

Citizens' Complaint Bureau

David Gaynes

1970

Some friends and I had occasion to check out the Citizens' Complaint Bureau recently. Located on the 4th floor of the YMCA, in the heart of beautiful downtown Detroit, this office is presumably set up to offer aid to the unfortunate citizen who has been brutalized, harassed or done injustice by the Detroit Police Department.

Oddly enough, the bureau is an arm of the police department. This creates some interesting situations and possibilities.

If it weren't for the fact that appointments are generally made in advance by telephone, it would be entirely possible to walk into the office and wind up face-to-face with the same pig that threatened to kill your ass out on the street the day before.

The bureau works hard to create the impression that they're really in the people's corner, defending them from a group of armed and licensed men who are known to be less than "professional" at times. ("Professional" policemen are _ those who manage to convey the impression that they really don't dislike you while they kick in your teeth.)

We were treated very courteously—I have to say that. The investigator on our case listened very politely and unemotionally to our story.

However, when we pressed him, he admitted that there was nothing he could really do but investigate.

"Listen," he said, lowering his voice in deference to a black officer working the desk adjacent to his own. "We had a colored fella in here this morning, y'know, complaining about the fact that he always gets stopped and gets tickets because he drives a red Cadillac and wears a (hand gestures indicating a beret) on his head.

"Now just like I'm telling you guys about your hair and all, I had to tell that guy—sure, we got some guys on the force that don't like you people, we know this, and we're trying to get programs together to sorta help things out, but, y'know if some officer stops you (the "colored fella") how can we tell if you were really speeding or if this guy just stopped you because he doesn't like you. It's your word against his."

That's right—it's your word against the word of one of their fellow pigs. Anyone with a firm grasp of the obvious can see what that means.

In a word: TOUGHSHIT.

In the course of our conversation with the bureau, we had a chance to really question and explore their attitudes. We tried to explain why people resent the police so much. I went back to that example of the black man who gets harassed for driving a red Cadillac. I explained to the officer that the man in question was-going to harbor a certain amount of resentment. Here the dude busts his ass to get up seven grand and trade it to GM for one of their dreamboats (guaranteed to command respect). What happens?

He can't drive it down the street without getting fucked-around by the pigs. Maybe he gets sick of it, and doesn't pay a ticket that he had no reason to get in the first place. Wham!! Next thing he knows he's

in jail. Somebody on the case probably calls him a nigger-and puts the handcuffs on a little tighter than they need to be. What about that? I asked the bureau(crut).

“Well, maybe some guy’s been on the force for ten, twenty years. He might not be too bright, or maybe he just doesn’t like some people...we can try to educate him, try to initiate programs...but we can’t always be there to watch him and make him do everything right.”

We tried to re-emphasize the enormous consequences that inevitably arise when people are oppressed by the police. The only response the investigator could give us was to indicate beyond any question that, as far as he was concerned, the job security of a policeman is more important than the true security of the people.

That is called oinking.

I sat around in the lobby after that, waiting for a friend to finish rapping with the investigator. While uncomfortably ensconced in “the belly of the beast” I chanced to flip through a police magazine.

The magazine was a mixture of articles by J. Edgar Hoover and advertisements for brass knuckles, clubs, blackjacks and lead-filled gloves. Tasty reading.

Whether or not you or your brothers and sisters ever have occasion to deal with the bureau, bear in mind that it is just another agency set up by the state to perpetrate the ruse that there is a real “freedom” in this country, and that the average citizen can depend on “proper channels” to respond to his needs in a benevolent manner.

A closing word to the wise: the Citizen’s Complaint Bureau may use everything you say and do against you.

They ARE against you.



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Fifth Estate #104, April 30-May 13, 1970

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