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## **Beating of Black Suspect Puts Bratton's Race Inroads to Test**

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The televised police beating of a black suspected car thief last week will test two years of efforts by LAPD Chief William J. Bratton to win over the city's African Americans.

But it also strikes at Bratton's deeper and more ambitious agenda: fixing America's race problem by fixing its crime problem.

"What is it that keeps this country so on edge?" asked Bratton. "It's race."

Putting his theories on race relations into practice is one of the reasons he came to the Los Angeles Police Department, Bratton said. He sees race and crime as "two seemingly intractable problems in American society, inextricably linked."

Since taking the job in the fall of 2002, the chief has attended barbecues and basketball games in black neighborhoods and held meetings in church basements. He has talked with unusual bluntness about such painful issues as black-on-black crime, and historic mistreatment of African Americans by police.

Many black community leaders — overcoming wariness and ambivalence — have answered Bratton's call, often at considerable political risk.

They gambled on the sincerity of a white police chief from the East Coast. Now, in the wake of Wednesday's beating of Stanley Miller, many of these leaders stand in an uneasy truce with the LAPD, waiting to see whether their trust was misplaced.

"Black leaders have really put themselves out on a limb with Bratton," said the Rev. Norman Johnson, executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's Los Angeles chapter. "To the degree that he demonstrates toughness in holding a line with his officers, he will justify the commitment that has been made. If it turns out that it's the same old rhetoric, then we will feel betrayed."

Miller was tackled by LAPD officers after a 28-minute car chase and was then hit 11

times by a flashlight-wielding Latino officer, John J. Hatfield, as cameras rolled. The incident has prompted an investigation, and on Saturday, Bratton announced that he would review the LAPD's policy on use of flashlights.

The beating is a pivotal moment for Bratton — not just for his leadership, but in his personal goals. Although he is famed for his bold promises on crime — L.A. homicides fell sharply in his first year, as he predicted — true success for Bratton means being seen as a progressive on race.

Bratton believes that Los Angeles is a crucial testing ground. Although Latinos are a growing majority and African Americans are now just 11% of the population, the city is still trying to overcome its historic white-black tensions, he said.

Bratton explained his views in the course of interviews over the past year:

Blacks are angry over unchecked crime in their neighborhoods and believe neglect of black communities by white leaders is partly to blame.

Whites, in turn, fear blacks because they see that crimes are disproportionately committed by African Americans.

Police officers are caught in the middle, Bratton said, and have been "the flashpoint" of strained race relations for decades. He contends that police also have the power to change these prejudices.

Bringing down crime "is half the battle," he said, a measure that will reduce tensions on both sides.

For whites, safer cities will serve to "take the Willie Horton face off of crime," said Bratton, referring to a black repeat felon furloughed from a Massachusetts prison who Republicans used in a 1988 campaign ad. That will boost investment in black neighborhoods, he theorizes, and challenge white indifference to black issues.

For blacks and Latinos, he said, safer cities will relieve the sense that crime in poor and minority communities is not treated the same as crime in more affluent neighborhoods

"I truly and passionately believe that we know what to do about crime," he said. "I think that if we take what we know about crime and reduce it, we can also begin to reduce the fear and tension ... that results in the races being kept apart."

"It may sound grandiose and egotistical," he said, "but I'm sorry. I think I can do this."

Bratton traces his ideas about race to his upbringing in racially divided Boston.

As a young officer there, he said, he saw abuse by police, as well as the frustration among blacks when their worries about crime went unheeded.

As head of the New York Police Department from 1994 to 1996, Bratton wanted to demonstrate that police could be aggressive about crime and still operate by the rules.

Behind this agenda, Bratton harbored a grander scheme. He said that if he could reduce crime, he could free up police to provide better service, and save taxpayers huge amounts of money spent on prisons and tracking down lawbreakers.

He sought, in short, a peace dividend.

The dividend could be spent on fixing the root causes of crime and combating racism, he said. He envisioned police freed up to work in schools, and new money made available for education and job programs.

Crime fell in New York. But Bratton's term was followed by police-abuse controversies and racial bitterness.

Bratton blames former New York Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani. He said Giuliani kept up the pace of minor crime arrests instead of easing up once order was restored, making ordinary citizens feel harassed.

Bratton said Giuliani also failed to enlist black community leaders in his efforts to control crime — an error Bratton was determined not to repeat.

Not all agree. Bratton's characterization was scornfully dismissed by New York critics of Bratton such as the Rev. Herbert Daughtry, who said Bratton did little to mend fences with blacks and oversimplifies the roots of racism.

But for Bratton, remaking his legacy "is a major reason why I came back to policing," he said. "I could have stayed outside, made my millions and lived on my reputation."

In L.A., the ouster of his predecessor, former Chief Bernard C. Parks, had angered many African Americans, said L.A. civil rights attorney Connie Rice.

Bratton worked doggedly to overcome the bitterness, she said. He held meetings, forged alliances and expanded police-community forums formed by Parks. Through his South Bureau Deputy Chief Earl Paysinger, the LAPD's top ranking African American commander, Bratton sought to enlist grass-roots black activists to his cause — people seldom included on the city's political A-list.

Former gang members-turned-youth mentors such as Ronald "Kartoon" Antwine of Watts found themselves courted by the LAPD. "We got a chance to meet those with stars and bars and stripes," he said. "That is something that never happened before."

Rapprochement was not easy. Some black activists found Bratton's early tough talk about gangs — declaring a war on them, for example — an endorsement of indiscriminate

police sweeps. To others, Bratton's constant emphasis on black accountability sounded like an indictment of black leaders.

And although Bratton talked about the importance of discipline among his officers, the sense remained among many black leaders that police abuse was still swept under the rug.

John Mack, head of the Los Angeles Urban League, said there was still a basic difference in black and white attitudes over this issue. Many whites view police misconduct as isolated, he said, while many blacks see it as widespread.

Although Bratton has detractors, a striking number of former critics have joined forces with him.

In part, Bratton's timing was good, said veteran LAPD Lt. Fred Booker. The chief arrived in L.A. just as the city's black leadership was beginning to embrace a new approach to the problem of black-on-black violence.

When black leaders talked about the problems of violence in the past, rather than compassion from whites they risked incurring harsh and reactionary police crackdowns, said Johnson of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

"We walk a fine line to say support of law enforcement does not mean carte blanche," Johnson said.

But during Bratton's term, black ministers and community leaders have spoken bluntly about violence. They have met with Bratton to defuse tensions after police shootings. In a key February meeting, black ministers, including some outspoken LAPD critics, called on constituents to condemn sniper attacks on police in South L.A.

Last week's videotaped beating exposed the fragile nature of the new alliances.

Booker displayed photos of Miller's injuries before a packed meeting of black activists hastily called to the LAPD's 77th Street Division on the day of his arrest. Police maintain that Miller's injuries were not serious. Still, many activists are outraged by what they saw in the video.

People also lamented that efforts to mend the complicated rift between police and the black community could be jeopardized by a single incident. But nearly all agreed: The beating would be seen as a crucial test.

Bratton knows this. For black leadership, he said, "there is a point they will go to in giving trust, but then they will wait and see if that trust is reciprocated. We are at that point."

Several black leaders emphasized that their goodwill had a price. They want change, they

said, not just words. They want just punishment.

"We need a victory. We need a success. We need results that tell us the police chief really does have a handle on this problem of police violence," said Johnson.

Bratton, also aware that he is being scrutinized by his own rank and file, is urging people to judge the incident by the way it is handled.

But Bratton said Friday that he knows this may not work. No matter what the outcome, some of his hard-won allies are bound to feel betrayed.

"But isn't that the crux of the whole frustration and dilemma of race in America? It comes down to winners and losers no matter what we try to do," Bratton said.

"It took us a couple of hundred years to get into this mess. It will take years to get us out. But we have to be optimistic."

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