

## The Texas Negro Peace Officers' Association: The Origins of Black Police Unionism

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In October 1935, the six members of Houston's black police detail organized the Texas Negro Peace Officers' Association (TNPOA), the first organization of black police officers in the United States. Founded to "increase the efficiency and cooperative spirit of its members," the TNPOA marked the beginnings of black police unionism. The Houston detail formed the nucleus of the organization and provided its impetus, although the organization later included black police officers from Galveston, Beaumont, and San Antonio. In forming this organization, the officers initiated a movement that attempted to address the precarious status of black police in Texas and the South. But the TNPOA's reach stretched much farther. It also provided a model that black police throughout the nation would use in their efforts to reform the token status of blacks in American police departments and to challenge the racism in American law enforcement.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>There is very little scholarly work on the formation of black police organizations and unions. Chapter 9 of Hervey A. Juris and Peter Feuille, *Police Unionism: Power and Impact in Public Sector Bargaining* (Lexington, Massachusetts, 1973), discusses black police unions, but it does not address the origins of black police unionism and why black police unions are different from the typical, rank and file police organizations and associations. Richard L. Bolden's "A Study of the Black Guardian Association in the New York City Police Department from 1943-1978" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1980), is the only other study that addresses thoroughly the phenomenon of black police unionism. The founding date for the Texas Negro Peace Officers' Association and the quote are found in the *Constitution of the Texas Negro Peace Officers' Association* (Beaumont, 1949), 1, and the *Texas Peace Officers' Association Golden Anniversary Annual State Conference Souvenir Program* (San Antonio, 1985), respectively.

The conditions that black police unions such as the TNPOA attempted to address began when blacks first integrated American police departments in the nineteenth century. In the South, blacks became police officers almost immediately after the Civil War. Republican-controlled state and local governments in the South appointed blacks as police officers to address the violence of the Reconstruction period, such as the race riots in New Orleans and Memphis in 1866, and the terrorist violence against blacks in Texas. In the North, with the ratification of the 15th Amendment in 1870 and the extension of the franchise to black men, blacks began participating in machine politics and earned patronage jobs as police officers in most big-city police departments. In both the North and the South, nineteenth-century black police functioned as essentially token police officers. They usually could not arrest whites; they worked exclusively in neighborhoods and communities inhabited by other blacks; and they were not eligible for promotions within the police hierarchy. Usually, they did not even wear police uniforms. Only the black police appointed during Republican control in the South deviated from this token status. To quell the violence of the Reconstruction period, black police who served under Republican-controlled state and municipal governments not only arrested white law-breakers; if necessary, they also used violent force. Indeed, many white southerners cited the presence of black police as one of the most objectionable experiences of the Reconstruction period.<sup>2</sup>

After the end of Reconstruction blacks lost access to police jobs in the South. While blacks in the North retained their token police jobs because of their continued participation in machine politics in most northern cities, violent intimidation and disfranchisement ended significant black political participation in the South. The presence of black police reminded many white southerners of Reconstruction—an era that they wanted to forget. Moreover, the presence of gun-toting, black law enforcement officers challenged the prevailing notions of white supremacy. Thus, by the beginning of the twentieth century, almost every major city in the South had eliminated blacks from police jobs and made police work and other

<sup>2</sup>Howard N. Rabinowitz, "The Conflict Between Blacks and the Police in the Urban South, 1865-1900," *The Historian* 39 (November 1976): 62-76; Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York, 1978), 31-60; W. Marvin Dulaney, "Black Shields: A Historical and Comparative Survey of Blacks in American Police Forces" (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State University, 1984), 12-15; and Vernon L. Wharton, *The Negro in Mississippi, 1865-1890* (New York, 1965), 168. For the violence against blacks in Texas during Reconstruction, see Barry Crouch, "A Spirit of Lawlessness: White Violence, Texas Blacks, 1865-1868," *Journal of Social History* 18 (Winter 1984): 217-232; Record of Criminal Offenses Committed in the State of Texas, September, 1865 - December, 1868, Roll 32, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Texas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen & Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

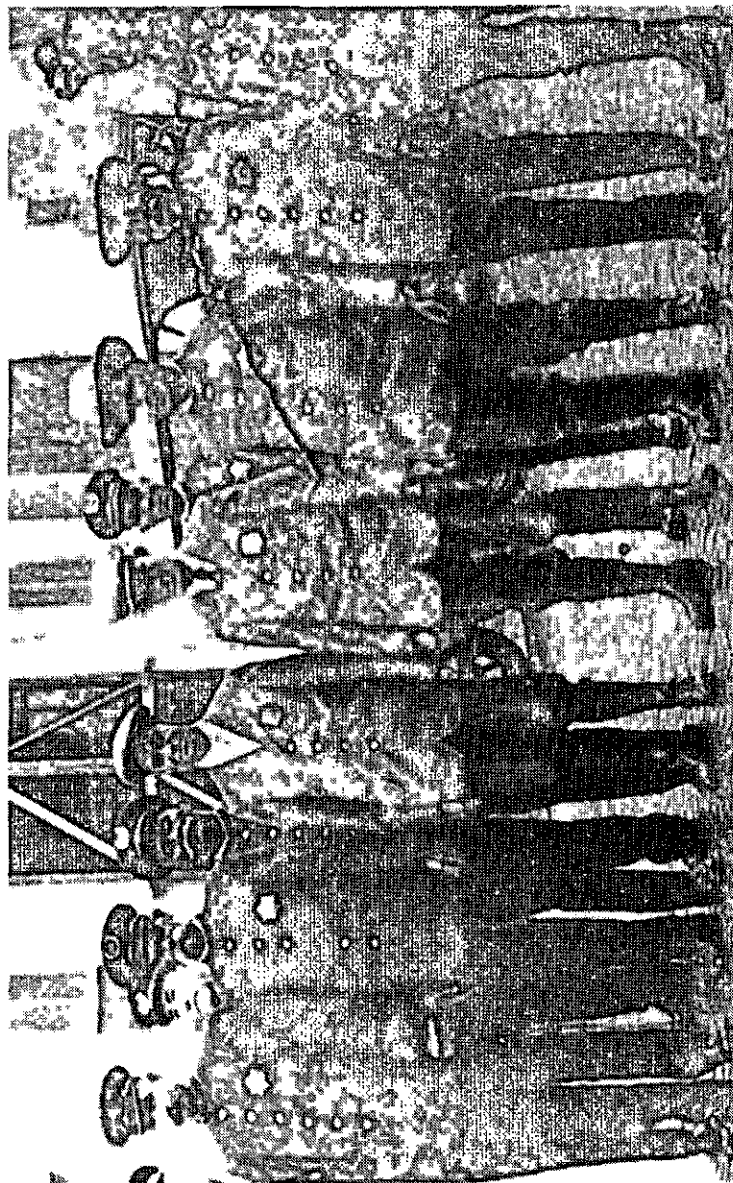
government employment the exclusive preserve of white males.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike other major cities in the South, Houston retained a black presence on its police force. Just as in other southern cities, blacks obtained police jobs in Houston during Reconstruction, and the city council appointed the first black police in the city in 1870. Whites in Houston also objected to the presence of blacks as police officers in the city, but after the end of Reconstruction blacks still retained a token presence on the police force. From 1870 to 1926, Houston maintained a special "colored police brigade" which consisted of at least one, and sometimes as many as three, black police officers. The blacks who served in this "brigade" had a status similar to that of black police in the northern states: they could not arrest whites, they policed only other blacks, and they worked exclusively in Houston's black neighborhoods. Unlike the black police in the North, however, they generally did not wear uniforms and the white members of the Houston police force did not recognize them as real police officers. Their low status as "special," token, or quasi-police officers and their assignment to handle only black crime problems probably explains why their presence was tolerated in Houston when every other major city in the South had eliminated blacks from police jobs.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1920s, Houston police chief Tom Goodson attempted to upgrade the status of black police officers in the city and improve the department's relationship with the city's black community. After his appointment as chief

<sup>3</sup>Dulaney, 14-18. Two articles by Dennis C. Rousey illustrate how two southern cities maintained a black presence on the police force after Redemption, but both cities eliminated them by the early twentieth century. See Rousey, "Yellow Fever and Black Policemen in Memphis: A Post Reconstruction Anomaly," *Journal of Southern History* 51 (August 1985): 357-374; Rousey, "Black Policemen in New Orleans During Reconstruction," *The Historian* 49 (February 1987): 223-243. The following sources illustrate how blacks lost police jobs in the South: *Cleveland Gazette*, September 27, 1884, and March 5, 1890; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, April 4, 1889; and "New Orleans Gets Two Negro Police," Press Release, June 19, 1950, Associated Negro Press Clipping File, Claude A. Barnett Papers, Chicago Historical Society (hereafter cited as ANP Clipping File).

<sup>4</sup>For the black police in Houston, see the *Houston Telegraph*, December 13, 1870; Marion E. Merseberger, "A Political History of Houston, Texas, During the Reconstruction Period As Recorded by the Press, 1868-1873" (M.A. thesis, Rice Institute, 1950), 108; and Louis J. Marchiafava, *The Houston Police: 1878-1948*, Rice University Studies 63 (Houston, 1977), 11-13. For reference to the "colored police brigade," see a 1910 clipping entitled "Police Time Book Entries" in Mrs. Patrick H. Campbell, "Scrapbook of Clippings, 1900-1923," vol. 2, Texas and Local History Department, Houston Public Library. The presence of blacks on the Houston police force can also be followed in Morrison and Fourmy's *Houston City Directories, 1870-1926*, which listed every police officer on the force and identified the black police by (c), (col'd), or (col). Some of the black police officers in Houston during Reconstruction were also members of the Texas State Police. See Ann Patton Baenziger, "The Texas State Police During Reconstruction," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 72 (April 1969): 470-491; and the *Houston Forward Times*, June 15, 1963.



This detail from a group photograph of the Houston Police Department, probably taken between 1913 and 1917, appears to show black police officers in uniform. In these years, lists of the police force in the *Houston City Directory* include two black patrolmen, David Burney and William E. Jones. By 1917 the department had added two other blacks to its staff: Leonard Green, special detective, and Abe Jones, assistant dog catcher.

of police in 1923, he issued orders banning police brutality. He chastised several police officers for their brutality against black citizens, and he suspended one white police officer for beating a black citizen on a street car. Beginning in 1925, Goodson moved to improve the status of blacks in the department by appointing nine blacks as police officers over a four-year period. In 1926, he even assigned two blacks to uniform and dismissed three white officers who objected to black police officers in uniform and refused to march in a parade with them.<sup>5</sup>

Support for Goodson's reforms came from the *Houston Informer*, the city's largest black newspaper, and from the Texas Commission on Interracial Cooperation. Prior to Goodson's appointment as police chief, Clifton F. Richardson, editor of the *Informer*, had editorialized against the crime problems in Houston's black neighborhoods and the mistreatment of Houston's black citizens by the police. In Richardson's opinion, the appointment of more black police officers would solve both problems. In addition, it would "reduce friction between the races to a minimum."<sup>6</sup> With better race relations as its prime objective, the Houston chapter of the Texas Commission on Interracial Cooperation organized in 1920 and began to act on Richardson's proposal to increase the number of black police in the city. While Richardson initially criticized the Commission as a way for whites to use blacks on the Commission to inform on other blacks, the Commission appeared to have had the influence and means to achieve what Richardson could not. Like Richardson, members of the Commission believed that increasing the number of black police in Houston and upgrading their status would improve race relations in the city. Black and white members of the Commission worked to achieve this objective, and in the Commission's annual reports for 1926 and 1928, they took credit for influencing both the mayor and police chief to act on the proposal of hiring additional black police officers in the city of Houston. The reports also indicated that the new black police had improved race relations and that the new men were "giving perfect satisfaction."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Houston *Informer*, January 20, 1923, October 6, 1923, and June 5 and 12, 1926.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, February 19, 1921, and June 20, 1923.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, November 11, 1922; *Texas Commission on Interracial Cooperation—Miscellaneous Publications* (Houston, 1925-1926); Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Texas Commission on Interracial Cooperation, Houston, Texas, November 6, 1926; *Condensed Reports of the Conditions in Texas Affected By the Texas Commission on Interracial Cooperation, November, 1925 - February, 1928* (Houston, 1928). All of the Commission documents are located in the Texas Commission on Interracial Cooperation Records, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library. For a critical analysis of the 1920s Interracial Commission movement in the South, see John H. Stanfield, "Northern Money and Southern Bogus Elitism: Rockefeller Foundations and the Commission on Interracial Cooperation Movement, 1919-1929," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 15 (Summer 1987): 1-22.

Richardson's agitation in the *Informer* and the work of the Commission resulted in a net increase in the number of black police in Houston from two in 1923 to six by 1931. From 1929 to 1948, six became the quota for black police in the city. During that time period the department appointed only one black police officer—after the accidental death of one member of the black police detail in 1938. Blacks in Houston would break the quota for black police in the city in 1948 by securing thirteen appointments as a payoff for their political support in the city council election of 1946. But the quota of six remained until that year. Despite this small quota for black police in Houston, only the Upper South city of Louisville, Kentucky, employed more black officers. In the 1930s, all other cities in the lower South employed only one, two, or none.<sup>8</sup>

The increase in the size of Houston's black police detail and the fact that some began to wear uniforms did not change their status as police officers. They still could not arrest whites. They still worked in predominantly black neighborhoods and communities in Houston. They remained ineligible for promotion in the Houston police department. Their status was similar to that of black police throughout the United States. Only the black police officers in large, northern cities such as Chicago and New York City differed from this norm: the officers in these two cities could arrest whites and had received promotions above patrolman.

When blacks in fields such as law and medicine confronted racial discrimination and occupational restrictions earlier in the century, they responded by creating their own organizations such as the National Bar Association and the National Medical Association. Through these race organizations, they established their own professional standards and fought discriminatory policies in their professions. By the 1930s, black police in Houston had the numbers and leadership to start such an organization among black police officers in Texas.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Houston *Informer*, June 5, 1926, March 10, 1928, September 21, 1929, and April 7, 1948; Dallas *Express*, November 12, 1938; Mrs. James S. Crate, "Texas Commission Works for Human Rights," *New South* (October 1948), 14, 20; Chandler Davidson, *Biracial Politics: Conflict and Coalition in the Metropolitan South* (Baton Rouge, 1972), 121. The City of Houston, *Annual Reports, Police Department, 1925-1931*, also listed the black police appointments in this period. Monroe N. Work, ed., *Negro Year Book, 1921-1922, 1925-1926, 1931-1932, 1937-1938* (Tuskegee, Alabama), listed the cities in the South that employed at least one black police officer for the years given. Work reported that outside of three cities in Florida, only Houston, San Antonio, Austin, Galveston, and Beaumont employed black police officers in the lower South.

<sup>9</sup>Dulaney, 34-39. For the status of black police in Chicago, see Harold F. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (Chicago, 1935), 244-279; and for New York, see James I. Alexander, *Blue Coats: Black Skin: The Black Experience in the New York City Police Department Since 1891* (Hicksville, New York, 1978). For the origins of the National Bar Association and the National Medical Association, see August Meier, *Negro Thought in*

In 1934, Houston's black police detail took the first step toward organization. In that year they organized a ball to raise money for the police burial fund. Police officers' mutual and benevolent associations throughout the nation held these fundraisers, but racial segregation in Houston mandated that black police officers in the city have a separate ball in order to contribute to a fund that benefitted all police officers. The black police detail not only appealed to Houston's black community to support the ball, but they also invited other black police officers in South Texas to participate. Thus, black police officers from Galveston, Beaumont, and San Antonio also attended the ball.<sup>10</sup>

With the success of this first ball, Houston's black police detail organized a second ball the following year. Again, they extended an invitation to black police officers from Galveston, Beaumont, and San Antonio. But they used this social event as an opportunity to organize the Texas Negro Peace Officers' Association (TNPOA) as well. The group elected Houston police officer James A. Ladd as the first president.<sup>11</sup>

No existing records reveal the initial purpose of the TNPOA in its first year. Nor is it clear why black police officers in South Texas decided to organize at this particular time. Retired Galveston police officer Leroy "Buster" Landrum, who was present at the first organizational meeting in 1935, stated that in the beginning their purpose was more social than professional. According to Landrum, a fraternal spirit existed among the black police officers in South Texas. Black officers from Houston often visited Galveston to attend social functions with him, and he in turn visited Houston to attend social functions sponsored by black police there. He also noted that black police in Texas had limited options: they could not socialize with white police officers because of racial segregation, but their police role was often a barrier to socializing extensively among other blacks. Past and recent studies of the relationship of black police officers to other blacks confirm Landrum's observations. While middle-class, educated blacks treated black police officers with respect and some esteem, they still did not regard them as their social equals. Lower-class blacks did not hold them in high esteem and felt that black police inhibited and prevented their illegal and extralegal activities. Given their marginality in both the police culture

*America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1971), 127, 262. For a discussion of the need for race organizations, such as the NBA and NMA, by Houston publisher and editor Carter Wesley, see his editorials in the *Dallas Express*, September 1 and 8, 1951.

<sup>10</sup>Houston *Informer*, February 17 and 24, 1934, and March 24, 1934; Leroy "Buster" Landrum, interview by author, January 7, 1987, Galveston, Texas.

<sup>11</sup>Landrum interview; Dallas *Express*, September 3, 1949; *Constitution of the Texas Negro Peace Officers' Association*, 8.

and among other blacks, initially black police chose to organize both because they had common interests as police officers and in order to socialize with each other.<sup>12</sup>

The purpose of TNPOA, however, soon expanded to promote the hiring of black police officers throughout Texas and to make the TNPOA into a statewide organization. In 1936, members of the year-old TNPOA agreed to march in the Negro Day parade at the Texas State Fair's Centennial celebration in Dallas, in response to an invitation from the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce. This parade became the "coming out party" for the TNPOA. The TNPOA's first president, James A. Ladd of Houston, saw their appearance in Dallas as an opportunity to publicize the organization's existence throughout the state and to assist the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce in building support in that city for the appointment of blacks to the Dallas police force. Since the city had no black police officers to participate, the Dallas police chief assigned two police station orderlies uniforms for the parade to represent Dallas. Members of the TNPOA led the parade and the *Dallas Express*, the city's largest black newspaper, lauded the officers for bringing to Dallas "one of the most thrilling features" ever seen in the history of the city. Despite the impressive showing of the TNPOA's members from Houston, San Antonio, Austin, Galveston, Beaumont, and Port Arthur in the Negro Day parade, the Dallas police chief removed the two orderlies from uniform after the parade and the Negro Chamber's effort to integrate the Dallas police force failed.<sup>13</sup>

The Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce invited the members of the TNPOA to participate in the Texas State Fair's Negro Day parade on two more occasions, in 1937 and 1938. The Negro Chamber tried on both occasions to use the TNPOA as an example of the professionalism and efficiency of black police officers in order to convince Dallas city officials to integrate the city's police force. The meetings helped the Negro Chamber to

<sup>12</sup>Landrum interview. Several studies analyze the relationship of black police to black citizens and the dichotomy between the feelings of lower and middle class blacks toward black police. A partial listing: James Ball III, "A Study of Negro Policemen in Selected Florida Municipalities" (M.A. thesis, Florida State University, 1954); Elliott M. Rudwick, "The Negro Policeman in the South," *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science* 51 (July-August 1960): 273-276; William M. Kephart, *Racial Factors and Urban Law Enforcement* (Philadelphia, 1957); Nicholas Alex, *Black in Blue: A Study of the Negro Policeman* (New York, 1969); Dulaney, Ch. 5. Jon J. Daykin, "A Study of Negro Police Officers in Eleven Selected Major Mid-South Cities" (M.A. thesis, University of Mississippi, 1965), 28, advanced the thesis that black police officers were "marginal men" since they could not be a part of the police culture because of their race, nor a part of the black community because of their jobs as police officers.

<sup>13</sup>Landrum interview; *Dallas Express*, October 17 and 31, 1936; Alvin V. Young, interview by author, November 10, 1977, Houston, Texas; "Dallas Gets Negro Policemen," Press Release, October 25, 1936, ANP Clipping File.

raise the issue of appointing blacks as police officers in the city, but the effort again failed. Meanwhile, members of the TNPOA used the two trips to Dallas to strengthen their organization. In the 1937 visit, the TNPOA called a convention of black police officers in Texas and Oklahoma to "further the cause of Negro peace officers." A new organization, the "Texas and Oklahoma Association of Negro Peace Officers," emerged from the 1937 meeting, uniting black police officers in the two states. Prior to the 1938 visit to Dallas, the Texas and Oklahoma Association of Negro Peace Officers called for a national convention of black police officers. The Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce hosted the three-day event and forty black police officers attended as delegates. But "a squad of detectives" from Kansas City were the only officers outside of the states of Texas and Oklahoma to attend the event. Prior to this convention, TNPOA president James A. Ladd had announced plans to form a "national Negro police association." The poor attendance at the 1938 convention forestalled such plans.<sup>14</sup>

The TNPOA's attempt to organize a national black police association was subsequently echoed elsewhere in the country. In 1941, black police officers from ten states met in Atlantic City, New Jersey, to lay the groundwork for a national organization, but they also failed. In 1943, black police officers in New York City began holding informal meetings for what became the Black Guardians Association. In 1944, the city of Miami, Florida, appointed its first six black police officers; two years later, they organized the Miami Colored Police Benevolent Association (MCPBA). Also in 1946, a racial incident involving a black police officer in Cleveland, Ohio, motivated black police in that city to organize the Shield Club.<sup>15</sup>

At its annual convention in 1949, the TNPOA again discussed the issue of a national organization. A year later, Houston police officer Henry Breed even traveled to Los Angeles in an attempt to interest black police in that city in a national organization, but he proved unsuccessful.<sup>16</sup> With the exception of the statewide TNPOA in Texas, only local efforts by black police to organize succeeded. Black police just did not have the numerical strength or the job security to organize a national group that could withstand reprisals from their white superiors. Reprisals were a serious concern, since the motivations that led black police outside of Texas to organize were not primarily social. In New York City, Miami, and Cleveland, black police

<sup>14</sup>*Dallas Express*, September 2, 1937, October 2 and 30, 1937, August 6, 1938, September 10 and 24, 1938, and October 1, 8, 15, and 22, 1938.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, September 6, 1941; Bolden, 35-36; *Atlanta World*, September 3, 1944; Robert Ingram, "Brother Man," in *The Officer Victor Butler Souvenir Program* (Miami, 1971), 4; *Cleveland (Ohio) Call and Post*, September 28, 1946, and October 5, 1946; *Dallas Express*, September 3, 1949.

<sup>16</sup>*Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 13, 1950; Dulaney, Ch. 3.

## Year of First Black Police Appointment in Selected American Cities

New Orleans	1806 (1950)*
Selma, Alabama	1867
Houston	1870
Jackson, Mississippi	1871 (1954)*
Chicago	1872
Washington, D. C.	1874
Indianapolis	1876
Cleveland	1881
Philadelphia	1884
Boston	1885
Columbus, Ohio	1885
Cincinnati	1886
Los Angeles	1886
Galveston	1886
Detroit	1890
Brooklyn, New York (before consolidation)	1891
St. Louis	1901
New York City (after consolidation)	1911
Louisville, Kentucky	1923
Miami	1944
Dallas	1947
Savannah, Georgia	1947
Atlanta	1948
Fort Worth	1953

\*No blacks served as police officers in New Orleans from 1911 to 1950 and none served in Jackson from 1890 to 1954.

Sources: Police Mutual Benevolent Association, *1900 History of the New Orleans Police Department* (New Orleans, 1900), 19; "New Orleans Gets Two Negro Policemen," Press Release, June 19, 1950, ANP Clipping File; Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York, 1979), 552; *Houston Telegraph*, December 13, 1870; Wharton, 168; *Houston Informer*, August 28, 1954; Gosnell, 247; John J. Grimes, "The Black Man in Law Enforcement: An Analysis of the Distribution of Black Men in Law Enforcement Agencies and the Related Recruitment Problems" (M.A. thesis, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 1969), 70; *Cleveland Gazette*, January 28, 1888; *The Cleveland Leader*, June 4, 1881; Howard O. Sprogle, *The Philadelphia Police: Past and Present* (Philadelphia, 1887), 173; *Cleveland Gazette*, January 9, 1886, and June 26, 1886; Homer F. Broome, *LAPD's Black History, 1886-1976* (Los Angeles, 1976), 43; Monroe N. Work, ed., *Negro Yearbook, 1921-22* (Tuskegee, Alabama, 1922), 47; Landrum interview; *Cleveland Gazette*, July 19, 1890; David Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1973), 120; Alexander, 16; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, March 29, 1901; Alexander, 20; George Wright, *Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, 1865-1930* (Baton Rouge, 1985), 252; *Miami Daily News*, August 29, 1944; *Dallas Express*, March 29, 1947; *Atlanta World*, July 2, 1947; *Atlanta World*, March 2, 1948; *Dallas Express*, January 10, 1953.

organized to confront racial discrimination and departmental policies that prevented them from exercising their full authority as police officers. In the 1940s, black police officers in Texas began to develop a similar rationale for the TNPOA.

After the 1988 convention in Dallas, the TNPOA concentrated its efforts on building a strong black police organization in Texas. The organization met in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1939, but the Texas and Oklahoma Association of Negro Peace Officers dissolved shortly afterwards, and black police officers in Texas held no more meetings with those in Oklahoma. Beginning in 1940, the TNPOA held all of its annual conventions in Texas cities. The agendas of these conventions included topics that affected all police officers, such as the proper use of firearms and tear gas, proper arrest procedures, relationships with the FBI, marksmanship, and crime prevention.<sup>17</sup> Other issues on the agenda focused on the specific experiences and concerns of black police officers in Texas. The conventions themselves offered an opportunity to become more visible; through the 1940s and 1950s, the TNPOA met in every major city of Texas in order to advertise the organization and to introduce the members of the TNPOA to white police officials throughout the state. This important concern merited frequent discussion at several TNPOA conventions because white police in Texas and throughout the South would arrest black police found carrying guns outside of their jurisdiction. White police officers would not extend to black police officers the same courtesy that they would extend to a white police officer from a different jurisdiction. The TNPOA met with white police officials throughout Texas in an attempt to promote courtesy and acknowledgement of common ground with white officers.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the meetings, the TNPOA did not achieve any significant improvement in their status during the 1940s and 1950s. Racial discrimination continued to limit the police powers of black police officers throughout the South. Ironically, as the TNPOA sought to improve the status of black police in Texas, cities throughout the South which had no black police began to appoint black officers with restrictions on their police

<sup>17</sup>*Dallas Express*, July 29, 1939, and September 9, 1939. For examples of the issues addressed by the TNPOA in the 1940s, see the *Dallas Express*, August 30, 1946, and the *Houston Informer*, August 21, 1948. For a comparison with the overall police unionization movement in this period, see Robert M. Fogelson, *Big-City Police* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1977), Ch. 3.

<sup>18</sup>*Dallas Express*, August 23 and 30, 1947, August 28, 1948, August 20, 1949, and September 3, 1949; *Houston Informer*, May 1, 1954, and September 3, 1955. Alvin V. Young discussed this problem with the author in the November 10, 1977, interview. Examples of the problems that black police had outside of their jurisdiction can be found in the *Dallas Express*, August 7, 1948; *Houston Informer*, August 21, 1948, and January 30, 1954; "Negro Cop's Arrest Fought by Milwaukee—City Lawyer to Defend Him in Tennessee," Press Release, June 16, 1959, ANP Clipping File.



powers. Dallas and Savannah each appointed their first black police in 1947, Atlanta in 1948, New Orleans in 1950, and Fort Worth in 1953. All of these cities limited the police powers of black officers, and Atlanta even wrote the racial proscriptions into law.<sup>19</sup> Despite these restrictions, most southern cities claimed that the appointment of black police officers would deter and control crime in black neighborhoods. But as the appointment of thirteen blacks as police officers in Houston in 1948 indicated, southern politicians also made such appointments to satisfy the patronage demands of the black communities newly enfranchised by the invalidation of white primaries. White politicians wanted the black vote, but they would not give black officers the full authority to arrest whites and thus challenge the prevailing norms of white supremacy in the South. Thus, even in the 1940s and 1950s black police throughout the South had limited police powers and remained essentially token police officers.<sup>20</sup>

In the South, the TNPOA was one of only two black police organizations that attempted to address the question of how to protect the limited police authority of black police officers. (The other organization was the MCPBA in Miami.) The 1949 constitution of the TNPOA addressed this issue in its preamble and in a by-law providing for a defense fund for members. Given the nature of legal segregation throughout the state of Texas and the ever-present possibility that a black police officer would have an unfortunate encounter with a white lawbreaker, the TNPOA's defense fund served as the only source of legal support. Unlike white police officers, black police officers in Texas and throughout the South could not rely on their department's rank and file organization to defend them if they were charged with dereliction of duty—especially if they violated the written or unwritten codes of racial etiquette in the performance of their duties. The TNPOA provided black police officers in Texas some insurance to protect their limited police powers and their jobs in the hostile, racially segregated environment in which they had to work. Southern police departments would

<sup>19</sup>Atlanta World, May 6, 1947; Dallas Morning News, March 25, 1947; Atlanta World, April 3, 1948; "New Orleans Gets Two Negro Police"; Dallas Express, January 10, 1953; City of Atlanta, Council Minutes XLV, December 1, 1947, 86-88.

<sup>20</sup>The *Smith vs. Allwright* case which ended the white primary in Texas and in other parts of the South was instrumental in opening up the political process to blacks and their acquiring police jobs. Houston Informer, April 17, 1948. For examples of the political nature of black police appointments in the South, see Herbert T. Jenkins, "Police Progress and Desegregation in Atlanta," *New South* (June 1962), 10-13; Elliott M. Rudwick, "Negro Police Employment in the Urban South," *Journal of Negro Education* 30 (Spring 1961): 102-108; Harold C. Fleming, "How Negro Police Worked Out in One Southern City," *New South* (October 1947), 3-5, 7; Dulancy, 40-41. For analysis of the subordinate position of black police in the South, see Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944), 542-545.

also support black police officers in some instances. But both the department's and TNPOA's support of black police officers still depended upon the circumstances and nature of their violation of the racial code in the performance of their duty. As a veteran black officer told Alvin V. Young when he joined the Houston police force in 1949, if he exercised police authority over whites, "you might beat the rap, but you won't beat the riot."<sup>21</sup>

In addition to protecting the limited police powers of black police in Texas, the TNPOA also sought to improve the relationship between black police officers and black citizens. In this endeavor the TNPOA was the forerunner in establishing the position that black police organizations adopted in the 1960s on police-black community relations. In the 1940s and 1950s, members of the TNPOA not only invited black citizens to participate in the public meetings and social events at its annual conventions, they also sought to end the adversarial relationship that some black citizens had with black police. In 1950, for example, Marshall Jenkins, president of the local TNPOA chapter in Houston, addressed the Fifth Ward Civic Club and the Knights of Peter Claver and stated that "the old time, untrained Negro police officer is being replaced by intelligent well-trained men." He also stated that the "old, Negro officers with no training" had been hired to use violence in the black community, to "whip heads and use whatever force necessary" to control the behavior of black citizens. According to Jenkins, the new black police officer was "carefully selected and highly trained, not only in handling prisoners, but in methods of treating the public."<sup>22</sup> Jenkins's assessment of the "new" black police officer's role in the black community represented a redefinition of the role. Black officers in the TNPOA believed that they could prove their professionalism as police officers by raising the standard of policing in the black community.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Alvin V. Young, interview by author, January 6, 1987, Houston, Texas. Juris and Feuille in *Police Unionism* discuss the defense funds maintained by organizations such as the Police Benevolent Association and the Fraternal Order of Police. The TNPOA's defense fund is cited in the 1949 *Constitution*, 2, 5. The TNPOA's charter, "Charter of the Texas Negro Peace Officers' Association," No. 90976, filed in Bexar County, Texas, April 10, 1947, also listed the organization's purpose and objectives. An exception to the rule was the Houston Police Association's defense of Officer H. C. Mackey after he was arrested for carrying his gun in Madisonville, Texas. Dallas Express, August 7, 1948. For an assessment of how black police in Houston felt about their limited arrest powers and the support that the Houston police department would provide them, see the Dallas Morning News, October 30, 1946.

<sup>22</sup>Dallas Express, November 5, 1950.

<sup>23</sup>Rudwick, "Negro Policeman in the South," 276; Kephart, 122. Jenkins's assessment of the role of black police officers in black communities is an important counterpoint to that of a black police officer in Chicago who justified the use of the "old methods"—beating and killing black offenders. See Sylvester "Two Gun Pete" Washington, "Why I Killed 11 Men," *Ebony* (January 1950), 51-57.



Meeting of the Texas Peace Officers' Association, ca. 1956. Courtesy May Walker.

From the inception of the TNPOA, its leadership had worked to develop a positive relationship between black police and black citizens. As the first president and the chief spokesman of the TNPOA, Houston's James A. Ladd began this effort by appealing to the city's black community to support the police balls held in 1934 and 1935, by showcasing the organization in the 1936 Negro Day parade in Dallas, and by attempting to heighten professionalism through forming a national organization for black police. After Ladd's accidental death in 1938, the TNPOA's second president, Brown L. Brackens of San Antonio, opened the TNPOA's meetings to black citizens, promoted police work as a career for blacks, and involved the TNPOA in public service activities among black citizens outside of police work. Brackens served as president of the TNPOA for twenty years and under his leadership the TNPOA received its first organizational charter in 1947, recruited new members from Dallas and Fort Worth, and helped to organize a similar black police association in Louisiana. Under Brackens's leadership the TNPOA also dropped "Negro" from its name in order to open the organization to all police officers and to bring the organization in line with the emerging civil rights movement across the South to end segregation.<sup>24</sup>

The status and background of black police officers changed greatly over these decades. The "new breed of black police officer" that Jenkins described in 1950 was better educated than earlier black officers and most white police officers. Most police departments did not require a college education for employment and few police officers attended college in this period. In the 1930s, this was true for blacks as well as for whites. Among the six black officers in Houston who founded the TNPOA in 1935, only one had attended college—William Stevenson, who attended Wiley and Huston Colleges.<sup>25</sup> Many of the black police officers recruited in southern cities in

<sup>24</sup>For Ladd's activities as the leader of the TNPOA, see the *Houston Informer*, February 24, 1934; *Dallas Express*, October 30, 1937, October 1, 8, and 15, 1938. Ladd was struck by a bus and killed in 1938. *Dallas Express*, November 12, 1938. For references to Brackens's leadership, see the *Express*, August 30, 1947, and September 3, 1949; *Houston Informer*, May 1, 1954, August 28, 1954, May 7, 1955, and September 3, 1955; *Golden Anniversary Souvenir Program*. Brackens's efforts to recruit members for the TNPOA are documented in the *Express*, August 15, 1953, and in his letter to A. Maceo Smith of the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce, July 20, 1949. Correspondence, Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce Collection, Texas-Dallas Collection, Dallas Public Library. The influence of Brackens and the TNPOA on the formation of the Louisiana Magnolia State Peace Officers Association is noted in an interview with Chief Julius Guillory of Opelousas, Louisiana, by Harry Gardner, May 15, 1977, and in the *Houston Informer*, May 1, 1954. For the TNPOA's name change to Texas Peace Officers' Association, see "Domestic Amendment of the Texas Negro Peace Officers' Association," No. 17-90976, filed in Galveston County, May 31, 1955. For an example of the involvement of the TNPOA in public service activities, see the *Dallas Express*, April 19, 1947.

<sup>25</sup>*Houston Informer*, May 15, 1948.



the 1940s and 1950s, however, had attended college. Indeed, black leaders throughout the South encouraged the most qualified young black men to join the police department. Black leaders wanted to ensure that the men chosen as police officers would do a good job and negate whites' claims that employing blacks as police officers was a risky experiment. In addition, racial discrimination in the private sector of the job market made police work attractive to young, college-educated blacks because of its civil service status and relative job security. For many black men, police work was the best that they could get, in spite of the discrimination and restrictions associated with the job. As a result, it was no accident that both of the blacks appointed as police officers in Dallas in 1947 had attended college. Five of the eight black police officers appointed in Atlanta in 1948 and all six of those appointed in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1948 had attended college. At least five of the blacks appointed to the Houston force in the 1948-49 group had attended college; among them was Alvin V. Young, a Prairie View A & M College graduate and a World War II veteran.<sup>26</sup>

When Young joined the Houston police force in 1949, the status of black police had changed very little. As Young recalled, black police officers could not arrest whites, they worked exclusively in Houston's Third and Fifth Wards, and no black officer had ever achieved promotion above patrolman. Young's college degree did not open any new opportunities for him in the Houston Police Department. A dual system of law enforcement existed in Houston: one for blacks and one for whites, in which the same crimes were treated seriously or lightly depending on the race of the persons involved. This hindered the police powers and advancement of black police officers and caused some black citizens not to respect them. In 1961, Henry Bullock of the Mayor's Negro Law Enforcement Committee also maintained that the dual law enforcement system in Houston caused the city's high homicide rate, since it taught citizens to ignore the law.<sup>27</sup> Young learned how to negotiate the dual law enforcement system because veteran black officers on the force recruited him into the TPOA and he became an active member. He learned the organization's history and discerned how the organization attempted to protect the limited police powers of black officers in the state. Young became president of the TPOA in 1961 and led the group in its transition from a fraternal organization to a police union working to

<sup>26</sup>Rudwick, "Negro Policeman in the South," 274; *Atlanta Constitution*, April 4, 1948; *Dallas Express*, February 8, 1947; Young interview, November 10, 1977; *Houston Chronicle*, March 9, 1969.

<sup>27</sup>Henry A. Bullock, Chairman of the Mayor's Negro Law Enforcement Committee, *Report to the Honorable Lewis Cutrer, Mayor, City of Houston: The Houston Murder Problem: Its Nature, Apparent Causes, and Probable Cure* (Houston, 1961), 69-84, available in the Texas and Local History Department, Houston Public Library.

improve the status of black police officers throughout Texas and especially in Houston.<sup>28</sup>

Young became state president of the TPOA concurrently with the national civil rights movement in which black Americans sought to win the citizenship rights accorded other Americans. One of the issues raised by the movement was that of the brutality that some police had used in black communities throughout the United States. Opposition to police brutality and other unfair police practices united citizens and black officers against police departments and unions such as the Fraternal Order of Police and the Police Benevolent Association. As black officers were increasingly estranged from much of the rest of the police force and its predominantly white organizations, the role of black police groups expanded to combat discrimination both in the community and in American police departments. Thus, in the 1960s, organizations such as the TPOA became unions and pressure groups that attempted to improve the policing that black communities received, to defend other blacks from police brutality, and to end the discrimination that limited the number of blacks in the profession and prevented their advancement.<sup>29</sup>

Young and the TPOA began to challenge the overt segregation in the Houston Police Department, especially the policy of separate patrols for black police officers and their exclusive assignment to patrol areas in Houston's black communities. The TPOA received support in this endeavor from black citizens in Houston and from black newspapers such as the *Houston Forward Times*; the *Forward Times*, in particular, publicized and challenged department policies that discriminated against black police officers. Along with other black organizations in Houston, such as the NAACP and the Harris County Council of Organizations, the *Forward Times* pressured the Houston Police Department to hire more black officers and to upgrade the status of those already on the force.<sup>30</sup> The pressure had some effect. A 1969 survey of black police deployment in Texas cited Houston as "the most progressive department in the state in the assignment of black officers." While it reported correctly that the Houston police department had begun to "integrate" by pairing black and white police officers in patrol cars and assigning them in all parts of the city on a nonracial basis, the survey failed to note that such reforms had occurred because of the pressure from black police officers and black citizens.

<sup>28</sup>Young interviews, November 10, 1977, August 25, 1978 (Chicago), and January 5, 1987; *Houston Chronicle*, August 12, 1959.

<sup>29</sup>Fogelson, Ch. 10; Alex, 209; Alexander, 80-108; Bolden, 60-74; Dulaney, 68-76.

<sup>30</sup>*Houston Forward Times*, February 16, 1963, April 22, 1967, and February 28, 1970; Davidson, 121; *Houston Chronicle*, January 24, 1961, and March 9, 1969; *Houston Post*, February 3, 1970, and April 16, 1970.

### Year of First Black Police Sergeant Promotion in Selected Cities

Chicago	1897
St. Louis	1923
New York City	1926
Louisville, Kentucky	1944
Miami	1955
Atlanta	1961
San Antonio	1962
Dallas	1966
Houston	1974

Sources: Gosnell, 264; St. Louis *Police Journal*, March 7, 1923, 9; James J. Green and Alfred J. Young, *A History of the 28th Precinct* (New York, n.d.), 3; "Louisville Has South's First Negro Police Lieutenant," Press Release, October 10, 1949, ANP Clipping File; Miami *Times*, July 18, 1969; Atlanta *Constitution*, August 14, 1970; Grimes, 112; Dallas *Post Tribune*, June 26, 1982; Houston *Post*, April 13, 1974.

### Year Black Police Association Founded or Chartered in Selected Major American Cities

Houston	Texas Negro Peace Officers' Association	1935
Miami	Miami Colored Police Benevolent Association	1946
Cleveland	Shield Club	1946
New York City	Guardians Association	(1943)* 1949
Philadelphia	Guardians Civic League	1956
Detroit	The Guardians of Michigan	1963
Chicago	Afro-American Patrolmen's League	1967
San Francisco	Officers for Justice	(1963)* 1968
St. Louis	Ethical Police Society	1968
Los Angeles	Oscar Joel Bryant Association	1968
Atlanta	Afro-American Patrolmen's League	1969

\*The primary date given is that of the group's formal organization, although they began to meet at the earlier date listed.

Sources: *Constitution of the Texas Negro Peace Officers' Association* (Beaumont, 1949), 1; Ingram, 4; City of Cleveland Council, "A Resolution Honoring Lynn R. Coleman," No. 2214-74, November 18, 1974; Bolden, 86, 88; "The Guardians Civic League," membership brochure, 1963; "The Guardians of Michigan," newsletter, July 15, 1977; "What Is the Afro-American Patrolmen's League?," one-page flyer in the Afro-American Patrolmen's League Papers, n.d., Chicago Historical Society; "Why? The Officers for Justice," membership brochure, 1968; "A History of the St. Louis Ethical Police Society," one-page flyer, n.d.; Broome, 216; Atlanta *Journal*, November 14, 1969. The author has copies of the police association documents mentioned above.

Furthermore, the survey provided incorrect information on several points. The most glaring error was in its statement that black police in Houston had been "promoted to supervisory positions and employed in every division of the department."<sup>31</sup> In fact, the Houston Police Department did not promote a black police officer to a supervisory role until 1974, thus becoming one of the last major cities in the United States to promote a black officer above patrolman. Even San Antonio and Dallas, two cities which had approximately one-third and one-half of the fifty-four black police officers that Houston employed in 1970, respectively, promoted blacks to supervisory positions earlier than did Houston. Dallas had a black deputy police chief in 1973, before Houston had its first black sergeant. The failure of the Houston Police Department to promote blacks to supervisory roles led to two lawsuits against the department in 1973 and 1976.<sup>32</sup>

Young was one of the plaintiffs in the 1976 lawsuit and his participation indicated the different strategies and tactics that black police officers and their organizations used in the 1960s and 1970s to seek redress for their grievances. No longer did black police officers accept discrimination and token roles without challenging them. They used their police organizations and unions to represent their claims and they often clashed with the older, rank and file police associations. For example, immediately after the filing of the 1976 lawsuit the Houston Police Association threatened to file a countersuit to prevent the black police officers' suit from blocking the promotion of white police officers in Houston. This incident was indicative of the difference between the old line organizations which sought to preserve the privileges that white police officers had, and black police organizations which emerged as unions seeking to upgrade the status of black police officers in American law enforcement.<sup>33</sup>

By the time that the TPOA made the successful transition from a fraternal organization to a police union advocating the rights of black-police officers

<sup>31</sup>Donald A. Cole, George G. Kellinger, Charles M. Friel, and Hazel B. Kerper, *The Negro Law Enforcement Officer in Texas*, vol. 1, Criminal Justice Monograph (Huntsville, Texas, 1969), 67.

<sup>32</sup>City of Houston, Civil Service Department, *Affirmative Action Report* (Houston, January 1974), 107. For the first promotions in Houston, see the Houston *Post*, April 13, 1974. The Dallas *Post Tribune*, June 26, 1982, and John J. Grimes, "The Black Man in Law Enforcement: An Analysis of the Distribution of Black Men in Law Enforcement Agencies and the Related Recruitment Problems" (M.A. Thesis, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 1969), 112, provide the information on black police promotions in other major cities up to 1970. For the two lawsuits, see the Houston *Chronicle*, October 30, 1973; Houston *Post*, October 23, 1976.

<sup>33</sup>Houston *Post*, October 26, 1976. For a more comprehensive study of the conflict between black and white police associations, see Leonard Ruchelman, *Police Politics: A Comparative Study of Three Cities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1974), and Edward Palmer, "Black Police in America," *The Black Scholar* 5 (October 1973): 19-27.

and working to improve their status, such groups had emerged in every major American city. Many new black police organizations had joined the TPOA, the Shield Club of Cleveland, the MCPBA of Miami, and the Black Guardians of New York City in the struggle to upgrade black police positions. In 1972, thirty-three of these organizations met in St. Louis to form the National Black Police Association: finally realizing the vision of James A. Ladd, Brown L. Brackens, Leroy Landrum, and the other black police officers who met in Houston in 1935 to lay the groundwork for the movement.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup>For the origins and purpose of the National Black Police Association, see Norman Seay, Coordinator of the First National Conference of Black Policemen, to Colonel Delbert Miller, President, St. Louis Board of Police Commissioners, July 18, 1972, Correspondence of the St. Louis Ethical Police Society; and a news release issued by Norman Seay, August 29, 1972, announcing the formation of the National Black Police Association. The author has copies of both documents.

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