

# NAACP NEWS

## NAACP Study of Police Use of Deadly Force

By President Louis Gaines

Black Americans, particularly black males, overwhelmingly constitute a high disproportion of police shooting victims. The data and related research illustrating this point are to say the least replete. Doubtlessly, no method of law enforcement outrages black citizens throughout the U.S. to a higher degree than does the unquestioned police shooting of a black citizen. In fact, nothing has done more in recent years to undermine public support of the police in the black community than disputed incidents of police shootings and related killings.

The fact that citizens have a right to know about police policies and practices is sometimes ignored in the varied atmospheres that characterize relations between the police and the black community. In a great number of instances, and in response, black citizens view police with suspicion, distaste, and fear. This estrangement between the police and the black community is evidenced most clearly when a black citizen becomes a police shooting victim. To the costly degree that black citizens generally view police gunfire as unrestrained, wanton, and the result of racial prejudice, and to the degree black community support of the police is damaged, police efforts to accomplish their tasks are undercut as a consequence. Thus, it is in the interest not only of citizens but also of the police to make certain that the police use deadly force only when absolutely necessary. To this end, this information packet introduces the NAACP project which is designed to pointedly attack unrestricted use of deadly force. Outlined are the varied issues relating to police use of deadly force, and the measurable importance of enlightened and restrictive deadly force policy.

### A. POLICE USE OF DEADLY FORCE

The fact that "body counts" cited in reports of police killings measure only some fraction of the frequency of police use of deadly force does not diminish the clarity with which it is understood that black citizens, namely black males, bare the brunt of police officer negligence and/or deliberate abuse of the grossly unrestricted grant of power to use deadly force through the use of firearms. A substantial volume of data, such as the following, support this clarity.

Data show that during the 24-year period 1950-1973, an average of 245 persons were killed by police officers. Further, between 1967 and 1974 an average of 359 persons were killed by police officers. Of these victims, 50 percent were black. Professor Paul Takagi of the University of California notes that between 1960 and 1968, 1,188 black men and 1,253 white men were killed by police officers in an area with a 10 percent black population. Takagi also indicates that during the 1956-1974 period the rates of police shooting deaths "remained consistently at least nine times higher for Blacks" than for whites. Takagi interprets data to show that homicide rates for blacks ranged up to 13 times higher than the rate for whites because the U.S. government does not distinguish Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans as national minorities. Takagi notes data showing that one researcher "found that 13 percent of those killed by police were Spanish speaking." Thus if we deduct 13 percent from the total we see that blacks have been killed by police at a rate 13 times greater than whites. These findings are reinforced by other work which shows that in ten American cities blacks (the vast majority of whom were men) were killed at rates six to 30 times greater than the rates for whites. Moreover, the Police Foundation studied police shootings resulting in death or injury in seven U.S. cities with a total black population of 39 percent. Of the shootings analyzed, 70 percent involved black victims.

### B. POLICE DEPARTMENT POLICY

With respect to police use of deadly force, the most significant aspect of internal police organization is interfaced: 1) police agency adoption of an enlightened restrictive policy which clearly delineates the circumstances under which police officers may shoot; and 2) tough, consistent management to ensure that officers adhere to that policy.

The effects of administrative action on shooting rates have been assessed. A study of the formulation, promulgation, and enforcement of deadly force policies among 50 independent police departments in the Los Angeles area presented considerable diversity in the degree to which these policies restricted police shootings. This diversity was noted to be most strongly associated with variations in the personal philosophies of the chiefs of the departments studied. The operational consequence of these philosophical differences is that departments with the least restrictive firearms policies had police firearms discharge rates per 1,000 felony arrests which were twice as high as those with the most restrictive policies.

Despite the benefits of restrictive shooting policies and stringent review procedures, many police agencies have not adopted them. It is of note that as late 1968, one southwestern department with more than 100 sworn members had the following policy on the use of a firearm (quoted in its entirety): "Never take me out in anger; never put me back in disgrace."

Further, in 1967, the President's Task Force on the Police reported that it found vague or nonexistent shooting policies in many police agencies. Its researcher reported that this variation was a reflection of "a failure on the part of police administrators

to provide adequate guidance for officers faced with situations where they must decide instantaneously whether or not to use their firearms in discharging their official responsibilities."

Internal shooting policies are particularly important because research indicates that the definition of acceptable and appropriate use of deadly force is made at the department level.

### WHAT IS THE NAACP DOING ABOUT . . . . . ?



**Child Care**  
The NAACP operates Day Care Centers for the children's working mothers.



**Housing**  
The NAACP sponsors low and moderate income housing in communities around the nation.



**Employment**  
The NAACP is fighting to secure meaningful and productive employment for black teenagers, women and heads of households.



**Veteran**  
NAACP operates programs designed to assist veterans to receive their entitled benefits.



**Ballot Power**  
NAACP registered 2000,000 (two million) new voters in 1976

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**THERON GOYNES  
TO  
SEEK  
RE-ELECTION**