

**BILL BLACKWOOD
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE
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AFRICAN AMERICAN POLICE EXECUTIVES

" FROM ALPHA TO OMEGA "

**A RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE GMI DESIGNATION**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research will be to portray to the Law Enforcement Community, "why" there are so few African American Executives in law enforcement. The major objectives of this research will focus on how the African American police officer can ameliorate their potentiality for the role of an executive.

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of African American police executives in both large and small departments has become a much publicized debate in recent years. This research document will focus on how African American police officers can enhance their likelihood of success within the executive ranks. Too often the argument has been the system (criminal justice) has discriminated against African American police officers. Nevertheless, many African American want to participate in a profession that requires possible risk to life and harm in a society that often resists police authority. While the argument of discrimination may be true, a percentage of officers have not strengthened themselves to accept the executive role.

The importance of increasing African American police executives, and the proper training of these individuals, cannot be overstated in today's society. With increases of African Americans within communities and more African American police officers, departments are constantly being reminded that the makeup of their command staff must be as diversified as the community they serve. Therefore, if that expectation is being placed on departments African American officers must prepare to accept these challenging roles in the best manner possible.

HISTORY

To understand the plight of African American police officers, we must first look at and understand the history of Black involvement in U.S. police service. The phrase police officer refers to a person who has been given general authority to keep the peace and arrest persons guilty, or suspected of a crime. He/she is the conservator of the peace.¹ The phrase executive as used in this research refers to a sworn officer above the rank of lieutenant.²

It is very difficult to determine when the first African American police officer was first sworn to serve an American community. Most African American officers, both past and present, who enlisted with municipal departments had to contend with the additional stress of dealing with minority and majority racial groups, while in their official capacity as a police officer they were considered a minority. Most African Americans who entered the police field did so because of economic needs, however, their stress levels increased because the public they were sworn to serve and protect had members who lacked respect for them. The African American communities often criticize Black officers because of the historic brutality police have displayed toward African American communities.

In the early years duties were minimal, to say the least. They were often only able to arrest other African Americans

who committed crimes, if a Caucasian was to be arrested, the African American Officer would have to wait for white officers to execute the arrest. It was very difficult in the early 1960's for African American Officers to play two roles: "*One of dealing with the stress on the Job*" and secondly, "*The stress of the African American community as a whole*". Inside and outside police departments, African Americans may find a cool reception when invoking their authority as law enforcers. They exhibit ego-defensive behavior which may manifest itself in a variety of ways, or they experience resentment, prejudice, and discrimination from higher status groups. More present than discrimination are the non-hostile withdraws or psychological distancing between African American police officers and Anglo officers who have not previously experienced interracial contact. This distancing may be expressed through ethnic jokes or confining interracial interactions to only job related tasks.

The first documented African American Chief of Police was Chief William "Bill" Dye. Chief Dye was chief of the East St. Louis, IL. Police Department in the late "70's". Chief Dye while serving in his capacity as chief of police, attended a symposium funded by the Joint Center for Political Studies and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration,³ which brought the highest ranking African American Police Executives together to discuss crimes in the African American community and issues of interest to African American police officers.

That meeting served as the foundation of a new organization: **The National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)**.⁴ In 1976, NOBLE was formed to assist African American Police Officers with obtaining the knowledge, skills, and ability to achieve the executive ranks within their departments: and to assist with issues pertaining to African American communities. During the late 70's and early 80's, African American Police Officers were hungry for assistance in their dilemma for equal justice within police departments. It was during those years that, African American Officers rushed to organizations such as NOBLE, National Black Police Associations (NBPA), and others. The above organizations with strong ties to the national government, offered officers a place of learning, discussion of common problems and the promise of assistance.

RECRUITMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

One argument for the under representation of African Americans in police agencies, is the attitude African Americans have toward the police system. An related explanation revolves around the notion that there are a lack of qualified African American applicants for police departments. In past years, departments have used double standards in their recruitment of African American and Caucasians; however, when the standards were made equal the

number of African American applicants actually dropped. The reason for this decrease was due to African Americans failing to pass written entrance examinations. Numerous lawsuits have been filed throughout this country in reference to entrance level exams. The leading case in the challenge of discriminatory examinations concerned the private sector: Griggs v. Duke Power Co., 401 U.S. 424 (1971). The court held that an employment requirement which appears neutral on its face, but which has a markedly disproportionate impact on a given class of applicants establishes a prima facie case of discrimination and the employer must show the requirement is job related. The definition of job relatedness in the Griggs case formed the basis for the suit challenging the City of Chicago Police Department and resulted in findings of discrimination in the Chicago civil service examination for patrolmen and sergeants and led to quota-hiring practices established by the court.⁵

Consequently, entrance examinations should be designed for actually testing a person's capabilities and potential for police work. Dr. Patrick M. Wright, Assistant Professor of Management at Texas A&M University, states that there are two very important factors regarding written employment tests;

- they should be valid measures of ability to perform the job.
- they tend to have disparate impact against ethnic minorities.⁶

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson established the *President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice*. In 1967, the Commission reported its finding in a Task Force Report: **The Police**. In their investigation the Commission found that there was very little minority recruitment in police agencies.

In order for departments to flourish into the next century, law enforcement officials must address the problems of recruitment today. According to Trojanowicz and Carter, by the year 2010, more than one-third of all American children will be African American, Hispanic, or Asian. The Caucasian majority of today will become a minority within America in less than 100 years. If Trojanowicz and Carter's projection is true, a complete overhaul of the current system must transpire. During the next ten years, only one out of four who enter the work force will be a white male. The rest will be either women or other minorities. Recognizing this, police executives can plan recruiting strategies now that will ensure that they get the most qualified individuals for their department.

Departments will need to develop concepts directed to influencing African American attitudes regarding law enforcement. With the influx of diverse ethnic groups into the United States, these groups have brought with them fear and distrust of the police. This may be a reason some minorities elect not to enter law enforcement.⁷

In 1968, 2,984 African Americans participated in a study of citizen attitudes, about police officers and police services in their community. In general, African American demonstrated an extreme low appreciation of police departments and the police role. There was, however, a moderately strong positive relationship between good perceptions and the per capita ratio of minority police to minority citizens. This study allow departments to understand why there were fewer minorities applying to the police department.

Strategies of discrimination used against African American police have historically included discrimination in appointments, area assignments, efficiency ratings, use of departmental facilities, unfair treatment by supervisors, limited arrest powers and low salaries. By the mid-1960's, the organizational practices of overt discrimination had been altered but replaced by overt and covert discrimination of some individual officers.

If departments are expected to enhance their efforts in recruitment. Excellence in performance must be the final goal of police recruitment and training if citizens are to receive the highest quality of police services.⁸

TRAINING

Effective executive leadership skills are not acquired in the basic training academy. In fact certain leadership practices that exist today emerge from two sources: the authoritarian military style of management and management practices used during and after the Industrial Revolution to control unskilled laborers. If we as African American executives are to emerge in the "90's", we must master leadership skills, such as patience, understanding, fairness and good judgement. African American police officers must take every initiative to seek out additional leadership training. The modern police department today places increased emphasis on professionalism and efficiency. When African Americans penetrate specialized units, they are often denied opportunities to attend seminars, workshops, or advance study courses. As a result, African American executives have been denied the opportunity for advance training and exposure. Consequently, African American police officers shy away from applying for staff positions, or often do not remain in these positions for an extended period of time, and to often upon being promoted to the executive level, have to perform strictly from an *"on-the-job-training"* basis.

Too often there is little formal preparation. This problem will continue unless chief executives make an honest and determined effort to develop effective affirmative action

and career development programs. Such programs would be the only way to convince African Americans police officers to start requesting assignments in divisions other than patrol. If our departments are to keep up with the many technological and professional advances, they must overcome their reluctance to assign African American Police Officers widely in police positions.

However, each African American police officer must also be the primary promoter of their own educational development. While understanding this concept, not all departments will fully train them for executive administration. That development now becomes the primary responsibility of the officer. Each African American officer must determine what education and/or specialized training is required to reach his/her own administrative goals. This can easily be accomplished by consulting with executives within their departments. African American officers armed with the understanding and the knowledge of the politics and discrimination within police departments must develop specific strategies that can help them acquire the power to operate successfully as executives. One of the most modern comprehensive lists of strategies for modern managers came from Dubrin.⁹

- ***Maintain alliance with powerful people.***

This is critical to the acquisition of power in an organization. An obvious coalition would be with members of other important departments or with members of upper-level departments.

- ***Manipulation of classified information.***

Observational studies by Henry Mintzberg and others have clearly demonstrated the importance of obtaining and disseminating information.

- ***Make a quick showing***

This is a strategy to look good on some project or task right away in order to get the right people's attention.

- ***Collect and use IOU's.***

This strategy says that the power-seekers do other people favors, but it should be made clear that they owe something in return and expected to "pay up" when asked.

- ***Fabianism***

This is a strategy of going slow and easy-an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary approach to change.¹⁰

African American officers must educate themselves regarding the above and other strategies if they are to reach and survive in the upper level of management.

A major relationship has evolved during the past decade between the police and institutions of higher education. Hundreds of colleges and universities have established

programs to educate or train police officers, and thousands of police and individuals aspiring to careers in law enforcement have enrolled in these programs. Few efforts to improve police operations in recent years have received such enthusiastic and widespread support as the general notion that police officers should be educated. It is a recognized fact that future police leaders have a great need for a broad education that acquaints them with critical issues in the profession and in society. One main shift is an acceptance of the idea that police personnel at the operation level should have a higher education. Among those offering law enforcement-related courses is the Southern Police Institute, a program which originated with a Swedish economist, Gunnar Myrdal. In 1944, Mr. Myrdal, author of An American Dilemma, wrote:

"It is my conviction that one of the most potent strategic measures to improve the Southern Interracial situation would be the opening of a pioneering modern police college in the south, which would give a thorough social and pedological training as well as technical police training."¹¹

Utilizing the definition of an executive, data was obtained on all African Executives within the City of Houston and the County of Harris (see Table 1). It was determined that there are 31 African American executives within local law enforcement agencies. Of the 31 executives, 25 had formal education, either bachelors degrees or higher. Each of the 25 executives felt their education had a significant influence on

their advancement, and it also facilitated their understanding of patience, understanding, fairness, and good judgement. Additionally, 12 of the 31 had attended some formal management training or certification, inclusive of any formal training. The survey also examined the tenure of each of the executives (see Table 2). The average tenure of those surveyed was between five and ten years in their present position.

Dr. John Houghton, Associate Professor of Sociology at St. Edward's University, indicates that education quality does impact mobility generally, and would have special impact on advancement where performance on standardized tests is a major criterion for advancement. Dr. Houghton further states:

"Education impacts career mobility in a powerful way, with educational credentials being the single most important determinant of access to employment, especially technical, managerial, and professional employment."

"However, in the case where occupational advancement is contingent on relative performance on standardized paper and pencil tests, educational quality may be decisive. There is, of course, a very well established relationship between access to schools of such quality and socioeconomic status. Schools with high proportions of low-income students and/or high proportions of socioeconomic disadvantaged minority students produce lower test scores than do higher-income, non-minority schools. Because poor and minority students are highly concentrated in schools of the former type, it is to be expected that those with low socioeconomic status and/or minority backgrounds would be generally less well prepared for advancement up test base career ladders."¹²

Using the above as a catalyst, if African American police officers are to move into executive positions, they must place

their destiny in their own hands to not only increase their education beyond departmental training and pursue formal educational training. However, African American officers cannot do it alone; therefore, this task should be a shared responsibility of the employing agency, the individual officer, and higher education.

Table I
AFRICAN AMERICAN POLICE EXECUTIVES
within the
CITY of HOUSTON & COUNTY of HARRIS COUNTY

NUMBER OF EXECUTIVES SURVEYED	NO FORMAL EDUCATION	COLLEGE EDUCATION	MANAGEMENT TRAINING
31	6	25	12

TABLE II
TENURE IN PRESENT POSITION

Years in present rank	Number of cases	Percentage
less than 1 year	0	0
one - four years	4	13.00
five - seven years	10	32.00
eight - ten years	10	32.00
ten or more years	7	23.00
Total	31	100.00

Figures are base on responding surveys

RETENTION OF THE EXECUTIVE

Too often, newly hired employees from the minority groups are overlooked when it comes to training and assignment to better jobs. With the number of African American officers growing rapidly in police departments, these practices cannot continue. The pressure is on management to have their rank structure represented by the percentage of African Americans that are represented in the internal work force leading to eventual parity with the external population.

The average black executive takes pride in the fact that he has been able to overcome great odds and many obstacles to reach his or her present position. The officer is confident of his/her ability to discharge duties and responsibilities in a highly effective and competent manner. The individual looks upon wearing the "white shirt" as a testimony to the ability to meet challenges and to succeed. As a result of progress made, lines of communication have improved where, they were almost nonexistent. Many reasons for the progress have been the mutual desire by African American executives to succeed, a sense of mutual cooperation, and a mutual understanding of the many difficult task and issues confronting them.

A study was done to examine differences in experiences and perceptions of African Americans and Anglo officers in their work and whether experiences and perceptions have differing influences on African American and Anglo officers likelihood of retention.

A total of 303 police officers from seven agencies were surveyed to determine aspects of their experiences that might influence the likelihood of job retention, job assignment, reactions to departmental pre-appointment selection procedures, feelings about the way they are treated, and various individual officer characteristics.¹³

African American officers reported receiving higher levels of feed-back on both the oral interview and background investigations than Anglo officers. African American officers also reported receiving less supervisory support during their probationary period. African American officers were less likely to report that they received fair treatment, and they were more likely to select community-base reasons for remaining police officers while Anglo officers were more likely to select aspects of the job itself. Factors predictive for African American officers' retention but not for Anglo officers were (1) feedback on oral interview, (2) feedback on background investigation, (3) receiving fair treatment, and (4) reason why the officer might leave the department. Factors more predictive for Anglo officers' retention were (1) understanding department

goals, (2) self-perceived social class, and (3) reason for remaining a police officer.

In the not too distant past, the black community showed concern over the lack of African American executives in police departments. Police administrators responded by saying they "would promote blacks to these positions", but they can't pass the examination, or they don't pass high enough to be reached on the promotional register. If they pass the exams, they will be promoted.

In an effort to assist African American Police Officer with promotional exams, the concept of study groups was first organized in 1959, in Washington, D.C. A total of nine African American officers originally participated and were promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

Even today, it has been reported that supervisors still give poor rating to African American officers, but fortunately, "we can overcome this handicap." However to do so, African American Officers must assume the attitude that you might beat me with the rating, but I'll beat you with the books.¹⁴

Active retention of African American police executives will not succeed if it occurs in reaction to pressure, as opposed to actions that are a part of systematic, planned program for change. Top administrators perform analysis of their work force to determine the extent of problems in the promotional process and for setting goals and timetables.

These goals cannot be implemented without a model for change that identifies and deals with organizational, interpersonal, and intrapersonal barriers to change.

CREDIBILITY

As the number of African American executives increases, their credibility continues to remain very high within their departments. This is more than likely the results of their ability as demonstrated on promotional examinations. In order for African Americans executives to be promoted, he/she must invariably rank at, or very near, the top of the promotional register. Further evidence of credibility is the confidence placed in many African American executives in command-level positions, as evidenced by the fact that they are constantly sought out for advice and guidance.

The competence and effectiveness of the African American executive has won the confidence and respect of individuals in many communities. This is evidenced by the constant demand from the community for promotion of more African American executives.

Pride in their accomplishments, and their determination to do the best job possible, have endeared many minority executives to every segment of their community, and they are often rewarded with support and cooperation in their endeavors. It is the hope of this author that favorable community response will continue.

Confident in the belief that they should not be looked upon differently than other executives in the department, they respond to management tasks without favoritism. In some instances, this has caused disappointment among some African American officers. In certain situations involving an encounter with an African American executive, they may feel some concession or special consideration should be forthcoming. If some favoritism was not extended, they felt they had been short-changed. These attitudes usually are short-lived, as these officers soon realize African American executives are making an effort to be fair and impartial in all actions dealing both inside and outside the department. Further they long to see that all efforts to compromise them will be rebuffed.

MENTORING

The term **MENTORING** dates back to Greek mythology - Mentor having been a wise counselor and friend to whom Ulysses entrusted his own son while he was on a ten year odyssey.

Other words, such as "sponsor," "coach," and "senior advisor," have also been used to describe this type of relationship. When applied to modern day organizations, the term conveys the image of a senior executive who can counsel and guide younger individuals as they move ahead in their careers.

One recent survey by Rudi Klauss "**Formalized Mentor Relationship for Management and Executive Development Programs**" in August, 1981, indicated that two-thirds of over 1200 top officials of the Nation's largest companies, had informal mentors at some point in their career. The obvious conclusion from these studies is that if white males need mentors to succeed in organizations, it is also essential for African Americans to have mentors if they are to succeed.¹⁵

African American officers cannot always negotiate the barriers alone; however, utilizing mentors, coupled with organizational efforts, can be a beginning for increasing the number of African Americans promoted to executives positions in police departments.

INTERVIEWS

This author interviewed **Chief Deputy Michael C. Tippitt**, who currently holds the position of Chief Deputy of the Harris County Constable Department Precinct Seven in Houston, Texas. The purpose of this interview was to secure his insight into issues associated with minorities promotion and retention. Chief Tippitt has been in his current position for 13 years. However, Chief Tippitt actually began his career in law enforcement some 25 years ago. He was initially asked to describe what obstacles he overcame to reach his current position?

Chief Tippitt explained that during his law enforcement career education played a very small part in his development. His rise through the Sheriff's department and the Constable's department was more dependent on the understanding of the world of politics. He stated that while he continues to increase his education, it is simply for personal reasons. However, he contributes his continued education toward his understanding of politics.

Today, young aspiring African American executives have far more complex problems than earlier generations. Not only will they have to contend with hidden levels of discrimination, but the management and operation of police departments have changed in the last 10 years. In order for anyone to prepare for these changing roles, young African Americans must take the initiative themselves and not rely totally on departments for the knowledge.¹⁶

Education, both formal and informal, must occur to ensure their total preparedness for the executive roles. Secondly, the concept of MENTORING must be implemented. Numerous studies have concluded that most executives rise within corporate America guided by a mentor. Mentors tutor them on the politics and how to avoid the pit falls of the job.

Assistant Chief Jimmy Dotson, Houston Police Department, was interviewed for his personal insight and suggestions. Chief Dotson became the first African

American appointed to the ranks of Assistant Chief within the Houston Police Department. Chief Dotson strongly believes the following was responsible for his rise to the executive level:

- Willingness to accept challenges.
- Education both formal and informal.
- Knowledge of the political system.
- Fairness towards the officers.
- Patience and understanding.

Chief Dotson has some simple advice for African American Police Officers. Don't settle for the status quo, be willing to take issue and matters into your own hands. Secondly, get all of the education you can, including but not limited to what your department has to offer. Thirdly, align yourself with a mentor, one who you trust and feel comfortable with. Fourthly, do not allow the negative criticism you will receive from your peers to affect you. Fifth and finally, be willing and able to accept increased responsibility with pride and fairness, because once you reach that level the microscope will be on you.¹⁷

Lastly, an interview was conducted with **Mr. Joseph Wright, JD, Executive Director of the National Organizational of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)**. Mr. Wright reported that the number of African American executives has risen over the last ten years: however, in

recent times the number has leveled off somewhat.

Presently, there are **12,502** Police department within the United States and **3,086** Sheriff's departments. Utilizing the definition given for an executive there are approximately **5,000** executive positions known to our organization compared to approximately **603,954** sworn law enforcement officers in the United States. According to the files compiled by NOBLE, of the 5,000 executive positions, African American occupy approximately 2,600 executive positions.¹⁸

NOBLE has developed a strategy for increasing the number of executives. First and foremost, African American Officers must be "**Educated, Educated, & Educated**, if they are to survive in today's law enforcement departments. We must thoroughly ensure that they grasp the political aspects of the job. No executives are born with all of the knowledge, skills, and ability to acquire executive positions, however, must develop to function in these challenging positions.

Lastly, a MENTORING system must be implemented to serve as a drawing pool of resources. African American executives must believe they have a support person/group to assist them when there is no one else to turn to. The concept "**I help you, you help someone & they help someone else**," must be in place. No longer can we have one executive reach the top and not reach back to those who have

pushed and encouraged them in their progress to higher positions.

CONCLUSION

With the influx of African American police officers into police departments, and with the desire to become a part of the management team, the best possible training must be extended to these officers. The officers, the organization, and educational institutions must recognize that the problems of African American officers, due to past historical practices and environmental obstacles, must be addressed in an straight forward fashion.

African American officers must take it upon themselves to prepare for the role of executive. Once the barriers are removed by the organizations, they can no longer depend on affirmative action for upward mobility. They must become politically astute, use mentors, form study groups, and use educational institutions to progress in management.

Educational institutions must play a major role in the process on increasing the number of African American police executives. They should conduct research to determine the discriminatory environment of organizations and develop methods for eliminating its effects. Research must also be conducted for the purpose of determining the type of training African American supervisors and executives need to become effective managers. Universities must take the

lead in fighting the obvious backlash that occurs when African Americans are promoted. Finally, these universities must expose their classes to African American lecturers and African American executives. The Southern Police Institute was founded for the purpose of education and improving interracial relations. It appears that this concept must be revisited to deal with the internal racial problems in today's police organizations.

The Joint Center for Political Studies and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration on September 7-9, 1976, sponsored a symposium of African American law enforcement officers and made the following recommendations for increasing the number of African American Executives:

African Americans executives must write and publish policy papers.

African American executives must advocate a reexamination of assignments practices and promotion procedures to insure equal opportunity for advancement.

African American executives advocate the lateral appointment of qualified individuals to assist police departments.

African American executives advocate solicitation of LEEP-LEAA grants and foundation support for the legal education

of blacks, which would incur a two year commitment to police service.

African American executives seek to establish executive career development programs to assure the upward mobility of African American officers.

African American executives must form study groups to ensure African American officers are prepare for the promotional exams.

African American executives must form study groups to ensure African American officers are prepare for the promotional exams.

African American executives remain accountable to the African American community and officers.¹⁹

Some attention should be shifted away from accusations that individual police departments are intentionally discriminating against African Americans. Although the imbalances that result from the effects of discrimination institutionally discriminate against African Americans. Police departments should take an active and aggressive part in becoming change agents to obtain promotional procedures that test the application of technical, administrative and

human relation skills. In order to attract African Americans with higher education to the law enforcement profession, administrators must advertise the rewards and benefits of the profession.

Departments must change their efforts and direction as it relates to recruiting and the retention of African American police officers. The officer cannot negate the necessity for higher education to overcome some of the barriers within a law enforcement career. The tragic history of African Americans, as people and as police officers, in their interaction with white society and with police authority has a tremendous effect on overcoming the barriers that exist within African Americans minds. These barriers are psychological, social, emotional, experiential, and educational. Barriers that are a result of experience or education are easy to correct. Formal education can increase the lack of education which may be required for the next level and on the job tenure will address the barrier of experience. The remaining barriers can be attacked with a cooperative agreement between departments and African American officers.

APPENDIX A
SURVEY REQUEST FORM

BILL BLACKWOOD
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE
AFRICAN AMERICAN POLICE EXECUTIVE
SURVEY REQUEST

PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT

Name: _____

Position: _____

Department: _____

Tenure in Present Position: _____

High School Grad.: _____

College Attended: _____

Degree Obtained: _____

Do you feel your college degree assisted with you
advancement?

What advice would you give to young aspiring
officers? _____

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