

# Local Blacks Say Causes of Concord Riot Not Far Removed from Winston-Salem

▲ Activist says "Our cup is full and ready to overflow"

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Chronicle Staff Writer

African-American community leaders say racial tensions due to police brutality and white citizens' denial of blacks being mistreated have reached their boiling points and could explode if citizens don't come together to resolve problems.

In light of the recent civil disturbance in Concord on July 11 over police usage of pepper spray to subdue a black man who died in their custody, blacks here said a similar incident could occur in Winston-Salem.

The Rev. John Mendez, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, said society in general has become violent, but police contribute to the problem by harassing innocent citizens.

"Police have created a lot themselves by going on false assumptions that all black men are criminals and their enemies," Mendez said. "Nobody will get upset when someone commits a crime and has to be arrested. The problem is when innocent people are wrongly identified."

Mendez said that every riot in the black community throughout the country has occurred because of police brutality.

Walter Marshall, one of two blacks on the city/county school board, said he rides through Kimberly Park and other public housing communities and witnesses the mistreatment of young blacks by off-

cers.

"It's (the projects) like a colonial society; like a Third World country almost," said Marshall. "You should see how little respect the blacks are shown from the officers: They stop them and search them unnecessarily."

The civil disturbance in Concord followed the death of Angelo Robinson, who died after he was sprayed with pepper mace. Just recently, Winston-Salem police sprayed Lawrence Francisco Cannon with pepper spray following his July 7 arrest. Cannon remains in critical condition in Forsyth Memorial Hospital.

Police Capt. G. C. Cornatzer of internal affairs defended the use of pepper spray and said he doesn't feel tension toward the police has reached the point where a riot would occur.

"Everybody realizes how little force the police in this city use," he said. "Our chief encourages people to only use the restraints that are absolutely necessary."

Cornatzer said the department will continue to use pepper spray because it's a way to decrease attacks.

"It's a good alternative to fighting and using firearms," he said. "When used incorrectly and wrongly it could be damaging like any other substance, but the spray is designed for them to close their eyes

so the officer can make the arrest without using force."

Marshall is against the use of pepper spray and feels more black police should be on the force.

"I think they should ban it (pepper spray) and stop using it," he said.

"They still employ too many who don't understand blacks. In cities where the police force is commensurate with the population they serve, there are less incidents."

"Police have a right and a responsibility to defend themselves, but not to brutalize citizens," said the Rev. Carlton Eversley, pastor of Dellbrook Presbyterian Church and a member of Citizens United for Justice. "That's why we worked hard for the (Citizens Police) Review Board to hear complaints."

Eversley also believes the problem is rooted in whites misunderstanding blacks and black culture.

"It's not unusual for white people in general and police officers to have a sense of denial about racism and its effects on the community," he said. "They should not get defensive with the individual who raises the question because he's speaking of a community problem."

Mendez believes black policemen could be a friend or an even bigger threat to the black community when a racist environment exist.

"If the black cops feel like they have to prove something to white people, they are often harder on

blacks and more dangerous," he said. "It depends on if they realize that they are a black man or black woman also."

Marshall said this deep-rooted resentment in the black community has reached its climax and a riot could occur at any moment.

"Our cup is full and ready to overflow," he said. "We need to stop putting our heads in the sand and recognize that there is a serious problem."

Marshall believes CUJ and other groups active in the community have prevented a riot from occurring in Winston-Salem.

"It's our only saving grace," he said. "We have advocates in the community working hard, but how much can any group do when they continue to violate not only civil rights but a person's human rights."

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## A Small N.C. Town Explodes

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homeowners stuck in the middle, is filled with poor but peaceful, deprived but dependable residents who all are either kin or at least know each other.

### Argument at Waffle House

Although most blacks and whites live segregated in the town, they seem to mingle at work — most are employed by Cannon Mills or Barber-Scotia College — and dine together peacefully at the few restaurants in the town. For leisure, most elderly blacks congregate on their front porches in the evenings and the younger blacks usually drive the 17 minutes to find a night life in Charlotte.

On July 11, Angelo Robinson decided to stay in Concord to party. It proved fatal. He and some friends left a party and went to the Waffle House on Highway 29. At the restaurant, according to police accounts, a disturbance erupted between some customers. An off-duty police officer who was working for the Waffle House called for backup while trying to break up the dispute. Other officers came and some used pepper mace as they attempted to subdue Robinson. Robinson and Edward Dwayne Cherry were arrested and were charged with disorderly conduct. When they arrived at the station, Robinson was unresponsive. Word of his death traveled like a summer-time brush fire through the tiny, close-knit Logan community.

### Firefighters use water hoses

Later that night, civil unrest broke out among some of the 5,500 blacks in this town. About 500 blacks entered a park in the Logan community and pelted police with rocks, bricks and bottles. Several people were injured, though none seriously. Some blacks went to the town's business community, where vandalism and fires caused about \$135,440 damage to property and vehicles.

Police from at least six jurisdictions were called in to assist the Concord police who, along with firefighters, were being set upon by the normally passive black residents. Firefighters turned water hoses on the crowd.

Several residents said it was not the first time that African Americans and police in the town have been at odds. But it was the first time that it has resulted in a death, which in this case was a rude awak-

ening to the entire community and a wake-up call to the usually docile blacks.

Joanne Carr, a relative of the Robinson's, described his death as the final straw that triggered the violent unrest. She said police have beaten and attacked other blacks before, including her son, John Carr.

On Oct. 27, 1991, Carr, 18, of 130 Scotia Drive, was hit in the head by police who charged him with possession of cocaine and delaying and obstructing an officer. The charges were later dismissed in Cabarrus County court for lack of evidence.

On Jan. 23, 1992, Alexander O'Brian Williams, 21, of 312 Griffin Circle, was reportedly bit in the face by a police dog and knocked down by an officer. Williams was charged with having an expired license plate, possession of cocaine and resisting, delaying and obstructing an officer.

She said events like those that have gone unpublicized added fuel to the fire that finally exploded after Robinson's death.

### State of emergency

Bernie A. Edwards, the town's mayor, called an emergency meeting with the city's board of aldermen at 3:30 a.m. on July 12 — the day following the destruction — to give him power to place the city under a state of emergency.

Residents had a 9 p.m. curfew, businesses in the Logan community were ordered closed between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m., and the sale of alcoholic beverages, guns or weapons and gasoline not directly dispensed into a vehicle was prohibited.

Businesses and homes where whites lived — in or near the Logan community — were boarded up. The few bootleg joints and corner stores run by blacks were not damaged, and they said they did not fear vandalism. The tragedy seemingly bonded the town's African-American community — from drug dealers to college students.

Damon Clark, owner of Cabarrus B.B.Q. in Logan, said two well-known drug dealers sat in his store and said white women would now be raped and police officers would be killed.

Clark said the city was very tense and "felt like a mini Beirut."

"We feel like prisoners in our own home, like everybody's under house arrest," he said.

### Weekend violence avoided

"This is the store they burned down," said a man sitting on a log pointing across the street to what used to be Komer Mart.

Tension in the town became more heated as the weekend drew nearer. But no incidents were reported last weekend. To head off another day of unrest, over two dozen black and white clergy gathered last Friday at First Baptist Church, where funeral services were held, for a community prayer service.

"We stand together as Christians to do some good and look for the common ground," said the Rev. David Morrow of McGill Baptist Church, who is white.

### A hometown hero

Robinson, 24, was considered a hometown hero. He was a star defensive end at Concord High School and earned a football scholarship to attend Wingate College, where he played nose guard his freshman and sophomore years.

Many of his teammates and friends lined the pews of First Baptist Church at his funeral Saturday afternoon. Lillian Robinson cried out her only son's name. Earlier in the day, the Rev. Jesse Jackson consoled the family and urged angry blacks to not use violence as a means of protest.

"Police brutality is a disease not limited by race," Jackson said. "It's not an issue of black and white but wrong and right."

Jackson said he would take the Robinson family to the Justice Department in Washington, D.C., to see whether Robinson's civil rights were violated.

### SBI conducts investigation

Concord Police Capt. Roy Coley said they felt it fair to the citizens not to investigate the matter at this point but wait on results from the State Bureau of Investigation. Coley said the officers involved have been assigned to desk duties.

"Some tension is still out there, but overall, most people are trying to remain calm and waiting for the results of the SBI investigation," he said.

Coley said the police has never had a problem with blacks, and they have only used pepper spray "a few months."

"This was just one of those unusual circumstances," he said. "It was very unfortunate and we hope we never have another."



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