

Increasing number of police departments hiring minority cops

BOSTON (AP) — Someone reported a fight at an apartment building, but the crowd of Haitians in the stairwell told police they knew nothing about it. Then they began talking animatedly in Creole.

About what? A gang fight they were scared to report? A domestic dispute?

Foreign languages can frustrate investigators, but in this case there was no barrier.

"It's just regular conversation," Officer Georges Exilien, a rookie Haitian-American officer, whispered to his black partner.

Exilien left the building, a little more confident the situation was under control. And that's just what the Boston Police Department was hoping for when it began

recruiting members of immigrant communities.

"This is how you can best serve neighborhoods that require specific language and cultural backgrounds," said Sgt. Detective Margot Hill, a spokeswoman for the Boston police. "It's not rocket science; it's just responsive."

Around the country, many police departments are finding that hiring a few newcomers can make their jobs easier.

• St. Paul, Minn., has hired 12 officers from Southeast Asia to help patrol the Hmong community. The ethnic group from Laos now accounts for more than 10 percent of the city's 300,000 people.

• Palisades Park, N.J., a New York suburb whose Korean community quickly grew to about a quarter of the

population, hired its first Korean officer in January after years of animosity between immigrants and authorities.

• Willows, Calif., a mostly white, rural town of 6,500, added a Hmong to its nine-member force when nearly 1,000 Hmong and Laotian immigrants moved into an apartment complex nine years ago.

In a city where four of every 10 residents are immigrants, Boston has helped create detente in what was a cold war between minorities and police, said Pierre Imbert, executive director of the Catholic Charities Haitian Multiservice Center in Boston.

"It raises the level of comfort. If you were stopped

or go to the department and there is someone there who speaks your language, you cannot buy that" sense of relief, Imbert said.

Many police departments have worked in recent decades to hire more blacks and Hispanics. But crime prevention experts have begun recommending that forces search for recruits from new immigrant communities, too, and departments in cities big and small seem to be listening.

"My feeling at the police department was that they're a new group and we need to start learning about their customs and learning how to deal with them," said former Police Chief Bob Shadley of Willows, Calif.

Shadley hired Thomas Lee, a Hmong, as a civilian

liaison. Lee eventually became a full police officer in 1995.

National statistics break down police forces by race, not by ethnic groups.

The vast majority of police officers are American-born white men who got their jobs with high scores on civil service exams.

It wasn't always that way. In the early years of the century, immigrant-dominated political machines doled out police jobs to their supporters, who often spoke with an Irish brogue.

With civil service reforms in the 1930s, departments began hiring new officers based on exams that were often difficult for many immigrants.

In the 1990s, however, police abandoned the strategy

of just responding to crimes and instead pursued community policing, which involves trying to forge new bonds with people in the neighborhood.

One problem is that many refugees fled official corruption and violence at home and do not trust the police in the United States.

Like most departments, the Boston police still hire new officers based on civil service exams, but some candidates who fill a special need, such as those who speak Creole, are pushed to the front of the list. That's how Exilien, whose exam scores were good but not sterling, became an officer.

Exilien, 23, was born in the United States to immigrant parents. Before
(See Cops, Page 18)

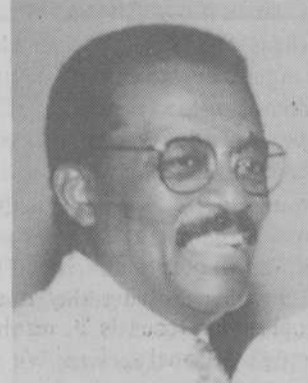
Black leaders call for march for protesting police brutality

By Denise Rolark Barnes
Washington Informer

In response to the recent police killings of Amadou Diallo in New York City and Tyisha Miller in Riverside, Calif., national black leaders are calling on all victims of police violence and their families to join in a March For Justice in Washington, D.C. on April 3.

The march was announced at a press conference held recently at the National Press Club, where leaders of national organizations joined together to say "enough is enough."

Their remarks were directed to President Bill



JOHNNIE COCHRAN
Clinton who was called on to intervene in "a national epidemic of brutality" by police officers. The group was called together by Hugh Price, president of the National Urban League, who led an appeal to Clinton to

get "personally involved" in an issue that "needs the president's leadership."

Price declared that "recurring instances of improper use of deadly force, excessive use of force, racial profiling, abuse of basic civil liberties and routine harassment of minorities who have done little or nothing wrong, are vivid signs of a national epidemic of police brutality."

He called on President Clinton to: convene a White House summit this spring to place the national spotlight on the problem; dispatch a blue ribbon panel armed with subpoena power to conduct



REV. AL SHARPTON
public hearings to ferret out evidence of police brutality; take legal action against departments that repeatedly brutalize and abuse people by placing police departments in receivership and investigate practices of racial

profiling.

Attorney Johnnie Cochran, the Rev. Al Sharpton, NAACP Executive Director Kweisi Mfume, the Rev. Joseph Lowery, Congressman John Conyers and Rev. Jesse Jackson were among those who backed calls to hold the "bad cops" accountable for the mounting police violence that is taking the lives of Black men and women across the country.

Speaker after speaker denounced the most recent killings by police of Diallo and Miller. Also attending was Joe Madison, a Washington, D.C. talk-show host, who is engaged in a

hunger strike aimed at encouraging a Black district attorney in Prince George's County, Md. to reopen the case of shooting victim Archie Elliott.

Six years ago, Elliott, 24, was hit by 14 of 22 bullets fired at him by Prince George's County police officers, while sitting handcuffed with his hands behind his back in the front seat of a police cruiser with the windows rolled up. Officers claimed that Elliott, who was intoxicated, aimed a gun at them. The grand jury refused to indict, concluding that the officers' acts were
(See Leaders, Page 15)

Dinkins, Rangel busted at Amadou Diallo protest

By Ikimulisa Sockwell
Special to Sentinel-Voice

A former mayor, two

congressmen and two city council members managed to get themselves arrested at

yesterday's police-brutality protest sparked by the killing of Amadou Diallo. But it wasn't easy.

Former Mayor David Dinkins, Reps. Charles Rangel and Gregory Meeks, and Councilmembers Margarita Lopez and Bill Perkins joined the Rev. Al

Sharpton at One Police Plaza to protest the shooting of the unarmed African immigrant, who died in a hail of 41 police bullets.

Cops watched as the protest leaders knelt and then stood with arms linked, blocking the entrance.

(See Protest, Page 17)



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