

The Future of Minority Law Enforcement Executives in the State of Florida

Leonard A. Davis

Abstract

The advantages gained by blacks, females, and Hispanics in the 1970s were lost in the 1980s and 1990s in law enforcement in Florida. The number of minority law enforcement executives in the state has dwindled. In addition, although the number of minorities in all ranks of law enforcement is higher, the percentages are lower when compared to the population.

Statistical data obtained through research and surveys show that minorities are losing ground when it comes to achieving executive positions in law enforcement in the state. There is a clear and identifiable profile that distinguishes the typical minority law enforcement executive.

Not only are there obstacles to promoting minorities to executive levels, there are still serious difficulties in recruiting, hiring and retaining. Those obstacles include hostility from within agencies that remain dominated by white males and a sociological aversion to law enforcement by minorities.

Introduction

A black male between the ages of 18 and 25 and living in the State of Florida has a better chance of becoming a homicide victim than he has of becoming a deputy sheriff.

Even though the number of black law enforcement officers throughout the state is higher than in the past, the percentage of the total workforce is lower as the number of deputies increases.

In regard to gender, females comprise more than one-half of Florida's population and may not be considered a minority in the population, but white males continue to dominate the law enforcement workforce. Women, therefore, hold minority status in such traditionally male-dominated fields.

A survey of sheriff's departments in the State of Florida showed the plight of minority officers and executives in law enforcement. The purpose of the study is not to criticize or condemn any agency, but rather to bring to the fore the need to draw more minorities into law enforcement, to prepare them for promotion, and to promote them into the upper ranks. The future of minorities in executive positions in law enforcement is at stake.

Demographics: Minority versus Majority

For the purpose of this study, the term minority will be used to include Blacks, Females, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians. Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans and Asians are generally considered to be in the minority in the United States, while females make up the largest segment of the population of the state. However, females in law enforcement are definitely in the minority category and will be treated as such for the purpose of this study.

True southern state? Geographically, Florida is the southernmost U.S. state. Generally, however, Florida is not considered a true southern state.

Florida is second only to Nevada on the list of the 12 states where the majority of inhabitants are outsiders. In Florida, 69.5 percent of the residents came from some place else. By contrast, the other southern states average 29.3% of residents who migrated from other places.

VIRGINIA	45.8%
GEORGIA	35.5%
S. CAROLINA	31.6%
TENNESSEE	30.8%
N. CAROLINA	29.6%
ALABAMA	24.1%
MISSISSIPPI	22.7%
KENTUCKY	22.6%
LOUISIANA	21.0%

It is imperative that we realize that most residents are not native Floridians if we are to understand the problems we face when we discuss the future of minority law enforcement executives in the State.

We cannot blame the low number of minority law enforcement executives on the "deep South" attitudes of the past toward minorities, particularly blacks. Even if such bias still prevails in some parts of the Deep South, such attitudes would have little bearing in Florida because it is not a typical Southern state. Instead, Florida is filled with transplanted Northerners.

According to the 1990 U.S. Census, the total population of the State of Florida is 12,937,930. More than 50%, or 6,676,207 are female. Less than 15%, or 1,759,534 are black. Less than 15%, or 1,574,145 are Hispanic. Less than 2%, or 154,302 are Asian.

When is the minority the majority? When discussing minorities there is an enigma. There are instances when the "minority" is the majority.

If you live in California or New Mexico, the minority is expected to be the majority before the year 2000. That's when non-whites should out number whites in those states according to projections drawn from the 1990 U.S. Census.

Closer to home, Gadsden County, located in Northwest Florida, has a population of 41,105. Of those, blacks outnumber whites 23,700 to 16,686. Gadsden is the only county in the state where blacks outnumber whites.

Barriers to Hiring Minorities

Although females comprise more than one-half of Florida's population, white males continue to dominate the law enforcement workforce. In particular, white males continue to dominate the positions in law enforcement that are responsible for recruiting, hiring, retraining and promoting.

Although they may not consciously block the hiring of blacks, females, Hispanics, Native Americans or Asians, research shows that executives tend to hire, retain and promote individuals who have qualities similar to themselves:

- similar economic background
- similar culture
- similar ideology
- same gender

Even though the chief administrator of an agency may espouse his desire to hire, retain, and promote minorities, the people in positions to have an impact on hiring, retaining, and promoting may not share his commitment.

Educational Requirements. We must be aware that the trend to apply higher educational standards might be based upon criteria that are at odds with the interests of members of minority groups. Higher standards, applied to entry-level positions, will further eliminate minorities. As some agencies around the state start to require a minimum of a two-year college degree, an already meager pool of minority candidates will become smaller.

Sociological Aversion to Law Enforcement. Why aren't more blacks and Hispanics pursuing careers in law enforcement? I interviewed minority law enforcement executives from around the state and approximately 100 college-age minorities during the Black College Reunion in April 1990 in Daytona Beach, Florida. I found that the majority of blacks and Hispanics have a learned aversion to law enforcement officers.

In black and Hispanic neighborhoods, cooperating with the police is frowned upon. Black children are taught by their parents and their peers to avoid the police. As a child growing up in Ormond Beach, Florida, I was always warned if the police asked you a question:

“You didn't see anything!”

“You didn't hear anything!”

“You don't know anything!”

Of the 100 college students I interviewed at random during the Black College Reunion, not one was interested in a career in law enforcement. Granted, this was an unscientific survey and was not done under the best conditions, but their responses are a sad commentary on the image of the law enforcement profession.

My personal survey also showed that Hispanics bring with them to this country a hatred and fear of police authority. Oftentimes, atrocities perpetrated upon them both in their native country and in this country are passed on to their off-spring, perpetuating bad feelings towards law enforcement.

The only answer to these barriers is education. Not only should we begin formally training more prospective minority recruits, but we need to start educating our young minorities in elementary schools that it is socially acceptable to become involved in law enforcement and that it is also socially acceptable to become a law enforcement officer.

The Study

This study was prepared utilizing a two-part survey. Surveys were sent to every Florida agency that has the responsibility to deliver law enforcement services to the citizens in its jurisdiction. Because some agencies failed to return the surveys, the decision was made to limit the target group to the 67 sheriff's offices, one for each county throughout the state. One hundred percent of those surveys have been completed and tabulated.

The first part of the survey was done to gather data on the number and location of minority law enforcement officers and the number and location of minority law enforcement executives (Captain, Majors, Commanders, Chiefs and Directors, etc).

The second part of the survey identified those minority executives, where they came from, and how they were able to progress through the system to achieve the positions they now occupy.

PART I of the survey form asked for the following information:

1. The number of full-time sworn/state certified law enforcement officers the agency employed.
2. The number of those full-time sworn officers who where in the following categories:
 - A. White Male
 - B. White Female
 - C. Black Male
 - D. Black Female
 - E. Hispanic Male
 - F. Hispanic Female
 - G. Native American
 - H. Other
3. Of those minorities, how many are in the position of captain and above? The ranks of captain and above were chosen because individuals in those positions have the ability to influence policy decisions within the various departments.

PART II of the survey targeted the minority law enforcement executives who were identified in Part I of the survey. Those executives were asked to list career highlights and promotional progression. They also were asked the following questions:

1. What problems did you encounter during your law enforcement career that could be attributed to your minority status.
2. Who or what influenced you to pursue a career in law enforcement?
3. What advice would you give current minority law enforcement officers and executive candidates?

Five case histories were selected as representative of the responses of the minority executives. One case history came from each of the five regions of the state. Those five have been included to show how such minority executives started out and then progressed through the system to ascertain if there is a formula for success that others may follow.

To facilitate comparisons, Florida's 67 counties were divided into five regions. The results of the survey were astounding:

1. The NORTHWEST Region includes Bay, Calhoun, Escambia, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Wakulla, Walton and Washington Counties. In this region, there are 1,056 deputies, including 164 minorities, with only one listed in an executive position.

2. The NORTHEAST Region includes Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Clay, Columbia, Dixie, Duval, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Nassau, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union Counties. Sheriff's offices in this region employ 1,529 deputies. Of that number, 440 are minorities and eight minorities are listed in the captain or above range.

3. The CENTRAL Region includes Brevard, Citrus, Flagler, Lake, Marion, Orange, Osceola, Putnam, Seminole, Sumter, St. Johns, and Volusia Counties. There are 2,792 deputies in the central region; 535 are minorities, with six listed at the rank of captain or above.

4. The SOUTH CENTRAL Region includes Charlotte, Desoto, Glades, Hardee, Hernando, Highlands, Hillsborough, Lee, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Sarasota Counties. In sheriff's offices in the south central region there are 3,347 deputies. Of that number, 665 are minorities. Of those minorities, six are listed in the captain or above range.

5. The SOUTHERN Region includes Broward, Collier, Dade, Hendry, Indian River, Martin, Monroe, Okeechobee, Palm Beach and St. Lucie Counties. The ten counties in the southern region employ 4,861 deputies.¹ Of that number, 1,914 are minorities. Of those minorities, eight are listed at the rank of captain or above.

Volusia County: An Example

Volusia County, located in the Central Region, was separated as a typical example of the low number of minorities in law enforcement. Volusia has 17 agencies that are responsible for the delivery of law enforcement services to its 370,712 residents.

There are 925 full-time sworn law enforcement officers employed by those 17 agencies. Of those 925 officers, 130 are minorities.

- Fifteen of the 17 have no Hispanics.
- Eleven of the 17 have no blacks.
- Five of the 17 have no females.
- Four of the 17 have no minorities.

There are four minorities rated at captain or above in those 17 agencies:

1. A BLACK MALE police chief with 65 sworn officers.
2. A WHITE FEMALE police chief with three sworn officers.
3. A COMMANDER whose agency has 213 officers.
4. A MAJOR whose agency has 318 officers.

The future of minority law enforcement executives in Volusia County may be in even more of a dilemma. It is evident that although there are four minorities in executive positions now, two of those four, as chiefs, can be dismissed at any time and the other two will be eligible to retire with full benefits in the next three to five years. The irony is that there are no immediate replacements on the horizon for these four should they leave law enforcement in the foreseeable future.

Of the four agencies with minority executives, only one has a minority lieutenant that could possibly be considered for elevation to an executive position given the current guidelines of the agencies. Two agencies have minorities at the rank of sergeant and the other two agencies have no ranking minorities.

I used Volusia County as an example because I am most familiar with the situation there, but agencies all over the state are in similar situations.

Minority executives such as those in Volusia County are facing a dilemma. They need to ask themselves:

Do I leave my position when I am eligible for full retirement benefits, knowing that in all probability I will not be replaced by a minority?

OR

Do I set aside my personal agenda and occupy my current position until such time that I am reasonably sure that a suitable minority candidate is in the position to be considered as a replacement?

Who is Florida's Minority Law Enforcement Executive?

Though few in number, Florida's minority law enforcement executives share similar characteristics:

Black Male

45 to 55 years of age

Married

2 to 3 children (high school to college age and above)

20-plus years in law enforcement

College education or training at institutions such as the FBI National Academy or the Southern Police Institute.

Although white females outnumber black males in law enforcement, more black males hold executive positions. White females are gaining.

Florida is not alone in its seemingly inability to attract minorities to law enforcement. On the national level, the Federal Bureau of Investigation employs nearly 10,000 agents. Of that 10,000, only 5% are black. The FBI recently acknowledged disparities in the way

black and white agents were treated and announced that more blacks would be promoted to supervisory positions.

The gains made by blacks in the 1960s and 1970s have been lost in the 1980s and early 1990s. Study the profile of the Minority Law Enforcement Executives: black male, 45-50 years of age, 20-plus years in law enforcement. These individuals were hired in the 1960s and 1970s, and although the number of blacks in law enforcement are higher in the 1990s, the percentages are lower because the total number of officers has increased during the same period.

The number and percentages for white females is climbing. The number and percentages for Hispanics and Asians are climbing. The number of Native Americans is negligible. The percentage of blacks is decreasing.

Case Histories

Northwest Region. MAJOR JAMES MORGAN, Leon County Sheriff's Office (200 sworn officers). Major Morgan has 26 years in law enforcement, all with Leon County:

Hired as deputy, 1967
Promoted to sergeant, 1974
Promoted to lieutenant, 1977
Promoted to captain, 1982
Promoted to major, 1991

Major Morgan advises minorities to be willing to start at the bottom and work their way through the organization. He believes there are always problems, but officers must be willing to work to overcome obstacles. He was encouraged to pursue his career by a law enforcement officer.

Major Morgan is not sure what the future holds for minority law enforcement officers. "The number seems to be dwindling," he said.

Northeast Region. CAPTAIN DELLA SHEALY, Alachua County Sheriff's Office (198 sworn officers). Captain Shealy has more than 20 years as a sworn officer and another two years as a cadet for a total of 22 years with the Alachua County Sheriff's Office:

Hired as a deputy, 1973
Promoted to sergeant, 1974
Promoted to lieutenant, 1984
Promoted to captain, 1987

Captain Shealy has the distinction of being the first female lieutenant and the first female captain of the Alachua County Sheriff's Office. She said she was not aware of any problems she had encountered during her career that could be attributed to her minority status.

She said she would give minorities the same advice she would give anyone interested in a career in law enforcement:

- 1) Be professional.
- 2) Be aggressive, but not pushy.

- 3) Improve your weak areas.
- 4) Get all the training you can to enhance career development.

There was nothing specific that led Captain Shealy to a career in law enforcement. "It was just something that happened."

Central Region. MAJOR LEONARD A. DAVIS, Volusia County Sheriff's Office (318 sworn officers). Major Davis has 22 years in law enforcement, all with Volusia County:

Hired as a deputy, 1972
Promoted to sergeant, 1977
Promoted to lieutenant, 1984
Promoted to captain, 1989
Promoted to major, 1993

Major Davis' advice to minorities in law enforcement or prospective candidates for positions in the field is "preparation." He gave these suggestions:

- 1) Prepare yourself mentally and physically for the long haul.
- 2) Education is the key to success.
- 3) Establish short-term and long-term goals and continually work towards those goals.

"I am not sure that any of the problems would be attributed solely to my minority status or to the usual competitiveness associated with promotions and specialized assignments," he said. "I decided to pursue a career in law enforcement because of my desire and the belief that I could make a difference. Now, more than 20 years later, I am confident that I have made a difference. Role models are very important."

Major Davis said the future of minority executives in the field depends largely on those currently serving in law enforcement. "If minorities are going to ascend to executive positions," he said, "it is incumbent upon those of us currently in those positions to hold the door open so that others may follow."

Southern Region. CAPTAIN ARTHUR OWENS, Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office (811 sworn officers). Captain Owens has more than 20 years in law enforcement in Palm Beach County:

Hired as a deputy, 1970
Promoted to sergeant, 1980
Promoted to lieutenant, 1983
Promoted to captain, 1986

Captain Owens advises minorities not to depend on status as a minority to get hired or promoted. He says hard work and perseverance are the keys to successful law enforcement careers. He also advises prospective employees to make sure they really desire to be a law enforcement officer. "It is thankless and rewards are few," he said.

Captain Owens said he always wanted to be a law enforcement officer, nothing

else was acceptable to him. He said he was influenced by a deputy with the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office. His role model was the first black hired as a deputy in Palm Beach County.

South Central Region. CAPTAIN GEORGE MONTESINO, Lee County Sheriff's Office (325 sworn officers). Captain Montesino has been in law enforcement for more than 23 years, including 19 with Lee County:

Hired as a deputy, 1974
Promoted to sergeant, 1980
Promoted to lieutenant, 1983
Promoted to captain, 1988

Captain Montesino had this advice for minorities seeking careers in law enforcement:

- 1) Don't expect to gain any advantage because of your minority status.
- 2) Expect to be treated fairly.
- 3) Hard work is your ally.

Captain Montesino does not attribute any work-related problems to his minority status but did mention that he had to face a stereotyped perception by his own peers during his early years in law enforcement.

Captain Montesino believes that minorities have an aversion to law enforcement largely due to such peer pressure. He said that he believes few minorities, particularly in Hispanic and black communities, are attracted to law enforcement because minorities traditionally live in high crime areas and the peer pressure and alienation of the residents of those neighborhoods is a deterrent to minorities.

Captain Montesino is the only ranking Hispanic officer in the Lee County Sheriff's Office.

Conclusion

Traditionally, minorities are trapped in entry-level jobs. Although there may be no blatant discrimination, minorities tend not to get promoted at the same pace as their white male counterparts. Promotions into supervisory and policy-making positions are infrequent. The question at this point is how to get minorities hired, how to retain minorities, and how to get them promoted through the system to positions on the executive level that have been dominated by white males.

Hiring in most law enforcement agencies is done by personnel divisions within the department. The people in positions in those divisions to influence hiring are predominately white males. Because the hiring process, including testing and physical examinations, can take several months, a good number of minority candidates pursue other options in the job market.

Retaining minorities is another problem in law enforcement. The training process in most agencies is supervised by white males. Before we can get minorities into executive positions, we have to retain them through the training process and prepare

them for promotion. Such a retention method is based upon observations and recommendations by training officers who are predominately white males.

Promotions are the next hurdle minorities have to clear in their quest to become law enforcement executives. In the average sheriff's office in Florida, a 3- to 5-year period of service is required before a sworn employee is eligible to participate in his first promotional examination. Future participation in exams for higher level promotion is based on more stringent education requirements and time in grade.

Consider this scenario: If a minority candidate for an entry-level law enforcement position is hired today, that candidate would have to invest approximately 15 to 20 years in his career to get to an executive level position, if, and only if, the candidate is promoted at each initial opportunity. A foot in the door doesn't always guarantee a step up.

A large percentage of minorities languish in entry-level positions their entire law enforcement careers, and the forecast for any change is bleak. Although some progress is being made by white females, the percentage of other minorities in executive positions is dwindling.

Without mentoring programs and organized support groups, minorities seeking promotions to executive positions will continue to fight for equal status. Minority executives in law enforcement have a moral obligation to mentor promising young minority officers. Once in a position to influence hiring, retaining, and promotions, the minority executive has an obligation to hold the door open for other minorities to walk through. If they don't, who will?

Suggestions for Success for Minorities in Law Enforcement

- 1) Be prepared to take advantage of opportunities when they occur. Education and career development training are the keys to successful careers in law enforcement.
- 2) Be prepared to make sacrifices. Pursue career enhancement opportunities vigorously. Many careers have been sidetracked because recreational activities interfered with career development.
- 3) Do not expect to gain any advantages based on your minority status. Expect and demand to be treated equally. Race, gender or ethnicity are not excuses to settle for mediocrity.
- 4) Do not allow negative influences to burden you with negativity. Associate with individuals who are positive, optimistic and enthusiastic about their work.
- 5) Give 100% at all times. Put forth your best effort even when the return on the investment is less than the energy expended. Service is the key to success.
- 6) Endeavor to persevere. Don't ever give up or sell yourself short. Remember the cliché: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."

Endnotes

1. Broward County was not included in the 4,861 number because there were discrepancies in the figures the Sheriff's Office provided. However, the county is included in the number of minorities listed at the rank of captain or above.

A native of Volusia County, Major Davis has served the citizens of Volusia County since 1972. His entire law enforcement career has been with the Volusia County Sheriff's Office. Major Davis is a graduate of the 143rd session of the FBI National Academy.

Major Davis is commander of the Law Enforcement Services Division, which encompasses Uniformed Patrol, Investigative Services (organized crime, major case investigations, narcotics, regular investigations and career criminal), Special Services (aviation, ranch and river patrol, motors and the Special Response Team). Law Enforcement Services is the department's largest division.