

U.S. Police Scandals Show Gaps In Law Enforcement

PHILADELPHIA - Retired Los Angeles police detective Mark Fuhrman's tape-recorded descriptions of police bigotry and an unfolding Philadelphia corruption scandal have cast a harsh light on American law enforcement.

Following police scandals within the past year in New York and New Orleans, the latest revelations of racism, thievery

and evidence tampering have highlighted what experts say are problems that recurrently surface in urban police forces.

Police representatives say the bad cops are only a tiny fraction of the 600,000 U.S. police officers and those few can unfairly stain entire departments.

But law enforcement researchers say the stress of police work, a flood of drug

money, and the culture and structure of some departments can all undermine police integrity.

"It's easy to lose your sense of right and wrong sometimes when you're out there and caught in a kind of vortex," said Gary Sykes, director of the Southwestern Law Enforcement Institute in Dallas, which conducts ethics training courses for police departments across the United States.

Richard Costello, president of the Philadelphia Fraternal Order of Police, said bad cops can only thrive where other parts of the establishment are corrupt. "You don't find much police corruption in governments that are honest," he said.

Fuhrman shocked the nation last week when recordings of him describing police beatings, evidence tampering, and hatred toward ethnic minorities were played at the O.J. Simpson murder trial.

Fuhrman's representatives say the conversations between 1985 and 1994 were exaggerations intended to impress a prospective screenwriter.

But on Friday, Los Angeles Police Chief Willie Williams announced murder charges had been dropped against two defendants after another police detective admitted forging a witness statement.

In Philadelphia last week, a sixth police officer pleaded guilty in a probe of police stealing and framing of purported drug suspects. City officials said more charges were likely.

A New York probe, which last year led to the arrest of 30 officers at a Harlem precinct, in June snared 16 officers in the Bronx on charges including theft, drug dealing and fabrication of evidence.

In New Orleans, nine officers were indicted in December on drug trafficking and weapons charges for guarding a cocaine warehouse. Some 40 officers have been charged with felonies including murder in the last three years.

There are no nationwide

statistics on levels of police corruption or brutality, experts said. "There's a lot of corruption that goes undetected," said Sam Walker, a criminal justice professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

A 1991 Gallup poll showed that 5 percent of all Americans surveyed — and 9 percent of non-whites — reported being physically mistreated or abused by police.

James Fyfe, a Temple University criminal justice professor and former New York City policeman, said police corruption in older cities such as New York, Philadelphia and New Orleans has roots in a long history of machine politics and patronage systems, and is now

fueled by huge quantities of drug money.

In Los Angeles, long-tolerated racism rather than money has fueled abuses, which are less well-organized, he said.

Chief Williams, who is black, has vowed to stamp out racism in the department.

What all departments have had in common is disciplinary systems incapable of quickly stopping abuses, Fyfe said.

"A small percentage of cops ... if the rules are not enforced, they just keep breaking them. I think that's what has happened in Philly and in New York with the corruption, and in Los Angeles with brutality and racism," he said.

COLIN POWELL COULD PRODUCE REPUBLICAN VICTORY

WASHINGTON - In a three-way race against Senate Majority Leader leader Bob Dole and President Clinton, retired Gen. Colin Powell would finish third, according to a Newsweek magazine poll released Sunday.

However, if Powell was the Republican nominee or was running on Dole's ticket as the vice presidential candidate, Powell would generate a victory, Newsweek reports in its Sept. 11 editions.

In the three-way race, President Clinton finished with 36 percent, Dole 33 percent and Powell 21 percent.

However, as the Republican nominee, Powell would beat Clinton by 10 percentage points, 51 percent to 41 percent. A Dole-Powell ticket would also defeat a Clinton-Gore ticket 51 percent to 44 percent, according to those polled.

Bringing in the Ross Perot factor, with the Texas billionaire running as an independent, Dole-Powell would win with 43 percent, followed by Clinton-Gore with 38 percent and Perot's ticket trailing with 14 percent.

Without Perot and Powell, a straight race of Clinton against Dole produces a statistical dead heat, with Clinton getting 47 percent and Dole 45 percent.

For the Newsweek Poll, Princeton Survey Research Associates interviewed 758 adults by telephone on the last two days of August. The margin of error was plus or minus 4 percentage points for the total sample and plus or minus 5 percentage points for registered voters.

Alabama Says Chain Gang To Be Unshackled

CAPSHAW, Ala. - Alabama prisoners forced to smash rocks with sledgehammers for 10 hours a day will lose their chains this fall, but chain gangs will continue to work along the state's highways, a warden said Thursday.

Forty inmates breaking up big rocks at the Limestone Correctional Facility in northern Alabama will be fenced in and watched by armed guards in observation towers, eliminating the need for shackles, deputy warden Ralph Hooks said.

Over 100 inmates have had chain gang duty since the programme was launched in May, for the first time since the 1960s. The Southern Poverty Law Centre and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference have both criticised the state policy.

"The rock breaking programme is our way of finding something meaningful for these inmates to do," Alabama's get-tough Prison Commissioner

Ron Jones said earlier this month when the programme began.

The groups breaking rocks consisted of five men shackled together with leg irons and eight-foot link chain the entire time they were outside, even when using toilets.

Inmates have filed lawsuits against Jones and Alabama Gov. Bob James, saying the gangs violated their civil rights. The cases are expected to be placed into a class action lawsuit later this year. Hooks said the state is not reducing its use of chain gangs, and other inmates picking up litter along Alabama roadways will continue to work in chains. Unshackling the Limestone inmates will free guards for other duties, he said.

Florida and Arizona also have chain gang programmes, while Wisconsin and Michigan are trying to start them.

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