

Black Police Had To Plan Atlanta Residence

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SEARCH FOR EQUAL JUSTICE....PART TWO

Black Police Had To Plan Atlanta Residence

BY GEORGE M. COLEMAN

The worn out story of race, versus politics has ever been with us, and people reading about Atlanta's first black policemen may be surprised to learn that they went through much of what is happening today, minus the thin covering of pseudo equality and acceptance.

And the feeling today that only a "super n--r" will be accepted by American society was apparent equally true in 1948 as it is today.

Loud was the statewide resentment when Mayor Jackson called for Atlanta police men to live inside the city limits, but this is what exacted from our first black officers 29 years ago.

Loud today, is the howl against so called cheating of tests, but how could the exact number of black officers that the city desired, pass the tests, back in 1948?

Moreover, it is almost comic to see what was expected of these first eight men; something that their white counterpart had never lived up to.

INTERESTING STORY

So much of what happened is recorded in the pages of the Atlanta Daily World for all to see, and is recorded as a history for all time, because of the paper's interest in equal justice for its black citizens.

A January 18, 1948 story, publishing the opening of examinations for policemen from the black community, carried this interesting paragraph:

"Non-residents of the City are accepted for applications. However, applicants, who are non residents, if approved, must move inside the City limits within a reasonable period of time."

This is in dire contrast of public belief of police policy. Things, over the years, were felt to be so extreme that Mayor Jackson called for officers to be residents; claiming that too many police men had no interest in the city, and simply spent enough time here to earn their pay. Tacked on to this belief is still the feeling that many officers hail from areas that traditionally have little respect for Negroes, and therefore, easily slip into racial disrespect or outright bru-

ality, if pushed by a black law violator.

THE MEMORY

Sgt. Ernest H. Lyons, one of the World War II veterans who integrated the U.S. Marine Corps, remembered vividly how it was when he first went on turn key duty:

"A white officer would be taking a black person up the stairs, not too gently. He would turn to the officer, and asked, 'what have I done? I've got the right to know.' The white officer would push him around and exclaim, 'Nigger, you ain't got no rights.'"

Lyons had another memory:

"If a white woman was arrested, they called a special car to take her to jail. If a Negro woman was arrested, she was thrown right in with the men, black or white. If we arrested some body, the white drivers would park way across the street, and holler, okay, bring that nigger over here, boy."

All of this makes it seem that Negro policemen were

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First Blacks In Police Cars

Patrolman Claude Dixon checks records, while Patrolman Ernest H. Lyons calls in to headquarters. Officers had just been promoted from walking beats, Lyons is now a sergeant, Dixon, a major. Photo was taken by Harmon Perry, a photographer with the Atlanta Daily World.

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Black Police

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expected to perform better, and more honestly than white officers, and it certainly seemed so. The politics seemed to start right with the examinations.

Another Daily World article pointed out that 57 black men had taken tests for policemen, and the city planned to hire only eight. It seemed a bit unusual when only eight passed the tests.

And when they were sworn in by Chief Jenkins, it was clear, he was demanding more of them than he could expect of the white officers already out on the street.

A March 2, 1948 story, written by veteran newspaperman C. Lamar Weaver, was sub-headlined, "New officers told to steer clear of bribery and graft."

Weaver quoted Jenkins as saying:

"It'll take time for the citizens, both white and colored, to get used to you, for you will be a novelty to Atlanta." Weaver's story continued:

"The chief asked each man personally if he received any threats or intimidations since applying for a position on the police force. The reply was a unanimous negative."

Weaver revealed that to begin with all will "work one shift in the Auburn Avenue vicinity." He then quoted Jenkins as saying that three fourths of their duty would be "using their eyes and head."

"Since my connection with the force, I've never had to shoot a man," Weaver quoted Jenkins as saying.

"He warned them against graft, bribery, brutality and other inducements that might present themselves," Weaver wrote.

"The number of cases an officer reported does not necessarily make a good officer," The Chief was finally quoted as saying.

"YMCA POLICEMEN"

This was good as far as it went. But even Jenkins, and Mayor Hartsfield realized that Atlanta whites were not ready for the black officers. They had made a deal with City Council that their work would be limited to black areas, and arrests to black people. Moreover, they would not come to police headquarters, nor wear their uniforms off duty.

In fact, if it had not been for Warren R. Cochrane, they may have never gone on a beat.

It was he, who stepped in when the City could not find a place for them to work out of. Cochrane offered the Butler Street YMCA's base - ment, and this became a sort of black police precinct, and a burden to the suffering black officers, being given the nickname of "YMCA Policemen."

MORE REASONS

But all of this had to happen. It was just the times. A sample of Daily World headlines, the morning of March 2, 1948, proclaimed the following:

1. The Atlanta school board had bought a plot of land at Irvin and Blvd for \$50,000 for a black elementary school, with a bond issue of four hundred thousand dollars planned.

2. The first all black jury was called for service, although it did not serve.

3. Fulton County Grand Jury Presentments ran for the first time in the Daily World.

And in the March 3 issue, this:

1. New trial date set for doomed Rosa Lee Ingram and her four sons in Americas.

2. Anti-bias job bill put on Senate docket.

Truly, the time of "Amos N' Andy" and "Step N' Fetchit" had passed. The black intellectual was about to have his say, with the power to pave his way, throw the strength of black leaders, moderate whites, black news papers, and black organizations. (continued)