

On several occasions I had an opportunity to discuss in detail the phenomenon of racial prejudice with members of the detachment. In each of the separate discussions, members were quick to point out the positive aspects of the Indian culture and that the majority did not present problems for them. Even the significant minority with whom they come into contact are decent, pleasant people until they begin to ingest alcohol. At this point a marked and sometimes violent metamorphosis may take place. To put it another way, the RCMP were not called to the Reserve unless there was a problem.

To elaborate on this point further, consider the following situation as put to me by a very concerned junior constable: suppose you are driving on a routine patrol in the evening and you see a car ahead. The car has no taillights and is wandering erratically all over the road. As you approach the car you notice that the driver is an Indian. Can you pull back, saying something like, "As we have already stopped one Indian this evening we had better let this person go and stop the next Caucasian we see." Obviously such action would be irresponsible and a violation of the right of other citizens to safe access to the public roads.

Consider another situation. A constable investigating a complaint at an Indian Reserve comes upon a group of people carrying a small child who is very still. The officer places his hand on her forehead and she appears to be "burning up" with fever. The constable insists, against the wishes of the adults who are on their way to a hotel, that the child should be taken to a hospital. Upon arrival at the hospital the child is found to have double pneumonia and without the officer's intervention would most likely have died. I suppose one could say that in this case the officer had interfered with the legal pursuits of a group of people who had committed no crime. One must ask, however, what of the rights of the child?

The final, and perhaps most important, point in the RCMP-Indian relationship

has to do with the subtlety I referred to earlier. I think that the native people have a very ambivalent (love/hate) relationship with the RCMP. On the one hand they are grateful when the RCMP restore order to violent family situations, etc., but on the other, see them as the "Police", who are agents of the "white people". Hence, hostility toward the RCMP could well be a symbolic displacement of hostility toward the vague group known as the "white people", occurring because the RCMP have a very visible role to play. Ironically, it is the visibility and distinctiveness of both the RCMP and the Indians which makes them both potential targets for symbolic and actual hostility and prejudice.

One question which may be raised from the preceding discussion is "What do the Indians think of the Mounties?" As I did not conduct a survey, it is a difficult question to answer with any degree of scientific precision. Based on some general observations I would maintain that the natives view of the RCMP is more positive than some might think. By way of illustration, on the evening of Saturday, July 9, 1977, Cst. Barry Storrey and I were patrolling on the Reserve. As it was a warm and pleasant evening, many people were sitting outside and we had an opportunity to stop and chat with a number of them. During these conversations I did not detect an air of hostility or a feeling of imminent attack, nor did I experience the kind of physical threat reported by Dr. George Kirkham (the Florida Criminology Professor who became a police officer). I should add, however, that not everything was "sweetness and light".

Quite late that same evening on a fairly deserted section of highway, Cst. Storrey and I stopped a car containing six occupants, to check for liquor violations. The people in the car jumped out and approached us as we got out of the patrol car. One man (a hulking six footer) charged over to me, looked into my face (nose to nose) and asked several times, "Do you know me?" I said I did not, at which time