COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

MPTC

Municipal Police Training Committee

Freedom of Assembly: Crowd Management

In-Service Training 2025 | *The First Amendment*



Introductions

- Instructor Introduction
- Professional Background
- Why This Training Matters

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the dynamics of protests, social movements, and gatherings.
2. Identify police responsibilities and best practices for responding to mass gatherings.
3. Evaluate how to preserve the right to assemble while maintaining public safety.



Why Here? Why Now?

- 2017-March 2024: 132 countries experienced large-scale protests
- 15-26 million Americans participated in 2020 protests
- 749 sentenced for criminal activity during Jan 6 assault on Capitol Hill
- 6000+ pro-Palestine protests in 802 localities between 10/23-3/24
  - 1.2 million participants
- 322,322 participants in 897 pro-Israel events across 338 localities.
- 2024 is an election year

Learning Objective 1

Explain the dynamics of protests, social movements, and gatherings.



Responding to Mass Gatherings

- Crowd sizes and unrest
- Crowd dynamics



Right of the People to Peaceably Assemble

> Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

- During drafting, some in Congress thought freedom of assembly should be omitted
- Response: without freedom of assembly, every other right can be taken away.

Freedom of Assembly

- Governments may restrict time, place, and manner
  - Can't be a pretext to prevent assembly. *Cox v. New Hampshire* (1941)
  - Must be narrowly tailored to serve gov. interest
- Municipalities may require permits



Types of Crowds



1. Event-based
2. Public demonstrations
3. Civil disturbances

Protest vs. Social Movement

- Level of organization, duration, and tactics
- Social movement:

  An organized effort by a large number of people to bring about or impede social, political, economic, or cultural change.

- "Politics by other means"
- Three types of social movements:
  1. Reform
  2. Revolutionary
  3. Reactionary



Protest vs. Social Movement

	Protests	Social Movements
Duration:	Short-lived	Long-term
Organization:	Spontaneous. If organized, goal is mobilization	Organized with formal structures, hierarchy, and communication
Tactics:	Highly visible (blocking traffic, public spaces, etc.)	Varied (lobby, organize, protest, campaign, civil disobedience)
Size:	Varies with cause and media coverage	Large; includes members and allies
Goals:	Immediate and specific	Substantive, long-lasting changes

Case Study: Protest or Social Movement?



Feb 20, 1939:

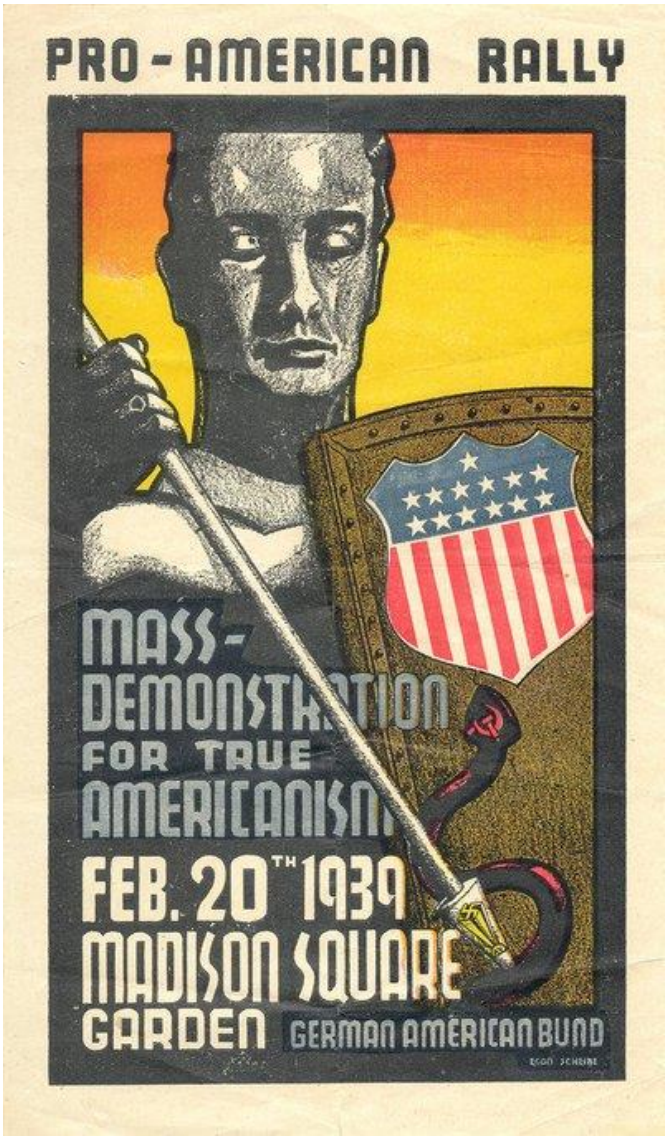
- "Pro-America" Rally at Madison Square Garden
- Nazi Rally sponsored by German American Bund
- 20,000 attendees
- NYPD deployed 1,700 officers
  - Commissioner: "enough to stop a revolution"
- Counterprotests outside
- Right to rally supported by Mayor LaGuardia and the American Jewish Committee

A Night at the Garden









Discussion:

1. Is this a protest or a social movement?
2. Is a hate rally protected by the First Amendment?
3. Assume this occurred in Massachusetts. What's the charge for Isadore Greenbaum, the 26-year-old protestor who charged the stage?

Motivations for Protest

- Reasons for mass demonstrations:
  - Recruitment
  - Discontent with existing conditions
  - Opportunity for action
  - Thrill



"Next to sex, the activity combining experience and intense emotion to the highest degree is the participation in a mass demonstration at a time of great public exaltation. …marching, chanting slogans, singing – through which the merger of the individual in the mass, which is the essence of the collective experience, finds expression."

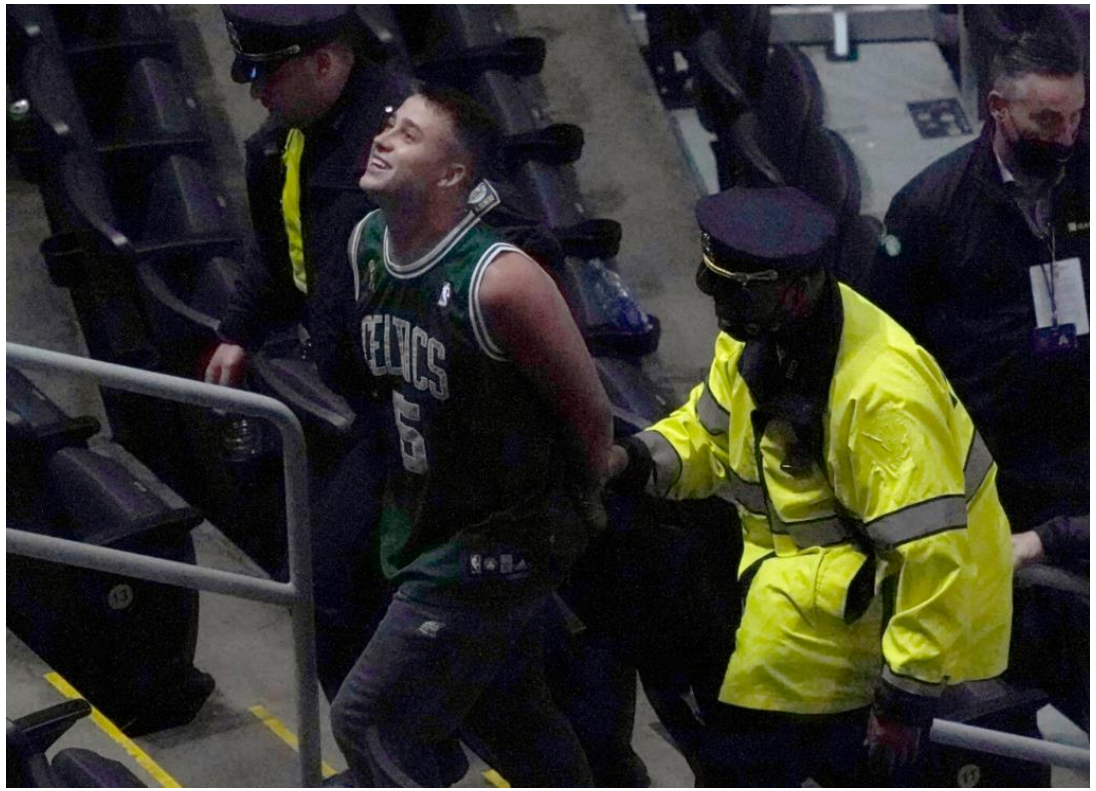
- Historian Eric Hobsbawm

Learning Objective 2

Identify police responsibilities and best practices for responding to mass gatherings.



Police Responsibilities



- Watch the crowd, not the event
- Be fair and impartial
- Ensure safety of all present
- Ensure members follow all laws

Department Responsibilities

MGL c 6E § 14(e) and 555 CMR 6.08:

- Communicate with organizers
- Discuss and establish logistical plans to avoid or de-escalate conflict
- Designate an officer in charge of planning and communicating



Crowd Management Tactics

- ✓ Gather information
- ✓ Communicate, especially with group leaders
- ✓ Identify and manage risks
- ✓ Conduct targeted investigations
- ✓ Conduct large scale interventions (last resort)

Tactics – Gather Information

- Motivation
- Culture
- Intentions



Tactics – Communicate, especially with leaders

- Before and during the event
- Remain fair and impartial
  - Do not take sides or share personal beliefs
- Safety precautions taken
- Expectations for assembly
- Goal of police:
  - ensure safety
  - protect First Amendment rights



Tactics - Identify and Manage Risks

- Identify:
  - volatile members
  - situations that may lead to disorder
- You are likely being recorded
  - Give clear instructions, provide time to comply
- Collaborate with leaders to prevent disorder
- Diplomacy & de-escalation to prevent conflict



Tactics – Conduct Targeted Interactions

- Crowd member(s) creating hazards
- Specific few vs. whole crowd
- Minimal intrusion into crowd activities
  - Targeted arrest requires timing and resources
  - Wait for target to move outside or away before making contact
  - Never walk into an unstable or hostile crowd to make an arrest
  - Request ample back-up and develop plan

Tactics – Large Scale Interventions (Last Resort)



- Communicate police intent to take action
- Demonstrate a show of force
- Take action to disperse the crowd
- Disperse the crowd and make arrests

Use of Force and Crowd Management

555 CMR 6.08

(1) Police department shall establish a plan; communicate with organizers

(2) Designate an officer in charge

(3) Discharge of tear gas or kinetic devices

(4) De-escalation tactics must be attempted or not feasible

(5) Use of canines

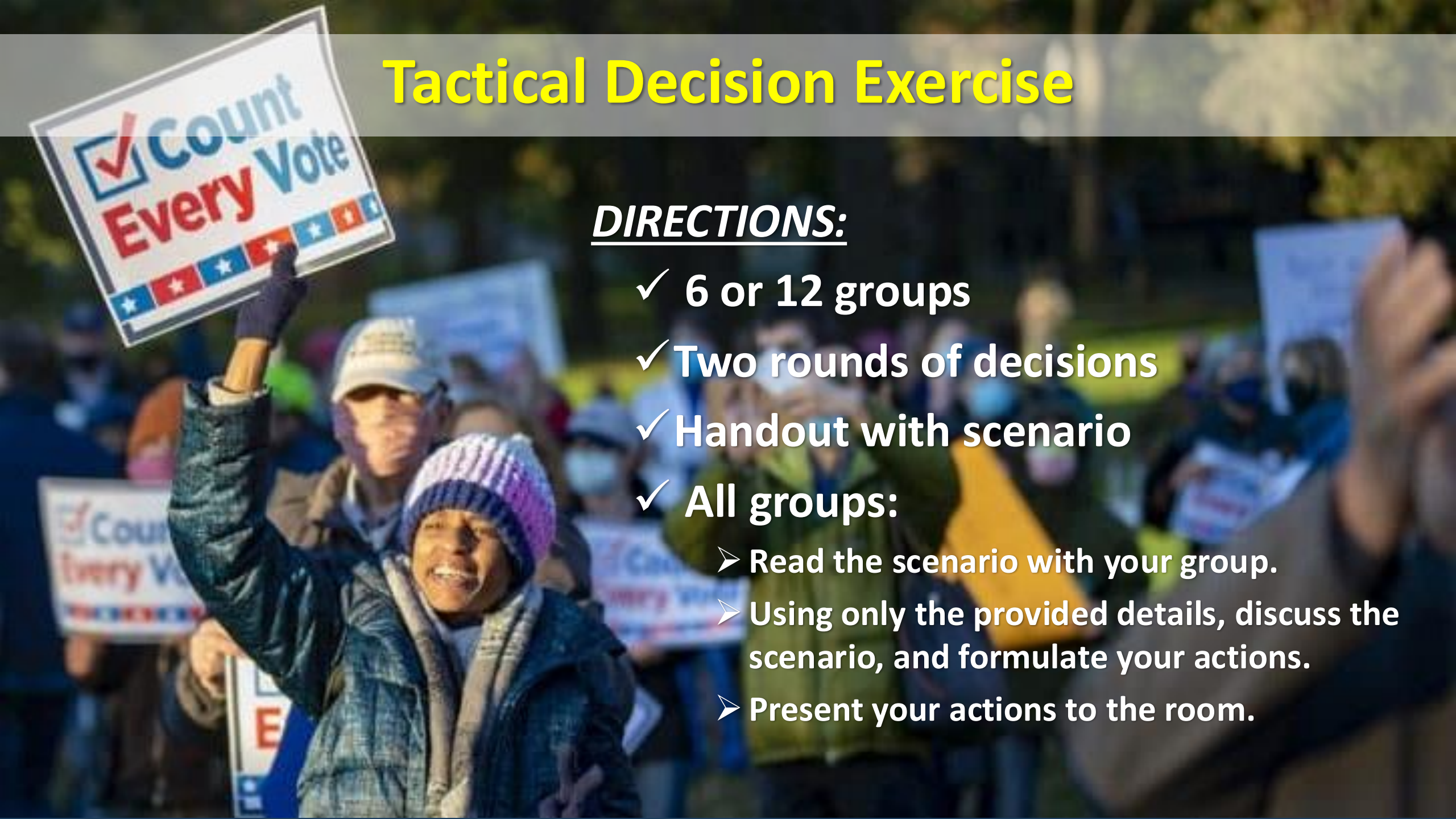
(6) kettling

Learning Objective 3

Evaluate how to preserve the right to assemble while maintaining public safety.



Tactical Decision Exercise



DIRECTIONS:

- ✓ 6 or 12 groups
- ✓ Two rounds of decisions
- ✓ Handout with scenario
- ✓ All groups:
  - ➢ Read the scenario with your group.
  - ➢ Using only the provided details, discuss the scenario, and formulate your actions.
  - ➢ Present your actions to the room.

Tactical Decision Exercise

- The instructor will provide your group with a scenario
- Discuss the scenario:
  - ✓ actions you will take
  - ✓ resources you will deploy

ROUND

1

Scenario 1 – Protest/Counter Protest

You are the sector car dispatched to a report of a large group gathering in the town common. Upon arrival it appears that this impromptu gathering is a reaction to the ongoing conflict in Gaza. There are about 25 people, many of whom are holding signs reading “Free Palestine,” “No more genocide,” and “End Israeli apartheid.” Across the common, a small group of 3-4 individuals is beginning to gather. One is holding a large Israeli flag and pointing at the protesters.

Scenario 2 – Exposition/Fair

While working the detail at the Exposition/Fair at the public fairgrounds, security asks you to respond to the livestock exhibit. They report that a group of animal rights activists has blocked access to the exhibit and is refusing people entry. When you arrive, you see their arms are interlocked together. A person with a bullhorn is making allegations about animal abuse. A crowd is beginning to gather and watch.

Scenario 3 - Parade

You are a detail officer working the pride parade. The parade is being organized by the group Pride for the People, a private organization. At the staging area, you notice a heated discussion between the parade organizer and a group of 20 people. You ask what is happening and are told the group is comprised of Super Happy Fun America members. They are looking to march in the parade as a symbol of their “white pride” but are being refused entry into the parade. The group is wearing masks and gloves.

Scenario 4 – Championship Sporting Event

You are working a detail at the local high school's league championship football game. It has been a close game, with questionable calls that have charged the crowd's energy. After the game, students, parents, and other spectators supporting the winning team storm the field and celebrate. After 15 minutes, the Athletic Director for the host school wants the crowd dispersed so she can turn the lights off and secure the facility.

Scenario 5 – Political Event

You are working a detail at the local polling station, stationed inside the gymnasium. Someone comes up to you and tells you there is a “commotion” in the parking lot. Upon walking out, you see a large crowd clearly divided into two camps yelling and screaming at each other. You learn that a woman got into a verbal altercation with one of the sign-holders across the street after she parked her car. They shouted disparaging comments back and forth at each other. The sign holder then crossed the street, entered the parking lot, and confronted the woman as she was about to enter the doors to the polling station. An election worker came outside and told the sign-holder that he needed to return to the picket area across the street. The sign-holder accused the election worker of taking sides and refused to leave. The other 15-20 sign-holders left their signs across the street, surrounded the election worker and the sign-holder, and began shouting.

Scenario 6 – Private Property

It is 10:30 PM on a Saturday night. You are dispatched to the McMansion Estate's subdivision on the report of a large gathering in a backyard with live music playing. Upon arrival, you see cars parked legally on both sides of the street. You estimate 40-50 cars. You encounter 7-8 people, in their 30s, in the front yard drinking from Solo cups. They explain that it's their friend's wedding, who is the daughter of the homeowner. You hear a band playing loudly in the fenced-in backyard and hear people singing along.

Tactical Decision Exercise

- Things can change quick!
- The instructor will provide your group with a changing circumstance to your scenario.
- Discuss the changing circumstance:
  - ✓ actions you will take
  - ✓ resources you will deploy

ROUND

2

Scenario 1 – Protest/Counterprotest



1977 Pulitzer Prize; Stanley J. Forman, *Boston Herald American*

The man with the Israeli flag crosses the boundary line you established, holding it as a spear, and is walking quickly towards the Pro-Palestinian protestors.

Scenario 2 – Exposition/Fair

Fair managers want the protestors removed, but the group is passionate about its cause, refuses to move, and continues chanting at the crowd.

Scenario 3 - Parade

The leader claims that if they are denied their right to march, they will “shout down the parade from the sidelines.”

Scenario 4 – Championship Sporting Event

While many spectators did leave, still on the field after the lights are out are a mix of 35 parents, students, and other spectators. They insist they are just celebrating and that you can't take that away from the kids.

Scenario 5 – Political Event

The belligerent sign-holder continues to argue the fact that everyone is taking the woman's side because of the candidate she supports. He refuses to move.

Scenario 6 – Private Property

The homeowner comes out. He is very cordial and explains that it's his only daughter's wedding, the band will be done by 1 AM, and people will be "pretty much gone" by 2 AM. He says he has a permit from the town. He retrieves it. Upon examination, you see that the permit approves the temporary use of a tent.



Conclusion

Today, we:

1. Explained the dynamics of protests, social movements, and gatherings.
2. Identified police responsibilities and best practices for responding to mass gatherings.
3. Evaluated how to preserve the right to assemble while maintaining public safety.

- Crowds can behave in varied and unpredictable ways
- Officers are always responsible for protecting First Amendment rights and public safety
- Effective crowd management
- When crowd members see police as fair and legitimate, the risk of disorder and violence is reduced.