance its leadership. To that end, the task force recommends the establishment of a top quality graduate institute of policing to provide ongoing leadership training, education, and research programs which will enhance the quality of law enforcement culture, knowledge, skills, practices and policies. Modeled after the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, this institute will be staffed with subject matter experts and instructors drawn from the nation's top educational institutions, who will focus on the real world problems that challenge today's and tomorrow's law enforcement, teaching practical skills and providing the most current information for improving policing services throughout the nation. This institute could even, as witness Lawrence Sherman proposed, "admit qualified applicants to a three-month residential course for potential police executives, concluding in an assessment center and examination that would certify qualified graduates to serve as chief police executives anywhere in the United States."⁹⁴

(⁹⁴ oral testimony of Lawrence Sherman, Wolfson Professor of Criminology, University of Cambridge, and Distinguished University Professor, University of Maryland, for the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, Washington, DC, February 24, 2015).

Finally, the Task Force also supported my recommendation and quoted my rationale for creating much larger police agencies:

2.13 RECOMMENDATION: The U.S. Department of Justice, through the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and Office of Justice Programs, should provide technical assistance and

incentive funding to jurisdictions with small police agencies that take steps towards shared services, regional training, and consolidation.

Half of all law enforcement agencies in the United States have fewer than ten officers, and nearly three-quarters have fewer than 25 officers. Lawrence Sherman noted in his testimony that “so many problems of organizational quality control are made worse by the tiny size of most local police agencies . . . less than 1 percent of 17,985 U.S. police agencies meet the English minimum of 1,000 employees or more.”⁴⁹ These small forces often lack the resources for training and equipment accessible to larger departments and often are prevented by municipal boundaries and local custom from combining forces with neighboring agencies. Funding and technical assistance can give smaller agencies the incentive to share policies and practices and give them access to a wider variety of training, equipment, and communications technology than they could acquire on their own.

The full report will be released in 6 to 8 weeks, with more details. Meanwhile, it is good to know that criminological and social science research was so prominent in the national response to a police legitimacy crisis, with much attention to the kind of research on police legitimacy done by Cambridge Lecturer Dr. Justice Tankebe and Professor Emeritus Sir Anthony Bottoms, as well as special mention of a master’s thesis on police use of body-worn cameras completed for the Cambridge Police Executive Programme supervised by Cambridge’s MSt in Applied Criminology and Police Management/ Experimental Criminology Lecturer Dr. Barak Ariel:

Jim Bueermann, retired chief of the Redlands (California) Police Department and President of the Police Foundation, told the task force about a seminal piece of research that demonstrated a positive impact of BWCs in policing. The researchers used the gold standard of research models, a randomized controlled trial, in which the people being studied are randomly assigned either to a control group that does not receive the treatment being studied or to a treatment group that does. The results of this 12-month study are highly suggestive that the use of BWCs by the police can significantly reduce both officer use of force and complaints against officers. They found that the officers wearing the cameras had 87.5 percent fewer incidents of use of force and 59 percent fewer complaints than the officers not wearing the cameras. One of the important findings of the study was the impact BWCs might have on the self-awareness of officers and citizens alike. When police officers are acutely aware that their behavior is being monitored (because they turn on the cameras), and when officers tell citizens that the cameras are recording their behavior, everyone behaves better. The results of this study are highly suggestive that this increase in self-awareness contributes to more positive outcomes in police-citizen interaction.⁵⁴

54 (Ariel, Barak, William A. Farrar, and Alex Sutherland, “The Effect of Police Body-Worn Cameras on Use of Force and Citizens’ Complaints Against the Police: A Randomized Controlled Trial,” *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 2014.)

The impact of all this remains to be seen, and there is a desperate need for more evidence on what works with such complex problems. But unlike the 1960s, when the US last saw a crisis of such proportions in police legitimacy, there is a much closer relationship between police and universities to help solve those problems.

Video of police killing a man in Los Angeles on March 1, 2015:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/03/us/skid-row-shaken-as-los-angeles-police-kill-man-in-confrontation-caught-on-video.html?action=click&contentCollection=Politics&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=Marginalia&pgtype=article>