

Chapter Seven

*Community Police Patrols and Vigilantism**

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In their introductory chapter, H. Jon Rosenbaum and Peter C. Sederberg define vigilantes as those who identify with the established order, yet in defending it resort to means in violation of traditional boundaries. They suggest a typology of vigilantism according to whether its purpose is primarily crime-control, social-group-control, or regime-control and whether participants are private or public persons. A group may, of course, have more than one purpose and this may change over time. This essay focuses on American private groups primarily concerned with crime-control, particularly those who see themselves as victims of crime and/ or are critical of the response of authorities to crime.

Americans have responded to recent law-enforcement problems with increased fear, estrangement from neighbors, avoidance behavior, increased receptivity to law-and-order politics, and, as the rising fortunes of the private security industry suggest, increased purchases of protective devices such as better locks, alarms, and weapons.

The above are primarily passive, defensive, indirect, and individual responses.¹ Other more active, aggressive, direct group responses may also be seen. American society has always placed a heavy emphasis on voluntary

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¹ For data on individual responses, F. Furstenberg, "Fear of Crime and Its Effect on Citizen Behavior," (Paper prepared for Symposium on Studies of Public Experience, Knowledge and Opinion of Crime and Justice, Bureau of Social Science Research, Washington, D.C., 1972), and J. Conklin, *The Impact of Crime* (New York, Macmillan, 1975).

action and masculinity. It should not be surprising that the country's populist, self-help ethos should have spawned a large number of citizen policing groups such as the Louisiana Deacons, Anthony Imperiale's North Ward Citizens' Committee, the Watts Community Alert Patrol, and the Jewish Defense League.

It is with these groups ("self-defense patrols," "vigilantes," "peace creeps," "security patrols," or "community patrols," depending on the group in question and the political perspective of the observer) that this paper is concerned. It focuses on an organizational response of victims (or at least those who see themselves and their communities as potential victims). Perceived victimization is expanded to include actions of authorities as well as actions of those engaged in traditional crime and disorder.

Relatively little is known about contemporary American patrol groups beyond an occasional journalistic account. There are few answers for such important questions as: In what contexts do patrol groups emerge? What are their natural histories of development? How widespread and enduring are such groups and what are the main types? What are their purposes and practices? What is the nature of their interaction with police, various levels of government, other ethnic groups, and their own presumed constituency? How are they viewed by these various groups? How are they organized? How are members recruited and to what extent are they screened and trained? What characteristics and attitudes do members have, and what factors are involved in their motivation to participate? What theory of police failure do they hold? How does the public view them? What are their consequences for the reduction of crime and civil disorders, feelings of safety, curtailing police abuses, or increasing intra- and intergroup conflict in a community; e.g., within or between ethnic groups or with the police? What are their implications for law enforcement and public policy? This paper makes a preliminary effort to deal with questions such as the above.

COMMUNITY POLICE PATROLS

When public institutions fail to meet felt needs, a number of recurring responses on the part of the communities presumably being serviced may be observed. These vary, perhaps in decreasing order of frequency, from passive resignation or withdrawal, to reformist and radical politics, to efforts to set up wholly new institutions outside the traditional system.

Citizen involvement in law enforcement is not new to the American scene. In earlier periods of American history when people felt that there was too much crime, that their persons or property were in danger, that cherished traditions and values were being threatened, and that regular law-enforcement officials were not coping with the problem, vigilante-type efforts frequently emerged. Counting only those groups which have taken the law

into their own hands, a recent account lists no fewer than 326 vigilante movements during the past two centuries of American history.²

R. M. Brown distinguishes two types of vigilantism in America. The first appeared prior to 1856 in areas where settlement preceded effective law enforcement. The concerns of this type of vigilantism were primarily horse thieves, counterfeiters, outlaws, and "bad men"—the enforcement, that is, of consensually formulated standards of peace and law.

The emergence of the San Francisco Vigilance Committee in 1856 was the birth of a second form of citizen mobilization, what Brown calls "neovigilantism." Unlike the earlier type, neo-vigilantism "found its chief victims among Catholics, Jews, immigrants, Negroes, laboring men and labor leaders, political radicals, and proponents of civil liberties."³

While the first type of vigilantism filled or attempted to fill a discernible void, the second generally emerged where the regular police and legal systems were already functioning, but where alien groups were seen to threaten the established order. Rather than simply enforcing the law, the second type frequently involved political struggles for power, racism, attempts to terrorize would-be criminals, and even the desire to spare the public the cost of the conventional judicial process.

Recent self-defense groups differ from more classic vigilante groups in that they, for the most part, have not killed or taken the law into their own hands. Instead, their primary functions have been the surveillance and protection of their own communities, often as an ancillary group to regular police. Thus, they more closely resemble the early anti-horsethief societies which amplified law enforcement through pursuit and capture, but did not try to substitute for it by administering summary punishments. Recent groups have performed largely deterrent functions and have not usually held street trials or meted out alley justice. But the fact that private citizens have chosen to involve themselves in police work has meant that the issue, if not often the substance, of vigilantism has reoccurred with them.

One of the most important of contemporary self-defense groups, at least in the last twenty years, has probably been the "self-defense guard" which organized in Monroe, North Carolina in 1956. The group's purpose was to protect its members against the harassment and incursive violence of the Ku Klux Klan, long a citizen patrol group of a very different nature. The Monroe group, led by Robert Williams, attracted sixty members and received a charter from the National Rifle Association.

The next widely publicized self-defense group patrolled the Crown Heights area of Brooklyn between 1964 and 1966. The group called itself the "Maccabees," after a Jewish resistance group which fought to curb Syrian

2. R. M. Brown, "The American Vigilante Tradition," in H. D. Graham and T. R. Gurr, eds., *The History of Violence in America* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 154.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

domination in the second and first centuries BC. Led by Rabbi Samuel A. Schrage, the Maccabees of the 1960s numbered 250 volunteer members and used radio-car patrols to report crime and deter potential criminals.

In 1965, a year after the Maccabees organized, a black self-defense group known as the Deacons gained prominence in Bogalusa and Jonesboro, Louisiana. The Deacons fielded armed patrol cars to protect civil rights workers and blacks from Klansmen, white rowdies, and the police. Led by Charles Sims, the Deacons claimed seven thousand members in Louisiana and sixty loosely federated chapters in Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and the Carolinas.⁴ A useful case study of a group like the Deacons is given by Harold Nelson.⁵

Shortly after the 1965 Watts riot, a group of young blacks organized the Community Alert Patrol to observe the way ghetto residents were treated by the Los Angeles Police. The following year, at about the time that Oakland, California rejected a proposal for a police review board, Huey P. Newton organized the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense to inform blacks of their legal rights and to "preserve the community from harm."

The riots of the latter part of the 1960s gave rise to a number of diverse patrol groups. Terry Knopf presents information on nine youth patrols (and notes eleven others) which worked to limit confrontations, arrests, and violence in ghetto areas during the summer of 1967.⁶ Ethnically based white groups, such as Anthony Imperiale's North Ward Citizens' Committee and the Jewish Defense League, emerged partly in response to the black riots.

More recently the concept of civilian policing has overflowed the original street patrol model, coming to focus on more limited contexts such as housing projects, rock concerts, and protest demonstrations. According to one estimate, more than eighty-five hundred unpaid volunteers were on "tenant safety patrols" in ninety-three New York City Housing Authority projects in 1970.

METHOD

We have gathered some descriptive information on twenty-eight self-defense groups, using a snowball technique of gaining cases. This information is based on interviews with police and patrol group members, observation, newspaper accounts, and analysis of documents.⁷

4. Ibid., p. 203.

5. H. A. Nelson, "The defenders: a case study of an informal police organization," *Social Problems* 15 (Fall 1967): 127-147.

6. T. A. Knopf, *Youth Patrols: An Experiment in Community Participation* (Waltham: Brandeis University Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence, 1969).

7. Interviews outside the Boston area were carried out using a semi-structured phone interview. We do not know the extent to which the descriptive material can be generalized beyond these twenty-eight cases. The "patrols" universe is unknown and subject to much fluctuation. Newspaper accounts of such groups are often deceptive and reflective more of the mood behind

Some Descriptive Data on Twenty-Eight Groups

Race of Members. Of the twenty-eight self-defense groups, seventeen (61 percent) were black. Since the performance of conventional police is probably least adequate and most controversial in black neighborhoods, the disproportionate emergence of alternate institutions there should not be surprising.

Operations. The functions performed by the groups varied. The most common function, characterizing more than four out of ten, involved patrols of their neighborhoods; 39 percent worked to "cool" existing or imminent civil disorders; 32 percent kept their communities under surveillance and were "eyes and ears" for the police; 25 percent, according to police, actively interfered with police arrests and other work; and 21 percent assisted in public education on matters of law enforcement.

Equipment and Weapons. Unlike earlier vigilante groups, a majority of the groups report themselves or are reported to be unarmed. Only two of the groups (7 percent) admitted to carrying guns, though at least four groups (14 percent) reportedly carried clubs. The most frequently reported types of equipment were walkie-talkies and car radios, and 14 percent of the groups (most of which had young members) wore identifying shirts, berets, or jackets.

Chronicity. Slightly over half the groups had routinized their operations. Roughly a third (32 percent) of the groups were active primarily during periods of civil disorder.

Police Departmental Regulation. Police were in communication with about two-thirds of the groups, generally to explain things like the legal limits of citizens' arrests and to give instruction or advice. In at least one city, Boston, police have actually drawn up guidelines for citizen patrol groups.⁸ In about one-third of the cases, police issued some form of identification, often in card form, to group members. This was particularly true in the case of groups whose purpose was to reduce, from within, the level of violence in civil disorders.

Attitudes of Police. In the case of 43 percent of the self-defense groups, police officials reported they were glad the groups existed. It is worth noting that this figure is not as high as the police perception of the number of groups which were pro-police (61 percent). In the case of 25 percent of the groups,

self-defense groups than of their substance. Some reported groups, upon inspection, turn out to be evanescent, practically inoperative, and in at least one case, an announced self-defense group was discovered to have membership of one man: the group founder himself. Our twenty-eight cases consist of most of the fully operative general patrols (as against special purpose patrols such as those restricted to one housing project) known to us and our informants in 1970-1971. The actual number of groups is no doubt much larger since some groups, such as the Jewish Defense League (treated as one case here), claim numerous affiliates. We have excluded traditional police auxiliaries.

8. Knopf, *Youth Patrols*.

police officials said they wished that the groups did not exist. Police felt that 36 percent of the groups had improved police-community relations, 29 percent were actually cutting down on crime, and 18 percent had helped to prevent or deflate riots. At the same time, police felt that 25 percent of the groups had “abused their authority,” and they reported receiving complaints from other citizens about the groups’ operations in 21 percent of the cases.

ANALYSIS: FIVE ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS

In the course of their creation and development, self-defense groups must come to terms with at least five major issues: (1) their relationship to the police and legal system; (2) their legitimacy in the eyes of the communities they wish to serve; (3) the recruitment and management of personnel; (4) the choice of appropriate operations; and (5) the maintenance of resources, incentives, and motivation for the groups’ survival.

1. Self-Defense Groups and the Police

Self-defense groups are heterogeneous phenomena. One of the most important dimensions on which they vary is their attitude toward police. By definition, self-defense groups believe that the police have failed to keep either order or security. But there seems to be an important and dichotomous difference in their *theory of police failure*.

The first type of group sees police failure as attributable to manpower shortages, overlenient local courts, the *Escobedo*, *Miranda*, and other decisions of the Supreme Court, and simply the rampant increase and encroachment of those they regard as “the criminal element.” This first type of self-defense group sees the police as good men overwhelmed from without and handcuffed from within. They see them, that is, as *failures, but not as blameworthy*.

The second type of self-defense group sees the police as part of the problem. In general, the second type of group attributes police failure to what they see as police (1) lack of understanding or any rapport with the communities they serve, (2) arrogant and corrupt behavior, (3) brutality, (4) racism, (5) their role as guardians only of the propertied classes and the status quo. The second type of self-defense group, then, counts the police among those against whom the community must be defended. This second type of self-defense group is intended either as a check on police or as a clear alternative to them. Police are seen as *highly blameworthy failures*.

The relationship of these two types of groups to police may be described as supplemental and adversarial, respectively.

The attitude of a self-defense group toward the police does influence police response to the group (and, as the increased revolutionary perspective of the Black Panthers indicates, subsequent police response and the nature of official labeling, of course, acts back on the attitudes of the group). It might be

predicted that police would approve all supplemental groups and allow them to flourish, while opposing and suppressing all adversarial groups. This is often, but by no means always, the case. Thus, for one-third of the groups that police perceived as “pro-police,” the opinion was nevertheless expressed that it would be better if the groups didn’t exist. There seem to be two mitigating variables: (1) police do not always approve of all supplemental groups because, among other reasons, they say it is bad for untrained citizens of any ideology to “take the law into their own hands,” (2) police do not immediately suppress all adversarial groups, partly to avoid trouble and partly because they know that the groups often have a better chance of maintaining order, particularly during active or threatened disorders.

A Typology of Groups. There are, thus, two important dimensions along which such groups vary: the nature of the group (supplemental or adversarial) and the nature of the police response (encouragement or opposition). When these two dimensions are combined, a useful typology emerges by which groups may be contrasted and analyzed.

In Figure 1, groups from eight cities have been placed in the appropriate cells of the typology.⁹

Figure 1 A Typology of Groups

		Police Response	
		Encouragement or Noninterference	Opposition or Suppression
Self Defense Group	Supplemental	TYPE I Cleveland Queens	TYPE II Seattle Boston
	Adversarial	TYPE III Baton Rouge Tampa	TYPE IV Oakland Minneapolis

9. As with any ideal-typical classification, the actual relations between the police and self-defense groups are often more complex than the table implies. For example, in the case of the proposed Boston Mattapan Dorchester Community Patrol, there is a hierarchical split of opinion within the police department. Officials at the superintendent level endorse the patrol, but the head of the department’s rank and file Boston Police Patrolmen’s Association is vehement in his opposition. There may as well be differences of opinion within a self-defense group over theories of police failure. Even where there is consistency within departments, the police attitude may be ambivalent. Thus, although the Boston Jewish Defense League considers itself pro-police and reports to the local police before going out on patrols, police interviewed appeared to be neutral toward them, approving of their concern over crime but not taking them very seriously.

Type I: Supplemental and encouraged by police. The self-defense groups which fall into Cell I of the typology generally meet police notions of acceptable citizen mobilization. In all cases within this category, *both power and independence are low*. The police exercise complete authority over the organization, its leaders, activities, and members. Typically, these groups either begin as or are transformed into police auxiliaries with jobs such as traffic control or property protection during civil disorders. Most housing project patrols also fall within Type I. Other Type I organizations are of police-supporting citizens' groups. They may establish and publicize "Crime Alert" telephone numbers and patrol streets only to call in bona fide policemen if they sight suspicious behavior or persons, or they may do public relations work for the police.¹⁰ Type I groups are the most numerous, well manned, and stable.

Type II: Supplemental and opposed by police. Police may oppose groups in Cell II on several grounds, in some cases for reasons having little to do with the specific nature of the self-defense group.¹¹ Instead, police may express a general dislike of amateurs. The mistakes of citizen patrols, like those of private guards, may be seen to give regular police a bad image. Police may resent the hedging in on their monopoly over violence and be wary of anything that smacks of vigilantism. In Seattle, for example, a citizen group mobilized to offer the police help in dealing with a demonstration against the war in Vietnam. The acting police chief declined their offer, saying he had no desire to end up fighting two mobs instead of one. Apparently, Type II groups either change to meet police requirements or fail. Some move into political action on behalf of law and order.

Several departments took a coercive approach to patrols. A chief in one western city reported:

When local people start talking about organizing a patrol, the community relations department goes in and invites them to ride in a patrol car. At this point the intent is more to educate the citizen than to help us. If the citizen is still gung ho, he is encouraged to join the police auxiliary.

In Cleveland a number of neighborhood patrols were made regular police auxiliaries. This was seen by the safety director as a way of increasing the size of the force while warding off the danger of vigilantism. In other cities some of those who start as private patrollers later join regular auxiliaries.

10. For example, a Community Radio watch sponsored as a "public service program of Motorola Communications and Electronics, Inc." reports that in 700 cities almost 500,000 drivers of two-way radio equipped vehicles are providing emergency information to public-safety agencies. This includes information on "suspicious acts, street crimes, and unusual occurrences."

11. Here it may be useful to differentiate the public police attitude which may be negative from the private attitude of particular policemen. Some members of self-defense groups interviewed reported that regular police envied what was seen as the private patrol's ability to crack heads and get away with it, in a way that police could not. Some patrols routinely have weapons such as mace or metal-tipped plastic clubs usually denied police.

Type III: Adversarial and encouraged by police. Because of their potential organizational contradiction, the self-defense groups in Cell III are of particular interest. Many of these groups are short-lived, and all appear to survive precariously. They and the police are mutually suspicious and resentful, existing in a state of hostile interdependence. Most of these groups are born during riots, and many demand, as a condition of their "cool-it" function, that police withdraw from troubled areas. Withdrawal is seen by the police as humiliating, though sometimes forced by higher authority, and police embarrassment is compounded if the groups are effective. At the same time, members of the "cool-it" groups may suffer a loss of the respect of their constituents, and they may feel (and sometimes say) that they were used as tools to deflate protest and then discarded. During the disorders, cities which have groups of Type III are remarkable studies in struggle for influence between institutional authorities and nascent alternate powers. However, after the disorder, or when all danger of a major conflagration has passed, groups in Cell III tend to collapse. Many cities voted to salary and support "cool-it" groups during and shortly after a riot, but the salaries inevitably dried up, often with the end of summer. At that point, long-standing tensions between the groups and the police often resurfaced, and the groups might move into Cell IV of the typology.

Type IV: Adversarial and opposed by police. The groups in Cell IV of the typology, although relatively small in number, are the most dramatic. Adversarial patrols have emerged among minority groups or where there are concentrations of whites with deviant life styles and dissenting political beliefs, as there are around university communities. Although specific tactics differ, most of the Type IV groups seek to protect their communities from what they see as police excesses by trying to oversee actual police operations or attacking police. In at least two cities, members of a self-defense patrol carried cameras to record police behavior during arrest situations. In another case, a self-defense group listened to police radio calls for the location of complaints likely to result in arrests and then showed up and urged those involved to leave before police arrived.

Police see these groups as among their most dangerous enemies. They say that most of the members have arrest records, that members have searched cars and homes without authority, and that the members themselves are as active on the side of crime and riots as in their prevention. While there may be some or a great deal of substance to the police assessment, it is also true that police surveillance of Type IV groups is intensive. There are many instances of police harassment of such groups, as in the cases of the original Black Panthers of Oakland, when they had active patrols, or the Deacons of Louisiana. Such groups have a volatile natural history. In the case of one Type IV group, 80 percent of its members were reportedly in jail at the time we made our inquiry.

Many groups which end up in Cell IV began in Cell III. Almost invariably, the groups lost the tolerance of the police through efforts to regulate police behavior, thus challenging the absolute supremacy of the police. As an example, the Community Alert Patrol in Los Angeles had applied for (and received provisional approval of) \$238,000 in Health, Education and Welfare funds to finance their operations. The grant included \$1600 for cameras and tape recorders, and any evidence of police misbehavior was to have been recorded and submitted for the investigation of complaints. The police opposed the patrol, saying they did not need “nonpolicemen to police the police,” and funding was halted.

In part, police oppose Type IV groups simply because they are most clearly “anti-police.” But Type IV groups are also those which, more than the other three types of groups, carry weapons, use violence to establish their authority, and resist any kind of control over their operations. It might be argued, of course, that these three traits are also characteristic of the police themselves and that such groups come closest to being competitors and alternatives to regular police. A number of police officials reported that their main objection to the Type IV group in their city was that it did things that only police were entitled to do. Although it is difficult to stipulate its content precisely, there is clearly a threshold between civilians and police which no citizens are permitted to cross.

2. Self-Defense Groups and the Communities They Wish to Serve

In part because they raise the spectre of vigilantism, self-defense groups are likely to be attended by controversy. Even in the case of supplemental organizations where communities generally seem to be united in their recognition of law enforcement problems, they are often divided over the appropriateness of the self-defense solution. In the case of adversarial groups, the host communities are even more sharply divided. The difference may be due, in part, to the lack of agreement among citizens as to whether or not the police are a problem to be dealt with, controlled, or exorcised.

For example, in Boston, a proposal to establish a police-controlled community patrol was supported by some black leaders as a vehicle for improving police-community cooperation. But the Boston National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was highly critical and rejected the proposal. An NAACP position paper called for increased numbers of patrolmen, saying that the overwhelming majority of the black citizens in the area wanted adequate and just police protection, not an amateur substitute. Its statement suggested that if crime rose on Boston’s Beacon Hill or other equally wealthy parts of the city, the city’s response would be augmented police forces. The statement added:

It is shameful that where Black people in particular are concerned—whether they are a majority or minority in an area—officials and leaders leap for short

cuts, ill-designed programs and faulty planning which in the long run render the situation worse than it was in its previous state ... Citizens throughout the city are entitled to proper police protection; they should not have to rely on a volunteer group to shoulder this responsibility.

Perhaps ironically, the same proposal was attacked by Boston militants. In the *People’s South End News* (July 1970), an article opposed the community patrol, saying:

If the power structure can keep the people arguing over (1) more pigs in the community or an unarmed auxiliary police force; (2) and continue to keep racial tensions high, they will never get around to the real issue facing every community. That is, community control of police and the total withdrawal of the present occupying army... It’s long past the time to stop fighting each other, and deal with the enemy.

In another example, two community organizers concerned with reducing crime in a housing project in a small New England town sought to encourage residents to organize a self-defense group. The organizers acknowledged that most residents felt the crime problem could be best handled by assigning more police to the project. Yet their hostility to the police and concern that increased regular police would undermine the community’s control over their own affairs led them to try to establish a self-defense group.

At least in Boston, and probably elsewhere (particularly in the North), a clear community mandate for any given autonomous self-defense group as an alternative to regular police is likely to be lacking (though considerable support may exist for the general principle of citizen involvement). The absence of a broad base of popular support may explain in part why Types III and IV live precariously and often have a short life.

However great their failings sometimes are, regular police forces still have something of a legal, consensual mandate to operate, though the strength of this mandate no doubt weakens as social class decreases or the proportion of nonwhite citizens increases. Although in practice the controls are often inoperative, there are still some constraints on police behavior by the courts, local officials, and state and federal government. For most self-defense groups, in the absence of a clear mandate from the communities they wish to serve, the problem of accountability is potentially a highly problematic one. Some groups, of course, may claim a community mandate which appears stronger than it really is because of community indifference, lack of awareness of the group, or fear of intimidation by it.

Legitimacy may simply be denied those seeking to play police roles. Though policing by one’s peers seems much more desirable than an outside praetorian guard, it may not always work. Neighborhood policemen may be seen as neighbors not police. Thus, in one housing project when an irregularly employed resident with a reputation for inebriation took a job in a tenant’s patrol, he found that his efforts to maintain order were met with amusement

and retorts such as, “you’re old Ernie; you ain’t a cop.” Or if legitimacy is granted, the appeal to ties of ethnicity, class, generation, or neighborhood may inhibit fair and universalistic behavior by those on patrol.

The legitimacy issue is also complicated by raising the question for heterogeneous areas: “In whose eyes?” Groups are likely to receive greater or lesser support depending on the degree of homogeneity between the racial and ethnic backgrounds (and other social characteristics as well) of the group doing the patrolling, the group it feels it is protecting, and the groups from whom it is seen to need protection. Many combinations in terms of support from the public are possible, and each has a potentially different outcome. A predominantly white patrol group in an area in racial transition is likely to meet more conflict than a black group in an all-black area.

For groups which emerge out of already existing organizations such as a civil defense unit, a minister’s association, athletic teams or faculty on the college campus, and community action and service organizations, problems of organization and legitimacy, while present, are likely to be less pronounced.

There also are problems of an operational nature. Most police interventions stem from citizen requests, usually through telephoning. Even if citizens have heard of the group, they may not know how to contact them. The groups are limited to observable behavior in public places.

3. The Recruitment and Training of Personnel

In discussing civilian mobilization around the issue of law enforcement, one police scholar writes:

Experience has shown that it is not alone the super defenders of hearth and home who clamor for an opportunity to serve. Truculent, disorderly, intolerant, and downright vicious elements also flock to police standards at such time [of crisis], from motives of their own and with objectives foreign to the maintenance of civil peace.¹²

There is, of course, likely to be variation among groups, and differences in the resources available to screen and train personnel, as well as the will to do this. The exact criteria for membership in the patrols are often not formalized and may depend on the whim of a charismatic leader. In Newark, Anthony Imperiale (who supported George Wallace in the 1968 presidential election) claims that he dismisses any member of his group whom he suspects of racism. He notes, “Many people came to us because of my old name as a Negro hater, but we have special details to look out for these people. They’re a bigger threat than the black militants.”¹³

In 1969 before aspirant members were allowed to patrol with the Jewish Defense League in Boston they were required to have an interview with the

12. B. Smith, *Police Systems in the United States* (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 314.

13. *Christian Science Monitor* (January 16, 1970): 2.

group’s psychiatrist (himself an ex-green beret) to screen out sadistic, unstable, or otherwise undesirable applicants.¹⁴ A JDL patrol coordinator reports receiving calls from a number of people, including members of outlaw motorcycle clubs, who wanted to shoot blacks and adds “the line between dedication and screwballs is very close.” The “defenders,” a group studied by Harold Nelson, requires, beyond a thorough background investigation, that members be married and, to weed out romantics and the inexperienced, that they have served in the military at least six weeks under active war combat conditions. Some adversarial police patrols require nothing more than an oath and memorization of a political party platform.¹⁵

Little is known about the range of motives that may lead a citizen to join (and stay in) a community patrol group, just as relatively little is known about why people seek to enter regular police forces beyond the quest for a steady job.¹⁶ American police departments that have a relatively thorough selection process (such as Los Angeles, which takes less than 5 percent of those who apply) still face many serious police-community relations problems.¹⁷ It seems likely that self-defense groups, which often experience manpower shortages and which have much less stringent screening or membership requirements, would stand a far greater chance of recruiting people not emotionally (or, in

14. Included in the undesirable category was a social researcher seeking to do participant observation. However, the ability of some people to patrol without the participation interview suggests that it may also have a public relations function.

15. It has been suggested that one factor (in addition to actions of the government) in the increased violence of the Black Panthers in 1969 and 1970 was a relaxation in their membership screening.

16. An additional motivational factor almost always neglected by social researchers either out of good taste, ideology, or the vast distance between them and those they are studying is the careerist implications that can be involved in the emergence of such noninstitutional phenomena. As with most human matters, motivation may sometimes be less pure than it appears. In describing a case, Tom Wolfe notes:

There was one genius in the art of confrontation who had mau-mauing down to what you could term a laboratory science. He had it figured out so he didn’t even have to bring his boys downtown in person. He would just show up with a crocus sack full of revolvers, ice picks, fish knives, switchblades, hatchets, blackjacks, gravity knives, straight razors, hand grenades, blow guns, bazookas, Molotov cocktails, tank rippers, unbelievable stuff, and he’d dump it all out on somebody’s shiny walnut conference table. He’d say “These are some of the things I took off my boys last night... I don’t know, man ... Thirty minutes ago I talked a Panther out of busting up a cop... ” and they would lay money on this man’s ghetto youth patrol like it was now or never. . . .

Tom Wolfe, *Radical Chic and Mau-mauing the Flak Catchers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970).

17. Perhaps something can be inferred about the greater abuse potential of those rejected by regular police by noting that private security guards, who seem to be higher in the abuse of their powers than traditional police, are often rejected applicants for the regular force. This may also be true of some who join citizen patrols. The leader of a highly publicized group in an eastern city had reportedly been rejected several times in his bid to join the regular police force. He subsequently set up his own.

some cases, morally) suited to policing others.¹⁸ Police folklore suggests that this is the case, although adequate empirical data are not available.

Patrols strive for public approval or official recognition. However, given the characteristics of many of those who become involved, this may be difficult—particularly in minority neighborhoods, where law enforcement tensions are greatest and where many self-defense groups accept for membership men with arrest records. Unfortunately, an arrest record is an ecological fact of life in such areas and need not imply very much about a person's character or potential. It may even be indicative of an ability to relate better than alien police to the young men on the street likely to be engaged in crime and civil disorders. Yet it also may influence the acceptability and image of the group in the eyes of the police and in at least some parts of the communities they wish to serve.

Even where such problems of membership are not present, a related problem reported in several cities involved nonpatrol members impersonating patrol members and using their authority and coercion to obtain personal or illegal ends. In several cities, supposed abuses of patrol members turned out to involve persons pretending to be in the patrol. Loose organization and ill-defined criteria for membership facilitate such impersonation, and the jackets or armbands which some patrols use as identifying symbols are easily obtained. Impersonation is less likely in the case of regular police, given their uniforms, badges, and clear criteria for membership.

4. Choosing Self-Defense Operations

The operations of many self-defense groups are conditioned by the nature of the precipitating event. Civil disorders, such as the ones in Newark, have given rise to youth patrols attempting to restore calm to their communities as well as to patrols in white areas, such as Imperiale's, concerned with keeping supposed black rioters out. Campus sit-ins have given rise to student and faculty marshalls. Attacks on women leaving church services have led to escort groups. Attacks on civil rights figures have resulted in protective guards, especially in the South. The Oakland Black Panthers' observations of police activities grew out of the police killing of a black. In New York, tenant patrol groups began frequenting poorly lit areas of their housing projects and, in many cases, rode the elevators with otherwise unaccompanied women after a number of apartment and elevator murders. The Boston Jewish Defense League placed guards in front of synagogues after several were burned. A series of closing-time robberies led one group to stay in stores as they were about to close. Children dying from drug overdoses have given rise to anti-drug groups in various cities. Requests from constituents for a certain kind of

18. Of course, this type of criticism seems less appropriate where an entire community of people has been excluded from involvement with the official police force, as it is in many southern communities.

service, help with a child in trouble or protection from harassment, can also help define a group's activities.¹⁹

In other cases an already functioning organization may come to see policing as compatible with its ends. Civil defense groups have given rise to various anti-crime activities. They offer an organizational structure, are neighborhood based, and have an ethos and sense of mission entirely compatible with crime control (this is of course also true of the local male youth, athletic, and fraternal groups which have been involved in patrolling). Some groups have emerged from civic, community welfare and development organizations. In one midwestern city a "clean up and beautification campaign" has since given rise to another kind of clean-up campaign involving local groups with a crime-awareness program.

Yet it is one thing to agree that there are problems and quite another to decide what lines of action are appropriate and possible. The role of the citizen patroller is not as clearly defined as is that of a teaching aide or hospital volunteer, and it appears to have basic conflicts structured into it. Although the groups have considerable latitude of choice with regard to operations, their use of weapons is subject to obvious restrictions. Almost no groups admit to carrying guns, although police said that two groups did.

In carrying out their activities, self-defense groups face potentially serious legal problems. They are on patrol; yet they lack the power of arrest and the right to use force granted regular police. There is no intermediary status in American society between the role of citizen and that of policeman. Unless a citizen, however concerned, is deputized or admitted to the low-power police auxiliaries, he can have no law-enforcement powers beyond those of the ordinary citizen. And the citizen's power in law enforcement is severely circumscribed, with potentially serious penalties for its usurpation.

In almost all cities, police errors (and sometimes abuses not stemming from errors) are routinely excused as justifiable, given the margin of error thought to be required in the performance of a dangerous and difficult job. But citizens, even those with police approval, do not receive the same de facto protective blanket. Instead, they are fully liable to tort actions for wrongful death or injury. Given the nature of self-defense operations, it seems likely that those affected by the groups would seek redress if they felt unjustly dealt with.

Although the legal situation is at present ambiguous, it is not at all clear that self-defense groups even have workable powers of citizens' arrest. In general, citizens are not allowed to use force unless it is to defend themselves personally from felonious violence. Short of that, in theory, citizens may not have the power to restrain, hold, or subdue suspects in most criminal behavior. And in

19. For example, a woman in an area many miles from where the Boston Jewish Defense League regularly patrols reported anti-Semitic harassment by a gang of local youth. After a "discussion" with a Jewish Defense League delegation, the gang's harassment reportedly stopped.

the case of adversarial groups, even if citizens did have the power to arrest or otherwise restrict police, such power is unlikely to be recognized.

As pressure is brought to bear on them, or the limits and ambiguities of the patrols are realized, some groups rather quickly abandon active patrols in favor of political action. They may move from threats of vigilante action to holding meetings, pressuring the city council, or evaluating the law-and-order record of judges and candidates. The groups or individuals in them may become part of the regular police auxiliary. Well-to-do communities may hire licensed private security guards. Groups that remain with active patrols may seek legitimacy through the concept of citizens' arrest and the right of self-defense and by stressing their support of regular police. They may be very careful to follow all laws. They may publicly stress that their actions are limited to observation and communications. They may be instructed to avoid any confrontation or use of force and simply be a presence. In one city, patrollers are told not to leave their radio cars unless asked to do so by police.

While an emphasis on the supportive and legal nature of a patrol may be conducive to support from authorities and some members of the community, it may alienate others who will more clearly see them as agents of regular police. Herein lies a dilemma. In such cases, to gain community support they must differentiate themselves from police and stress their independence; yet in doing this they may alienate themselves from police, whose support, at least tacitly, they are likely to require. In Watts, for example, members of the Community Action Patrol were accused of being police agents. To allay fears and suspicions that they would "rat" on blacks by reporting crimes to police, a patrol's commander publicly stated that they would not do this. This then further strengthened police opposition.

The role of citizen patrollers tends to lack clarity and there is not much consensus about what it should entail. It is often unclear whom a group is serving, or what actions it should be taking. During a period of civil disorder, for example, are patrollers agents of established authority, third party intervenors serving as a buffer between (or controls on both) antagonists, or are they agents of an aggrieved community? Even if patrollers have clearly defined this issue for themselves, others may not see them in the same way.

Police may see those playing such roles as part of the problem and not grant them the legitimacy promised by higher officials. For example, according to the governor of New Jersey, during the Newark riot black peacekeeping volunteers (supported by the mayor and the state government) "were chased around so much by [law enforcement] people who suspected them as participating in the riot that they had to abandon their efforts."²⁰ During a Cincinnati riot, police refused to cooperate with black peacekeepers (given badges by the mayor) and arrested them on charges of loitering. A similar

20. Governor's Select Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report for Action* (New Jersey, 1968).

situation regarding the efforts of student and faculty marshalls prevailed during some campus disorders.

On the other hand, police may treat a group which sees itself as a more neutral peacekeeping force (trying to maintain order while remaining a buffer between authorities and an angry community) as if they were merely an extension of regular police. That the groups need at least tacit police support may offer police a means of bargaining for ends they seek. Given the apprehension, prevention, and surveillance goals of police, there appear to be pressures to move neutral buffer groups into more explicit police activities. Thus, in one city in Kansas, the police chief who cooperated in the setting up of a patrol group later tried unsuccessfully to get the head of the group to infiltrate the Black Panthers. In another city a patrol leader was asked to ride with police and point out "troublemakers." In a western city, local citizen "beat committees" are encouraged to write legislators about "laws due to come before the legislature which the [police] department believes would be beneficial, also those which hamper our efforts." Yet, even with police support, broader political changes may greatly affect a group. Thus, in one midwestern city a newly elected law-and-order mayor replaced the police chief and dissolved a citizens' patrol he had helped to sponsor.

Even where a group is clearly able to play a role independent of authorities, some members of the community they wish to relate to will simply see them as auxiliary police, no matter what the group does. Dissenting political ideas and the fact that the group may have some of the same ends and trappings of regular police (paramilitary organization, uniforms, radio cars, walkie-talkies, etc.) for some people are conducive to seeing indigenous patrols as, in principle, indistinguishable from regular police.

The question of how indigenous policing groups maintain (or try to maintain) credibility with those they wish to serve is an important one. One definition adopted by some black adversarial groups is to try and enforce the morality of the dominant society but not to use its institutional means. A frequent appeal by ghetto patrols to disorderly youths was "Come on, we don't want the cops in here." Several patrols were set up by ex-felons, not to aide police, but to try and keep their friends out of trouble. As one activist put it, "the attitude is you don't want to be a policeman; you want to help." A Baton Rouge group's overall purpose is "looking after the people." This includes victims of crime as well as victimizers. In some places part of looking after the latter may mean getting them to cease criminal activity without turning them over to police and courts. Black groups in some areas are seeking to drive narcotics peddlers, thieves, and prostitutes out of their communities without involving regular police.

Legitimacy may also be sought through a spillover effect as the group's operations come to involve less controversial activities. A number of groups had a tendency to expand into traditional welfare activities: ambulance

services, free health clinics, free breakfast and lunch programs, job counseling, tutoring programs, all-purpose complaint centers, Little League baseball teams, community oriented business, etc. This may help their image in the eyes of an uncertain community. Social assistance and order maintenance activities raise fewer problems for a group than do efforts at enforcing the law. They can also give the organization new life and purpose.

5. Incentives for Group Survival

A large proportion of self-defense groups fail to develop the requisites for prolonged group survival such as with a formal organization having a relatively clear sense of direction and a continuing source of support. Type I organizations appear to be the most permanent. They are also the most bureaucratic and most likely to be able to pay members. The presence of resources as such is not, however, a guarantee of success; they can result in much in-fighting and factionalism as members of a group compete to control what is available.²¹

The existence of other types of groups seems to depend largely on a sudden felt crisis (civil disorder, a particularly horrible crime or instance of police brutality, a rapidly changing neighborhood) or on a charismatic leader. When these conditions are no longer present, such groups tend to disperse. The modeling influence of the media is important here. For example, within six weeks after the first youth patrol appeared during the 1967 civil disorders, at least eight more appeared. As the riots subsided, so did the groups.

For many of the young, lower-status males involved in patrol groups, to be invested with the symbols of authority (armbands, special jackets, badges, identification cards, uniforms, etc.), and to be offered a degree of respect and responsibility usually denied them had great meaning. In the words of one observer, "the uniform helps a lot; it makes a man feel like a big shot." In the initial stages, such intangibles were important motivating factors. Yet, for many people involved in volunteer groups over a period of time, certificates and banquets are of limited effectiveness as motivating devices. Many police interviewed could not understand why citizens would be willing to undertake gratuitously such a job with its hazards and ambiguities.

An unconscientious approach to the task, which characterizes some policemen, may also characterize patrollers. In the case of one tenant patrol in a high-crime project area, some volunteers preferred to stay in the lobbies where it was warm rather than patrol stairwells and elevators where there was danger of attack or encounter.

Beyond the need to cope with a severely felt problem or payment for the work, such self-defense groups may attract members for a variety of reasons,

21. The leader of a successful Boston group sees the voluntary nature of his group as being crucial to its success and reports "money has been the death of other organizations."

such as the desire for novelty, excitement, authority, and machismo. Such needs can be satisfied or frustrated by group operations. The participants interviewed rarely reported encounters, and so their tasks may quickly become routine. While this might be an argument for the deterrent value of patrols, it does not help sustain those whose motivation for joining involves the search for action. An observer of the Newark North Ward Citizens Committee reports, "Actually, though the potential for excitement is most obviously there, the patrols tend to be boring."²² As of August 1970, after many months of operation, the Jewish Defense League in Boston had not reported any direct encounters with offenders. After three and a half years the founder of a housing authority patrol had not seen anything "really suspicious" and saw the work as "mostly tedious duty." An analysis of a Minneapolis Indian Patrol notes "On a given night they might help no one. They might not observe any arrests nor encounter any police officers."²³ A common theme in a number of accounts was the boring, routine nature of patrols. There is a high attrition rate and in eastern and midwestern areas participation rates drop appreciably in the winter.

Even those groups which develop an organizational structure and are successful in keeping order and reducing crime or perceived police abuse are not assured of continued existence. In fact, under some circumstances, organizational success may even make survival less likely. A weak, disorganized adversarial group may be seen to pose less of a threat to regular police than a stronger group. For example, when a group—through the use of cameras and tape recorders or the threatened use of violence against policemen seen as offenders—begins to make the police feel its presence, strong pressures may emerge for the group's abolition. The success of groups in dealing with crime or disorders may also be seen to highlight the failure of regular police. Though a degree of external conflict may increase a group's solidarity and will to struggle, political pressure, particularly from police, has disbanded apparently successful programs in a number of cities including Los Angeles, New York, Minneapolis, and Pittsburgh (California).

SOME IMPLICATIONS

The emergence of self-defense groups (along with increases in gun sales, homicide and riot) represent a countertrend to the increasing tendency of the state to monopolize the means of violence and to extend its control ever outward. The twentieth century has seen a decline in American traditions of

22. P. Goldberger, "Tony Imperiale Stands Vigilant For Law and Order," *New York Times Magazine* (September 29, 1968) p. 120.

23. Fay Cohen, "The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis: Social Control and Social Change in An Urban Context," *Law and Society Review* 1 (Summer, 1973): 784.

nongovernmental interference in private violence.²⁴ The groups represent a return to an earlier less differentiated period of American history.

Max Weber has argued that a major characteristic of the modern state is its ability to claim “the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”²⁵ But, compared to highly centralized European countries, this process is much less pronounced in the United States, a country whose Bill of Rights guarantees each citizen “the right to keep and bear arms.” Where it exists, the struggle between citizen patrol groups and the state is part of a broader historical process and the unresolved conflict over the role of force in modern American life.

Beneath the surface of our supposedly monopolistic social control institutions and our beliefs about the legality of government violence and the illegality of private violence, there endures considerable support for violence of a private, noninstitutionalized, and nonbureaucratic character. This draws on populist and frontier traditions. The United States is perhaps unique among industrialized nations in the strength of this sentiment. It is not surprising that such citizen patrols are almost unknown in most European societies. The patrols can be seen as the iceberg tip of America’s potential for the private violence that is likely under greatly increased levels of crime and disorder. Indeed, we have not begun to think about the implications of the increase in privately owned handguns by Americans. In the last ten years this has increased from ten million to forty million. Popular films such as *Death Wish* serve to diffuse and legitimate a vigilantism model.

In our survey of citizen attitudes toward patrol groups in the Boston area, a very high level of support was found.²⁶ Of adults between the ages of twenty-one and sixty-five in the Boston area, *over half* (55 percent of whites; 69 percent of blacks) supported the idea of supplemental citizen patrols. Perhaps even more surprising, *over half* (55 percent of whites and 70 percent of blacks) also supported the idea of groups which try to check up on the police by observing their operations.

If this finding can be generalized to adults between the ages of twenty-one and sixty-five in all American metropolitan areas the size of Boston or larger, it means (conservatively, using the white percentage based upon the 1970 census) that there are more than 12 million Americans who could support supplemental and/or adversarial citizen patrols in their communities. If our findings can be further generalized to adults between the ages of twenty-one and sixty-five in all urban areas, regardless of size, the number of Americans

24. For example, see A. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-In* (Garden City; Doubleday, 1966).

25. H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 78.

26. A full report of the survey can be found in our paper, “Picking Up the Gun: Some Organizational and Survey Data on Community Police Patrols,” in the proceedings of The Symposium on Studies of Public Experience, Knowledge and Opinion of Crime and Justice, Bureau of Social Science Research (Washington, D.C., 1972).

who would support supplemental and adversarial patrols in their communities jumps to more than 42 million.

These perhaps unexpectedly high levels of support for citizen patrols make it interesting to speculate about the potential for vastly more widespread citizen mobilization in America under various kinds of provocation. For example, if crime or riots and social movements were more sustained or perceived as more of a threat than they have so far been, and law-enforcement authorities were unable to restore order, would literally millions of Americans pick up the gun to respond to the perceived threats with private violence?

Alternately, are there acts of police brutality or oppression sufficiently provocative to galvanize adversarial groups in far greater numbers than have been involved before? These speculations raise important, almost Hobbesian questions about the potential of private man to resort to his own violence if society’s monopoly of legitimate violence fails to preserve what is felt to be a desirable level of order. Although our research, of course, is far from providing predictions about the levels of vigilantism and private violence under various conditions, a study of existing citizen patrols can help to illuminate the fears and values which support or oppose citizen mobilization.

Self-defense groups raise important questions for public policy as well as for social theory and future research. The present paper is more an effort to raise issues and questions, and to establish a framework for additional research and thought, than a final presentation of results, firm conclusions, or a well-documented, single point of view. We have specified what seem to be two crucial variables, the group’s definition of the problem and the police response. An additional differentiating variable might be whether the group arises in a context where in principle and, at least to a degree, in practice (as in the North) law enforcement has a universalistic character, or in areas (as in parts of the South) where a group, such as blacks to a much greater degree, is granted protection neither by, nor from, law-enforcement officials. A related variable might be whether the group primarily seeks protection from crimes which violate widely held legal and moral standards or (as in the case of the Ku Klux Klan) seeks to enforce a particular set of social practices on a community. It may be that little is to be gained in trying to make broad generalizations about such highly varied groups which may share little more than a desire to act on law enforcement issues.

Let us then restrict our focus to the more prevalent and enduring supplemental groups which are concerned with violations of widely held legal and moral standards in a milieu where there is at least an expressed value of universalistic police protection (e.g., parts of the South are excluded). Most of the existing evaluations of such self-defense groups have been based on hunches, impressionistic evidence, deductions from abstract political theory, parallels to earlier periods of American history, and often a goodly dose of ideological self-justification. But, given the limitations on the nature of the

available data, what can we conclude about self-defense groups? Perhaps the safest conclusion is how little is known about them.

But next, the most striking feature of the groups we considered involves the large number of organizational and operational difficulties they face—and the related phenomenon of the relatively short lifespan which many groups experience. Many problems are inherent in authority relations, and groups trying to establish new policing institutions face complex problems not faced by regular police, in addition to all the problems facing the police.

Self-defense groups often lack a clear mandate from the groups they wish to serve and their legal position regarding the use of force and citizen arrests is ambiguous. They may have trouble defining their task. The tendency of the groups to lack the resources for recruiting, screening, and training appropriate manpower, and for sustaining motivation beyond that which stems from a deeply felt crisis (and the degree of autonomy some groups have) may contribute to ineffectiveness and abuses. And even if internal problems are solved, the groups may face harassment from police.

Yet the survival and growth of some groups show that these difficulties are not always insurmountable. It becomes important to ask why. Three important factors would seem to be (1) a crisis that continues to be deeply felt, (2) the presence of a charismatic leader, or at least one capable of performing the delicate liaison role between his patrol group, its presumed constituency, and authorities, (3) the emergence of a formally organized group with a continuing source of financial support.

The longest lived groups tend to be those in Cells I and II of the typology developed earlier (supplemental). They are subject to varying degrees of regulation by local government but in return are able to draw on their financial support and legitimacy. Patrols made up of those higher in social position seem more likely to endure. Also relevant to survival and commitment is whether the group is united by more than a common enemy. Does it have an ideology which helps bind members together and tells them what they are *for* as well as what they are *against*? Are patrols only one part of a broader program, as with some black groups and the Jewish Defense League?

EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of self-defense group operations has not been evaluated with any kind of systematic before-and-after data, such as reports of crime, civil disorders, complaints against police, citizen feelings of safety, attitudes toward the groups and the police, and police and group abuses.²⁷ In terms of

27. For the evaluation of a one-week New York City experiment, G. Nash, *The Community Patrol Corps* (New York: Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, 1968). It is perhaps unfair, of course, to ask for evidence of the effectiveness of patrols in reducing crime when

the ability to survive organizationally, a majority of groups appear to fail. But while they are operative their consequences can be assessed. Moreover, as will be indicated, the disappearance of a group may not mean failure. One factor inhibiting the evaluation of effectiveness may be competition with regular police. Thus, the police in one large eastern city have refused to release crime data that would permit some assessment of the effect of a large housing authority tenant patrol. Many groups have a spontaneous and nonbureaucratized quality not much given to systematic evaluation efforts.²⁸

If there is little evidence that marked regular police patrol cars prevent crime, there is even less indication of the success of irregular, often unclearly marked citizen police patrol cars, though they do occasionally relay information to police. Escort services may mean crimes are prevented, though measuring events that don't happen can be difficult. Several informants reported that they thought the main consequence of their patrols was symbolic and participatory, rather than effective in actual reductions in the crime level. However, visible guards patrolling on foot in a limited area, such as an old people's home or a playground, have reduced vandalism and physical assaults. Some civil disorders, enlarged by regular police, have cooled when police were withdrawn and community patrols attempted to maintain order, though in other cases such patrols have seemed to have no effect.

It is interesting to speculate on the several possible relationships between the groups and disorders. At their inception, self-defense groups often tend to be a precipitate following from the perception of violence, injustice, and

evidence of the effectiveness of regular police patrols is also lacking. In the case of southern black adversarial groups there is impressionistic evidence that some of the more grievous white offenses have been curtailed. Charles Sims, a leader of the Louisiana Deacons, observes about groups such as his:

Well, when the white power structure found out that they had mens, Negro mens that had made up their minds to stand up for their people and to give no ground, would not tolerate with no more police brutality, it had a tendency to keep the nightriders out of the neighborhood.

In characterizing the essentially defensive character of his group, he notes, "The nonviolent act is a good act—providing the policemen do their job. But in the southern states ... the police have never done their job when the white and the Negro are involved—unless the Negro's getting the best of the white man." *National Guardian* (August 20, 1965). See also the case study by H. A. Nelson, "The defenders."

For the North, the case seems less clear. Groups such as the Black Panthers have certainly helped publicize instances of police abuse, and may have served as a threat inhibiting police abuse. However, their activities may also mean a reduction of police protection as police become more hesitant to take action for fear of criticism and in order to avoid troublesome situations.

28. Some of the most interesting patrol action is also likely to be very well hidden given its "by any means necessary" character. For example, recent rumors are that former SNCC workers and street gang members in a vigilante action are moving to rid black communities of drug pushers. Note ten unsolved murders and numerous shootings of suspected narcotics distributors in New York City. *New York Times* (January 23, 1972): 2; also *Newsweek* (September 27, 1971): 75-76.

lawlessness. If the groups do derive from urban disorders and violent crimes, then presumably self-defense groups would deflate as conditions of order and stability are (often as a result of their own actions) reestablished. While some groups such as the Tampa and Dayton White Hats or the Youth Alliance in Boston appear to have contributed to a reduction of civil disorder, some groups of Type IV may have had a reverse effect on general racial conflict and polarization, if not necessarily on civil disorders. At least some self-defense organizations may themselves become independently strong variables in the disorders which were their occasion. Particularly in urban areas, the groups may give organization and sometimes arms to long-standing hostilities between police and citizens. At the same time, those organizations which operate street patrols may bring into direct contact, often without police mediation, populations whose mutual fears and prejudices are currently tempered by distance. On the other hand (as the decline in labor violence associated with the growth of labor unions suggests), organization, through binding potentially violent members and creating collectivities which can negotiate, may actually reduce violence.²⁹

Self-defense groups may also have an importance beyond themselves. Citizen mobilization around the issues of lawlessness and crime or police abuse and neglect may be symbolic of broader tensions during periods of rapid transition. For example, the issue of order has face value but can also be a fairly respectable euphemism for preventing a redistribution of power between competing groups in society. Armed patrols organized by minority groups have also been means for facilitating power changes and questioning traditional standards.

One of the more striking things about the patrols is that, relative to what might be expected, there has been so little organized interethnic and interracial violent conflict. Although far more people probably have access to weapons today than in the 1930s, there seem to have been relatively fewer clashes between (as against clashes within groups or between them and the state) ethnic and racial groups. Such groups today, with several prominent exceptions, tend much more to be literally *self-defense* groups prepared and waiting for attack and violations from some other group, rather than making offensive attacks. A factor here may be the *achieved* rather than *ascribed* source of the problem. The issue is defined (at least publicly) not as an ethnic

29. In Newark, Imperiale's group maintained contact with black groups, such as that led by Le Roi Jones, and even had a direct telephone link. In considering one event Imperiale observes:

There was an incident one night, when we were supposed to have done something. The hot line rings. It's Kamil Wadeu Security [Le Roi Jones' Chief of Staff]. Immediately through our radios we dispatch one of our cars, check it out and find it's a fallacy. In the meantime Kamil's people are in the area, checking out the same thing. We dispel the rumor together, before all our people take to the street and start something.

Quoted in Goldberger, *New York Times Magazine*, p. 118.

group but as a problem: crime and disorder. As one observer noted, "Their orientation is antihoodlum not anti-ethnic." As a result many white northern groups have some black members as well, though the reverse pattern seems less prevalent. Several of the more successful patrols (at least judged in organization and endurance terms) are well integrated. But the lack of offensive group violence is also partly a result of the greater inclusion of white groups into the dominant society and their greater stake in it and of increased residential segregation, particularly in the North. In this sense the greater isolation of whites and blacks and the emergence of clearly delineated ethnic areas may ironically serve to reduce conflict, if at a cost to other desired values.

It would be a mistake to look only at the direct effects of civilian policing groups. In a number of cities, the groups have performed critical catalytic functions—suggesting, in some cases, that the groups are used by communities to bargain for what they want in the way of law-enforcement changes. In addition to their face value meaning as alternative institutions, the self-defense groups act as a form of demand on the law-enforcement system. For example, when citizens in Brockton, Massachusetts organized to apply for gun permits to protect their homes from a wave of housebreaks, city officials met to discuss the lack of adequate police protection. In response to the self-defense initiative of the citizens, the chief of police promised to ask the mayor for additional men and for overtime pay to extend the number of police man-hours in the city. Some of the police interviewed in our study welcomed the groups as a citizen's lobby seen as better able than the police to exert pressure on the political system. Beyond increasing police resources, groups in some places have made it easier for police to crack down. The police may argue that unless they are allowed to act quickly, vigilantes will. The possible illegality of both actions, those of police and vigilantes, may seem less important than the need to prevent vigilante behavior.

The bargaining element is also present in the case of adversarial groups. In summarizing the position of the Defenders, Harold Nelson observes, "if police failed to perform their duties, either they would have to be forced to do so, or someone else would have to perform them."³⁰ Even where a group lacks power to actually do either of these, it may be important in symbolically communicating dissatisfaction with the status quo. The threat of violence from an adversarial group may also increase the acceptability of more moderate protest groups.

The bargaining perspective, of course, enlarges the criteria for evaluating the success of citizen policing efforts. Groups which successfully change police operations as they wish may be thought of as successful, whether or not their patrolling or other activities are long-lived.

Similarly, whatever their objective consequences, some of the groups may

30. Nelson, *Social Problems*, p. 130.

increase citizen feelings of security and reduce feelings of isolation. The patrols may be appreciated for listening and at least trying to act on the complaints and fears of those who feel ignored and forgotten by city governments. They may also contribute to a sense of self-worth and responsibility on the part of participants. Members of the larger, often problem-ridden communities the patrols wish to serve may gain pride and a sense of satisfaction in seeing the community organize to help itself. The Maccabees in the Crown Heights area of New York appear to have served as a cohesive force and slowed down the rapid demographic transition of their neighborhood.

Finally, some citizen patrol groups may form a symbiotic relationship with police. We came across occasional hints that group members sometimes did things for police which the latter were prevented from doing, in return for police cooperation or noninterference in the patrol's operations. In one instance, members of a patrol group kidnapped, through their own means obtained a confession, and then turned over to police a murder suspect who had been released earlier for insufficient evidence. The suspect was subsequently charged with the crime. The cooperation which has existed between the Ku Klux Klan and some southern police is well known. While the dimensions and extensiveness of such symbiotic relations are not known, to the extent that supplemental groups consider police as handicapped from within by overzealous concern for the rights of suspects, extralegal criminal investigations and techniques are not improbable.

Citizen involvement in law enforcement, particularly when it involves autonomous groups, is unlike other forms of citizen participation. The stakes are higher; the risk of miscarriage may be greater, and the consequences of abuse or error appear more serious. New institutions such as the Catholic schools of an earlier era and current community schools, or ethnic and racially centered hospitals and welfare organizations, often face, in addition to some of the organizational problems of older institutions, major difficulties in obtaining resources, but they have generally not aroused as much opposition, resentment, and fear as have some of the patrols. What is at stake here is control over the means of violence and coercion that are so central to the organization of the state itself.

Like other efforts for increased citizen participation, the self-defense groups raise issues with inbuilt trade-offs. The enthusiasm of the group members is usually offset by their lack of professional training; the inclusion of some sectors of an urban community can antagonize other sectors; the use of local residents to protect their own communities may mean a sacrifice of the ideal of the disinterested and even-handed peace officer, but a gain in the ability to relate to the community in question.

On a personal note, let us consider our own ambivalence toward such

groups, an ambivalence rooted in contradictory aspects of the American value system and the unmet needs of a sizeable proportion of the American public.

First, it is clear that an acceptable level of public security does not exist in many low income communities, and serious conflicts may exist between police and citizens in such areas. Often police are either unwilling or lacking the resources to provide adequate protection. Rigid requirements may preclude many potentially effective local men from joining the force (such as previous arrest records; past history of radical activities; minimum height, weight and age requirements; or the need to be a policeman full-time). Police may also be separated from many of those they ostensibly serve (or at least deal with) by ideological, social, economic, racial, ethnic, religious, geographical, attitudinal, and age factors. Along with this may go a resulting lack of knowledge about, concern with, or sympathy for a community and patterns of hostility and mistrust on all sides. The isolation of police from their constituents is related to the exceptional degree of autonomy and problems of accountability which characterize some departments. The problems of overly rigid, nonresponsive, highly centralized bureaucracies are well known. As attempts to break through and go beyond the exclusive and professionalized provinces of established authority, self-defense groups are analogous to community mobilization around issues of schools, urban renewal, transportation, recreation, and welfare. They may be seen as a special form of the increasing demand for citizen participation in the planning, control, and delivery of the services which affect them. In light of these factors, the groups are not unappealing.

Who, after all, can be opposed to self-defense? In the best of American violent and populist traditions, the groups can be seen to represent action and involvement, self-help, embattled neighbors banding together in a righteous crusade against the dark forces of crime and disorder.

Yet there is clearly another side: the anti-democratic potential of privately organized citizen violence.³¹ Mass enthusiasm for direct action in the face of institutional restraints (the law, courts, elected officials, formal police bureaucracy, and procedure, etc.) for many people raises the spectre of the Ku Klux Klan and European fascist groups. The picture of independent armed entrepreneurs patrolling "their" heterogeneous communities is not one that can be unequivocally welcomed.

The rhetoric of vigilantism and threats to "take care of" a given group must be considered apart from a group's actual activities. A group may make threats of an extremist nature without intending to carry them out. Such rhetoric can be an important factor in political struggles. Some groups may

31. This is certainly not to deny the same potential and reality in government-organized violence.

have a high degree of control over their members. Yet they may be unable to limit the violent actions of nonmember sympathizers, who, unaware of the functions of rhetoric, may interpret such rhetorical threats as heroic calls to action. The consequences of such groups must be considered in terms of the general climate of opinion they help create.

Even where the threat of actual vigilante type violence is minimal, there is an ambiguity here reflecting a conflict in values not found to the same extent with citizen involvement in other public service bureaucracies. Take for example, the leaflets passed out by a sheriff's office in Oregon which ask citizens "do you know something the sheriff's office in Multnomah County should know?" On the one hand this can be seen as a legitimate appeal for cooperation with authorities for the enforcement of community standards involving the protection of persons and property. Yet on the other hand such citizen involvement can raise the specter of neighbors spying on each other under the benevolent (or not so benevolent) guidance of Big Brother. For many people the negative reaction against police in unmarked cars giving traffic tickets, or plainclothes police making arrests during demonstrations, would also apply to the policing actions of private citizens.

There is a second problem as well. The patrols can be seen as a mechanism for perpetuating the second class services that low income people often receive in American cities. As the survey data indicate, support and mobilization for the patrols is found disproportionately among lower status persons. In the event of a felt crisis over crime, middle class people apparently more often effectively press the government for the increased services of outside professional police specialists, or they hire private licensed guards. Lower status people are more likely to try and do the job themselves, or they may have such a solution thrust upon them by city government. In either case, inequality in city services may result.

Patrols organized around a particular ethnic group or class, aside from the chance of increasing interethnic and class conflict, may be based on the erroneous assumption that serious crime is the problem and responsibility of a specific ethnic group or class rather than a public problem and responsibility. The language of universalism, institutional restraints, and municipal responsibility is appealing from a standpoint of political theory and high school civics courses, its anti-patrol implications are obvious. However, it avoids the issue of what a group that feels threatened is to do if the government is unable or unwilling to provide the required services. In the words of one patrol leader, "If the government can't protect us then we have to protect ourselves."

Aside from their use in delimited and focused contexts of internal policing involving order maintenance and assistance (where clearer boundaries and a relatively homogeneous constituency are more likely to exist), as in rock concerts, protest demonstrations, schools and housing projects, it can be

argued that the patrols are inferior to more responsible and sensitive regular police who are carefully chosen, trained, and supervised in restructured departments.³²

Yet matters are unfortunately not so simple. American society has not dealt meaningfully enough with its lack of equality of opportunity, not to mention equality of outcome, and it shows little sign of doing so at present. Continuing high and increased levels of certain types of crime and disorder related to this are to be expected, as are increased citizen demands for security. To judge from the last ten years and the conditions of the cities, more responsible and sensitive regular police are not likely to be forthcoming in adequate supply. In such a context we may be left with the patrols as the better of limited alternatives.

32. Many of the problems and failings of such groups, of course, also characterize some police. However, the issue is not that police are always appreciably better, but that increasing the total amount of abuse does not seem desirable. In addition, although they are often inadequate, there are mechanisms for regulating police behavior.