The Gulf Between 'Them' and 'Us'

Los Angeles and its chief epitomized the professional crime-fighting forces. Therein lies the weakness.

By MARK H. MOORE

Four days before Rodney King was savagely beaten, I publicly noted the achievements of Daryl Gates to hold together the county's own established standards of professionalism. Gates is not alone. The police department radically changed. I still stand by that. Yet I cannot help but be touched by my deep concern that savage beating was a rare event or not, it must be witnessed. Lessons must be drawn.

The incident, I now believe, gives powerful evidence of the ultimate limitations of a certain idealism of policing that Daryl Gates and the Los Angeles Police Department have long espoused and that has inspired police executives and guided the career of a cop across the country. At the core of this ideal, which I call "profession," are two powerful values.

One is professionalism. In the world of policing, professionalism is primarily concerned with creating a disciplined, highly trained, law-abiding and technologically advanced police force. It has also meant keeping the police trained in improper judicial influences, ready to serve humanity. Fundamentally, professionalism has been pursued through "moral" policing, expressing in such technologies as computerized crime analysis, automated fingerprint identification systems and the development of specialized units from SWAT teams to narcotics task forces.

Gates has excelled at professionalism, and his police approach is no far as it goes. But there is another part of the Los Angeles police, an ideal focused on "crime-fighting" as the professional objective and dominant justification for the existence of the police force. In this professional police department focuses its resources on the highest priority task, when the police believe to be the central to the most serious crimes—robbery, rape, murder, assault. To achieve those crimes effectively, police professionals have insisted on the value of a mobile police force, able to respond both quickly and often when emergencies come, but sufficiently distant to preserve privacy and guard against the favoritism or prejudice that would follow from from familiarity.

'In short, such things as police eavesdropping, illegal searches, trespassing, and wiretapping, all have provided the legal means that the police are allowed to use the criminals are transformed from aid and desperate people who get into fights or prey upon equally desperate people for small economic rewards into well-armed, dangerous offenders. In the view of Daryl Gates, Daryl becomes the hero of the law-enforcement system.'

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This tacit deal with the community is as irreparable as their deal with management. When an incident occurs, as it inevitably will, and as it did in the case of Rodney King, the public turns on the police. Usually, apathetic are sought and the cleaning power of improved training and discipline applied. Thus the police are reinforced in their cynicism and sense of isolation.

There is an alternative. The community and the police could decide that the ideal of working with the viewers of the officers themselves. The police are a "their" view. To police are seen as people from the bad. When crimes in hiding, it is said to be because the police arrested were wrong or weak, and become the weak-based criminal justice system exists no real accountability. Such trends rely well in external police, may even have something to do with. The problem is that, in the end, there...