

# A Break in the Ranks of D.C. Policemen's Wives: Divided Wives of D.C. Policemen

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## *A Break in the Ranks of D.C. Policemen's Wives*

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Wives of D.C. policemen have formed themselves into two separate organizations—one black and ghetto-resident oriented, the other 97 per cent white and militantly pro-Establishment.

Their differences echo the growing national debate on how to keep order and maintain justice in an increasingly divided society.

On one hand is the nearly all-white D.C. Police Wives Association, whose 100 members have mounted an all-out attack on the Black United Front and on what they call a "soft" approach to crime in the District of Columbia.

Most of the Association members live in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs. They vigorously object to proposals that District policemen be required to live in the neighborhoods where they serve.

The second group, formed two years ago, is the Metropolitan Police Wives Association. It consists of 15 wives of black policemen, most of them living in the District.

They maintain that Negro policemen are often the object of discrimination within the force, that policemen black and white often deal unfairly with ghetto residents and that D.C. policemen ought to be required to live within the city limits.

The Metropolitan Police Wives are also pressing for a sharp increase in the number of black policemen on the force. At the moment, 731—or 24 per cent of the 3048-man police department—are Negroes. The women feel the force should more accurately reflect the make-up of the city's population which is more than 62 per cent black.

The break in the ranks of policemen's wives

occurred two years ago, when Goldie Johnson, a beauty salon owner and wife of 13th Precinct Pvt. William E. Johnson, attended her first meeting of the D.C. Police Wives Association.

As Mrs. Johnson tells it, discussion was invited by the club's president. Mrs. Johnson stood up and reported that, in her opinion, Negro policemen were receiving stiffer disciplinary penalties than white policemen. She urged the wives association to look into the matter.

"When they told me to sit down because I had a chip on my shoulder," Mrs. Johnson recalled, "I said 'this ain't no chip, it's a whole darn tree.'"

Mrs. Johnson says she was offended when one of the women told her if she didn't want

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MRS. WILLIAM JOHNSON

. . . wives are divided.

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# Divided Wives of D.C. Policemen

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to go along with the club's way of doing things she ought to get out.

"Another one wanted to know why I was making trouble. She said, 'We white ladies and you black women ought to be getting along.'"

Mrs. Johnson, who spent two years in the WACs and claims she can "break down an M-1 like any man," decided it was time to form her own police wives group. The result was the Metropolitan.

Mrs. Johnson has proposed to City Council Chairman John Hechinger that the Council consider making it compulsory for District policemen to live in the city.



MRS. JAMES WEBB  
... forever uneasy.

"If they can't afford to live here, then we ought to put their salaries up 50 to 75 per cent," she said. The Council

has not yet debated the question.

This proposal is one of several that have angered the D.C. Police Wives Association. They feel it is unfair to ask them to uproot their families, take their children out of school and leave familiar neighborhoods because of their husbands' jobs.

But Mrs. Johnson argues that only when a policeman lives in the neighborhood where he works can he and his family be committed to the needs of that community.

On one issue, however, the D.C. Police Wives, under steady attack from the Metropolitan Police Wives, has backed down.

Mrs. Johnson publicly criticized Joan Abbott, the leader of D.C. Wives and the

wife of 5th Precinct policeman E. D. Abbott, for continuing to hold club meetings out in the suburbs.

Monday 60 members of D.C. Wives held their first meeting inside the city. Some who went said they were "nervous" about coming into the city at night.

"My husband says it's unsafe," one said.

In spite of their differing views on most issues, D.C. Wives and Metropolitan Wives share several common concerns. Uppermost is fear for the safety of their husbands.

At Monday night's meeting, D.C. Wives considered ways to help the wife and children of 10th Precinct Pvt. Frederick Matteson, who was shot in the head and chest last July, and remains seriously ill in a hospital. Matteson's scout-car partner, Pvt. Stephen A. Williams was killed during the same incident.

Mrs. James Webb, wife of a black detective who was injured last year while serving in the Metropolitan Police force and a member of the Metropolitan Club, says:

"As long as he's a policeman we'll be living under a terrific strain, wondering if he'll come home alive."

Goldie Johnson says: "Whenever the phone rings you wonder if that's to tell you to get down to the hospital to view your husband's remains."

Beyond this, the women apparently share very little in common viewpoint.

Mrs. Abbott's group recently sent out 200 letters to District businessmen, saying her group subscribes "wholeheartedly" to the idea that "fundamentally, crime is neither racial nor economic, nor political." The D.C. wives have launched a major sales campaign for red, white and blue bumper stickers reading "Help Your Police Fight Crime."

They have also registered vigorous protests with everyone from President Johnson to the City Council, over the Black United Front's statement that the shooting of Pvt. Williams was as much justifiable homicide as the shooting of a citizen by a policeman.

Mrs. Johnson charges that the D.C. Police Wives are "suburban dwellers who are set in their ways and just don't understand how it feels to live in the city's ghettos."

The job, she says, is to bridge the gap between a policeman with his family and the District residents.