

Riots, Policing and Social Disadvantage: Learning from the Riots in Macquarie Fields and Redfern

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Introduction

Every once in a while in New South Wales a wave of youth lawlessness and public disorder breaks out in one of our suburbs or towns that generates saturation media coverage. One of the most recent was the riot at Macquarie Fields, but there have been others at earlier points in time: in Redfern in 2004, in Mt Druitt in 1998, in Walgett and Bourke in 1997, in Villawood in 1995 and in Brewarrina in 1987. These riots usually trigger a public debate about causes that is every bit as intemperate as the disorder itself. Invariably, one side of the debate blames the riot on lawless, self-seeking criminals, while the other blames the riot on social and economic disadvantage.

Fearful of the public anger that inevitably accompanies any outbreak of social disorder, most politicians choose the former reaction. Responding to suggestions that the root cause of the violence in Macquarie Fields was disadvantage, the former NSW Premier, Bob Carr said, for example:

Listen, reality check ... There are no excuses for this behaviour and I'm not going to have it said that this behaviour is caused by social disadvantage ... A lot of people grew up in circumstances of disadvantage and they did not go out and attack police with bricks and light fires in the street (Jopson, Davies & Norrie 2005:1).

Such reactions are to be expected from elected officials anxious not to be seen by the police or the public as in any way sympathising with the perpetrators of violence and disorder. The tendency to dismiss those seeking underlying causes, however, is not confined to politicians. The conservative American economist Murray Rothbard (1995) expressed a similar view in response to the riot that erupted in Los Angeles following the acquittal of four Los Angeles police accused of brutally bashing Rodney King. On that occasion Rothbard declared that those who sought to identify the structural causes of public violence were simply looking for ways to condone it and went on to add:

... the rioters, with a devotion to present gratification as against future concerns, engaged in the joys of beating, robbing, and burning, and massive theft, because they saw they could get away with it. Devotion to the sanctity of person and property is not part of their [the

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rioters] value-system. That’s why, in the short term, all we can do is shoot the looters and incarcerate the rioters (1995:62).

Rothbard’s predilection for simple solutions finds only slightly less strident echoes in Australian public debate. In the wake of the Redfern riot, for example, one well-known former police officer called for ‘tactical response squads of highly trained, armed officers in special trucks ready to be mobilised within an hour to quell disturbances before they turn into full-scale riots’ (Devine 2005).

This idea received little support among criminologists, with one publicly describing the unwillingness to confront the social causes of crime and the blind reliance on punitive policing as ‘100 per cent wrong’ (Jopson, Davies & Norrie 2005). And yet, the idea that disadvantage is the root cause of social disorder, though hardly populist, is in some ways just as unsatisfactory as Rothbard’s view that riots occur when those ‘with a devotion to present gratification’ think they can get away with ‘it’. Why, one might reasonably ask, do riots occur in some disadvantaged areas but not others or at some times and not others? Explanations that cannot answer this question are plainly unsatisfactory.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the role that crime, policing and disadvantage play in generating outbreaks of social disorder. Riots are the subject of a vast popular and academic literature but no attempt is made in this article to provide a comprehensive review of this literature. Our focus is on the riots that occurred in Macquarie Fields in 2005 and in Redfern in 2004 although the points to be made in connection with these places have considerable relevance to similar outbreaks of public disorder in other Australian suburbs and towns. They probably only have passing relevance, however, to the riots that have occurred at Australian sporting events (e.g. Cunneen et al 1989) and in Australian custodial institutions (Findlay 1982).

The Antecedents of Social Disorder

Street riots commonly occur in places where crime is a serious and chronic problem (Power & Tunstall 1997). Table 1 illustrates this point by comparing Macquarie Fields and Redfern to NSW on a range of common offence types.

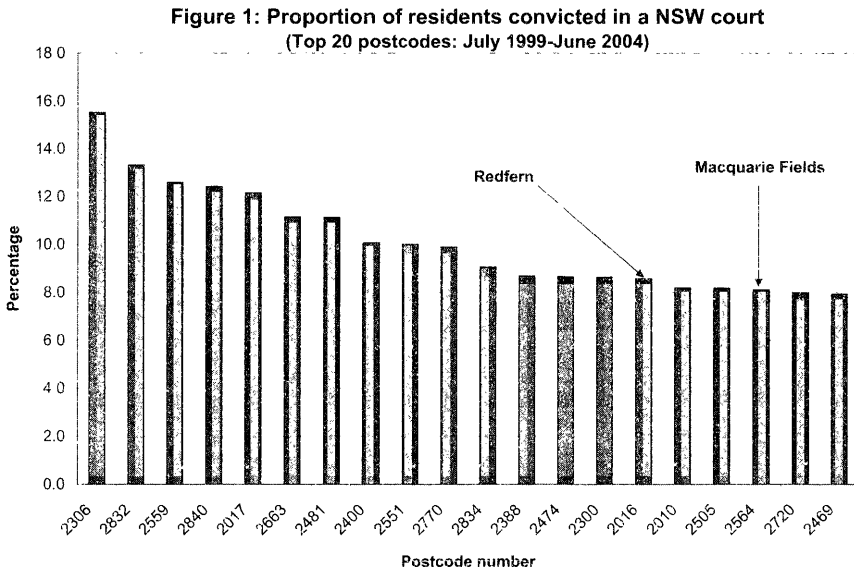
Table 1: Selected rates of recorded crime in 2004: Macquarie Fields, Redfern and NSW

OFFENCE	Rate/100,000 pop by Locality		
	Macq. Fields	Redfern	NSW
Break and enter (dwelling)	1679	2312	832
Motor vehicle theft	808	1027	496
Stealing from motor vehicle	659	3562	892
Non DV Assault	943	2830	646
DV assault	971	830	385
Sexual Assault	182	152	63
Robbery without a weapon	234	1866	74
Mal. Damage to property	3202	3624	1415

It is obvious from the table that Macquarie Fields and Redfern in 2004 had crime rates in many categories that were two or three times higher than the State average. The rate of robbery without a weapon in Redfern was more than 25 times higher than the State average. Although the table does not show it, high crime rates had been a feature of these suburbs for a very long time (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2005).

One obvious explanation for the fact that riots tend to occur in high crime areas is that crime-prone neighbourhoods, almost by definition, contain more than their fair share of people willing to engage in antisocial behaviour. If having a large population of offenders were enough to spark a riot, however, we would see many more riots than we actually do. Figure 1 shows the top 20 postcodes in NSW, in terms of the proportion of residents who had been convicted of a criminal offence in the five years from July 1999 to June 2004.¹ Of course, officially recorded offending is a far from perfect measure of spatial variation in rates of involvement in crime. The data in Figure 1 nonetheless suggest that there are a number of areas with larger numbers of active offenders than Macquarie Fields and Redfern. Few of these areas have ever experienced a riot. It seems likely then, that something other than a large offender population is necessary to turn a high-crime area into one that has a riot.

Figure 1: Proportion of residents convicted in a NSW court (July 1999 to June 2004)



Waddington (1992) provides a very useful review of the dominant explanations for riotous behaviour that have been put forward. Most, like the one we have just canvassed, are rather unsatisfactory. It has been argued, for example, that large crowds cause individuals to act aggressively and without restraint because they confer anonymity and promote loss of self-awareness. The trouble with this view is that it fails to explain why some crowds erupt in a riot and others do not. It has been argued that rioting is an emotional outburst due to frustration at feelings of relative deprivation. The problem with this

¹ Source: Unpublished data, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

explanation is that in most disadvantaged communities, most of the time, riots are the exception rather than the norm. It has also been argued that the mass media contribute to outbreaks of disorder by sensitising the police and the public to the possibility that conflict might occur. This may be true, but most outbreaks of social disorder lead to media coverage rather than the other way round.

Waddington himself has put forward what he calls a 'flashpoint model' of public disorder (1992:13–20). At the risk of oversimplification, the flashpoint model asserts that riots occur when certain events (flashpoints) prompt an outburst of anger amongst a group of people who (a) are frustrated and/or resentful about the conditions in which they live (or some set of government policies deemed immoral) and (b) have lost their stake in the existing political and moral order. Waddington argues that inequalities of power, material resources and life chances are the main contributing factors to (a). He also argues, quite reasonably, that hostile interactions between police and members of an aggrieved group often provide the flashpoint for the onset of a riot. It is not at all clear, however, that this model provides the most insightful account of the kinds of spontaneous riots and disturbances with which we are presently concerned.

Waddington contends that loss of faith in the existing 'political and moral' order only comes about after efforts to convey grievances through conventional democratic channels have failed (1992:15). In some circumstances this may be true but, as we shall see, there is no evidence in places like Redfern and Macquarie Fields that loss of faith in the existing social order was precipitated by the failure of authorities to respond to well-defined grievances on the part of those who engaged in a riot. Waddington also contends that the propensity toward violent behaviour is encouraged by certain characteristic features of police culture, such as a tendency to engage in racial stereotyping and a desire for 'action and excitement' (1992:16). These characteristics probably do typify many police (and many of those with whom they deal) but they are hardly unique to police in riot-prone areas. Furthermore, while it is entirely true that hostile action on the part of police toward certain people is often the proximate cause of social disturbance, Waddington's model offers few insights into the social conditions in a neighbourhood that might prompt or foster aggressive police behaviour. In most Australian suburbs and towns where riots have erupted, for example, citizens appear to have been just as concerned about crime as they were about economic and social disadvantage. On the whole, the 'flashpoint model' appears far better equipped to explain union confrontations or political demonstrations than it is to explain spontaneous outbreaks of disorder in high crime neighbourhoods of Australia.

Two general conditions would seem to characterise the disturbances that periodically erupt in crime-prone neighbourhoods. The first is a build up in anger, resentment and frustration among the local community or some significant section of it. The second is an event that serves as flashpoint for the discharge of this anger, resentment and frustration. There does not seem to be any discernible pattern to the events that trigger riots in crime-prone neighbourhoods. The flashpoint may be a serious miscarriage of justice, such as the acquittal in Los Angeles of a number of white police officers involved in the brutal bashing of Rodney King. What outsiders might view as innocent events, however, can also spark a serious riot. The riot in Macquarie Fields was sparked by the death of two young men fleeing from police in a stolen car. The Redfern riot was sparked by the death of TJ Hickey while being followed by police. The riot in Walgett in February 1997 was sparked by police attempts to arrest two women engaged in a fight outside of a local pub (Coultan 2004:4). The more interesting question for policy, then, is not what sparks a riot but what causes a build up in anger, resentment and frustration in a local community or a significant section of it.

There are at least five conditions that might be expected to have this effect, any or all of which may be operating at any given time. The first is a high level of fear or anger about crime. The second is a chronically poor or unhelpful response to calls for police assistance. The third is widespread anxiety about the possibility of being arrested, detained and possibly imprisoned for involvement in crime. The fourth is widespread anger about what is perceived to be discriminatory, unfair or unduly oppressive policing. The fifth is a pervading sense of social exclusion from the wider community, perhaps coupled with a sense of abandonment by government authorities. Let us consider these issues in a little more detail in the context of the riots in Macquarie Fields and Redfern.

The Riots in Redfern and Macquarie Fields

There seems little doubt that residents of high-crime areas, like Redfern and Macquarie Fields, are deeply concerned both about crime and about the police response to it. Tensions between police and Aboriginal people in Redfern date back at least to the 1960s, when complaints about the abuse of police powers and discriminatory policing led to the establishment of the first Aboriginal legal service (Cunneen 2001). Morgan (2004) points out, however, that there were tabloid reports of social problems in Redfern almost as soon as the main influx of Aboriginal people into Redfern began in 1948.

Concern about crime and policing in Macquarie Fields are of more recent origin but are no less intense for that. University of Western Sydney academic, Murray Lee conducted interviews with the residents of Macquarie Fields two years prior to the riot. He maintains the common themes emerging from his interviews were: 'speeding cars in the estate, police unwillingness to respond to calls, and a lack of services, public transport and recreational facilities' (Lee 2005:11; Lee 2006). These findings are not surprising. Police in high crime areas often find it difficult to cope with the sheer volume of calls for assistance they receive. To make matters worse, many calls for police assistance come from the same small group of families week after week. It is easy to become cynical about repeated calls for assistance from the same group of households or individuals, particularly when the source of the trouble seems to be some intractable family or neighbourhood dispute, or when police efforts to assist are met with hostility and aggression.

There is reason to believe that many young people in Redfern and Macquarie Fields were fearful and resentful of the attention being given to them by police. Immediately prior to the riot in Redfern, for example, police were reportedly taunting young Aboriginal offenders, calling them 'c...s' (Leveit 2004:7). According to one 13 year old involved in the Redfern riot: 'Even if we walk in the streets, they chase us for nothing'. According to another: 'They pick on black kids. I don't see white kids being bashed' (Jopson & Tomas 2004:7). On the day of the riot, there were also reports that police had acted provocatively toward Aboriginal people who had gathered in Lawson Street Redfern to mourn the death of TJ Hickey (Birch 2004).

Allegations of police provocation and abuse were not confined to Redfern. The *Sydney Morning Herald* carried a story in the immediate aftermath of the riot in Macquarie Fields quoting a resident alleging that: 'One of [the police officers] threw my 12 year old son against the wall so hard it left marks on his back' (Brown 2005:34). Other young people in Macquarie Fields have claimed that '... the cops harass us, they pull up at four o'clock in the morning and play the song Bad Boys really loud and put their sirens on. We want revenge' (Jopson, Davies & Norrie 2005:1).

Lack of restraint may be a particular problem among young or inexperienced police officers. In the words of one local Indigenous leader:

... police have only got their act together at the stars and stripes level; at the PR level ... many police straight out of college are different: The one-strippers are full of adrenaline and testosterone and we always have some particularly bad officers at Redfern (cited in Jopson 2004:25).

It is, of course, impossible to verify these sorts of claims. They may be false, misguided or misleading but it would be unwise to dismiss them out of hand. Even if they are misguided or misleading, they may reflect genuinely held beliefs. It is this fact, as much as the veracity of the beliefs in question, that makes the comments in question relevant to an understanding of why young people might be provoked into engaging in a riot.

Anxiety about the prospect of being arrested and anger at what is perceived to be unfair, discriminatory or oppressive policing are often co-occurring phenomena. There are two reasons for this. One is that aggressive policing directed at suspected offenders can sometimes unwittingly cause harm to innocent people. The other is that conditions in crime-prone communities sometimes prompt police to adopt a punitive or hostile attitude toward entire neighbourhoods or groups. The risk of the latter may have increased in recent years. Following the NSW Police Royal Commission, public concern about rising crime and lack of police accountability prompted the NSW Police to introduce what they call Operations and Crime Review (OCR) Panels. These panels involve periodic meetings between senior police management and Local Area (LA) commanders. LA commanders are given data on the local crime trends and shown maps highlighting crime hotspots within in their command. They are then pressured to come up with strategies to reduce crime. At subsequent meetings, the strategies they have put into effect are reviewed in the light of fresh evidence about trends in crime.

OCR panels appear to have some utility as a crime control tool (Chilvers & Weatherburn 2004). However one consequence of these panels is that police now put a great deal of emphasis on the surveillance and apprehension of repeat offenders. Even where they do not have enough evidence to prosecute a suspected repeat offender, police are encouraged to make sure that suspected offenders are kept fully aware of the fact that they are under scrutiny and liable to be arrested if they commit any kind of offence.² It has been argued by some that this sort of tactic encourages police to become aggressive and confrontational toward anyone they think is or might be involved in crime (Dixon 1998; Poynting 1999; cf. Darcy 1999). Offenders would naturally resent this. Young people wrongly suspected of involvement in crime would resent it even more.

It is impossible to understand the build-up in tension that leads to a riot, however, by focussing only on perceived injustices experienced by residents who end up rioting. Because they are trained and paid to deal with hostile and aggressive behaviour, the impact of working in a hostile environment on police is all too often ignored. Yet police sometimes experience the same fear, anger and frustration as those whose behaviour they are expected to control. Police-community relations in Bankstown were strained by appalling working conditions and a firearm attack that put the lives of officers at risk. In places like Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett they are perennially strained by the fact that young police do not like working in remote rural areas with large Aboriginal populations. In suburbs where young people and the police do not share a common language or a common culture, police-community relations are sometimes strained by miscommunication and racism. These sorts of problems were evident in Redfern and Macquarie Fields as well.

2 The author has been present at several OCR panels conducted by the NSW Police.

In Macquarie Fields, for example, a female officer was allegedly threatened with rape while protecting an accident scene (*The Daily Telegraph* 2005:5). In Redfern, police are reportedly ‘... attacked with bottles and rocks 40 or 50 times a year’ (Devine 2004:15). The same journalist reported police as saying that ‘... while trying to arrest a 13-year old wanted for robbery [in Redfern], two officers were surrounded by youths and attacked’ (Devine 2004:15). Police resentment in Redfern appears to have been further fuelled by a belief that constructive efforts to engage with and support disadvantaged young people have not produced the kind of response they deserved. Prior to the riot, police had apparently been involved in mentoring programs and a range of other activities supportive of Indigenous youth. According to an executive of the Police Association, police now: ‘... feel really let down ... We like to think we are friends to the community, not enemies. But some people down there treat us like an occupying force’ (Devine 2004:15).

The same officer contended that: ‘... criminals instead of elders now [hold] control over the Aboriginal community living in the Block’ and that violence is ‘regularly unleashed on police at Redfern’ in order to ‘intimidate police and let them know that the Block is enemy territory to make it as unattractive as possible to enter’ (Connolly 2004:2). This sense of feeling ‘let down’ seems to extend to other government agencies as well. Police in Redfern have reported considerable frustration with the Department of Community Services for allegedly ‘failing to protect children’, with one officer contending on this issue that ‘... police at Redfern have been “let down badly” [on this issue] by the Government’ (Connolly 2004:2). The local NSW Police Association representative epitomised this sentiment when, in the aftermath of the Redfern riot, he declared: ‘We need to make all agencies accountable, not just the police ... There are kids of up to 10 years of age walking through carpets of syringes, throwing bricks at police, six- or seven-year-olds walking the streets at 2.00AM’ (Levett & Jopson 2004).

It must be emphasised once again that there is no way of corroborating these claims. As with the criticisms made by residents *of* police, the criticisms made *by* police may be misguided, misleading or false. They are cited not because we can be certain they are true but because the fact that they have been made at all, provides insight into the perceptions, sentiments and emotions that led to a build up in tension between residents and police. The claims do not have to be legitimate for this purpose. They only have to reflect widespread and genuinely held beliefs.

So far we have only dealt with the sources of tension between residents and police. One notable feature of riot-prone areas in Britain (Power & Tunstall 1997) and in Redfern and Macquarie Fields, however, was a generalised hostility to the wider community as well. This hostility appears to stem from a widespread sense of social exclusion or disenfranchisement. Given the history of colonisation and dispossession that Aboriginal people have had to bear, one would expect to find a deeply embedded sense of social exclusion and disenfranchisement and there is. As one experienced local observer put it: ‘The most common feeling is abandonment. You have an Aboriginal leadership as demoralised as the people themselves ... The feeling is “no one cares about us”’ (Jopson 2004:25).

Similar sentiments were expressed by the head of the Lumbu Indigenous Community Foundation, Darren Godwell: ‘... people are speaking with conviction about their sense of being betrayed or forgotten, or being trapped in a sinister plot’ (Jopson 2004:25). The sense of being ‘trapped in a sinister plot’, of course, derives from constant suggestions that the solution to the problems of Redfern is to remove the residents, bulldoze the Block and make Redfern an extension of the Sydney CBD (Jopson 2004:25). The pervading sense of social exclusion in Redfern, however, dates much further back than the modern preoccupation with Sydney’s gentrification might suggest. According to Morgan (2004:4), for example,

when the Queen visited Australia in 1954, local authorities were so concerned about the sight of Redfern’s Aboriginal districts on the approaches to Central Station they erected ‘great hessian screens to obscure her view’. It is hard to imagine a measure better calculated to engender a collective sense of exclusion from the dominant culture and all it stands for.

The evidence of a generalised sense of social exclusion is less obvious in Macquarie Fields but it would be surprising if it did not exist. Macquarie Fields is a housing estate, embedded among wealthier suburbs and with a rate of unemployment that is said to be double that of greater Sydney (Totaro & Connolly 2005:25). The contrast between the housing estate in Macquarie Fields where the riot erupted and the surrounding area has been vividly described by Totaro & Connolly:

... not more than a kilometre away [from Macquarie Fields] stand grand houses with tennis courts, pools, horses and fancy cars. Sandra Shields (not her real name) and her husband, Stan, have lived in this part of Macquarie Fields for more than 20 years. The couple love their home, bushland, proximity to the Georges River and golf links. House prices here start in the high \$800,000s. Ask Sandra Shields what she and her neighbours share in common with the nearby public housing communities and her answer is quick: ‘Just our postcode, 2564.’ She says she, too, watched on TV as local streets succumbed to rioting and heard a chlorine bomb explode in the distance, but interaction is rare (2005:25).

In circumstances like these it is easy to see how tensions between police and residents become autocatalytic. Police placed under intense pressure to bring down crime react by adopting more aggressive and confrontational styles of policing. This fuels resentment on the part of non-offenders and offenders alike, prompting them to behave in ways that are provocative and attract even more intense police scrutiny. The resulting deterioration in law and order puts further pressure on police to crack down on crime and they become yet more aggressive. This increases the perception that police are picking on certain groups and treating them unfairly. Add a generalised sense of social exclusion and all it takes is a hot day or perceived injustice to bring on a full-scale riot.

The Role of Disadvantage

What role does economic and social disadvantage play in all this? In their analysis of riots in Britain, Power and Tunstall (1997) point out that the common characteristics of riot-prone areas are (a) a high percentage of sole parent families, (b) a high rate of geographic mobility (population turnover), (c) a low employment to population ratio, (d) a low school retention rate and (e) a high percentage of residents belonging to a minority ethnic group. As can be seen from Table 2 below,³ many of these are characteristics of Macquarie Fields and Redfern.

Table 2: Selected indicators of social and economic disadvantage — Macquarie Fields, Redfern and New South Wales

Indicator	Macquarie Fields	Redfern	NSW
% employed male (15-19 yr olds)	33.9	29.0	38.4
% with different address 1 year ago	14.4	28.7	18.0
% highest schooling year 10	53.3	27.0	45.0
% lone parent families	29.7	18.6	15.5

3 Source: 2001 ABS Census.

The critical question is what links these forms of disadvantage to a heightened risk of social disorder. Early social theorists such as Cloward and Ohlin (1960) would have argued that disadvantage creates 'structural blockages of opportunity' which engender a sense of frustration and alienation among young people. This frustration and alienation according to Cloward and Ohlin, prompts them to form delinquent gangs as a means of conferring social status on themselves denied them by mainstream society. Variations on this theme are common in contemporary appeals to disadvantage as the cause of social disorder, with some arguing that the outbreaks of social disorder seen in Redfern and Macquarie Fields reveal nothing more or less than an inchoate expression of anger and political resistance on the part of delinquent youths to the frustrations and privations they have to endure.⁴

Despite its obvious romantic appeal, there is not a lot of evidence to support this view. Most of the crime that occurs in Redfern and Macquarie Fields is *not* gang-related.⁵ The outbreaks of disorder in these areas showed little or no sign of planning, nor did the rioters present any defined list of grievances. This is not to say that those who participated in the riots at Redfern and Macquarie Fields felt no anger or that their anger was in no way affected by a sense of social exclusion. Being jobless and impoverished in a country (or a neighbourhood) where most young people are not only in jobs but conspicuously enjoying the benefits of rising real incomes, is bound to engender resentment (Coultan 2004). Even if it did not, there is clear evidence that long-term unemployment has a strong direct effect on property crime (Chapman et al 2002). It would be a mistake to suppose, however, that disadvantage increases the risk of social unrest simply because it makes young people resentful and frustrated. The damaging effects of chronic economic and social disadvantage are much more insidious than this.

Long-term unemployment and poverty place a severe economic strain on a family, particularly when there is only one parent or caregiver. This stress is greatly exacerbated when one or both parents suffers from a mental illness (particularly depression), abuses drugs or alcohol, experiences domestic violence or lacks a close friend, relative or neighbour they can call upon for support (National Crime Prevention 1999:136; Weatherburn & Lind 2001:28–45). When parents or caregivers are exposed to such stress (especially in the absence of strong social supports) they are less likely to form strong emotional attachments with their children, more likely to neglect or abuse them and more likely to engage in parenting practices that are harsh, erratic and inconsistent. This sort of behaviour has a range of effects on child development (e.g. low self esteem, poor impulse control, poor social skills, poor school performance, a susceptibility to delinquent peer influence) all of which, over time, significantly increase the rate at which juveniles get involved in crime (Weatherburn & Lind 2001:67–101).

The dominant way in which disadvantage contributes to the risk of a riot, then, is through the creation of chronically high-crime communities. It is in the context of such communities that the immediate precursors to a riot (fear, chronic anger and frustration, social alienation, overzealous policing and a poor response to calls for police assistance) are most likely to take root. Kane (2005), for example, examined the interaction between overzealous policing and disadvantage in New York City. He found no relationship between crime rates and measures of over-policing and police misconduct in neighbourhoods that scored low on measures of disadvantage. In communities characterised by extreme disadvantage,

4 This view was forcefully put by one of the audience members at the forum on the Roots of Riots referred to at note 1, above.

5 Recorded crime data held by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics shows that most crime incidents in these areas involve only one offender and one victim.

however, violent crime rates were higher in police precincts that had higher levels of over-policing and police misconduct. This is strong evidence that, when police behave in ways that erode their perceived legitimacy, the outcome in disadvantaged communities is higher rates of violent crime.

Preventing Social Disorder

How should we respond to problems such as we have seen in Macquarie Fields and Redfern?

It is impossible to substantially or durably reduce the risk of social disorder without addressing the crime problem that generates most of the heat. And herein lies a serious problem. Many of the most effective short-term strategies for controlling crime (e.g. focusing police resources on 'hot' times and at 'hot places'; weapons confiscation, targeting of repeat offenders) involve either intensive surveillance and/or some form of coercive action on the part of the police (Sherman & Eck 2002). Social crime prevention and 'problem oriented' or 'community policing' might appear to offer an alternative but there is little evidence that social crime prevention programs actually work (Welsh & Hoshi 2002). Indeed some of the most popular *non-coercive* policing strategies (e.g. neighbourhood watch, police 'storefronts') are known *not* to work (Sherman & Eck 2002). There are ways of preventing crime that do not involve the police (e.g. early intervention programs, programs designed to improve school retention and performance, treatment programs for drug dependence). Unfortunately, most of these measures take time to implement and even longer to produce their beneficial effects. It is neither fair nor politically realistic to say to people who are repeatedly the victims of crime that they may have to wait some years to get relief, or that, to avoid inflaming community tensions, serious and persistent offenders will be left unpunished.

The immediate challenge when dealing with high crime communities (especially in the wake of a riot), then, is to find ways of pursuing what are known to be effective policing strategies without engaging in policing that is provocative, discriminatory or unduly oppressive. There is no easy or formulaic solution to this problem but there are at least three commonsense guidelines that might help reduce the risk of police-citizen confrontation. There is now quite a body of evidence that people are more willing to obey the law where they view local police with respect (Sherman & Eck 2002:318). The first requirement, then, is a willingness to treat the residents of crime-prone neighbourhoods with civility and respect, regardless of whether they are suspected offenders, victims, innocent bystanders, people seeking assistance or simply residents going about their business. The second important consideration is a determination to respond promptly and courteously to calls for police assistance. This is central to the flow of intelligence from citizens to police about criminal activity and to the maintenance of public respect for the police. The third requirement is to engage the community, wherever possible, in the solution of specific problems. Even if this does not greatly increase the capacity of police to deal with crime, it is likely to improve police-community relations. This helps to reduce the tensions that foster social discontent.

Ultimately, of course, policing and criminal justice policy do not provide the best means through which to engineer a reduction in crime. Arrest and incapacitation may help in the short term but over the long term they may have the effect of entrenching criminal behaviour (Hunter & Borland 1999). In the longer term, therefore, the better course of action is to alleviate the conditions, such as poor parenting, poor school performance, delinquent peer influence, lack of employment, substance abuse, that get young people

involved in crime. The influence of these factors cannot be reduced simply by building new sporting and recreational facilities or by investing in programs designed to tackle youth boredom (though these may be intrinsically worthwhile things to pursue). Indeed the history of efforts to prevent crime through youth recreational and social programs is decidedly bleak (Welsh & Hoshi 2002). They are best reduced through policies that relieve the economic burden on low-income families, strengthen social cohesion, reduce the spatial concentration of disadvantage, improve school performance, reduce substance abuse and create meaningful work.

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