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**BROKEN U.S. POLICE CULTURE AND LACK  
OF POLICE TEMPERAMENT EXPLAIN THE  
INFAMOUS GATES-CROWLEY  
ENCOUNTER**

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**BROKEN U.S. POLICE CULTURE AND LACK OF POLICE TEMPERAMENT EXPLAIN THE INFAMOUS GATES-CROWLEY ENCOUNTER**

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I learned fast as a cop that the catchall arrest is called Disorderly Conduct. When a citizen dares to disagree with an officer—he or she goes to jail. Astonishingly, the prosecutor and the judge and the whole criminal justice system accept the officer's false account of events and probable cause. And, it happens again and again, but perhaps not anymore---maybe now with less frequency because of an encounter between a small-city cop and a renowned university professor, Sergeant Crowley and Dr. Henry Louis Gates. **Now the way has been paved, for the first time in U.S. history, for Americans to address the problem of a U.S. police culture that holds that arrest and harm should come to a citizen who dares question the authority of a police officer.**

I worked in a police precinct/district in which some officers, in an effort keep a citizen from knowing their identity, would intentionally punch out one or more of the numbers of their badges, alternatively they would destroy their department issued name tags. This, like the turning backwards of the marked police hat, was commonplace when the objective was to be unaccountable. So, it goes without saying that in 2009, to ask many police officers for a name and badge number is dangerous. Indeed, the citizen will ultimately get the badge number and name, but on their arrest report. There lies problem.

The Gates Crowley encounter illuminates that ours is a country in which the slightest disagreement with a police officer can have tragic results for the citizen. **Any knowledgeable cop can tell you that Dr. Gates was moments away from being tasered or shot. And, that but for Henry Louis Gates' friendship with the president of the U.S., he would have been just another statistic.** Take 15-year old Dewey Elder, he was white and stood 5-foot-6 and weighed about 140 pounds. The handcuffed boy disagreed with three Bay City Michigan Police officers---a shouting match ensued. The boy surrounded by the three burly male officers was tasered and died. There is no shortage of documented, credible accounts of the elderly and even children tasered or pepper sprayed by the police for disagreeing with a police officer. In American police work, the Taser, Pepper Spray, and dark sunglasses have replaced courage and professionalism.

Henry Gates did join the hundreds of thousands taken to jail and their only action was that they argued or disagreed with a policeman. I credit my training as a United States Marine (Infantry) for embellishing my courage and teaching me temperament. Many of my colleagues in blue have never been to the military, rather choose to live out their military aspirations in your residential neighborhood---as evinced by police officers clad in fatigues and that they look and act less like the police by like soldiers in combat--- and you are the enemy.

The job of a police officer demands excellent social and oratory skills merged with courage and most important temperament encapsulated in a problem solving paradigm. The right temperament for a police officer is the skill base to de-escalate a situation without violence, and professionalism marked by thick skin to withstand the names sometimes hurled at them. The larger problem solving component is personified by a skill set that enables officers to realize that people they encounter get angry. They are usually angry by time we get there, and the anger is usually not directed at us. When in a crisis people become emotional and sadly, many police officers wrongly interpret the conduct as aggression. It is anguishing to watch an officer haul a mother of a teenage homicide victim to jail because she won't stop screaming---yelling out: "Jesus." If the officer just takes a moment and allows a person to blow off steam, often, that is all that is needed. But Officer Crowley, accompanied by another male officer, chose to call for back-up---this act (evinced by the police dispatch recordings released to the public), was significant. It escalated the encounter with Dr. Gates along with [now] allowing for us to ask significant questions about Officer Crowley's physical ability---Gates is a 65 year old petite man who walks with a cane. Police officers should be physically fit.

When we as a society fail to demand that applicant processes for a police officer's screen out men and women with uninspiring temperament and inept conflict resolution skills, we get what we perhaps, deserve: the sunglasses wearing cop with the short fuse and not an ounce of social skill.

The character of policing should change on the heels of the Cambridge, Mass incident. Police academies need new curricula that emphasize problem solving and people skills. Moreover, this is a chance for politicians to legislate out impediments to positive police-citizen social interaction, such as the mirrored sunglasses and exterior bullet proof vests by example, and that the same legislators implement a rule of law that requires a police officer to

reveal his\her name and badge number. That same legislation should bear criminal penalties for the officer who refuses to provide a badge and name. There is no such crime as "Contempt of Cop."

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