

Blacks and the Police in Portland

PART IV

By Joyce Boles

Editor's Note: The shortage of Blacks in the Portland Police Bureau has been a subject of public discussion for years. Why won't Blacks become cops? Why won't the bureau hire more Blacks? How are the 12 Black officers now treated? What lies ahead?

Trying to get Black officers in the bureau has been the target of special recruiting for a number of years with very little success. In 1968, Chief McNamera attempted to bypass civil service by hiring six Blacks to fill vacancies created by disabilities. This move was met by fierce union opposition on the same grounds as the current union opposition: alleged lowering of standards. Louis DeGiovani, the union president, was quoted as saying the union position did not mean racism. "We want negroes on the force, but not at this cost."

At the time, the papers stated, there was a six percent concentration of Blacks in the population, which would have meant 30 in the bureau had all things been equal. A 1971 article reported that Portland had the lowest proportion of Blacks in the bureau, seven out of 715 men, or less than 1 percent, of 18 cities in a national survey. The article said the number of Blacks had ranged from a low of 6 in 1968 to a high of 10 in 1965 in the previous 10 years.

A 1968 recruiting effort failed, with 20 prospective applicants, of whom three showed up to take the test and none passed it. McNamera's program for hiring six temporarily died, the one man having been hired, fired after seven months for multiple reasons. On the basis of population the bureau should have had 35 in 1971, it was noted.

Another effort in 1974 was also a failure. Lt. Robert Schwartz was in charge, and he was quoted as saying that after the bureau spent \$11,723, it hired five minorities, of whom three walked in the door by themselves. A goal of hiring thirteen was not met, making the effort a failure. At that time, among the 735 officers there were five Blacks, four Spanish Americans, two Indians and two Chinese.

In October, 1974, another effort with \$50,000 in federal money was launched with Tony Newman, Joseph Murillo and Joe Lane (an Indian) working on it. A February, 1975 article had a picture of Murillo and Lane along with Christy Rushing, who all claimed that time was healing all the 1960s wounds. About 34 minority persons were lined up at the time to take the test, including 18 Blacks, six Indians, six Spanish Americans, and six Asians.

Despite all that, today there are 12 Black police officers on the bureau, a fact of which Commissioner Charles Jordan, one of the few Black police Commissioners in the country, is well aware. This low number is what is behind his push for the change in civil service procedures that mean two hiring lists, one of white males and the other of protected groups. "People say that if Jordan can't do something, then what hope is there?" says the Commissioner.

Jordan is certain the change will withstand a court challenge. So is Freddie Pette. Similar action has been successful in other cities, they say.

Jordan goes on to say that he thinks Stan Peters is fighting the change only because he has to, that it is his role as union president to fight it, but that knowing he is in a no-win situation he doesn't like doing it.

Peters, however, is emphatic in the justice of the union position. The union says the change is in violation of the city charter and should be stopped.

There are several steps to becoming a Portland police officer, according to Harvey McGowan of the civil service office, the man who wrote the most recent test and who designs most exams. First, he and the director of personnel, Capt. Schwartz, talk over the situation. This is before the test is written.

In general, when a city bureau wants to hire, it sends the civil service office a notice of vacancy. Civil service then goes through its lists, picks the correct list, and certifies the top three names of three names of three is one opening, the top four if there are two openings, the top five if there are three, and so on.

Bureaus have different methods



HARVEY MCGOWAN

of proceeding from that point, says McGowan. They are supposed to consider the top three. What the word consider means varies from bureau to bureau. Some will go through a fairly structured interview process. Others already know whom they will hire and will not even make contact with other persons on the list. The police bureau, generally speaking, hires straight down the list, along the way turning down many more white males than either females or Black males, says McGowan.

Some persons, once on the list, may be ejected through failure of their background exams, something the police personnel office does. Others may fail either the psychological or the physical exams. Some will fail the physical agility test, others the oral interview.

McGowan says he personally makes sure that the oral interview brings a candidate face-to-face with a woman on the panel, or a minority, depending on the applicant. "If there's not enough women and minorities on a particular day to go around, then I sure make the interview panel consist of all males will see all male candidates that day," he says. "When a woman comes in, she will see a woman sitting there. When a minority comes in, he will always see a minority." McGowan notes that women and minorities rarely fail the interview exam.

The interview panel consists of one person for civil service and three persons from the bureau who have been specially trained for the assignment, he adds.

This year, 733 persons turned in applications, of whom 37 percent, or 273 did not appear for the written test. Of this, 70 Black persons sent in applications, but 34, or 48 percent, did not appear for the written test. Of the 36 Blacks taking the test, five passed. Of the 617 whites who sent in applications, 35 percent, or 217 did not appear. Of the 400 whites taking the test, 219 or 54 percent passed.

Dwight Ford, who works in minority recruiting, thinks he knows why so many Blacks failed to appear for this year's test: "When I was out recruiting, it was my understanding that the test would be reading and judgment, reading comprehension, memory and observation, and of course I was out there selling people on that. Two weeks before the exam they come out with a test preparation manual with the Oregon Criminal Code and bureau rules and regulations and no one ever told me about that. So I am out telling people one thing and civil service is doing another. So people were sort of saying you kind of lied to us about the exam, why in the world should I ever bother to take it? My credibility wasn't worth a plug nickel."

Ford believes there are a lot of qualified Blacks in Portland who would like to be police officers but who were discouraged by what appears to be at best a failure to communicate, at worst duplicity.

McGowan was responsible for that, says Ford, but he adds that McGowan thought he was writing a job-related exam. The results indicated this was the tendency of the test. Of the top 25 on the list, 20 were persons with prior police experience, most of whom tended to be white Oregon-born males.

Has Ford done anything to see that this doesn't happen again? "Yeah. I jumped up and down. I made it known that I am very, very

disappointed and angry about it." If it happens again, he notes, he will never do any recruiting again for the bureau.

Chief Baker agrees. "That last one was not good. They changed the test and God only knows why. It was slanted toward having too much prior police experience."

Stan Peters disagrees: "Every applicant for that examination received the same booklet with every question on the exam and every question on that exam came out of that booklet. (If we say not to give) an advantage to an ex-police officer, ...let's make police officers restricted from that, then that's not fair, either. That's the same as favoring somebody for their race, which is equally unfair, says Peters.

Furthermore, says Baker, nobody questions the fairness or unfairness of the five Veterans Preference points allowed in the City Charter. Looking at the current list, Baker says: "Let's look at number four. A 94.6 score. Subtract five, and we would move him to number 30. If we took the number 30 person...who had an 89.6, and subtracted five from his score, that would make him 84.6 and that would have moved him to 87. He would have dropped 57 points on the list."



STAN PETERS

Peters disagrees, saying the VPPS are written into the charter and offer compensation to a man who has served his country. While not addressing the issue of whether or not the VPPs "lower standards" for the bureau, Peters notes that the disability preference points award 10 extra points. "But for a person to take four years, nine months, and 28 days like I did and spend in the service, and leave him go someplace else and now come back and say I wanna compete with people who have had those same four years, nine months and 28 days to develop their careers, that's not fair, either, says Peters.

In the next test, according to Ford, there is a strong possibility some of the material will come from suggestions from him and Det. Janisse. Ford believes Blacks do less well on the test than whites because: "I guess you could say cultural bias. It doesn't make any kind of difference what kind of bias it is. It is excluding a group from the process of getting a job and being police officers. If the union and command put as much energy into supporting new ideas as they do in fighting, then perhaps the street officers would have a better perspective on the change, and be better able to deal with it themselves...A lot of people don't realize the overriding factor of how all this came about, how Blacks in the country, this country, have been discriminated against and denied due process for years and in many instances still are. A lot of white people and white officers can't relate to that because they don't feel they are... they don't (feel directly responsible)...They feel, hey, I didn't do it, it's too bad it happened, but why should I have to pay for it?"

In response to the union position, says Ford: "They're not telling them how Blacks have been held back from educational opportunities, and how we're not really lowering standards if we have a dual list. The test is not really...Because I think they want to paint a blue picture to patrol officers to get their support. It might strike me as funny because I sure as hell struck me funny that no one from the union ever came and asked Black officers how they felt about the dual list...When I first heard about it, I said oh, there has to be a better way,

this is going to cause problems if Blacks come into this bureau this way...I think the union had better learn to deal with its constituents. All of us. I think any time they use money that I pay every month in dues to fight something that indirectly is hurting me, as a Black officer and as a Black human being without first consulting me, it's awful ironic and shows a high degree of stupidity in someone...I'm just saying that dammit, why didn't you come talk to me about it and maybe we could decide to work something out and present it to people in a way that we could all sit down and live with it. If you don't get this through, we're going to be looking at quotas...No one wants that, I don't think."

But cautions Bob Janisse: "We don't want to appear to be trying to divide the Blacks from the whites in the department. That's not the way you do things. You have to deal with people diplomatically. We don't want to resort to name-calling."

Both Ford and Janisse are cautious about what they say. Ford met the reporter's tape recorder with one of his own. Janisse is reluctant to say anything that would antagonize anyone in the department. "I'm very concerned about the effect of your article on me. I'm not very popular in the department right now."

Janisse testified at the hearing on the rule change before the civil service commission. Among other things, he denied Stan Peters speaks for him. He also doubted the bureau's commitment to affirmative action, and said the progress so far is "disgusting" to him. He also cited a recruiting snafu which found the local recruiters at Black colleges in Washington, D.C., while they were out for the summer -- evidence of uncoordination.

Blacks on the department are deeply concerned that reason be abandoned for fear and name-calling. Ford believes the tension in the air can be felt, and has heard covert remarks about attempts to "get" any Black recruits hired off a second list. "The word is out that we're going to hire a bunch of dummies," he says.



DWIGHT FORD

Chief Baker says that the probationary time of the new recruits will be watched "very closely...to presume that this guy's a dummy because he came off a separate list so we'll get him, now there's bigotry. If you want an example of bigotry, that would be real bigotry." As when females came abroad, notes the chief, special efforts will be made to be sure they are treated fairly.

In 1963 Sidney Poitier became the first Black actor to receive an Academy Award for best actor for his role in *Lilies of the Field*.

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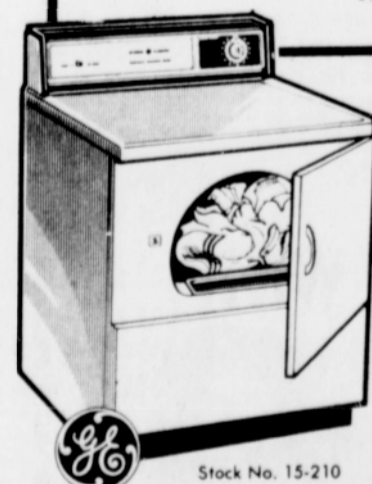
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