

**Fear:** an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat

In the wake of the Mayor's announcement of the formation of the Office of the Independent Monitor, it has taken a short time to recognize the impact this will have on the relationship between the community and the police. Instead of taking the expected "The sky is falling" approach, myself as well as other members of the Tulsa Black Officer's Coalition took the initiative to research the history of citizens oversight.

During my research I was pleasantly surprised to discover that these commissions have been in existence for nearly 100 years. In 1928 an unofficial body was created by the Los Angeles Bar Association to receive complaints of police misconduct. In 1935 a mayor's task force in New York City recommended the formation of a similar organization but the mayor deemed this idea "too radical" and the idea was not implemented. The first official civilian review board was established in Washington D. C. in 1948. Even with the formation of these early review boards, they were considered ineffective either due to lack of participation by involved parties, lack of political support, fear, and the desire to maintain the status quo.

During the Civil rights movement of the 1960s, the idea of citizen oversight became a national issue. The stories told by Lee Willie and James Harper growing up in Central Mississippi were not being captured on film. Violent confrontations between law enforcement and people of color were brought into the living rooms of America. It appeared that the social conscious of America started to gain a pulse as it witnessed people of color not only fight to be treated as equals, but in many instances fight for their very lives.

Fast forward to the 1970s and the 1980s civilian oversight continued to gain momentum. Kansas City, Missouri established the Office of Citizen Complaints in 1969 and became operational in 1970. Similar to previous oversight efforts, this momentum was met with fierce opposition from police unions. The threat of lawsuits and the playing of the 'crime will skyrocket' card was the common tactic. As we continued to move forward, community policing became the new norm in policing. As police departments across the country worked to develop relationships with community stakeholders and maintain accountability, the thought of civilian oversight continued to be kicked down the road.

Historically we can see that the issue is not necessarily with the individuals, but with a police culture that is slow to change. Cities such as Denver, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, St. Louis, Kansas City, Norman, and Oklahoma City have some form of civilian oversight.

This culture, of which I am a part of, gives us the mindset that any form of oversight is not needed. We are servants of the people therefore we are held accountable by the people. We have become too comfortable hiding behind our keyboards and surrounding ourselves with

people that are afraid to challenge once accepted norms. There are times when you have to get uncomfortable to gain a true perspective of the impact that you are having. However, if you continue to talk to yourself, you will always be right.

This belief that people are getting their perception of the police from television, the movies, or national media only pushes a personal agenda. Perceptions are formed by personal experience. Just ask Lee Willie and James Harper. When a section of our society is telling us that there is a problem, and our response is either there is no problem or the numbers are skewed, it can become infuriating. Crime, single parent homes, unemployment, healthy food options, and education are issues in many communities. As a community we represent many races, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and political affiliations. Our own police community represent these same differences. These differences in the community have absolutely nothing to do with police oversight.

To be clear I am speaking on behalf of the Tulsa Black Officers Coalition and the many among us that embrace this endeavor. My organization supports Mayor G. T. Bynum and his decision to form an Office of the Independent Monitor. We will continue to support efforts for continued transparency and focus on building meaningful relationships with communities throughout the City of Tulsa.

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Tulsa Black Officers Coalition



