

RACIAL PROFILING

Numbers show Eugene police stop blacks, Latinos more.

B Y A L A N P I T T M A N

Driving while black or Latino isn't a crime in Eugene. But you wouldn't know that by looking at a recent racial profiling study of 18,000 traffic stops by Eugene police in 2002.

Police stopped African-American drivers at a rate 2.3 times higher than white drivers. Latino male drivers were stopped at a 22 percent higher rate.

Police searched Latino drivers at a rate 2.6 times higher than whites and searched blacks at a 37 percent higher rate.

The data indicate that targeting minorities for stops and searches has little apparent justification. White drivers were slightly more likely to be arrested or cited as a result of stops than blacks or Latinos and minorities were no more likely to be carrying contraband.

Despite the large racial disparity in the data, EPD officials do not admit there is any problem in their department. "There's no way to tell based on the study if we do racial profiling," says Police Capt. Elvia Williams. "We're examining further why we have the differences."

Acting Police Chief Thad Buchanan did not return a call requesting comment.

Asked what he thought of the city's racial profiling study, Eugene police union president Willy Edewaard replied, "I am going to reserve my opinion until the whole thing's done," and then hung up the phone in the middle of a subsequent question.

Members of the black and Latino community say they've long heard complaints of racial profiling by Eugene police and say the city needs to acknowledge there's a problem and move to address it.

"I've heard it from a lot of different folks," says Chuck Dalton, president emeritus of the local NAACP. "Virtually every black male has been stopped at least once" in Eugene under questionable circumstances, he says.

"Denial is a very deep rooted thing," says Dalton of the EPD's response to the data. "They're a lot of drug addicts and alcoholics who say they're not drug addicts and alcoholics."

Carmen Urbina, director of El Centro Latinoamericano says the profiling data "is a real red flag for the community."

Urbina says the data clearly indicates a problem. "If you're a Latino or African-American, you're more likely to be stopped," she says. "The numbers are there, they're there," Urbina says. "Absolutely, there's a lot of work that needs to be done."

DRIVING WHILE BLACK

About 89 percent of the drivers Eugene police stopped last year were white. But blacks, who make up just 1.1 percent of the local driving age population, accounted for 2.6 percent of the traffic stops of local drivers. The relatively high number of stops of local black drivers for a small local black population make for the high stop rate.

The rate at which young black male drivers were stopped was especially high. There are only about 280 black males aged 18 to 29 in Eugene, according to census data. But Eugene police reported 151 traffic stops among this small group. That's a rate of more than one stop per two young black residents.

Dalton says he's "not at all" surprised by the numbers, which he says match years of complaints he's heard from local black residents. In the 1980s, Dalton says the city admitted that it had been keeping a photo book of all black residents for years.

In 1994, a teenager under Dalton's guardianship and another young black male were stopped by Eugene police. "They were terrified, they had guns put to their head," Dalton says.

The police had somehow mistaken the two youths for an armed 35-year old Latino bank robber, Dalton says. The two young men sued and eventually won a \$20,000 jury verdict, but the police never apologized, Dalton says.

While the police were going after his guardian and his friend, the bank robber got away, Dalton says. "The other side of this coin is who's getting away while they're doing this" racial profiling, he says.

"It's bogus," says Dalton of racial profiling. "White folks do the vast majority of drugs in this country, white folks do the vast majority of crimes in this country."

Dalton says it's vital that police aren't racist. "They have a license to kill, so it's really critical to eliminate as much bias as possible."

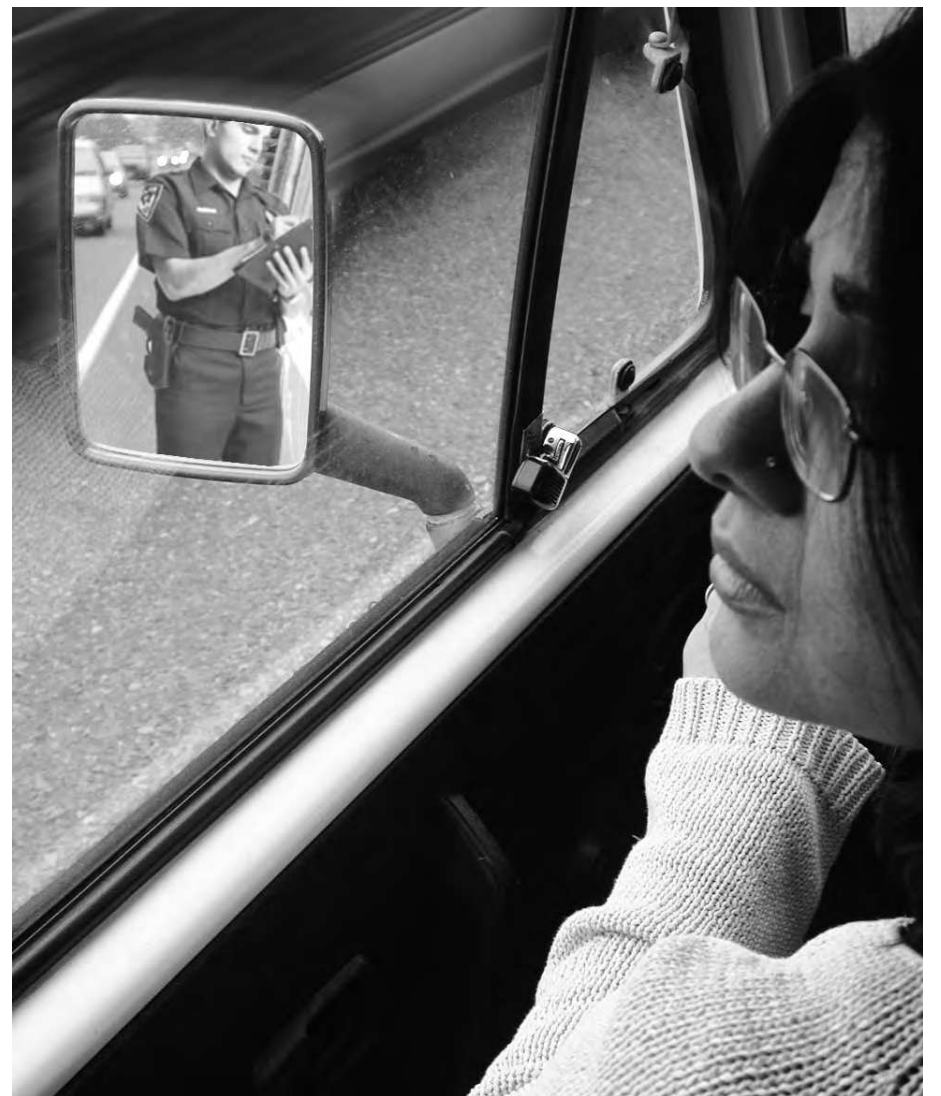
Dalton says he doesn't believe racism at the EPD is overt, but more deeply rooted. "I don't think there's a grand conspiracy there, a car-load of card-carrying Klansman."

"The culture of law enforcement in America is such that they can't help but view people of color as being more criminal," Dalton says. Fear of blacks is deeply entrenched in American culture by TV and movies that portray blacks as criminals.

People who haven't met minorities personally have little information to counter the stereotypes, Dalton says. Eugene officers recruited from Idaho, Montana and Oregon, states with very low minority populations, "have met virtually no people of color."

"If all you know about black people and Latinos is what you see on TV, hey, we're criminals," Dalton says. "I don't think they realize that they're doing this."

Police work, with its "us against the world view," and risk of injury from criminals, "just magnifies the attitude" of racial bias in society,



Dalton says. "It's really a psychological issue."

Eugene police managers recognize the problem, Dalton says, but they are reluctant to fight the police union to press for change. "In management in general, there's a reluctance to press forward because if they really did, they'd have to fire about 20 percent of their labor force."

Police management finds it easier to "finesse" the minority community around the profiling issue than to take on big change in the department, Dalton says. "I have yet to see a police chief in this town go out and say that [profiling] behavior could cost you your job."

ALWAYS BEEN A PROBLEM

Ed Coleman, a retired UO English professor and another longtime leader in the local African-American community, says he also is not surprised by the data showing blacks get stopped far more often. "It's always been a problem," he says.

In 1963, the local chapter of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) found a "systematic, patterned police bias" in stopping and interrogating blacks, according to *Eugene 1945-2000*, a local history book.

In 1995, an EPD survey found that 55 percent of blacks and 25 percent of Hispanics felt that officers did a poor job of treating people fairly regardless of race and class.

Decades ago, Eugene police would stop

black drivers with white women in the car on "general principal," Coleman says.

Coleman says he warned his sons that they were more likely to get stopped when they were growing up. One of his sons was stopped while cycling, Coleman says, "He was so scared."

When he himself has been stopped, Coleman says, "I panic, my heart throbs almost out of my throat."

Coleman says Eugene police have gotten a lot better over the years, although the issue remains. He praises the work of Eugene's recent police chiefs and top managers, but he remains concerned about the line officers. "Once you get the guys out on the street or in the cars, that's a different problem."

Eugene had a black police chief when Leonard Cooke served in the 1990s but, "it was still a problem and he couldn't do very much," Coleman says.

Coleman says he's discussed racial issues in Eugene with Eugene's new city manager, Dennis Taylor. "He's got to find out where the bodies are buried before he can do something dramatically, and he wants to do something dramatically," Coleman says. But he says Taylor has to wait to get a new police chief before starting any reforms.

Capt. Williams is black, but Coleman says, "She has to be careful herself." Williams "can't do everything that she might think is necessary," he says. "There's that whole police mentality, there's a whole society there and sometimes you run into a wall there with-