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Police Race and Ethnicity: A Guide for Law Enforcement Officers, 3rd ed.

B.K. Cryderman, C.N. O'Toole & A. Fleras
Toronto: Butterworths, 1998

Reviewed by Janet Burt-Gerrans[†]

Recognizing that Canadian police forces have had difficulty maintaining a positive public in recent years, the authors of *Police, Race and Ethnicity* set out to write a guide book for law enforcement officers. The goal of the guide is to outline the role of police officers, while imparting information about certain racial and ethnic groups in the hope of demystifying cross-cultural communications. To this end, the book is divided into three sections: Part I, "The Social Context of Policing," Part II, "Policing in Society," and Part III, "Police Minority Relations."

The authors of Part I "The Social Context of Policing," provide a technical explanation of racism by breaking it down into constituent parts. Prejudice, the first component, is divided into ethnocentrism and stereotypes. The second component, discrimination, is said to be linked to prejudice in that it is prejudiced actions that give rise to discrimination. Here, the authors categorize various expressions of racism as "rednecked racism," "polite racism," "institutionalized racism," and "systematic racism." These categories offer a description of the various instances of racism.

In explaining racism, the authors argue that there are "social and cultural dimensions which account for racism." Specifically, they point to racism as the "ideological life-support" of the "profit-oriented society."¹ Although they do discuss the power relations that are a condition of racism and the "profit-oriented society," the authors neglect to adequately treat the issue of economic disparity. The authors acknowledge that the two main reasons persons born outside Canada want to move to this country are political and economic, but they do not

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¹ B.K. Cryderman, C.N. O'Toole & A. Fleras, *Police Race and Ethnicity: A Guide for Law Enforcement Officers*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Butterworths, 1998) at 53.

attempt any further analysis.² Issues of property and resource allocation (global and domestic) are glossed over. As well, the historic economic hierarchy of the dominant culture and powerlessness of women are completely ignored. The lack of discussion of these issues is distressing.

Part II, “Policing in Society,” authored by Augie Fleras, deals with cross-cultural communication and makes a case for a police force that takes on the “community service model” of policing rather than the “professional crime-fighting model” that currently prevails. He beseeches officers to recognize that successful communication depends on all parties being open enough to *receive* the message. His suggestions for police officers entail an awareness of difference, respect and patience both for their own efforts, and for those persons with whom they deal. This section is hopeful and forward looking. It envisions a police force that holds less tightly to its bureaucracy and hierarchical power structure in favour of a diversified, horizontal structure.

Unfortunately these lofty ideals were not attained by the author of Part III, “Police Minority Relations.” In this section, Brian K. Cryderman attempts to describe a number of racial and ethnic groups and to point out the most frequent sources of miscommunication between police officers and others. Cryderman’s description of these groups and his suggestions are useful, but he misses his co-authors observation about cultural relativity and bias. The author purports to be an expert on every racial and ethnic group that forms the chapters: “First Nations,” “Blacks,” “South Asians,” “Chinese,” “Portuguese,” “Hispanics,” “Italians,” and “Youth.” These chapters would have more legitimacy had they been written by members of these groups or, at the very least, had the author relied on resource materials published more recently than in the years between 1950 and 1976!

The reader soon becomes acutely aware of the fact that each description is written from the point of view of the dominant cultural group that does not see itself as “ethnic.” Members of the racial and ethnic groups described are silenced, their voice is appropriated, and their hopes, dreams, desires, reactions, and place within Canadian society are “explained” by a member of the dominant group.

One example is the discussion of personal names in each chapter. Cryderman purports to offer deciphering strategies for police officers

² *Ibid.* at 8.

when they encounter names from various cultures. He chose to deal with this subject as a matter of “translation,” where the main task is for the officer to fit the person’s name into the code used by the computer system that is organized by first, middle and last name. However, many cultures do not organize names in such a sequence. This would appear to be a classic example of trying to fit square pegs into round holes. There is no acknowledgement of the fact that this is precisely the type of systemic racism the other authors attempted to describe in Part I, “The Social Context of Policing.” This would have been an opportunity to explore the beautiful diversity in names and urge law enforcement officers to work with the community in using some of the systemic change strategies outlined in Section II.

In describing each group, Cryderman also perpetuates several racial and ethnic stereotypes. For instance, in discussing workforce participation, he notes that immigrant women workers are concentrated in the textile industry and in domestic work. His explanation for this phenomenon for Portugese people is that “[j]ust as Portugese tend to live in communities of fellow Portugese, so do they tend to congregate in certain workplaces.”³ Other studies have suggested that the underlying reasons for job ghettoization are more closely linked to the economic power structure and racism/sexism than with a desire on the part of immigrant groups to maintain racial and ethnic boundaries in the job market.

Although the need for such a guide for law enforcement officers is evident, this book does not do the job. By ignoring factors such as gender and resource allocation, the theoretical analysis does not address complex reality. Furthermore, the description of specific ethnic groups from the perspective of the dominant culture who actually perpetuates stereotypes, defeats the main purpose of the book. The authors’ attempts to foster cross-cultural communication based on respect and mutual understanding is not achieved. The section entitled “Policing in Society” describes a community-based police force with problem solving as its priority rather than the complaint-driven, random car patrol system that is now in place. This sounds wonderful and offers a glimmering hope, but these authors have not explored the implications of their theory thoroughly enough to apply it to all sections of their book.

³ *Ibid.* at 23