

# “Police must acknowledge and apologize for the historical patterns of abuse”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Ochs, Holona, Police August 9, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing 

*Police organizations are highly resistant to public “interference”*

*(Human Rights Watch, 1998)*

**Police must acknowledge and apologize for the historical patterns of abuse that have roots in the origins of the profession and continue to impact the patterns and practices of the police.**

**Prof Holona Ochs**

The Ochs’ to-do list starts with a bang for your Gadfly.

Something Gadfly never thought about, never knew.

The **history** of police departments.

Police departments owe their origin to 1) slave patrols and 2) 19th century big city municipal police forces formed to control the “dangerous underclasses” (African American, yes, but Italians and Irish too).

Police departments were born in racism.

Gadfly tried to imagine Chief Diluzio acknowledging and apologizing for the history of police abuse.



But maybe, just maybe that was unfair on Gadfly's part. For every time the Chief has spoken he has acknowledged the police are human, have bias like everybody else, make mistakes.

What does such acknowledgment and apology look like?

Maybe here's an example. Wellesley, Massachusetts, Chief Terence Cunningham, President of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, in 2016.

*from Tom Jackman, "U.S. police chiefs group apologizes for 'historical mistreatment'*

*of minorities." Washington Post, October 17, 2016.*

Cunningham's comments are an acknowledgement of police departments' past role in exacerbating tensions and a way to move forward and improve community relations nationwide.

"Events over the past several years," Cunningham said, "have caused many to question the actions of our officers and has tragically undermined the trust that the public must and should have in their police departments...The history of the law enforcement profession is replete with examples of bravery, self-sacrifice, and service to the community. At its core, policing is a noble profession."

But Cunningham added, "At the same time, it is also clear that the history of policing has also had darker periods." He cited laws enacted by state and federal governments which "have required police officers to perform many unpalatable tasks...While this is no longer the case, this dark side of our shared history has created a multigenerational — almost inherited — mistrust between many communities of color and their law enforcement agencies."

Cunningham continued, "While we obviously cannot change the past, it is clear that we must change the future...For our part, the first step is for

law enforcement and the IACP to acknowledge and apologize for the actions of the past and the role that our profession has played in society's historical mistreatment of communities of color.”

He concluded, “It is my hope that, by working together, we can break this historic cycle of mistrust and build a better and safer future for us all.”

Robinson said, “and a very significant acknowledgement of what much of America has known for some time about the historical relationship between police and communities of color. The fact someone high in the law enforcement community has said this is significant and I applaud it because it is long overdue. And I think it's a necessary first step to them trying to change these relationships.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GZDdq7L7ZY>

After his comments, Cunningham told The Post in an e-mail that, “We have 16,000 police chiefs and law enforcement officials gathered here in San Diego and it is an important message to spread. Communities and law enforcement need to begin a healing process and this is a bridge to begin that dialogue. If we are brave enough to collectively deliver this message, we will build a better and safer future for our communities and our law enforcement officers. Too many lives have been lost already, and this must end. It is my hope that many other law enforcement executives will deliver this same message to their local communities, particularly those segments of their communities that lack trust and feel disenfranchised.”

Civil rights activist Al Sharpton welcomed the apology by Cunningham, but also said he “wants his words backed by action.” Sharpton said in a statement he hoped that Cunningham would “urge officers around the United States to back his words up with action and legislation to protect communities of color from the onslaught of police misconduct that has disturbed the country...words are important but action is integral.”

Here's a sober **bottom line**: "The persistence of racially biased policing means that unless American policing reckons with its racist roots, it is likely to keep repeating mistakes of the past. This will hinder police from fully protecting and serving the entire public.

You must know your history.

Your thoughts?