

Black State Troopers Plan To File a Bias Complaint

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A lawyer for six New Jersey state troopers said today that she would file a Federal complaint on Friday that alleges systematic racial hostility, humiliation and job discrimination against black officers.

The lawyer, Renee Steinhagen of Newark, said she would submit a two-page memorandum to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission here seeking a broad investigation into "policies, patterns, practices and activities which have resulted in disproportionate adverse treatment of persons who are black."

She said racially motivated hazing, including the distribution of offensive fliers and posters, and the lack of opportunity for black officers appeared to be pervasive and long-standing. Under a Federal order issued in 1975, the state police were forced to increase their complement of minorities from a negligible number to at least 14 percent. At present, minorities account for nearly 17 percent of the 3,150-member force, including about 8.5 percent who are black. The order was lifted last year. Fearful of Retaliation

Ms. Steinhagen described her clients as a sergeant, a detective and four troopers, who have served between three and eight years with the department and had failed to gain redress through departmental channels. She said she would withhold their names until the complaint was filed because they were fearful of retaliation within the agency. She said their concern was so great that it was not clear how many of them would ultimately agree to participate.

Responding to the allegations, which were first reported in The Daily News today, the state police superintendent, Col. Justin J. Dintino, said the agency did not tolerate discrimination of any kind. In a statement released in Trenton, he said he had not seen the complaint but would investigate fully when he did.

In a news conference later, Colonel Dintino seemed both angered at the assertions of racism and skeptical of the validity of a poster featured on The News's front page that depicted a silhouetted caricature of a black man running across a bull's-eye target. The caption reads: "Official runnin' nigger target." A Similar Poster

"Everytime there is an allegation, that poster surfaces," he said, referring to an inquiry several years ago involving a similar poster. But he said the agency would investigate.

Asked if the allegations could have originated with a disgruntled employee, he answered, "Yes."

Ms. Steinhagen said she and her clients decided to pursue the issue through the Federal commission because a court case might turn into a battle over credibility. To be successful in a Federal civil rights lawsuit, she said, a larger group of officers representing a greater cross-section of blacks on the force would be preferable.

But if the E.E.O.C. conducts a full investigation, she said, it could have the effect of uncovering the problems her clients allege and of requiring the state to pursue specific remedies. The commission, she said, has six months to act before other Federal legal action can be brought. Suit by Prison Guards

The complaint is unrelated to a lawsuit filed in Federal Court here on Tuesday by five black prison guards. The guards, who worked at the state prison in Avenel, charged that their civil rights were violated by a pattern of racial bias and harassment.

Ms. Steinhagen said the state police case had developed during the last 18 months in discussions with 10 troopers, who told of being rebuffed by superiors when they complained of harassment and unfair treatment.

She described instances in which black troopers' car tires were slashed, their doors locked and their badges stolen.

"If a badge is stolen, he can get written up," Ms. Steinhagen said. "If the trooper's uniform is not in order, he can get written up. Those very acts which might seem innocent in one setting are highly charged here. There are disciplinary repercussions."

It was also common, she said, to find racist fliers circulating in various state police barracks. One, which she said turned up at the Totowa barracks last month, was a copy of a Time magazine cover depicting a chimpanzee and the headline: "Can Animals Think?" Below it was written "No!!!" and a trooper's name and "Living Proof." She said the trooper did not complain.

"He's not speaking out," Ms. Steinhagen said. "What he does is he shrugs his shoulders and he walks away and hopes that it doesn't occur again. I think that what some of these guys are saying is that it is occurring again and it keeps occurring and it is humiliating."