

BILL BLACKWOOD  
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS

A HISTORICAL REPORT: THE STRUGGLES AND PLIGHT OF BLACK FEMALE  
OFFICERS IN THE HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

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

BY  
MAY WALKER  
HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

JANUARY 1995

# 265

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **II. METHODOLOGY**

### **III. FIRST BLACK FEMALE OFFICERS AT HPD**

### **IV. TRAINING AND ASSIGNMENT**

### **V. PROBLEMS OCCURRED BY BLACK FEMALE OFFICERS**

### **VI. COMPARISON OF MALE AND FEMALE OFFICERS**

### **VII. CHANGES THAT OCCURRED OVER THE YEARS**

### **VIII. CONCLUSION**

### **IX. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## INTRODUCTION

This case history compiles historical information about Black female officers in the Houston Police Department and is solely based on the occurrences, perceptions, and attitudes of Black females from the time when the first Black female officers were employed in 1952 until the early 1990's.

This research focuses on comparisons of male and female officers during the period with special reference to variation in qualifications, training and potential as well as differences in the duties, training, and attitudes of female and male officers. In addition, the case materials of the study recap significant encounters of various officers during the fifties through the nineties.

The primary goals of this project are to provide information and that enhances awareness of the tremendous struggles that Black females, and females in general have encountered from their initial entry as trainees in the police academy onto their formal entry into the workplace. Even though the objective of both female and male law enforcement officers is to "serve and protect", the study reports upon the perception that females were neglected and treated in a less than equal and stereotypical manner.

## METHODOLOGY

This research consists of 35 taped personal interviews with presently employed black female officers and retired black female officers. Some of the officers interviewed were selected because they were the only females that existed in a particular year. Others were chosen because they were the first to work in the different divisions of policing.

Due to the limited amount of black females available for assignment in different areas, in Houston, among the top ten largest Police Departments in the United States, only 10% of the black females were assigned to the Jail and Juvenile divisions until the mid-seventies. After that date, 20% were assigned to the Traffic/Enforcement divisions and the other 70% were assigned to Radio Patrol. There were two or three exceptions with sprinkles of black females in specialized divisions. It was easily to interview the majority of the black females that existed between the fifties and eighties because they were so few. In 1993 we have 140 black female officers with over 70% being hired during the early 80's.

In this research I will identify some of the struggles that Black females encountered during the 50's thru the 80's at the Houston Police Department. I will focus on the negative and positive occurrences of the females I interviewed.

## **THE STRUGGLES AND PLIGHT OF BLACK FEMALES IN HPD**

### **THE HERMAN SHORT ERA-HISTORY BEGANS IN THE '50s**

In July 1953, black females in the Houston Police Department took the first of several giant steps forward when Police Chief L. D. Morrison (after whom the police academy is named after) appointed Margie Duty to the police force, making her the department's first black female officer, or matron, as then they were called. Unlike her male counterparts, however, Duty received no formal training. It was not until 1959 that women officers were trained at the police academy.

Along with being the first black female officer, Duty was also the first black female to be assigned to the Juvenile Division. She was trained on the job by Detective Thomas Blake at a time when the division's two other black officers handled all black juvenile cases. Reflecting on her appointment to the Police Department, Duty says she believes that God called her to this type of work since she never actively chose it or studied for it. Nevertheless, it is a career Officer Duty says she enjoyed and believes it is the best thing that God could have given her.<sup>1</sup> For the first 23 years of her career at the Houston Police Department, Officer Duty worked plainclothes assignments in the Juvenile Division, and then transferred to a uniformed assignment, the Jail Division. After 34 years of service, Officer Duty retired August 29, 1986.

For about the first six years after her appointment to the force, Duty was the department's only black female officer. On September 14, 1959, however, political considerations prompted the department to hire two more black female officers. Barbara Ellison and Johnnie V. Greene were the first females to attend the academy and were the only females in the entire class. The department, however, apparently was not prepared to accommodate females. Officer Ellison recalled "the academy did not know what to do with the black females or females in general." For example, there were no uniforms for the female officers. Officer Ellison and Officer Green, therefore; were instructed to buy a khaki military-style outfit and a hat similar to that worn by persons in the military. The women purchased the required material and a pattern and designed their own uniforms.

Officer Ellison remembers "the women's physical training was done separately from and at a different time than the male cadets".<sup>2</sup> The two black female cadets had to stay several hours each day after class for their physical training, which consisted of judo lessons. During these after-class sessions, the women trained privately with the gym instructor.

Black female cadets, however, received no training in Dispatch or the Jail Division and no formal training in how to write tickets or direct traffic in downtown Houston as did the male cadets. When the male cadets were allowed to go to the different divisions, the black female cadets were sent home.

The different treatment of male and female officers was extended into nonpolice-related areas. For example, Officer Ellison and Officer Green were taken to the main police building (in the area where the department's maintenance workers now use for their offices) and were told that this was where the women's restroom was located and that they would be given five extra minutes during break time to go to the restroom because they had to cross the driveway. Officer Ellison said, "that the black male officers were allowed to use the facilities in the academy, and at the same time, both male and female officers had to enter the department's cafeteria through the back door, though they did have the option of leaving the academy during lunchtime and eating elsewhere."<sup>3</sup>

After graduating from the academy, Officer Ellison and Officer Green were assigned to the Juvenile Division as were all female officers during that time. As with their black male colleagues, black females were allowed to handle only those cases involving blacks. Until Officer Ellison and Officer Green came to the Juvenile division, Officer Duty was the only female assigned there. There were, however, four black males, Officer Earl Williams, Officer Frederick Black, Officer Lawrence Polk and Officer Oval O. McClendon who were assigned to the Juvenile Division. Both females were assigned their case each morning and worked the entire city of Houston. They worked all types of cases such as burglaries, robberies, and rape.

Officer Ellison stated, "One difference in policing in the late 1950's compared to the late 1980s is that the Miranda warning did not exist. Officers simply went out and got the suspect's confession, some officers felt the suspects have more rights today than they did then, making them less willing to give up their rights to remain silent since they know they do not have to do so. Some officers have said, however, that if the Miranda warning had existed then and they were required to read it to suspects as they must do now, fewer cases probably would have been solved. If the suspects had known then what they know now, these officers felt that the suspects would not have confessed."<sup>4</sup>

#### **THE FRED HOFHEINZ UPRISING OF THE '60s**

Some aspects of policing, have changed for the better from the street officer's point of view. According to Officer Ellison, "the good outweighs the bad." The new Mayor, Fred Hofheinz made an effort to hire and elevate more black officers and given better equipment. For example, "there were more positions available for black officers. In the late fifties, black male officers were assigned to the Patrol Division as a matter of course. They were given walking beats and dilapidated patrol cars."

Officer Ellison said, "working as a plainclothes officer in the Juvenile Division was much different from working as a uniformed officer, because black officers mainly worked black cases. They were able to relate to members of the black community."<sup>5</sup>



There were occasions when Officer Ellison would try to arrest a suspect and the person would resist. In such instances, a white uniformed officer had to be called to provide assistance.

In the early seventies, black officers began to handle all cases, regardless of the suspect's or the victim's race. By then, there was no resentment from other races; if someone needed help, it usually made little difference if the officer was black or white. The most shocking thing to most Houstonians was that there were black female officers on the police force. There was for example, an incident in which a citizen expressed surprise that there were any female officers at all--black or white, because females did not work in uniform, they were less visible than their male colleagues.

Not until 1962, three years after Officer Ellison and Officer Green graduated from the academy, did the Houston Police Department increase its ranks of black female officers. The admission of Janelle Freeny Scott and Eddie Hamilton to the police academy brought the number of black females officers to five.

After graduating a year earlier from Texas Southern University (TSU) with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration, Janelle Scott worked as an assistant librarian at Texas Southern University. About five months later, in September 1961, she learned that the Police Department was looking for black applicants since it was an election year. Near the end of October, Janelle Scott applied at the Police Department and was interviewed. After completing the usual process of the interview and medical

examinations, she received a certified letter stating that she had been accepted into the police academy and that she was to report for the November 6 class. Janelle Scott, however, also had applied for a position with the federal government and was to take a placement examination on that same date, giving her exactly one week to choose between the two positions and resign her job at Texas Southern University.

After being told during an interview with police officials that all female police officers would be assigned to the Juvenile Division, Scott decided to attend the academy. She had worked with children while attending TSU and liked doing so. On November 6, Janelle Scott arrived at the academy and learned that three other blacks--two men and one woman had been accepted. There were also two white females in the class.

"The orientation and first day were routine."<sup>6</sup> Around the middle of the week, however, the four blacks were asked to remain seated during the lunch break and then report to the office. Officer Scott does not remember which office. Once there, the black cadets were told that the police cafeteria, which was located in the basement of the main police station, was off limits to them. They were told that if they wanted something to eat or drink during breaks or at lunchtime, they were to go to the back door and tell the person who answered what they wanted. According to cadet Scott, the four cadets then looked at each other and after the meeting rode with one of the black cadets who had a car to get lunch and talk about the situation. Because they

knew that segregation was considered the norm, they decided not to complain or protest; rather, they would do well in their studies, pass all exams and become Houston police officers. They were by no means satisfied with the decision, but decided not to rock the boat. Thereafter, the four brought their lunches from home and ate together everyday.

Officer Scott remembers during the week before gym classes began, she and Hamilton and the two white female cadets were kept after class and told that their gym class would be held from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. each afternoon after all classes had ended for the day. Other than this one exception, class periods were routine because they knew that as minorities more was expected of them. The four black cadets always studied together each week before the exams. That paid off, as all did well enough to make the honor roll.

Another incident Scott recalls vividly from her cadet training is the afternoon when the four black cadets were told to remain after class. They had no idea what it was about and tried to figure out what they had done wrong. The class instructor told them that the next afternoon the 100 Club was having a banquet at the Rice Hotel in honor of Houston police officers and that the entire academy class had been given tickets to the affair. The four blacks were given their tickets and told, "at the banquet you are to sit together at the back of the ballroom and not sit with the rest of the class."

That night, the four cadets conferred by phone. They were angry but determined to attend the banquet. They did not want to do anything that would cause them to be

kicked out of the academy, but they also wanted to defy the order. They decided to ride together to the banquet, park the car a distance away, walk separately to the hotel, enter the banquet room and sit wherever they chose, as if the order had never been given. The group assumed that all that could happen would be for them to "get busted" from the academy the next day for not obeying orders. They carried out their plan, and nothing was said. All four graduated from the academy.

After graduation, Officer Scott and the other black female cadet along with the two white female cadets were assigned to the Juvenile Division. While Officer Scott was in Juvenile, there were times when the white officers would be swamped with prisoners and phone calls, and was over loaded with work. But because the black officers was instructed never to answer the telephone except when they were called. As a result, the black officers, would sit in the "back office"--talking and looking out the window with nothing to do.

For 22 years, Officer Scott worked as a Houston police officer. In October 1984, she retired from the department to accept the position of instructor at Houston Community College. While no longer a police officer, Officer Scott remains involved in the law enforcement process in Houston because, she feel, policing is a vital function in American society. According to Officer Scott, her career with the Houston Police Department was one of "joy, happiness and some letdowns." It was an experience, that she said she will never forget. Those years of learning, she added, will remain with her forever. At the same time, the sixties is an era she would rather not relive.

Still she feels "elated" to have been a part of the process of blacks and women being accepted as Houston police officers and was happy to see the department make progress in the law enforcement arena. Officer Scott felt that the department has made "progress toward the black officer's total acceptance as a peace officer among the elite with all the responsibilities of a officer, adding that some changes still need to be made."

For about seven years, there was a decline in the number of black females joining the Police Department until Ruby Allum and Robbie Field-Phelps entered the academy on January 13, 1969. Near the end of that year, Marilyn Batts-Henry also became a police cadet. Between 1969 and 1972, only one black female, Joyce Pomares, entered the academy. Officer Phelps and Officer Allum graduated from cadet class 40. Of the approximately 68 cadets in that class, two were black females, four were black males and one was a white female.

Officer Phelps recalls, "during the late sixties and early seventies, the requirements for women were different from those for men. Women had to have completed some college education, and they could not have any preschool-aged children. They also had to meet height and weight requirements. For black women, the road to acceptance into the academy was even more limited as black women were selected only during election years. All cadets--black or white, male, or female--had to wear khaki uniforms, though the female cadets wore skirts. All cadets had to purchase their uniforms and starch and iron them every day. The cadets also had jackets and gloves to wear on cold days, but if one of the cadets left a jacket or glove at home, then no none could wear their gloves

or jackets. Everyone was required to march and drill in the cold weather everyday. Marching and drilling was the first thing the cadets did each morning."

After Officer Phelps graduated from the academy, she automatically was assigned to the Juvenile Division, which maintained a separate seniority list for blacks and whites and assigned blacks and whites different days off. In general, blacks had the least seniority and the least desirable days off. Some of the black officers who had worked in the division for several years, however, would have Saturdays and Sundays off, though they could not compete with the white officers in the division for assignments of days off. The attitude toward female officers in the late sixties and early seventies was that women should be given office and desk assignments, not street assignments. The reasoning behind this double standard is not clear, though it could have been that the men who ran the Police Department believed that women could not perform police work on the streets as well as men could.

Officer Phelps remembers "it was not until Fred Hofheinz became mayor of Houston that we saw a change in attitude toward female officers in the Houston Police Department. During Hofheinz's mayoral tenure, sincere appointments were focused upon women and blacks. Mayor Hofheinz appointed the first woman's advocate and gave that individual the responsibility for ensuring that women were treated fairly. It was during this time that women police officers were allowed to wear slacks rather than skirts. When Jim McConn succeeded Hofheinz as mayor, he discontinued the woman's advocate position.

"It also was during Mayor Hofheinz' tenure that blacks began to see a change in attitude about members of the minority groups serving as police officers. Much prejudice still remained in the department, although it was not as blatant as it had been in the years past. Nevertheless, blacks were very much aware that such prejudice existed. Many of the policies were understood, not necessarily written. There was a unwritten policy that blacks had their "place" in the department."

While working in the Juvenile Division a minor disagreement arose between Officer Phelps and Captain Robert Horten. This illustration will show how unwritten policies were practiced as if they were officially pronounced. The dispute stemmed in part from Captain Horten's belief that Officer Phelps was a very militant person because she asked questions and wanted to know why certain things were done. Officer Phelps assumed that Captain Horten was not accustomed to working with blacks and that he believed the black officers should "stay in their place" and do as they are told. According to Officer Phelps, before women were assigned to patrol duty or to directing traffic, Captain Horten had threatened to give her a traffic assignment. Horten said, "If you want to be like the men, and you want equal this and equal that, well, then maybe we'll see about getting you on a street assignment." Officer Phelps recalls that she was somewhat frightened because at that time no female officers were directing traffic or working patrol duty, nor had she heard that the department was even thinking about giving women such assignments. She, therefore, took the offer as a threat. She

said, Captain Horten came from the old school and had to have things done his way or not at all. Herman Short who was Police Chief at the time supported that type of attitude, according to Phelps.

Despite the dispute, Officer Phelps remained in the Juvenile Division for three more years and then transferred to the Recruiting Division, where she worked for six and a half years. During that time, Officer Phelps says she noticed a lot of changes regarding black applicants, though discrimination still was practiced. However, she added, it was not blatant discrimination. The extent of the discrimination depended on the particular investigator and how he would review the black applicant's background. At that particular time discrimination was the focus point for blacks in the department and because of the discrimination allegations in reference to recruiting, a lawsuit was filed, the Tovar Title VII Lawsuit. Officer Phelps noticed, "once hired, blacks sometimes were used to manipulate other blacks. If a black officer was having a problem with a supervisor, the black officer would be transferred from his position and replaced with another black who was considered to be one of the so-called good old boys. No attempts were made to pinpoint the problem or resolve it."

When Officer Phelps left the Recruiting Division, she did so for what she believes was unfair treatment--namely, the department's practice of making black officers compete unfairly against one another. For example, Officer Phelps disagreed with the white officer with whom she worked. She disagreed with his investigative tactics and



attitudes toward blacks. When he was promoted to sergeant, he was assigned to the Place substation. After about two years, he was reassigned to the Recruiting Division and became Officer Phelps' sergeant. Suddenly, she said, her supervisor decided that she could do nothing right, even though he could not find anything wrong with her work. Officer Phelps alleged that he decided that she had a bad attitude, and he sought to have her transferred. To garner support for his recommendation, the white sergeant used a black sergeant to support the allegation. Officer Phelps said that when she met with the Recruiting Division lieutenant and the two sergeants, "the three men agreed that I had a bad attitude. Because I was not the kind of person who would go into my office, put my heels up on the desk, chew tobacco, talk about my personal business and make racial slurs, they formulated that I was perceived as having a bad attitude."<sup>7</sup>

Officer Phelps said that as a result, everything she did was scrutinized. For example, when she was in court, her supervisors would call the court every day to see if she was there. They used tactics like this to try to intimidate her or to provoke her into doing something that could be used as legitimate grounds for transferring her out of the division. Because her supervisors' tactics were unsuccessful, they resorted to telling her that she had a bad attitude and that she would have to find some place else to work, and she did.

After finding a place to transfer, the vacancy suddenly was no longer available. Officer Phelps speculates, though she has no hard evidence, that the transfer fell through after her lieutenant talked to the lieutenant in the division to which she would have been transferred. Although she had no street or patrol experience, her supervisors told her she would have to work a patrol assignment. The decision was made on Friday, and her new assignment was to start the following Monday. She was given the name of the Patrol Division's lieutenant and told to call him over the weekend. The lieutenant told her to report to work Monday evening, which she did. For about the first month or two, she rode with another black officer. Afterwards she was assigned to a patrol car by herself. She had asked for some patrol training, but her request was denied. Had it not been for the report-writing experience she acquired while in the Juvenile Division, she would not have known how to write an offense report and would have been totally lost. It was common sense, she said, that pulled her through. After about two years in the Patrol Division, Officer Phelps transferred to the Personnel Division where she work today.

Many of the other black female officers had experiences similar to that of Officer Joyce Pomares, who graduated from cadet class 56 on December 6, 1972. Of the 50 persons in her academy class, six were women--one black (herself), four whites and one Hispanic. Though only four positions were to be filled, said Pomares, six women were hired because the department did not believe that all of them would complete their academy training and graduate. All six women, however, did graduate.

Three were assigned to the Jail Division and three to the Juvenile Division. Those were the only divisions to which female officers could be assigned. Officer Pomares was one of the women selected to go to the Juvenile Division. According to Pomares, the three women assigned to the Jail Division believed that since Pomares was the only black officer, she would have been one of the persons assigned to the Jail Division. This caused a little distinction among the black and white females.

Officer Pomares' training in the Juvenile Division consisted of observation and instructions in how to work cases involving youths. The instruction was provided by the senior officer to whom she was assigned. Unlike her male counterparts, Officer Pomares and the other female officers in the division worked a rotating shift and had rotating off-days. At the end of each month, she and the other female officers would sign their names in a log and indicate which days they would like to have off during the next month. The assignment of days off went according to seniority. Because she was relatively new to the division, and therefore had less seniority than the other officers, she would wait until everyone else had signed up and get what was left anyway.

The desk and "floor" jobs were also rotated. Once such desk job was the runaway desk. One particular incident that Officer Pomares remembers distinctively occurred on a Sunday afternoon. She was assigned to the floor and responsible for taking any calls that came in whether they were to be worked on the street or in the office. One of her co-workers was assigned to the runaway desk. There was a call that came in

from the Fifth Ward area where a mother, who was mentally ill, had killed her son. The Juvenile Division received the call and a unit was requested to go to the scene. The officer assigned to the runaway desk that day was chosen to handle the case, even though Pomares was working the floor and should have been assigned that task. According to Pomares, the case was assigned to the desk officer to see if she would react or complain in any way. If Officer Pomares complained, she felt her supervisors would have given her a bad efficiency rating.

### **THE BEGINNING OF THE 70's**

During the early 70's, most black officers were given lower efficiency ratings than their white counterparts. When Pomares received her first efficiency rating, her score was 19.5. This compares with 22.5 for the two other women from her cadet call who also were assigned to the Juvenile Division. Officer Pomares speculates that she was given a lower rating because her supervisors wanted to see if she would complain, but she did not, she said nothing, because she knew it would not do any good.

Shortly afterward, the department began rotating female officers to the Jail Division for a six-month assignment. The purpose of the temporary assignment was to give the women some experience in working in the jail. When it was time for Pomares to begin her jail rotation, Harry Caldwell was the Juvenile Division's deputy chief. In an attempt to break past practice, Caldwell wanted the selection of officers for the jail rotation to be based on the officer's work record and not simply on the basis of the person's race. Because few blacks were assigned to the Juvenile Division, Caldwell apparently wanted to be able to bend the rules a little so as many blacks as possible

would remain in the division and be available to handle the many black cases that needed to be resolved.

Nevertheless, Officer Pomares went to the Jail Division as scheduled, and when she returned to the Juvenile Division, she was assigned to the midnight shift. At the same time, the department was looking for more officers to work in the Recruiting Division. Officer Pomares applied for one of the openings, was accepted and remained in that division for five years. During that time, if a person transferred from one division to another it was the department's practice to replace (whenever possible) the transferred officer with another officer of the same race. For example, if a black officer was transferred from one division to another, he would be replaced with another black officer. This practice, however, has since been abolished.

Being a black officer in the Recruiting Division, said Pomares, was a new experience. Quite a few blacks were assigned there, she said, adding that she seemed to have more freedom and, therefore, was able to recruit more blacks than might otherwise have been possible. Hiring more minorities was one of the department's recruiting objectives at that time.

When Officer Pomares left the Recruiting Division five years later, Caldwell was named chief of police. He selected her as one of the officers to be assigned to his office, making her the first black officer to serve in that capacity. Pomares assumes that she was selected because Chief Caldwell, the former head of the Juvenile Division, had observed her during public speaking engagements and television spots she did while

assigned to the Recruiting Division. For the most part, however, her duties in the chief's office consisted of staffing the reception desk.

Working in the chief's office allowed Officer Pomares to meet many people, some of which she would by chance meet later. "It was a very good public-relations position,"<sup>8</sup> she said, adding that she was able to learn more about the department, where to go and whom to talk to about getting a response to a citizen's request for action or information.

After Chief Caldwell retired, Officer Pomares transferred to the Criminal Intelligence Division (CID) because she had always been interested in that type of work. To Officer Pomares, CID was a unique division. Throughout the department it was known as the "elite division." Officer Pomares remained in CID for two years and during that time she had what she considered to be a very rewarding experience. Among the highlights of her tenure in CID was the chance to meet many noted public officials, such as presidents, prime ministers and members of the royal families.

Officer Pomares left CID in 1982 the same year that the department's Field Training Program (FTP) was started. She began working FTP at that time and stayed there until budget constraints forced the department to stop hiring new officers. The FTP was then phased out. While the program was still in operation, Officer Pomares was responsible for keeping the paperwork on the field activities of each probationary

officer and the senior officer assigned to them. Officer Pomares now works with Sergeant Paul McCann in the Community Services Division.

Officer Pomares felt "since the 1970s, blacks in the Houston Police department have made several strides forward. For example, there are more black supervisors now than there were a decade ago, and all officers are free to speak for themselves. In the seventies, black officers were reluctant to say too much because there were fewer black supervisors with whom the black officers could air their problems or discuss a particular policing situation."<sup>9</sup> If she had to do it over again, said Pomares, she would still join the Houston Police Department. "It is what one makes of it," she said, adding that, "one has to be very committed to stay because there are so many other opportunities outside the department that have opened up for blacks." The result, said Pomares, is that blacks are a little better off today than they were when she joined department. At that time, blacks joined the department for financial reasons because the pay was considered to be very good. Today, the job market is so expanded for experienced persons and the pay is much higher, a officer may remain at the department for the experience for five or six years and [then] go to something else that is related to law enforcement, such as the FBI or the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration or something of that nature, because that would give you a little bit more of a sound background in law enforcement."

All of the black female officers that were interviewed experienced some of the same problems that the black male officers experienced. Most of the female officers said they were treated like office helpers, with the understanding that women were to be "seen and not heard." One can perhaps assume that the male officers believed that the women did not perform "real" police work because they were not assigned to patrol duty or to any other task that was under the preview of the department's Field Operations Command. The female officers' jobs, however, were just as important as those performed by the male officers. It was these black women who served as the catalyst for other black females' entering various divisions within the Police Department, in addition to the Juvenile Division to which all females at one time were assigned automatically.

Females began to enter the policing arena in Metropolitan cities in a significant number in the mid-seventies. "November, 1974" denotes an historically significant month for the department because, of the 73 persons enrolled in cadet class #67, 26 were women. This number represented the largest number of females ever to enter a Houston Police Department cadet class. The class itself was one of the department's largest. Only four of the 26 women were black, and only three of the black females graduated from the academy. The three were Officers Marcella Guidry, Rachael Julian and May Walker.

Four months later, the trend began to change. The women who graduated from cadet class 67 were assigned to the Juvenile and Jail divisions and, for the first time,



to the Special Operations, Accident and Enforcement divisions. Most of the women, however, had desk jobs or performed secretarial duties. The only exception was the female officers assigned to the Special Operations Division. Their duty was to stand on street corners, direct traffic and patrol the downtown area on foot. These assignments gave female officers a tremendous amount of public exposure. Houston citizens began to notice that the department had female officers and grew accustomed to seeing the women in police uniforms. Some veteran male officers, however, started to resent the presence of female officers because they felt threatened and believed that they might lose their desired positions to a female officer. Some of the male officers adjusted, although others never really accepted the change.

In 1975, female officers broke a barrier by entering into Radio Patrol. This area of field operations had been dominated exclusively by males until Officer Shirley D. (Linwood) Williams and another white female officer became the first female probationary officers to be assigned to the Central Patrol Division's Radio Patrol Unit. Officer Williams was assigned to a senior officer and was not allowed to patrol on her own. She had to perform the tasks as instructed by the officer assigned to supervise her. Some of the senior officers with whom she worked used positive patrolling techniques, and others had a negative attitude that made learning difficult.

The following year, this author, May Walker "was assigned to the Park Place (Southeast) substations's Radio Patrol Unit after having been a police officer for only one year." With that assignment I became the first female officer to ride a one officer

unit in a patrol car. That year I also expressed my dislike for not being able to enter the locker rooms, choose my own partner and basically asked to be able to accomplish the normal things that a certified Houston police officer was supposed to accomplish. The author very disturbed because female officers were treated as second-class officers. I, therefore, spoke with my supervisor who in turn talked to Police Chief Byron "Pappy" Bond. Chief Bond agreed that female officers should be given the same opportunity to function as male officers since both men and women received the same pay and training. This decision paved the way for female officers to ride alone in patrol cars and to enter the locker rooms. It also was the impetus for a program to determine whether female officers could effectively ride with another female officer as their partner or chose any officer as a partner.

The pilot program with two female officers riding as partners was very successful. What proved its effectiveness was an incident in which the two female officers subdued and apprehended a robbery suspect as he fled the scene of the crime. This incident proved that women could handle life-threatening situations in a safe and professional manner. The department's practice of having two female officers ride as partners in the same patrol car also began as a result of this.

### **PERSONAL CASE HISTORY**

My first days in the Park Place (Southeast) Substation's Radio Patrol were marked by much hostility from the male officers. Before I began the assignment, I was told

that a meeting had been held to prepare the substation's officers for my arrival. After I walked into the station, everyone stared at me. After being seated in the roll-call room, everyone got up and sat on the other side of the room. About twenty minutes later, roll call began (to me it seemed as though it was eternity). When patrol partners were assigned during roll call, no one wanted to ride with me. After all assignments had been given, I had to wait a long time without a partner before a supervisor told me that he was having trouble getting an officer assigned to me. About four hours into the shift, Officer Roger D. Robinson volunteered to ride with me that week.

While riding with Officer Robertson, he told the author that the other officers (all men) believed that women did not belong in the Radio Patrol Unit and that some of the officers believed that women should be housewives or secretaries or in some other type of office job. (I was the only female at the entire substation.) He added that he volunteered to ride with me only because the sergeant would have ordered one of the officers to do so, and that would have caused problems. For the remainder of the shift and for the rest of the week, neither of us said another word to each other. It was a week of silence and uncertainty. The other officers I rode with also said little to me. There was conversation only when it was absolutely necessary, such as making an arrest or talking about the cases we were working on.

After riding with Officer Robertson for a week or so, the police dispatcher broadcasted a call of a residential burglary in progress. My partner and I answered the call "running hot" with the patrol car's red lights flashing and the siren blaring. When

we arrived a short time later, the suspect still was inside the residence. My partner went to the back door and I went to the front door. At that time the suspect ran out of the front door carrying some of the owner's property. I then chased the suspect west to a major intersection. When I caught him, a physical fight broke out. We fought intensely. The suspect hit me in the mouth, broke out my two front teeth and cut my lip. My partner arrived just as I began to subdue the suspect. Together we handcuffed him, read him his rights and placed him in the patrol car. When our supervisor arrived at the scene, he told us to take the suspect to the substation. My partner then told the sergeant, "You know, May is ok. She can fight like the rest of us. She can hold her own. I don't mind riding with her." After we booked the prisoner and placed him in jail and returned to the substation, word had spread that "May's ok." The next day, several officers asked to ride with me. This, of course, is only one incident. I would imagine other female officers surely could tell of similar incidents. This illustrates, however, the extent to which one sometimes has to prove one's ability and, thus, be accepted by their co-workers. After that incident, I was sure that I would always have to prove myself to the department's male officers since most believed that women had no place in policing.<sup>10</sup>

From my experiences at the Houston Police Department, I have come to believe that I cannot settle for being just good, but instead must be better. For example, each night after my patrol shift ended, I would practice self-defense and practice using my baton vigorously. I was determined to be better than good. I became obsessed with

trying to compete with the male officers with whom I worked. I wanted to make more felony arrests, write more tickets, catch more auto thieves and, most of all, never lose a suspect that I was chasing or be beaten in a fight. I have been fortunate enough to have been able to reach all of these goals and be accepted by most of the department's male officers.

Most of the female officers seem to find themselves in the same situation of needing to prove themselves to their co-workers. Many other female officers, however, had partners who treated them quite well while carrying out their patrol duties. According to these women, their male patrol partners would open the car doors for them, be protective of them when they arrived at the scene of a crime by checking out the surrounding area and making sure that everything was safe. Such actions could perhaps be attributed to the male officers upbringing or their lack of confidence in the female officer's policing abilities or even a fear that the female officers would be unable to respond adequately. We have also had some male officers who have approached their female partners with dating propositions. Still you have other officers that treat their female partners as they would a male partner while respecting them for being female.

The two people I remember most in my career as a patrol officer are Sergeants, Larry Watts and Raymond Mize. Both helped me tremendously in getting through some difficult times and provided me with the cushion I needed to survive the transition into a male-dominated department. Sergeant Watts was the person who had the courage to take my complaints to the chief of police, because he was concerned not only about my well-being as a person but also as a police officer. Many positive changes occurred

for female officers and the department as a whole, with his help. Male and female officers were treated equally and allowed the same opportunities to function as police officers. For example, female officers now could enter the men's locker room, ride in a patrol car as a one-person unit, choose their own patrol partners and respond to all types of calls, and not just those involving the report of an offense.

The seventies were quite a transition period and a memorable one for me. Sometimes tears come to my eyes when I recall how I was treated so unfairly simply because I was female and black and how I was never given the opportunity to be judged by my character and my knowledge. At other times I recall the good times, the laughter, the frightening incidents, the rewarding moments, and the feelings of self-gratification and accomplishment about a job well-done. After being a patrol officer for a while, I began to love patrolling. Most of the department's other female officers have said the same thing.

After 1976, female officers reached a few more milestones, such as acquiring our first black female supervisors. On July 10, 1982, Sergeant Dorothy Edwards became the first black female sergeant assigned to the Southwest Substation's Radio Patrol. On August 6, 1982 Renita Jones-Ferguson became a detective, and on July 20, 1984, Marceline Guillory was promoted to sergeant.

Advancements also were made when several divisions received their first black female officer. For example, in 1977, Marcella Guidry was the first black female assigned to the Vice Division. Other "first" for black female officers were Carlella D. Limbrick, Narcotics Division, 1980; Janelle Freeny Scott, police academy

instructor, 1979; Cynthia Dean-Bass, Mounted Patrol 1983; Barbara Ashley-Kemp, field training officer, 1985; and Joyce Pomares, administrative assistant to the chief of police in 1977.

### **MOVING INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

As the mid-1980s to the 90's approached, female officers continued to acquire and; 1) tackle jobs that male officers had previously held and dominated. For example, in 1985, Officer Claudia Warren became the first female officer to hold the position of security officer for the Mayor of Houston, and in 1978, Officer Kathy Black became the first woman assigned to the Special Weapons and Tactics team.

Furthermore, the number and percentage of female officers increased significantly only after the passage of the 1972 Equal Employment Opportunity Act, which prohibited the use of sexist and blatantly discriminating personnel practices.<sup>11</sup>

Today, the department's female officers, 2) continue to move in all directions. There are many young, energetic black females in the department who have not been mentioned but have contributed immensely to, 3) the upward mobility of black female officers.

Today, management must understand police roles and address the issues of institutional and individual racism and cultural sensitivity. If given the appropriate attention at intake, this could drastically improve the number of females joining our police department.<sup>12</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

As we move into the twenty-first century the national indicator dictates that over 50 percent of the work force will be females.

It will be beneficial to police agencies to recognize the importance of female officers in all phases of law enforcement from officers to managers. For a law enforcement agency to truly be an equal opportunity employer, they must start with advertisement, recruiting, retention, advancement, and upward mobility in reference to appointment of females to executive positions. A concentrated effort should be made to demonstrate the commitment of the agency to enhance recruitment of white, Black, Hispanic and Asian female officers. This will also lend credibility and sincerity to the agency and reflect the diversity of the community it serve.



## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. Duty, Margie, Retired Houston Police Officer. Interview by Author, November 1990.
2. Ellison, Barbara J., Police Officer, Houston, Texas. Interview by Author, December 1990.
3. Ibid, p.3
4. Ibid, p.4
5. Ibid, p.4
6. Scott, Janelle, Retired Houston Police Officer. Interview by Author, April 1991.
7. Phelps, Robbie, Police Officer, Houston, Texas. Interview by Author, May 1991.
8. Pomares, Joyce, Police Officer, Houston, Texas. Interview by Author, May 1991
9. Ibid, p.19
10. Walker, May, Police Officer, Houston, Texas, The Author, 1992.