

THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 2017

When law enforcement and community meet

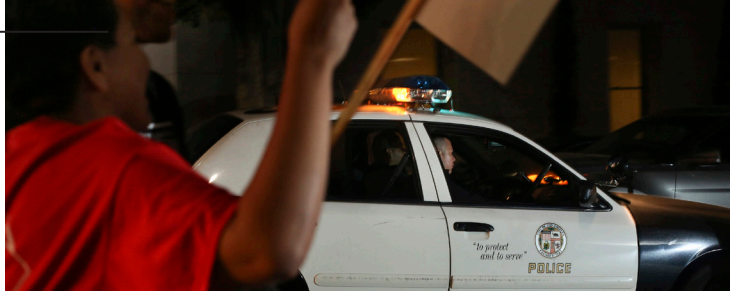
By Angela Powell

A young African-American man was shot and killed by a police officer. Soon there is outrage from the African-American community and cries that the community will not stand for one more life lost to a white police officer. Then the next day, the image of the shooter is blast across television and it is of a young African-American police officer. Does your black life matter when you're a police officer? We often talk about the divide between law enforcement and the African-American community, but what about when the two meet?

In my interaction with the law enforcement community, you realize that "blue" really does unite them. However, that does not mean that race does not carry with it a perspective unique for the African-American police officer.

The plea from the African-American community is to have a police force that is a representation of those whom they police. There is a sincere desire by law enforcement to have more diversity. But what is it like for the African-American officer?

"Uncle Tom," a "sell out" and worse is what the African-American officer has to hear when all he would like to do is make the community a better place. It's his first day on patrol. He and his field training officer make an arrest. The suspect is in the back seat and all the African-American young deputy sheriff has to do is obtain the African-American suspect's name and date of birth — should be easy enough. After the fifth attempt to get this basic information, the young deputy has to go to his supervisor and tell him that the suspect simply won't answer him. His white supervisor goes to the suspect and is quickly able to get the information. That type of disrespect is all too common for



New York Times News Service

Protesters hold signs demanding action against police violence in downtown Los Angeles, July 13, 2016.

the African-American officer. The young Los Angeles County Deputy sheriff, Kerry Carter, rose above it all and is now the captain for the Century Station of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. The population that this station serves is predominantly African-American and Hispanic. Out of the 300 deputy sheriffs assigned to that station, there are only two African-American deputy sheriffs. When asked why such a disproportionately low number, Captain Carter explained that many African-American deputies do not want to endure the backlash from the community that he experienced.

It's not just the African-American community that does not often welcome the African-American officer. A young African-American deputy sheriff responds to a residence that had just been burglarized. The white homeowner answers the door and tells the young deputy that she does not want to speak to her and wants to talk to a white deputy. The deputy's partner, who is white, stands up for her and says, "either you speak to her or we leave." They left shortly thereafter. Los Angeles County Deputy Sheriff April Tardy is now the captain, and first female captain of the South Los Angeles Station. Much like the Century Station, the population is mostly African-American and Hispanic. And again with nearly 200 deputy sheriffs, there

are less than five African-American deputies.

Law enforcement agencies have taken a proactive role in the recruitment, hiring and promotion of African-American police officers. There are currently 12 African-American chiefs of police in California. Chief Eugene Harris of the San Gabriel Police Department says that change within the African-American community has to start with young people. Community based programs that provide a safe environment for young people to participate in after-school activities is just one way law enforcement agencies try to reach young people. Sergeant Christopher Cuff of the Gardena Police Department is proud of the partnership that the Department has with a private coed school located in Gardena. Each year, the department invites young men and women from the school to spend a day at the department and learn what it is to be a police officer. Sgt. Cuff has noticed a peak in the level of interest that these young people now have in becoming police officers.

From January 2016 to April 2017, there have been approximately 45 African-American gang related shootings within the South Los Angeles community alone. You have to wonder if there is something to be gained from the political voice that rushes to every officer involved in the shooting,

demanding that change take place when that same voice is virtually silent when innocent lives are lost to gang violence.

As a former prosecutor for the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, now led by an African-American woman, Jackie Lacey, I was no stranger to some within the community questioning why I chose to "prosecute black people." I would retort that I convicted people who committed crimes and that more often than not, the victims of those crimes were African-American. I now face similar questioning when representing and defending law enforcement with many asking how I can represent police officers who shoot and kill young African-American men. I find that law enforcement agencies and officers embrace the perspective I bring and welcome any insight I can share on how to strengthen the relationship with the African-American community.

Change will come when we accept responsibility for what we do and respect those who try and help us along the way.

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