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The Carolina Times

THE TRUTH UNBRIDLED

VOLUME 94 - NUMBER 11

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA - SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2015

TELEPHONE (919) 682-2913 PRICE: 30 CENTS

Counting the Victims of Police Violence

By Jazelle Hunt

NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - As Eric Holder ended his tenure as U.S. Attorney General, he said, "The troubling reality is that we lack the ability right now to comprehensively track the number of incidents of either uses of force directed at police officers, or uses of force by police," he said, at a Martin Luther King Jr. Day event. "This strikes many - including me - as unacceptable."

As it stands, both the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Justice compile information on police killings, as reported by police departments themselves. But there are challenges with the reliability with this data. By law, collecting and providing this information to the government is mandatory only for police agencies that receive certain federal funds; police killings found to be unjustified are not included in the FBI's measures; and reporting guidelines can vary from place to place, to name a few issues.

Over the past few years, citizens have attempted to step in where official entities would not, creating well-regarded crowdsourced online databases such as KilledbyPolice.net, FatalEncounters.org and the U.S. Police Shootings Database (launched by Web sports blog, Deadspin).

MappingPoliceViolence.org is the newest addition to this effort. Mapping Police Violence builds on this tally by merging and cross-checking those first two databases. It compiles a month-by-month death toll for 2013 and 2014; and by combing through media reports and other public data, the contributors have confirmed the race of every victim in 2014.

Samuel Sinyangwe, a 24-year-old Ferguson protester and one of the project's directors, said that this detail is missing for approximately 60 percent of the victims in the source databases.

Though the project highlights the disproportionate killing of black people, it includes all reported deaths by date, location, race, age, gender, cause of death, and medical condition (e.g. under the influence, mentally disabled, etc.). Additionally, users can compare police departments around the country by population, murder rate, and how "likely to threaten black life" they are.

"When you compare white folks and black folks who were killed by police, there are big differences. White folks tended to be more likely to have a mental illness, to be armed, to be older - or to be drunk or under the influence. So they were more likely to have some condition that made it more challenging for police to deal with them," Sinyangwe says.

"However for black folks, they were less likely to do all of these things, and then they were still more likely to be killed. You can only do that analysis if you looked at all races and were able to compare and contrast."

By Mapping Police Violence's count, police killed at least 1,175 people in 2014. Of these victims, 302 were black - a disproportionate rate of 26 percent - and 56 percent of these black victims were unarmed. Most victims were shot, but other causes of death included beating, physical restraint, being hit by cars, and in one case in New York, falling from a window.

"What you can show quite plainly with this tool is that, in fact, places with the same amount of crime, the same demographics, have very different levels of police violence. So crime is not an excuse," Sinyangwe said. "We're hoping to really help [communities and organizers] make the case for why a given city or police department is really culpable for this and really needs to make a change."

According to the data, Florida, Texas, and California had the highest number of black victims last year (each responsible for between 10 and 35 deaths). Police departments responsible for the most deaths last year include Chicago Police Department (13 killed), followed by Los Angeles and New York (10 each), and Prince George's County Police Department in Maryland (five deaths).

Sinyangwe points out that for the city of St. Louis, if the current trend continues, black males 27 and younger will have a statistically greater chance of being killed by police than dying in a car accident.

The data also shows a marked drop in police killings after Michael Brown's death and the start of the Ferguson protests. In August 2014, police killed 140 people around the country, 43 of them black; the next month, those numbers fell to 80 and 19, respectively. They still have not returned to their August 2014 levels, for any demographic.

MappingPoliceViolence.org is run by Ferguson protesters and organizers, and is a project of the movement's online hub, WeTheProtesters.org. Volunteers around the country contribute to, sort, and verify the information.

"What I hope, and what DeRay [McKesson], [Johanna Elzie], and I are building the capacity to do, is to use this tool to support groups on the ground - to be able to really make the case, using the best data available, for long-term institutional change," Sinyangwe says.



ATTY. LORETTA LYNCH

NC's supporters of Loretta Lynch go to DC to lobby senators

RALEIGH (AP) - North Carolina residents unhappy with announcements by their two U.S. senators that they'll oppose the nomination of Greensboro native Loretta Lynch as attorney general are heading to Washington to try to get them to change their minds.

The state NAACP chapter said a women's coalition along with state president the Rev. William Barber were slated to travel to Washington March 17 for a news conference. The advocates also wanted to meet with Sens. Richard Burr and Thom Tillis.

The two senators said late last month they wouldn't support Lynch, the U.S. attorney for eastern New York. They both cited in part pending elections-law litigation by the Justice Department against the state that they believe will continue under Lynch if she's confirmed.

NC attorney general asks about hotel's tournament surcharge

CHARLOTTE (AP) - Attorney General Roy Cooper wants to know why a Charlotte hotel imposed a 15 percent service charge to the bills of customers in its lounge during a basketball tournament last month.

Customers at the hotel for the CIAA basketball tournament had a service charge added to their bills. The hotel has apologized to those who were offended. The hotel said the charge was not intended to single out any particular group.

The Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association is the oldest African-American athletic conference in the country.

Deputy Attorney General Harriet Worley has written to the hotel asking about the surcharge and how it was disclosed to customers. The letter also asks if the hotel has imposed similar charges at other events.

The hotel said it will respond to the letter.

Attempt to allay NC police-citizen conflict is focus of bill

By Gary D. Robertson

RALEIGH (AP) - The chief sponsor of a measure designed to address potential discrimination by law enforcement in North Carolina says ethnic and racial profiling is a tough issue but needs to be discussed by lawmakers, police and the public.

Rep. Rodney Moore of Charlotte, other legislators and civil rights advocates held a news conference to discuss the bill Moore filed.

The measure would make clear "discriminatory profiling" is unlawful, require more homicide and traffic stop data collection and give local governments the ability to create citizen boards to investigate misconduct allegations.

Moore wants the bill to become law but hopes it will start a dialogue in light of several black or multiracial men who have died during incidents with police. Those deaths occurred in Missouri, New York and most recently Wisconsin.

California hopes to ease path to historically black colleges

By Lisa Leff

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) - Leaders of California's vast community college system on Tuesday approved a program aimed at making it easier for students to transfer to historically black colleges and universities in other parts of the country at a time when seats at the state's own public universities have gotten harder to come by.

Under a deal brokered by Chancellor Brice Harris' staff and approved by the system's governing board, nine historically black schools in the South and Midwest have promised to admit all transfer students who have completed certain prescribed courses at California's 112 two-year colleges with a cumulative grade point average of 2.5 or higher.

The agreements, set to take effect in the fall, are designed to reduce the time it takes students to accumulate enough course credits to move to a four-year school and then to earn their baccalaureates by making sure the work they do in California is recognized by the historically black institutions. Mismatches between the content of lower-division courses at community colleges and the same classes at four-year schools often make it hard for students to meet transfer entrance requirements or cause them to lose credits.

"This is very important for our students," Joseph Bielanski Jr., a member of the systems Board of Governors, said of the agreements. "It's a way of building pathways that are clear to the students so they can have a variety of opportunities now to get their education."

Individual community colleges throughout the U.S. have created their own compacts with historically black colleges, most of which also have transfer pacts with the two-year schools in their home states. But California's arrangement is believed to be the first of its kind between a community college system and multiple historically black institutions of higher learning, Paige Marlatt Dort, a spokeswoman for the chancellor, said.

"This may be a model that can be used by other states in the nation to look at HBCUs to provide meaningful opportunities for access and educational attainment," George Cooper, executive director of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, said at Tuesday's meeting in Sacramento.

California's community college system is the nation's largest. African-Americans make up about 7 percent of the 2.3 million students enrolled. In 2011, the last year for which statistics were available, less than half of one percent of the 112,327 students who transferred from a community college in California to a four-year school opted to complete their studies at one of the nation's 105 historically black colleges and universities, some of which have been facing declining enrollments.

Though the transfer agreements are with HBCUs, the program is open to students of all races and ethnicities.

The nine schools are Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas; Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri; Dillard University in New Orleans; Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina; Wiley College in Marshall, Texas; Fisk University in Nashville; and Stillman College, Talladega College and Tuskegee University, all located in Alabama. With the exception of Lincoln, all the institutions are private schools with annual tuitions ranging from about \$9,300 to over \$19,000.



President Barack Obama greets the 2015 Intel Science Talent Search finalists in the Grand Foyer of the White House, March 11. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)