

Blacks and the Police in Portland

Part III

By Joyce Boles

Editor's Note: What about the cops working today in the Black community? What about the feelings of Black citizens toward them? This *Observer* article, third in a series, examines the dynamics of their interaction.)

Police officers have frequent contact with Blacks who are up to no good. Says former Black police officer Dick Bogle, now a newsman at Channel 2: "A lot of white police officers really are at a disadvantage. Because their contact with Blacks in the main are with the criminal element, and they can easily get a distorted view. A Black coming up in Portland, a middle class guy like me, I was in a multi-racial thing all my life. Sometimes I try to put myself in the position of a white police officer who didn't really know any Blacks, he comes in contact with prostitutes, thieves, dope dealers, the scum, and what is that going to do to your attitude toward Blacks, when the people you come in contact with are scum? I hope that today the guys who are being hired have had more contact with Blacks prior to being hired..."

Are there any flat-out bigots working in Albina area?

Jim Loving thinks so. "I would have to say yes, I believe so, in my experience. The police is a legal instrument of the law, and he doesn't want to just flagrantly do anything against you that he can't justify that is not legal. But he's going to do everything in his power to provoke you to do something so that he can justify doing what he wants to do, that is, drag you off to jail, beat you up, whatever he wants to justify what he do. Even if it's come to the point where he wants to kill you, he'll figure out a way that you would give him justification to kill you, and that is legalized murders. And there are some legalized murders in this country, and there are some in Portland...I have no confidence in 'em dealing with Blacks and minorities." His attitude is not uncommon.

Loving refers to a time in 1975 when Black leaders went to United States Attorney Sid Lezak to request an investigation into police practices in Portland following the deaths of four young Blacks at the hands of police. But Lezak clearly signalled to the community that it was because he felt he could not refuse, rather than that he wanted to do it. He was quoted as saying he



RONNIE HERNDON

would not proceed to the grand jury before being satisfied that a case existed, a seeming pre-judgment of the situation at the time the remark was made. Whether or not the four shooting deaths at question were justified, many in the Black community thought they were not, and still think so.

Rev. Jackson agrees that there are bigoted officers: "Well, they gave the indications of being bigots."

Ron Herndon thinks that not only are there racist officers, but that the entire institution of the police bureau is racist: "It's racism, pure and simple. And not just in the officers. In the next 10 years they'll be gone, but the institutions will reflect those same values and it's not different than any other institution except that by law they are able to use force, and in doing that the results of their practices many times will be much more severe and immediate than what happens in a hospital and a school system, or another institution like that."

Former Black police officers agree. Recalls Dick Bogle: "I've never really said anything about racism in the police bureau. But there was racism, nothing that's really easy to document as far as an official basis, but I think there was racism. There was a lot of ignorance, and there was a lot of insensitivity among the highest in the department. Captains. Deputy Chiefs. They were smarter than to make remarks. There were bigots as patrolmen in the mass of officers, and I guess you have to expect that,

because anytime you get a large number of males, then you have got a microcosm of society...I can remember an incident when I was trying to make an arrest with my partner, who was white, of a Black man, and the guy swung and hit me and I knocked him down. Then I jumped on him to cuff him, put the handcuffs on him. A rather simple procedure for two guys to handle this one person. My partner, who was white, been working with him all evening, had worked with him before, pulled his flashlight out and started hittin the guy on the head with it and callin him a nigger. I mean we're standing shoulder to shoulder, me and him, with the guy down on the ground, and I'm trying to cuff him and this guy is hittin him on the head and callin him a nigger. That made me feel pretty uncomfortable around that guy, but it certainly in the game of one-upmanship made him, gave him a step up on me. He knew I was embarrassed, you know, because he and I were both Black, my white partner called him a nigger, and well, there were also a lot of racial jokes."

Pressed for other examples, Bogle remembers: "I used to work with one guy, now retired, who used to call Blacks, apes. 'Hey, there's a car full of apes, let's stop 'em.' It was apes, apes, apes all night, every night you work with this guy. (Even with you in the car?) Yeah. Right!"

Chief Baker thinks the training officers get in this area is inadequate: "I don't think from a cursory review of the training that we give in that area that we do a good job at all. I can flat-out say it. I think we're well-intentioned, but I don't think we're accomplishing what we set out to do." He adds that officers get about six hours at the academy in training to deal with different cultures.

Robert Phillips thinks there are bigots working in North Precinct. Phillips, 29, is a social worker, and presently chairman of the Inner Northeast Precinct Council (a creation of Chief Baker), and he also chairs the Neighbors Against Crime Program. He served 2 years on the police budget advisory committee as well.

While he sees the main problem with police in the Black community as one of interpretation of police behavior to the citizens, and a secondary issue as the lack of courtesy afforded citizens, it was an incident he personally experienced that got him involved as a citizen in police matters. He and some friends



DICK BOGLE

were on their way to a party, but took time to inquire into police behavior with another Black citizen. Their inquiry resulted in their being followed and eventually stopped by four police cars bearing eight officers and multiple weapons. Phillips is convinced the police response would have been different had he and his friends, all employees of the Oregon Department of Human Resources and as middle class as it is possible to get, been white.

Further, Phillips has heard citizen testimony involving "situations on the council trying to interpret things to the police that make me feel that there is bigotry in North Precinct, and I think overall in the police department." He has heard from whites in north precinct who have been on ridealongs about racist police behavior, and rumors of certain parking lots being used for beating Black citizens. "It's not a lot of officers, it's just a few that are getting away with this, and the commissioner's office says it has an idea of who these officers are."

Freddye Pette thinks there are bigoted officers in North. "It's a matter of lack of understanding of the community in which they work. Officers will use the word 'boy' to Black males, a term that is certain to antagonize a Black," she says. "And they overreact in the Black community," she charges. "Lots more cars on a call, for example. And they will say to a white woman living in Northeast Portland, 'you

shouldn't be living here,'" she says. "Well, why not?" she asks. "That's not the sort of remark for a cop to make. It instills fear that's not already there."

Commissioner Jordan backs away from saying there are bigots in North. "I think there are some officers in the Black community who have a problem...I think a lot of it is naivete in terms of the Black culture. If you talk to a white officer and ask him to tell you something about a Black male, he's not going to tell you what I'm going to tell you, and that is that Black males need space. You don't crowd Black males because they need space, and if you crowd them you provoke them to do something. You don't put your hand on them to talk to them. Those little things an officer needs to know about Black males so they can deal with a situation, because if they knew that, it would be unnecessary sometime to make a number of arrests in the Black community. If they just knew those small things."

While Jordan has never experienced personally any inappropriate police behavior, "my staff has. My staff, since I've been commissioner has had encounters with the police bureau and the attitude was bad, very bad."

And Jordan has heard from Black club owners who complain to him about the way police act in some of the clubs. "My officers go into some of the clubs and it's the attitude, you know, the throwing your coat back and letting your weapon show. That sets 'em off. Not going up to the proprietor of the club and acknowledging the fact that he owns the club. And saying, Mr. Barnes, just a routine check, that's all. Walking in and walking right by the owner, and looking at the patrons, like some kind of gestapo. That really set 'em off. I get a lot of complaints."

Leon Johnson thinks racism operates in the Bureau. When he was a motorcycle officer, he gathered data from the police radio about who was getting stopped how often, and what they were charged with, and if having a white girl in the car made a difference, and who got fined how much, and who was transported to jail and who got off with a citation, and so forth, long before the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration also gathered this data.

Johnson's informal study agrees with LEAA. If you are Black, you are much more likely to be stopped,



COMMISSIONER JORDAN

and once stopped much more likely than whites to be taken to jail instead of cited for the same offense, and if taken to jail much more likely to be convicted, and if convicted much more likely to do time instead of getting probation or some lesser sentence.

"You think there's not racism? If you happened not to be a white male, and you were driving around on SW Mont Vista Terrace the likelihood of you getting your fanny stopped and either harassed or arrested -- there's a lot of ways to arrest folks if you take a notion to. I haven't seen a car yet I couldn't stop and give a ticket to if I wanted to. There is no way in America not to get nailed if somebody wants to nail you."

Johnson took his data to the command in the bureau and was met with massive indifference, he recalls. "Tough luck, that's too bad," he says was the response. But he is quick to add that the present administration is much more progressive.

Says Stan Peters about Johnson's study: "I don't agree. You see, if you want to get into name calling, go along as an invisible person in a Black neighborhood if you want to hear some name calling. But there's no charges brought against the Black individual for name calling. Leon Johnson knows this. So I'm not going to comment on Leon Johnson's interpretation of how police react."

Black voter participation declines

The number of Blacks of voting age has risen from 15 million in 1976 to about 17 million in 1980, but actual voter participation in this group slumped from a high of 57.6 percent in the 1968 presidential election to 48.7 percent in 1976, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Overall, there has been a decline in voter participation among the general population of the country, despite the increase in the total number of persons of voting age.

The projected figure for the voting age population of the U.S. in 1980 is 160 million, an increase of 10.3 million since 1976. According

to the Bureau's Current Population Reports, which monitor population characteristics of the nation, less than half of the civilian noninstitutional population of voting age actually voted in the November, 1978, Congressional election.

The reported turnout in 1978 (46 percent) was close to the turnout reported in the 1974 Congressional election (45 percent), but substantially below that reported in the Presidential election of 1976 (59 percent). U.S. voters traditionally do not turn out in Congressional off-year elections as heavily as in Presidential election years.

The Social and Economic Status of the Black Population, a publication of the Bureau of the Census, notes that Blacks made significant advances in voter registration and participation in the 1960s as a result of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the civil rights movement and voter registration drives. However, these gains were not maintained in the 1970s. In fact, for both Blacks and whites there has been a decline.

While overall white voting rates are considerably higher than Black rates, analysis of previous Current Population Survey results show that racial differences in voter turnout are related to socioeconomic differences.

The first year in which data on voter registration was collected by the Census Bureau was 1966; about 6.3 million Blacks of voting age reported that they had registered to vote in the Congressional elections

that year. For the Presidential election of 1972, the number of Blacks registered had risen by 2.5 million to a high of 8.8 million. In the 1974 Congressional election, the number of Black registrants dropped to about 7.8 million.

After the reported rates of 60 percent Black voter registration for 1966 and 1970, the rate or percentage fell substantially to 55 percent for the 1974 Congressional election. This was the lowest rate reported for any of the five general elections from 1966 to 1974.

• College graduates are more than twice as likely to vote as persons who did not complete elementary school -- 64 percent and 29 percent, respectively.

• White-collar workers are more likely to vote than persons in other occupational groups.

• Persons 65 years and over are nearly three times as likely to vote (56 percent) as persons 18 to 20 years old (20 percent).

Eugene project honored

A CETA project of the Eugene Oregon Indian Center, Inc., has been selected one of the outstanding in the nation. Ida LaMonds, director will accept the center's award at the National Native American CETA Convention, which will be held July 21-24 in Arlington, Virginia.

The award-winning project provided manpower jobology training for clients from Lane, Douglas, Jackson and Josephine counties. Training consisted of the participants' setting long-range career goals, through self-evaluation of their present situation, decision-making and goal-setting techniques and computer aptitude analysis, awareness of his or her

own abilities, community resources and schooling availability. The program was primarily aimed at the hard core unemployed and underemployed.

The CETA Convention, for the 181 Native American CETA programs from throughout the United States, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, will be the first attempt by the ten regions to meet in one body.

In addition to honoring outstanding CETA projects, also on tap are mini-seminars in: Discretionary Funds and Research Development; CETA and Economic Development; The Legislative Process, and a number of others. These topics will be addressed in the regional sessions.

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