

## Traffic arrest: A ticket to violence

Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file); Nov 6, 1973; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune (1849 - 1985)

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# Traffic arrest: A ticket to violence

HAROLD WILLIAMS couldn't believe he had violated any traffic regulations when two policemen in a squad car pulled him over at 19th Street and Kostner Avenue.

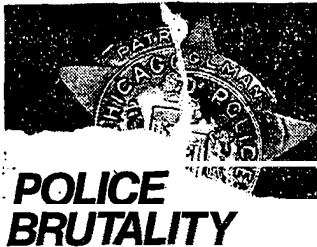
He was right. They had stopped him because they couldn't see the city vehicle tax sticker on his windshield.

It was 10 p. m. Oct. 16, 1971, and Williams, 41, of 237 N. Long Av., was alone in his car, driving home.

He never got home that night. A city street sanitation worker, Williams was beaten on the street by four policemen and ended up being handcuffed to a bed in County Hospital.

During The Tribune's five-month investigation of police brutality complaints, it soon became apparent the majority of the complaints started like Harold Williams'—during a traffic stop.

REPORTERS talked to hundreds of alleged victims and witnesses of police brutality throuth the city and documented their charges with medical and court records. Whenever possible, The Tribune asked alleged victims to take polygraph tests at the newspaper's expense.



The reporters found a pattern of legitimate brutality complaints that the Police Department has ignored. The complaints that began with stops for traffic violations pointed to two actions by policemen that can turn simple traffic violations into serious brutality cases:

- Using abusive, insulting language in approaching motorists already upset by being stopped, language that can set off temper tantrums on both sides.

Policemen meet the ordinary citizen most often thru routine traffic law enforcement. Most of Chicago's 13,751 policemen handle the duty with patience and tact. But the abusive conduct of some policemen has turned routine stops for traffic violations into ugly and violent incidents. This is the third in a series of reports on police brutality based on a five-month investigation by The Tribune. It was compiled by reporter Emmett George and the Pulitzer Prize-winning team of chief investigator George Bliss, William Mullen, and Pamela Zekman.

- Stopping and searching motorists under false pretenses, in the belief they will find contraband in the automobile.

IN DEFENSE of the policeman, altho the traffic stop is one of his most mundane duties, it is also perhaps the most dangerous.

A policeman can never be certain who is in a car, and he has only a few seconds to decide if it's an average

motorist or someone much more dangerous.

It could be a man who has just s'aged a robbery or it could be a pusher carrying drugs.

But policemen are trained to minimize these risks. They are trained, too, to treat any motorist they stop for a traffic violation with firm, official, courteous dispatch.

Alfred Conrad, director of the Police Department's Internal Affairs Division, which is responsible for investigating brutality complaints against policemen, concedes that 75 per cent of the complaints come from traffic arrests.

"The major reason is people objecting to the issuance of a traffic citation," Conrad said, "and then the situation escalates."

HAROLD WILLIAMS didn't object to being stopped so that policemen could see the tax sticker in his windshield. He did ask why the policemen had to search his car after they stopped him, however, and for this he was beaten.

He had no witnesses, and the only hope he had of proving his story was a

polygraph test. The IAD refused to arrange one for him.

The Tribune arranged the test for him, and the results strongly supported Williams' story.

After the policemen stopped him, he said, he got out of his car when they told him he didn't have the sticker.

"I got out and showed them where it was," he said. "I guess I had just stuck it on about six inches too high in the window."

He said he was showing his driver's license to one of the policemen when he noticed the second one searching his car. He asked why they had to search it.

"Oh," the policeman with his license explained, "You're getting smart, are you?"

HE SAID the policeman hit him on the back of the head and he fell down. Both policemen pulled their clubs, Williams said, and began beating him as he curled up on the pavement.

"I didn't know what was happening," he said. "I kept thinking this was a dream. This ain't me. Let me wake up.

"I was hoping somebody else would stop as they drove by in their cars. Everybody must have thought the way they were beating me, I must have killed somebody. Nobody stopped."

He thought he was saved when another police car arrived.

"Instead," he said, "they just joined the assault."

By this time they had put handcuffs on him, he said, and they forced open his legs so one of the policemen could kick him in the groin.

"I WAS PRAYING to God they wouldn't kill me. My wife was pregnant at the time, and I was pleading with God to let me live to take care of that child."

He finally blacked out, and when he came to, a squadro? was carrying him to Cermak Memorial Hospital for stitches. He was later transferred to County Hospital.

"They left me there shackled to a bed like I was a common criminal or something," he said. He was charged

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# Traffic arrest: Breeding place for brutality

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with resisting arrest and improper display of a city sticker.

Williams was never able to find out who beat him up because the arresting policemen never showed up in court and the charges were dropped.

The two policemen who originally arrested him were Patrolmen Lonnie Segroves and Joseph Mara. They said Williams grabbed Mara as Mara searched the car, and when the policemen tried to handcuff Williams, he put up a terrific struggle.

**THE POLICEMEN** said they subdued Williams, who is big, only after police in a passing squad car came to their assistance and after Mara struck Williams several times with a flashlight.

Williams had no one to back up his story. He had given up hope that anyone would believe him until The Tribune contacted him.

"I kept wondering that night what would happen to my wife and seven kids if they killed me," he said.

"The way they beat me, I could have been crippled and useless for the rest of my life, and my kids probably would have been on ADC."



Tribune Photo

Harold Williams with his sons, Harold Jr. [left] and Bruce.

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