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ON THE BEAT: BLACK POLICEMEN IN CHARLESTON, 1869-1921

JOHN OLDFIELD*

TODAY, BLACK POLICEMEN ARE A FAMILIAR SIGHT IN Southern cities. Directly or indirectly, these men are the products of the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s. But properly speaking we can trace the history of black policemen back to Reconstruction and beyond. In New Orleans, for example, blacks served on the city guard as early as 1805, and during the 1870s they were added to police departments in twelve Southern cities, including Montgomery, Vicksburg, and Charleston.¹ Charleston presents an interesting case study. In many parts of the South black policemen disappeared after 1877. In Charleston, however, they remained a small but integral part of the police force until well into the twentieth century.

Approximately 150 blacks served on Charleston's police force between 1869 and 1921.² Most of these men were privates but, as we shall see, a small number did reach the rank of sergeant or first or second lieutenant. Blacks were also appointed to the detective branch, and for a short time during Reconstruction an African American served as chief of detectives. Who were these men? How were they recruited and trained, and how did they respond to the challenge of police work? What follows is an attempt to answer these questions, drawing on newspapers and other sources to shed fresh light on the black experience in South Carolina.

CHARLESTON'S POLICE FORCE HAD ITS ORIGINS IN THE OLD city guard, established in 1806. During the 1850s, however, the guard was replaced by a modern police force consisting of a chief, two captains, six

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¹W. Marvin Dulaney, *Black Police in America* (Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, 1996), 8-10, 13-18; Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 41-43. By 1880, however, blacks had been removed from the forces of six of these twelve cities. See Dennis C. Rousey, *Policing the Southern City: New Orleans, 1805-1889* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 137.

²This figure is based on the following sources: *Charleston Daily Courier*; *Charleston News and Courier*; *Charleston City Directory, 1869-1921*; Bureau of the Census, Manuscript Census Schedules, Population, 1870, 1880, 1900, Charleston, South Carolina. It includes members of the detective branch but does not include hostlers, janitors, or steeplemen. A checklist of all 154 men has been deposited with the South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, and the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.



This street scene of Charleston depicting a black policeman appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, January 21, 1877, p. 341.

lieutenants, six sergeants, and 150 privates. As Laylon Jordan has written, it was "a full-time, day-and-night police," which cost the city approximately \$100,000 a year. The new police was put on the streets in June 1856. Five years later Charleston was engulfed by the Civil War. During the lengthy siege that followed the new police department fell into disarray, and when Charleston was finally occupied in February 1865 the city was placed under martial law. A civilian force was reintroduced later that year and, during Reconstruction, continued under the supervision of three militarily-appointed mayors, W.W. Burns (1867-68), Milton Cogswell (1868), and George W. Clark (1868).³

³Laylon Wayne Jordan, "Police Power and Public Safety in Antebellum Charleston: The Emergence of a New Police, 1800- 1860," *South Atlantic Urban Studies*, 3 (1979), 122-140; Walter J. Fraser, Jr., *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 268-88.

Not surprisingly, the first blacks on Charleston's police force date from the Reconstruction period.⁴ In July 1868 the *Charleston Tri-Weekly News* reported that Mayor Clark had appointed J.H. Roberts, a former slave, to fill a vacancy on the police. Describing the appointment as "another step toward Negrodom," the *Tri-Weekly News* nevertheless took some comfort in the fact that Roberts would for the present "occupy the position of door and gate keeper, which [would] confine him to the Guardhouse proper."⁵ All of this was to change, however, under Gilbert Pillsbury's administration. Finally taking office in May 1869, following a bitterly contested election, Pillsbury moved quickly to restructure the police force, reducing the number of privates and at the same time giving places to his Republican supporters.⁶ As the *Charleston Daily Courier* observed testily, "Mayor Pillsbury is being bullied by the idle negroes who throng about the City Hall, to discharge the respectable, decent white men on the force, in order to make room for these vagabonds." "It makes no difference whether a man be competent or incompetent," the newspaper complained, "unless he is 'loil,' he must go by the board."⁷

It is possible that as many as 50 blacks were appointed to Charleston's police force between 1869 and 1871, although not all of these men would have been on the payroll at the same time.⁸ Some clearly served for only a short period of time, perhaps a year or even less. The 1870 Census, for instance, lists 32 black policemen, who made up approximately 45 per cent of a total force of 70 privates. Of these 32 men eighteen were "blacks" and fourteen were mulattoes. Most of them were young—in all, twenty-four fell in the age range 21-35—most were married, and nearly all of them were native South Carolinians. As one might expect, most of these men were also literate, while a further three were semi-literate (that is, they could not

⁴For a general overview, see Richard Zuczek, *State of Rebellion: Reconstruction in South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996). Also see Layton Wayne Jordan, "'The New Regime,' Race, Politics, and Police in Reconstruction Charleston, 1865-1875," *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (Columbia: South Carolina Historical Association, 1994), 45-53; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 538.

⁵*Charleston Tri-Weekly News*, July 28, 1868.

⁶Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 287-89. The police bill of September 1869 provided for three lieutenants, two sergeants, and 82 privates. It should be noted that an earlier bill, which provided for 110 privates, was rejected by the City Council. See *Charleston Daily Courier*, August 30 and September 8, 1869.

⁷*Charleston Daily Courier*, July 26, 1869. See also October 14, 1869 and January 13, 1870.

⁸*Ibid.*, October 21, 1869; *Charleston City Directory*, 1869-71; Bureau of the Census, Manuscript Census Schedules, Population, 1870, Charleston, South Carolina.

write). In each case, "blacks" were more likely than mulattoes to be illiterate or semi-literate.⁹

Some in this sample, like Julius Bing, Frank Desverney, and Edward Gaillard, came from well-known free black families in Charleston.¹⁰ Others were undoubtedly ex-slaves, while a few were black carpetbaggers. Take William Viney, for instance. A native of Ohio, Viney served as a sergeant in the 55th Massachusetts Regiment and after the war settled in South Carolina. In 1868 he represented Colleton District in the constitutional convention. Two years later Viney put himself forward as a candidate for second lieutenant of police, eventually losing on a third ballot to the white incumbent, Sergeant John Cassidy. Undeterred, Viney remained with the Charleston police until 1873, but for many his presence on the force was a painful reminder of outside interference in local affairs. As the *Daily Courier* noted with obvious distaste, Viney was "a Northern colored man, one of the 'culled' troops who 'fought nobly' for the cause."¹¹

Viney, it should be said, was not a typical recruit. To judge from the available sources, most of the blacks appointed during Pillsbury's administration were laborers. A much smaller number (we cannot be sure how many) were artisans: carpenters, butchers, bootmakers, tailors, and bricklayers. Very few, it seems, owned property. Of those listed in the 1870 Census all but two were propertyless. The exceptions were J.W. Griffin, a forty-year-old black private, who owned real estate valued at \$4,600, and Frank Dantzman, a twenty-four-year-old mulatto, who owned real estate and personal property amounting to \$300.¹² While it would be wrong to read too much into these two examples, it will come as no surprise to learn that Griffin did not stay with the police for very long. Dantzman, on the other hand, became a sergeant before 1874-75 and finally left the force in 1877.¹³

⁹Dulaney, *Black Police in America*, 116 (Table 3); *Charleston Daily Courier*, March 29, 1870; Bureau of the Census, Manuscript Census Schedules, Population, 1870, Charleston, South Carolina, First Ward, Sheet 88; Second Ward, Sheets 9, 45, 106; Third Ward, Sheets 37 and 68; Fourth Ward, Sheets 16, 17, 78, 202, 232; Fifth Ward, Sheets 9, 25, 27, 69, 71, 99, 110, 128; Sixth Ward, Sheets 11, 12, 55, 104, 129, 164, 198; Eighth Ward, Sheet 258.

¹⁰State Free Negro Capitation Tax, Charleston, South Carolina, 1860, State Archives, Columbia.

¹¹Eric Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders during Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 219; *Charleston City Directory*, 1869-73; *Charleston Daily Courier*, November 30, 1870.

¹²Bureau of the Census, Manuscript Census Schedules, Population, 1870, Charleston, South Carolina, First Ward, Sheet 88 (Griffin) and Sixth Ward, Sheet 12 (Dantzman).

¹³*Charleston City Directory*, 1874-78.

In 1871 Pillsbury was ousted by a conservative ticket headed by John A. Wagener, the president of a local insurance company. Under Wagener Charleston's police force was reorganized into a day force of 40 "elite Guards" assisted by 60 "Night Guards."¹⁴ The elite men, however, were retained out of the existing force, black and white. In addition, blacks were recruited in significant numbers to the night watch. When Wagener inspected the police force in October 1873, in the dying weeks of his administration, 126 men presented themselves at the Guardhouse, "one half of whom [were] colored."¹⁵ Ironically, it was also during Wagener's administration that the first black officer was elected to Charleston's police force in the person of James H. Fordham, a thirty-two-year-old mulatto.¹⁶

Wagener's successor, Republican Mayor George Cunningham, tilted the balance further in favor of blacks. On coming into office in November 1873 Cunningham reduced the police force to six lieutenants, four sergeants, and 90 privates.¹⁷ But if anything it was whites who bore the brunt of these changes. By November 1876 the number of black privates had risen to 57, about twenty-five more than whites.¹⁸ At the same time, there were now three black officers: Fordham, Thomas D. Smalls, and James A. Williams. More striking still was the composition of the detective force. In November 1873 a mulatto, George Shrewsbury, Jr., was elected chief of detectives. Moreover, three out of his six subordinates, Primus Green, William A. Hoard, and H.Z. Burkmeyer, were also black.¹⁹ These years, 1873-76, represented the height of black influence on Charleston's police force. Never again would blacks enjoy such an obvious numerical superiority, particularly in the lower ranks, and never again would they fill so many senior positions.

Not surprisingly, many local whites regretted what they saw as the growing politicization of the police force. In September 1876 the *Charleston News and Courier* complained that it was "a necessity of the Republican party

¹⁴Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 291-94; *Charleston Daily Courier*, November 9, 1871.

¹⁵*Charleston Daily Courier*, November 9 and 21, 1871; *Charleston News and Courier*, October 27, 1873. This figure obviously would have included officers as well as hostlers, for example, and other station staff.

¹⁶*Charleston Daily Courier*, November 15, 1871. For Fordham, see Bernard E. Powers, Jr., *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885* (Fayetteville, Ark.: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 242; Bureau of the Census, Manuscript Census Schedules, Population, 1900, Charleston, South Carolina, E.D. 110, Sheet 17.

¹⁷Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 294-95; *Charleston News and Courier*, November 26, 1873.

¹⁸*Charleston News and Courier*, November 14, 1876.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, December 10 and 11, 1873.

to use public patronage, first and foremost, for the strengthening of the political power of the leaders of the party." These same leaders, it charged, were believed to "rule the police force in Charleston, to the extent of encumbering it with colored men whose prime qualification is that they are active ward politicians, very serviceable in primary meetings, and at the polls on election day." The result was evasion and double standards. There were some "gallant and efficient" black policemen, the *News and Courier* conceded, but how many, it asked, could be depended upon to do their duty, "when that duty required them to arrest, at any serious risk, criminals belonging to their [own] race and political faction?"²⁰

Many of these fears were realized during the gubernatorial campaign of 1876. Riots broke out in September and again in November, following the election, when black policemen were alleged to have opened fire on rioters, in the process killing one white man and wounding others. Within days of the incident, five blacks were discharged from the police force, including Private Richard Beckett, who almost immediately was arrested for suspected murder.²¹ Then on November 20, in a separate incident, the chief of detectives, George Shrewsbury, was shot and killed by Frank Johnstone, the assistant clerk at the Guardhouse. Both men, it turned out, were Republicans and the whole affair inevitably focused attention again on the "efficiency" of Charleston's police.²²

In the weeks and months that followed, Captain Hendricks, Chief of Police, set out to remodel the force under his command. Anyone convicted of using incendiary language during the recent riot was immediately discharged and the balance between black and white privates restored to something like parity. Addressing his men on November 13, 1876, Hendricks told them that they were to have nothing to do with politics. "You have got to be policemen and nothing but policemen," he explained. "If there is a member of this force who proposes to be a politician, a member of a fire company or a member of a military company, let him step forward and pull off his uniform." Hendricks also took a firm line on police discipline. The public was dissatisfied with the police, he believed, because they were

²⁰Ibid., September 15, 1876.

²¹Zuczek, *State of Rebellion*, 174-75; Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 299-300; *Charleston News and Courier*, November 9, 11, and 14, 1876. Beckett was later released. It transpired that the real culprit was an "ex-colored policeman," George Mitchell. Mitchell, it appears, had been discharged from the police force several months before the 1876 riot "but kept his uniform and had it on when he was firing." See *Charleston News and Courier*, December 4, 1876.

²²*Charleston News and Courier*, November 21, 1876. According to newspaper reports, four shots were fired, three by Johnstone, who was white, and one by Shrewsbury. The details are unclear, but the dispute appears to have involved Shrewsbury's wife, who was a widow of the late Robert C. DeLarge.

"continually speaking to citizens on the street, and expressing [themselves] in a partisan manner." This had to stop. Henceforth, anyone found conversing on his post would be discharged forthwith.²³

Nevertheless, for some black policemen it proved almost impossible to suppress their political loyalties and affiliations. In January 1877 the *News and Courier* reported that William E. Elliott, a member of the detective force, had told a crowd of black Charlestonians that "he was ready and willing to put himself at the head of a column of colored men and wipe out every Democrat from the city." The Democrats, he said, were "all a parcel of villains, and the negroes should show them that they were masters and intended to remain so." Whether true or not, stories like these did little to allay white anxieties. "To pass over such an offence," observed the *News and Courier*, "is to encourage the ill-feeling that Elliott and those like him live upon, and to invite the collisions which such as Elliott would be the first to flee from when the tug of war came."²⁴

In November 1877 Charleston was redeemed and Republican rule finally came to an end. Determined to uphold white supremacy, the new administration, headed by William Sale, forced black Republicans out of politics, together with their white supporters. Democratic "Redeemers" also purged the police of known Republicans. Early in 1878 a total of 45 men were discharged from the force. Among the victims were Frank Desverney, Julius Bing, and thirteen black privates, at least one of whom, Robert Mandora, had been charged with using incendiary language during the 1876 riot.²⁵ In their place, Sale and his Chief of Police, Colonel Alfred Rhett, appointed loyal Democrats. Politics not race was the critical issue here. Significantly, Sale did not pursue a whites only policy. In fact, eighteen black privates were taken on between January and March of 1878, and more black appointments were made throughout Sale's term of office.²⁶

Under Sale and his successor, William Courtenay (1879-87), the police force was again turned into a political machine, but this time of a distinctly Democratic complexion. Many of the blacks appointed between 1878 and 1887, including men like Malcolm B. Holloway and Jesse B. Nell, were connected with leading black Democratic families.²⁷ Many of those who

²³*Charleston News and Courier*, November 14 and 15, 1876.

²⁴*Ibid.*, January 1, 1877. Little is known about Elliott but see *Charleston News and Courier*, September 6, 1877.

²⁵Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 301-302; *Charleston News and Courier*, November 15, 1876 and February 2, 1878.

²⁶*Charleston News and Courier*, January 21 and 24, February 2, March 2, July 4, and November 22, 1878.

²⁷See Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 308. C.H. Holloway, a drayman, and Clarence B. Nell, a barber, were two of only three black aldermen who served on the City Council between 1877 and 1883. Both were Democrats.

survived the purge of 1878 were also active in Democratic circles. One of these was Moses D. Brown. Brown, it seems, was appointed in 1875-76, during Mayor Cunningham's administration, and served on the force until 1884. Recognized to be a "good colored policeman," Brown was also vice-president of the Hayne (Colored) Democratic Club and presided at many of its meetings. Another member of the club was Samuel Gordon, who served on the police force between 1878 and 1892, while the president, Stephen Hayne, another Sale appointee, eventually reached the rank of city detective.²⁸

Through their affiliation with the Democratic party, Brown, Hayne, and Gordon were able to make a career out of the police force. But there is no denying the fact that the 1880s witnessed a decline in the overall number of black policemen. Estimates of this kind are necessarily tentative, but at the beginning of the decade there were perhaps as many as twenty-four black privates on the city police, making up roughly 30 per cent of the total force of 80 privates. Ten years later the figure was closer to eleven per cent.²⁹ In the meantime, blacks had all but disappeared from the upper ranks. The only black officer to survive the purge of 1878 was James Fordham. As for the detective branch, this, too, became predominantly white, although two blacks, Stephen Hayne and John A. Mitchell, did serve for a time during the 1880s.³⁰

The decline of the 1880s can be attributed to a number of factors. For one thing, the force as a whole was undergoing contraction. In 1880 the number of privates was reduced to 80, in line with a general policy of retrenchment, and during the 1890s the number fell to 73. Then again, the 1880s witnessed

²⁸*Charleston News and Courier*, September 8, 1877, September 14 and October 20, 1882, July 15, 1884, and June 4, 1886; *Charleston City Directory*, 1875-1894; Police Payroll Records, City Archives, Charleston. It is possible that Brown switched political allegiance in 1878, thereby ensuring his survival.

²⁹Dulaney, *Black Police in America*, 116 (Table 3); Bureau of the Census, Manuscript Census Schedules, Population, 1880, Charleston, South Carolina, E.D. 52, Sheet 24; E.D. 54, Sheet 8; E.D. 55, Sheet 28; E.D. 56, Sheet 9; E.D. 61, Sheets 26 and 33; E.D. 63, Sheets 6, 12, 21 and 44; E.D. 64, Sheet 12; E.D. 66, Sheet 11; E.D. 68, Sheets 3 and 36; E.D. 70, Sheets 14 and 25; E.D. 72, Sheets 11 and 26; E.D. 75, Sheet 2; *Charleston City Directory*, 1878-1899. To put these figures into perspective, in 1880 blacks made up fifteen per cent of the Vicksburg police and just seven per cent of the force in New Orleans. Charleston's only close rival was Memphis (23 per cent). See Rousey, *Policing the Southern City*, 137. Rousey, however, underestimates the number of blacks on the Charleston force in 1880.

³⁰*Charleston News and Courier*, January 15, 1884; *Charleston City Directory*, 1882 and 1886-87. Hayne was appointed to the detective force in 1885. He was discharged, or perhaps resigned, in 1887 and appears to have rejoined the police force as a private in January 1889. He was finally discharged in February 1896. See Police Payroll Records, 1889-96, City Archives, Charleston.

a rapid turnover of men, particularly toward the end of the decade. Between 1888 and 1893, for instance, 81 privates were dismissed, while a similar number resigned.³¹ Demoralization was a factor here, particularly during and after the earthquake of August 1886, but so, too, was prejudice and the drive toward a younger and fitter police force.³² Blacks undoubtedly felt the full force of these pressures. And while fresh appointments were made throughout the 1880s, they never matched the much larger number of dismissals and resignations.

Blacks were hit again in 1896 when Governor John Gary Evans invoked the Metropolitan Police Law to ensure better enforcement of the state prohibition law in Charleston. As a result, control of the police force was put in the hands of three Commissioners of Police who confirmed Gary's nominee, J. Elmore Martin, as Chief of Police. Martin, in turn, proceeded to dismiss one quarter of the force, targeting, in particular, blacks and Irish.³³ Among those discharged were James Fordham, after twenty-six years service, and four black privates. Two of these men, however, Eugene Brown and Henry Fraser, were subsequently reinstated. This left just four blacks on the city's police force: Brown, Fraser, Henry Carroll, and John Hassell. All four were Democratic appointees. Carroll and Hassell had been appointed in 1884 and 1887, respectively. Fraser had entered the force in December 1891, while Brown had joined just eight months later, in August 1892.³⁴

For the next five years these four men, all privates, represented a small but important black minority within Charleston's predominantly white police force. Theirs was an unenviable position, however. No new appointments were made between 1897 and 1920, and as the years went by it became increasingly clear that none of them would be replaced. When Brown resigned in 1902 the situation deteriorated still further. For Carroll, Hassell, and Fraser it was now only a question of seeing through their service to retirement, or, more likely, until they were dismissed. Fraser was the first to go in 1911, followed by Carroll, who was discharged in 1915 at

³¹See the Reports of the Police Department in the *Yearbook of the City of Charleston*, 1880-99.

³²*Charleston News and Courier*, August 12 and October 27, 1886. In 1888 the *News and Courier* noted that "the Chief [of Police] in filling such vacancies as occur from time to time is endeavoring to secure young, able and vigorous men who will be fully capable of standing the wear and tear of the service." See *Charleston News and Courier*, March 20, 1888.

³³Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 329-30; Layton Wayne Jordan, "Police and Politics: Charleston in the Gilded Age, 1880-1900," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 81 (1980), 45-47.

³⁴Jordan, "Police and Politics," 46-47; Police Payroll Records, 1889-97, City Archives, Charleston; *Charleston City Directory*, 1884-92.

the age of sixty-two. Hassell, for his part, clung on until May 1921. But curiously this is not the end of the story. In October 1920 Carroll's son, Herman, who for years had served as a dayman at the main stationhouse, was taken on for nine months as a private, and it is Carroll who has the distinction of being the last black patrolman to serve on Charleston's police force until blacks were taken on again in 1950.³⁵

FOR ALL NEW RECRUITS JOINING THE POLICE FORCE OFFERED obvious attractions. Not least of the benefits were the financial rewards. Throughout this period, privates could expect to earn anything from \$600 to \$720 a year, significantly more than industrial workers, for instance, while a second lieutenant's salary in 1878 was \$900.³⁶ Police work, moreover, conferred status and authority. Policemen were "conservators of the peace" and, as such, carried clubs and handguns, as well as rattles and whistles: for a time, between 1869 and 1874, they were also issued with Winchester rifles. The uniforms, too — military frockcoats in winter and blue flannel suits in summer, topped off with Panama hats — lent the police an air of special distinction.³⁷

Nevertheless, the job posed its own challenges. First and foremost, the police force was a quasi-military organization. The chief of police usually had some military experience, and the drills and parades, not to mention the rules, regulations, and disciplinary procedures, all bore a military stamp. For many blacks this must have been an alien, even hostile environment. As if this were not enough, there was little or nothing in the way of basic training. New recruits, black and white, were expected to learn their trade

³⁵Police Payroll Records, 1902-21, City Archives, Charleston; *Charleston City Directory*, 1900-1921. Herman Carroll was officially discharged on July 31, 1921. That same month, twenty-six blacks, among them some of the most prominent members of Charleston's African-American community, petitioned the City Council to consider putting "a few colored men on the police force." The timing is significant. What at first glance might seem like a call for new initiatives was, in fact, a protest against deteriorating conditions. See Petition to His Honor the Mayor of the City of Charleston and the Honored Gentlemen of the City Council, July 26, 1921, Police Records, City Archives, Charleston.

³⁶Jordan, "Police and Politics," 42-43; Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 306. There is no evidence to suggest that black privates and officers were paid less than their white counterparts. See Police Payroll Records, 1889-1921.

³⁷Jordan, "Police and Politics," 40-43; *Charleston Daily Courier*, January 13 and 17, and September 8, 1869, January 13 and March 23, 1870, and November 2 and 9, 1871; *Charleston News and Courier*, June 16 and November 26, 1873, February 9, May 19, June 12, 1874, May 19, 1877, January 17, 1878, May 29, 1882, and May 3 and 12, 1884.

"on the beat," usually under the guidance of an experienced patrolman.³⁸ Finally, black recruits were integrated immediately into the police force. Unlike black policemen in other parts of the South, they were not assigned to black wards, nor were they given specific duties that limited their contact with whites.³⁹ That is to say, black patrolmen invariably found themselves thrust into the front line, sometimes with embarrassing or unfortunate results.

Typically, privates were out on the streets for four (later six) hours during the day and six at night. Admittedly, the men were entitled to leave, one day out of three after 1886, but the long hours inevitably took their toll. So, too, did the routine of police work. More often than not, black policemen found themselves dealing with cases involving petty larceny, drunkenness or disorderly conduct. Indeed, breaches of the peace dominated crime statistics in Charleston, certainly during the 1870s and 1880s.⁴⁰ At other times, the city was simply quiet. Police reports tell their own story. Roundsmen frequently found privates (white and black) asleep on duty or missing from their posts. An even greater danger was drunkenness. Even senior officers, including, on one occasion, Chief of Police, Alfred Rhett, found themselves accused of being drunk while on duty.⁴¹

In the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that some blacks fell prey to these temptations. Henry Alston is a case in point. In December 1869, after just two months on the force, Alston was reported for "being off his post at 11 p.m. and coming out of a barroom at [the] corner of Pitt and Beaufain at 12 p.m." Early the following year he was in trouble again, this time for being absent from his post. In June of 1870 Alston's police career effectively came to an end when he failed to attend the Captain's Court, having previously absented himself from drill.⁴² Equally turbulent was the short career of Charles Green. In October 1873 Green was involved in a shooting incident with his brother, Samuel. Later the same month he drew a pistol on another policeman, while "under the influence of liquor," and was subsequently

³⁸Jordan, "Police and Politics," 39-40, 43; Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 306; *Charleston News and Courier*, June 10 and 12, 1874.

³⁹In most Southern cities, according to Rabinowitz, "blacks were supposed to arrest only blacks." See Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 43.

⁴⁰Jordan, "Police and Politics," 39. Also see the Reports of the Police Department in the *Yearbook of the City of Charleston*, 1880-1900.

⁴¹Jordan, "Police and Politics," 41; Police Records, Offences and Sentences, October 1868 to July 1869, and Minute Books, Main Station House, December 1869 to July 1870 and July 1883 to October 1884, Charleston Library Society; William Sale to Colonel Alfred Rhett, October 21, 1879, Police Records, City Archives, Charleston.

⁴²Charleston Library Society, Police Records, Minute Book, Main Station House, December 1869 to August 1870, entries for December 19 and 21, 1869 and January 2, 9, 28, February 7, 8, 17, and March 9, 1870.

carried before a trial justice and committed to jail.⁴³

These cases were the exception, however. Most black policemen proved honest, sober, and reliable, often under trying circumstances. As court records reveal, police work was dangerous and physically demanding. Black privates, like their white counterparts, met with abuse, taunts, and outright resistance. Scuffles were common. In May 1874, for instance, Private James Wright was "set upon, beaten and badly bitten on the left hand" by members of a black fire company on King Street.⁴⁴ Other patrolmen were "brickbatted" by gangs of black boys or overpowered by crowds of revelers. Guns were also a constant menace. At least three black policemen were wounded during the election riot of 1876 and in another incident Private William Hamilton was shot in the foot and "slightly wounded" by one of several whites apprehended disturbing the peace on the corner of Meeting and Market Streets.⁴⁵

Sometimes these assaults had tragic consequences. One of the worst occurred in 1870 when Private Thomas Martin was shot and killed by a white infantryman stationed at the Citadel. The Martin incident was particularly ugly because of its apparent racist motivation. At the inquest a witness testified that one of those involved in the fracas had been heard to say that "if a nigger policeman should attempt to arrest any of their party they would kill him."⁴⁶ Such tensions, one suspects, were never far below the surface. Whites frequently complained about the "insulting manner" of "colored policemen." In March 1871 the *Daily Courier* reported that a black patrolman had told a "lady" living in Rutledge Street "that if she did not have her front door kept shut he would prosecute her." The incident clearly caused great offence. What was at issue here was not only a (white) lady's honor but the proper relationship between whites and those they regarded as their natural inferiors.⁴⁷

Police procedures gave whites ample opportunity to air their grievances against black patrolmen. In 1872 Private William Grant was arraigned before the Chief's Court, charged with "clubbing a young man severely" at the corner of Amherst and America Streets, and in a similar case, this time in 1880, Edward Gaillard was accused of assaulting P.R. O'Connell "without provocation" on Church Street. Interestingly, both complaints were dismissed. Grant, it transpired, had acted in self-defence, while the case

⁴³*Charleston News and Courier*, October 6 and 31, 1873. For similar cases of indiscipline, see *News and Courier*, September 14, 1877 and January 26, 1878.

⁴⁴*Charleston News and Courier*, May 22, 1874. See also *Charleston Daily Courier*, November 24, 1870.

⁴⁵*Charleston News and Courier*, October 30, November 9, and December 11, 1876.

⁴⁶*Charleston Daily Courier*, July 23 and 25, 1870.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, March 1, 1871.

against Gaillard was never proven.⁴⁸ Procedures like these obviously served a purpose but they also had a devastating effect on morale. Even the *Daily Courier* was moved to protest against the "practice of arresting policemen on the complaint of every party who feels aggrieved because of having been arrested." Such arrests were not only reprehensible, the *Courier* observed, but they were "calculated to destroy the esprit of the force."⁴⁹

Nevertheless, black policemen did sometimes overstep the mark. In January 1874 Peter Weston filed a complaint against George Shrewsbury, Chief of Detectives, charging him with "several alleged acts of cruelty while a prisoner in a cell in the detective office." On this occasion, the complaint was upheld and Shrewsbury was promptly dismissed, only to be restored to duty by the Mayor, George Cunningham.⁵⁰ Significantly, Weston was black. Some years later, George Stevens, also black, took out a warrant against Private John Rowan and Sergeant James Robinson, charging them both with assault and battery. Here again, Robinson was found guilty and sentenced to pay a \$5 fine or go to jail for ten days.⁵¹ In other instances, black policemen were accused of abusing their authority in the settlement of domestic disputes. Edward Walker, for instance, was reported to have "severely cowhided a colored man on Meeting Street" in June 1873 for "interfering in his domestic affairs."⁵²

Discipline, or, rather, indiscipline, was a problem that plagued the police force throughout this period.⁵³ So, too, was fatigue and the wear and tear of police service. For many, the long hours, abuse, and physical intimidation obviously proved too much. Natural disasters like the 1886 earthquake also stretched resources to the limit. The *News and Courier* noted in October 1886 that "several of the best men on the force appear to have been demoralised since the earthquake." "They went through the big shock and the following month with credit to themselves but the continuance of the shocks in October seems to have broken them up." As a result, two patrolmen, both blacks, resigned, while a further four were discharged. The

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, March 5 and 6, 1872; *Charleston News and Courier*, May 22, 1880.

⁴⁹*Charleston Daily Courier*, August 20, 1872.

⁵⁰*Charleston News and Courier*, January 1 and 5, 1874.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, July 18 and 19, 1877. In another incident, this time in 1874, William Hoard of the detective branch was arrested and charged with drawing a pistol and firing two shots at Benjamin Mills on Meeting Street. Hoard subsequently served a jail sentence. See *Charleston News and Courier*, October 14, 1874 and July 11 and 12, 1877.

⁵²*Ibid.*, June 29, 1873. For a very similar incident, involving Private Hiram Lewis, see *Charleston News and Courier*, July 24, 1873.

⁵³Reports of the Police Department, *Yearbook of the City of Charleston, 1880-1900*. In 1899 the Chief of Police, James Golden, reported that there had been "a material advance in the discipline and efficiency of the force," adding that "rigid enforcement of the rules against intoxication and sleeping on the post was having its effect."

loss of six good men gave many pause for thought. "The policeman's lot is not only not a happy one," the *Courier* conceded, "but it is also a very laborious one."⁵⁴

The harsh realities of police work help to explain why many blacks quit the service, particularly if they had a trade or alternative means of employment. Jesse Nell, for instance, served on the police force for eight years, between 1878 and 1886. Before that he was employed as a tailor with John Rugheimer on King Street, and he returned to Rugheimer in 1886.⁵⁵ A very few left the police to pursue their political ambitions. H.Z. Burkmeyer, for instance, who served on the detective force, represented Charleston in the state House of Representatives between 1874 and 1876.⁵⁶ For all that, a significant number of blacks did stay on and make a career out of the police force. Samuel Gordon, Stephen Hayne, Henry Fraser, and Richard Smith all served between fourteen and twenty years. Fordham, of course, was with the police for twenty-six years, while between them Henry Carroll and John Hassell put in nearly 70 years' service.⁵⁷

These men were members of an elite group. Unusually, Carroll left the police force in 1915 on a pension, having been connected with the department for over 40 years, first as a dayman and later as a private. He evidently owned his own house, at 117 Line, and was a prominent member of St. Peter's Catholic Church on Wentworth Street.⁵⁸ The *News and Courier* described him as an "efficient" policeman whose record was "a good one," adding significantly that Carroll was "a Democrat and always voted the Democratic ticket."⁵⁹ Fordham, too, was a houseowner and so light-skinned that he could easily have passed for white. But color alone does not explain Fordham's successful police career. To judge from newspaper accounts,

Golden went on: "As a whole the men are beginning to realise that politics has no place in this department, and that political influence is no protection against infraction of the rules." See *Yearbook of the City of Charleston*, 1899, 112.

⁵⁴*Charleston News and Courier*, October 27, 1886 and March 20, 1888.

⁵⁵*Charleston City Directory*, 1877-94.

⁵⁶Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers*, 32.

⁵⁷*Charleston City Directory*, 1877-1921; Police Payroll Records, City Archives, Charleston.

⁵⁸*Charleston City Directory*, 1888-1922; Bureau of the Census, Manuscript Census Schedules, Population, 1900, Charleston, South Carolina, E.D. 110; *Charleston News and Courier*, January 9, 1923. This is a rare example of a black policeman who can be positively identified as a Catholic. While many white policemen on the Charleston force were Catholics (and specifically Irish Catholics), there is no evidence to suggest that the same was true of blacks. See Sacramental Records of St. Peter's Parish, St. Patrick's Parish Archives, Charleston.

⁵⁹*Charleston News and Courier*, January 9, 1923.

Fordham exuded a natural authority and a calmness under pressure that won him universal admiration.⁶⁰ Hassell emerges as a rather more shadowy figure, an "efficient" patrolman, who, like Carroll, was reliable and unobtrusive.

THE INTRODUCTION OF BLACK POLICEMEN WAS ONE OF THE most striking innovations of Republican rule in Charleston. As we have seen, blacks were recruited to the police force in large numbers between 1869 and 1876, and for a short time they outnumbered whites, certainly at the rank of private. A decade later the situation had changed dramatically. But black policemen did not suddenly disappear. In 1886 there were still fifteen blacks out of a total force of 75 privates.⁶¹ And while numbers continued to fall, some blacks managed to survive even the convulsions of the 1890s. Men like Carroll and Hassell were admittedly the exception to the rule. Their success, however, served as an important reminder that blacks could assume authority over white citizens.

The recruitment of blacks undoubtedly caused resentment. Yet if white Charlestonians sometimes complained about their "colored policemen," they were also capable of giving praise where praise was due. Individual acts of bravery were frequently commended by the local press and the force as a whole attracted favorable comment, even during Reconstruction. "The police have rapidly improved in efficiency," the *News and Courier* conceded in April 1874, at the height of Republican rule in Charleston. "Captain Hendricks [Chief of Police] has the hearty co-operation of his lieutenants, and the working of the whole department is smooth and satisfactory."⁶² Certainly, within the force there is very little evidence of racial tension. By and large, black and white privates and officers appear to have worked together harmoniously.⁶³

For blacks themselves police service was tough and demanding. Survival as a policeman demanded tact and intelligence, as well as political know-how. The work was also physically punishing. But for those who survived and made a career out of the police force the rewards were obvious: status, authority, and a measure of financial security. The wider black community also benefited. Black policemen and career policemen, in particular, helped

⁶⁰Ibid., June 12, 1874 and January 30, 1896.

⁶¹*Charleston City Directory*, 1885; *Yearbook of the City of Charleston*, 1886, 116.

⁶²*Charleston News and Courier*, April 2, 1874.

⁶³Powers notes that in 1870 white Republican policemen sent a delegation to the mayor in protest against the appointment of blacks, but this seems to have been an isolated incident. I have found very few examples of such protests, either for the Reconstruction period or for the 1880s and beyond, when admittedly the numbers of black policemen were much smaller and, as a consequence, much less of a threat. See Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 241-42.

to vindicate black capabilities. Furthermore, their presence on the streets, like the presence of black lawyers in the courts, created greater confidence in the police and, by extension, the whole criminal justice system.⁶⁴ Today, the representation of minorities is considered to be an essential element of good community policing. The irony is that Charleston should have experimented with this idea, albeit under considerable outside pressure, as long ago as the 1870s.⁶⁵

Between 1869 and 1921 blacks were an integral part of Charleston's police force. Their demise can be attributed to a number of factors, among them economic recession, political upheaval, and a harsher racial climate. Only with the advent of the Second World War and the rising tide of black protest would conditions show any signs of marked improvement, and even then progress was often slow and halting. Finally, in August 1950, four blacks, the first in nearly thirty years, were taken on again by the police department.⁶⁶ The real pioneers, however, were the men who joined the force during the 1870s and 1880s. For so long ignored or simply forgotten, their efforts represent an important chapter in the history of South Carolina and in the history of black Americans.

⁶⁴For black lawyers, see J.R. Oldfield, "The African American Bar in South Carolina, 1877-1915," in James Lowell Underwood and W. Lewis Burke, eds. *At Freedoms' Door: African American Founding Fathers and Lawyers in Reconstruction South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 116-129, 223-227.

⁶⁵The representation of minorities is discussed in Nicholas Alex, *Black in Blue: A Study of the Negro Policeman* (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1969), 14-16, 23-31, 200-201. See also Dulaney, *Black Police in America*, 52-53. For comparative British perspectives, see Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Thematic Inspection Report, *Winning the Race: Policing Plural Communities* (London: Home Office, 1997).

⁶⁶*Charleston News and Courier*, August 29, 1950 and June 29, 1985.