

News at a Glance

Charlottesville police put DNA testing of large number of black men on hold

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — Police temporarily stopped asking some black men to voluntarily provide DNA samples as part of the search for a serial rapist.



Longo

Police Chief Timothy J. Longo Sr. said April 14 he is re-examining the months-long policy following criticism from the black community and others.

The testing will continue once the department develops more "stringent, well-defined criteria" regarding which men will be asked to provide genetic samples, Longo told The Washington Post.

Charlottesville police had asked 197 black men to provide a DNA sample obtained by a cheek swab as part of the search for a rapist who has attacked six women since 1997. In most of those requests, police said, officers were responding to tips about men who resembled a composite sketch of the rapist or who seemed to be acting strangely.

Ten of the 197 refused to submit to the swabs, officials have said. The American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia is preparing a flier that will be distributed in the Charlottesville area to inform black men that they do not have a legal obligation to let police take a DNA sample.

SCLC calls for investigation into Georgia police killings

ATLANTA (AP) — The Southern Christian Leadership Conference is calling for the state to investigate the deaths of several black men they say died at the hands of law enforcement officials under mysterious circumstances.

Surrounded by the families of men killed either during arrests or while in custody, leaders of the civil rights group said Georgia needs to do more to get to the bottom of what they call a troubling trend.

"We're not here to say the police are bad all the time, because we know they're not," said the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, interim president of the group founded by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and others in 1957. "But we have to hold law enforcement responsible for their actions."



Shuttlesworth

Shuttlesworth called on Georgia Attorney General Thurbert Baker to create a task force to study deaths that occur while in police custody. The attorney general's office said it was looking into the request but did not have an immediate comment.

The organization also plans to produce a national report documenting questionable deaths in police custody before its 2004 convention in Jacksonville, Fla., and to push for stricter state and federal laws and fines for unlawful deaths that occur in police custody.

Members of the group cited deaths ranging from that of Surafel Assaminew, a native of Ethiopia shot 15 times by Cobb County police last year, to Dexter Brown, a Tifton native whose mother said he died of what jailers called a suicide just hours after he assured her he was guilty of no crime.

Dodd apologizes for Byrd tribute

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Christopher J. Dodd apologized last week, saying he was sorry if anyone was offended by his tribute to a fellow senator who once voted against civil rights legislation.

Dodd, D-Conn., has been criticized by some conservative broadcast and Internet commentators for saying April 1 that Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., would have been a great senator and leader at any time in history, including the Civil War.

Byrd, who at one time was a member of the Ku Klux Klan, opposed the 1964 Civil Rights Act. He has repeatedly apologized for his brief KKK membership and said his vote against the civil rights bill was one of only two votes that he regrets having made during his 45 years in the Senate.

"Words can sting and hurt," Dodd told The Associated Press. "If in any way, in my referencing the Civil War, I offended anyone, I apologize."

He said he was trying to make the point that Byrd would have been a good senator at any point, and "I was not thinking of the KKK or his vote against the civil rights act."

White males given 96 percent of Philadelphia contracts, report says

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Firms owned by white males were given 96 percent of city contracts from 1998 through 2003, a new city report found.

The overwhelming majority of the city's \$2.78 billion in contracts for construction, goods and services were awarded to white males despite a pledge from Mayor John Street, who is black, to increase diversity in the government.



Street

Minority-owned businesses received 2.3 percent of the contracts, and 1.8 percent went to firms owned by women. Street was elected in November 1999 and was in office for four years during the study period.

Administration officials have said the long-standing problem would take time to fix. They plan to use the report to reorganize the Minority Business Enterprise Council, the city agency that implements, monitors and enforces the city's contractor-diversity laws. The Philadelphia Inquirer reported in its Sunday editions.

A. Bruce Crawley, chairman of the African-American Chamber of Commerce in Greater Philadelphia, called the report's findings "outrageous." Crawley, a one-time political ally of Street's, has been criticizing the mayor of late, claiming he has not done enough to help minority businesses.

Blacks still color-conscious?

BY HAZEL TRICE EDNEY
NNPA CORRESPONDENT

This is the first of two articles on how one's complexion still colors how many African-Americans view themselves and others in their community.
— The Editor



WASHINGTON — Atima Omara-Alwala had just left her office at the State Capitol in Richmond, Va., and was on her way to lunch when she heard a voice from a passing car scream, "Blackie!"

It was the kind of insult that she has come to expect but not accept.

A few years earlier, as a sophomore at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, 40 miles away, she heard some guys in a passing car laugh as one yelled, "Darkie!"

That anyone would stoop to that level of behavior was disappointing enough. But what made these insults doubly painful was that they were uttered by black men.

"It's not surprising anymore, but it's still somewhat painful," Omara-Alwala admitted. "I kind of wince or flinch on the inside. Even when I work in black communities, I'm always conscious that there might be some reason that I'll be picked on — not because of any fault in my personality — just the fact that I'm this complexion. And, of course, I'm no good if I'm this complexion."

Omara-Alwala's complexion is dark. She was born in Providence, R.I., to parents from Uganda in East Africa.

C. Yvette Taylor, a psychologist who counsels many women of color at the University of Virginia, and has heard many stories similar to Omara-Alwala's, says

See Color on A9

Ashcroft asked again to re-open Till case

BY GEORGE E. CURRY
NNPA EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

WASHINGTON — Rep. Bobby L. Rush has rejected Attorney General John Ashcroft's assertion that the Justice Department has no authority to open a federal investigation into the murder of Emmett Till, the 14-year-old African-American who was beaten, shot to death and thrown into a river in 1955 for allegedly whistling at a white woman in Money, Miss.

Rush's appeal to Ashcroft was joined last week by Congressman Charles Rangel and Sen. Charles Schumer.

"Emmett Till's murder seared into the minds of all Americans the hate and violence of racism in the South," Rangel said. "But because of the efforts of the black press especially, the crime, not solved in the courts, raised the consciousness of Americans and triggered the Civil Rights Movement."

In February, Rush, a Chicago Democrat, filed a bill in Congress asking that body to formally request that Ashcroft launch a federal investigation into Till's brutal murder. However, a spokesperson for the Justice Department told the Chicago Tribune that "the statute of limitations... barred the department from investigating the case further."

In a letter to Ashcroft, Rush says, "After consulting with Legislative Counsel for the House of Representatives and with the Congressional Research Service, I respectfully disagree with this assessment, and I remain firm in my call upon the Justice Department to investigate the murder of Emmett Till."

Rush said, "18 U.S.C. 3282 states that 'an indictment for any offense punishable by death may be found at any time without limitation.' 18 U.S.C. 214 as established by the Civil Rights Act proclaims that the type of lynching and murder that took place with Emmett Till is punishable by death. As such, I fail to understand why the department finds the statute of limitations as a bar to investigate the murder."

In addition, another federal statute, 42 U.S.C. 1988 (a), gives "the federal courts jurisdiction to entertain, as an original matter, civil or criminal actions under state law in any case affecting the deprivation of civil rights."

The Illinois congressman cited the 1963 murder of civil rights leader Medgar Evers and the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist, even though the cases

were more than 30 years old.

"In the case of the Sixteenth Street Church bombing, the U.S. Attorney's Office actually prosecuted the case in state court under state law," Rush stated. "The Justice Department did not seem to think that statute of limitation issues barred its involvement in these cases, so I see no reason why the department would think differently with regard to Emmett Till."

In an interview with the NNPA News Service, Rush said: "The federal government has the resources, it has the authority and should have the will to re-open this case. Emmett Till cannot and

will not rest in peace. Mamie Till Mobley (his deceased mother) cannot and will not rest in peace until there's justice. We cannot rest in peace."

The bludgeoned and disfigured face of Till was flashed across the country in 1955. His mother shocked the nation when she insisted on an open casket funeral so that the world could see what had happened to her son."

Rush is also pushing for the awarding of a Congressional Medal of Honor to Till's mother "for her courage, but also for her commitment to young people across this country."



Rush

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