

Video tapes capture cops using racial, gender slurs

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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Two Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) officers vacationing in Green Bay, Wis. have been suspended for a run-in with a group of African-Americans.

The altercation in itself is not what got the officers in hot water but it was the accusation by Green Bay police in a detailed report – and partially backed up by multiple dashboard cameras – that the officers apparently used slurs to describe the men they were confronting; including the most harmful word in the English language to describe African-Americans. MPD officers Brian Thole and Shawn Powell also spoke disparagingly of the department's chief, Janeé Harteau, who is openly gay.

The incident, which just recently came to light, took place outside of a Green Bay bar on June 29. According to the 40-page Green Bay Police Department report and various police surveillance videos, Thole and Powell refer to the group of African-Americans they confronted as "n*****" and said the men were "doing their little monkey thing." Powell admitted to striking one of the African-American men and admitted that he was the first to throw a punch.

According to the Green Bay report, the two Minneapolis officers, who are members of the Minneapolis SWAT unit, repeatedly used the N word and said the Green Bay department was "too n***** friendly." Thole and Powell were not arrested in the incident, but the Green Bay Police Department contacted the MPD and the two were placed on leave pending a MPD internal investigation.

This incident is not the first sign of trouble for the two.

Powell has already cost MPD \$235,000 as a result of a settlement in the 2010 videotaped beating of motorist Derryl Jenkins, and a wrongful death suit is pending stemming from a suspect death in a 2009 stolen vehicle chase. Powell was not disciplined for either incident and was commended for his actions in the vehicle chase.

Thole was arrested in 2006 for a DWI and was suspended from the department for 10 days.

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Conversely, he was twice honored as "SWAT Officer of the Month."

Though Harteau is not speaking about the incident citing the officers' appeals of their suspensions and data privacy laws, she did issue a statement voicing her displeasure over the officers' conduct, but she stopped short of fully addressing the racial slurs the pair was heard to have made.

"What I saw and heard on the video posted on several news websites involving these two officers is appalling and goes against everything we stand for," said Chief Harteau. "The type of behavior exhibited on the public video significantly damages public trust. Every member of this department and community deserves better. I would also like to extend my apologies to the community and the Green Bay Police Department."

Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak also released a statement condemning Thole and Powell's behavior.

"I was appalled and disgusted by the behavior of two Minneapolis police officers that I saw on the video from Green Bay," said Rybak. "The actions, language and behavior I saw in no way reflect the values of a department paid to protect and serve our community. I will await the results of the internal investigation and I am confident that Chief Harteau will take all appropriate action."

Some in the African-American community beg to differ with the mayor and feel the officers' actions in Green Bay are indicative of a department-wide culture of racism, harassment and intimidation.

Zachary King knows firsthand the sometimes heavy-handed tactics of some members of Minneapolis Police Department. King was the victim of a vicious beating by Minneapolis police that landed him in the hospital. The June 2012 beating King received came after he was confronted by an officer in downtown Minneapolis and asked about a "bulge" in his pants. According to King, he notified the officer he has a legal conceal and carry handgun permit and the officer yelled "Gun" and several officers slammed King on the concrete and punched and kicked King.

King was charged with obstruction of legal process, but those charges were eventually dropped and King is suing the department. The 2012 incident was documented in a previous Insight News article.

"Of course they (MSP) have it out for us (African-Americans)," said King. "I experienced it with what I went through, what I've seen other Black people go through – innocent people."

According to King, the only way the culture in the department will change is through greater media attention.

"I think they need to be exposed. That's the only way things will change," said King, who said he now suffers migraine headaches, stutters and has anxiety attacks as a result of his beating.