

Bogus Arrests Give NY Youths Rap Sheets

Written by Robert ID1611

Thursday, 30 June 2005 00:06 -

On the morning of June 14, a Queens, NY scooter officer was shot in the leg with his own service revolver while trying to arrest a man he found smoking marijuana near the Laurelton baseball fields in Cambria Heights, Queens.

Officer Christopher Wiesneski of the 105th Precinct told investigators that his assailant, described as a black man in his early 20s, with a medium build and a medium complexion, had struggled with him for his service weapon, and then escaped after the gun went off.

The Police Dept. immediately launched a massive dragnet throughout Cambria Heights and nearby Laurelton, both quiet, middle-class black neighborhoods of single-family homes near the Nassau County line.

During the next three days, 181 black men were arrested on misdemeanor charges and quality-of-life violations by cops from the 105th Precinct, and every one was fingerprinted, sent to central booking and spent 24 hours or more in the court system, according to the Queens district attorney's office.

There were 93 misdemeanor arrests the first day alone. That's 10 times the daily average for that precinct. There were an additional 36 arrests on June 15, and 52 more on June 16.

Many were for marijuana possession; others were for urinating in public, drinking alcohol, suspended driver's licenses and disorderly conduct.

One of those arrested the first day was 20-year-old Hason Joseph, who is light-skinned, stands 5-foot-6 and weighs barely 100 pounds.

He was grabbed by plainclothes cops around 2:30 p.m. on 121st Ave. near Laurelton Parkway. Hason told me yesterday that he and three friends had gotten out of a car to talk to three other black youths when cops suddenly appeared from an unmarked car, drew their guns and handcuffed all of them.

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"They wouldn't tell us why they were arresting us," said Russell McKee, 20, who had been in the car with Joseph. McKee is 6-feet-1, about 220 pounds and has a much darker complexion than Joseph. Then there's Donald Young, also 20, who is about an inch taller than McKee and heftier.

All said they were taken to the 105th Precinct, questioned about the shooting and then transferred to Queens Central Booking, where they finally learned the charge: disorderly conduct.

Francis Payen, one of the three young men they stopped to talk with that day, also was arrested for disorderly conduct.

But Payen was lucky to have a family friend as a lawyer.

"When I got to central booking, someone had already written ACD [adjournment contemplating dismissal] on his file," the lawyer, Sonia Metellus, said.

"He told the judge he didn't want an ACD, that he'd done nothing wrong and was pleading not guilty."

Nicole Navas, a spokeswoman for District Attorney Richard Brown, confirmed yesterday that "quite a few of the people arrested" during those three days had received ACDs, but she couldn't say exactly how many.

NYPD Deputy Commissioner Paul Browne denied there were wholesale bogus arrests.

"We made numerous arrests ranging from marijuana to gun possession," he said. "And we sought to determine whether the persons arrested would have any information about the

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shooting, and that's what we should be doing."

Norman Siegel, former head of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said that normally, people arrested on minor charges would be given a summons or desk appearance ticket.

"Whenever these young men apply for a job in the future," Siegel said, "they'll have to answer that question, have you ever been arrested before?"

Leroy Comrie, the local City Councilman, says he has gotten more than 20 calls from parents furious that their children were grabbed in mass roundups. Comrie said he has "no problem with a total lockdown and sweep when a cop is shot" but that arresting scores of young men who bear no resemblance to the suspect is going too far.

Along with Queens Rep. Gregory Meeks and Democratic mayoral candidate Fernando Ferrer, Comrie has demanded answers from police and City Hall.

But so far, our top city leaders keep acting as if this injustice to an entire community never happened.