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The African American Police League

*How Black law enforcement officers took on racial abuse and discrimination
in the Chicago Police Department*



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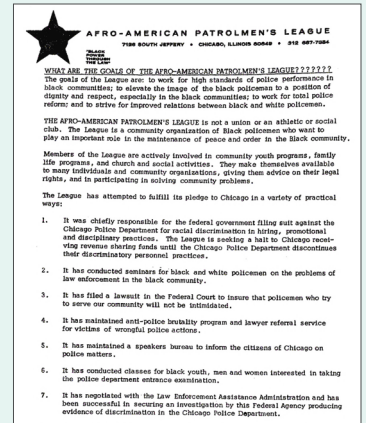
Howard Saffold is one of the founding members of the Afro American Patrolman's League (AAPL) which formed in 1968 with the goal to improve relations between law enforcement and the Black community, as well as to protect and advocate for Black law enforcement officers.

We recently interviewed Saffold about his experiences as a Black police officer in Chicago, a founding member of the AAPL and his current work as a community activist. He also told us how researchers can benefit from access to the records and documents of the AAPL for insight into the struggles which continue today.

Records of the AAPL are housed in the Chicago History Museum and are a trove of historical information including AAPL fundraising and publicity materials, organizational correspondence and meeting notes, police brutality report files, court files, news clippings and speeches. In partnership with the museum, ProQuest has scanned and indexed these documents, making them available in ProQuest History Vault where they can be searched alongside the NAACP Papers and other primary source documents related to the Black Freedom Struggle.

The AAPL was founded in 1968, a year rife with racial tensions. It was the year that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, and riots broke out across the country in response. For many people this was a turning point in the civil rights and Black power movements. Leaders of such organizations as the Black Panthers argued that the police didn't exist to protect and serve their communities, but to protect and serve against them.

This argument was emboldened by documented cases of police brutality and abuses of power against Black citizens. The Afro American Patrolman's League (later changing its name to the African American Police League) formed in response to these concerns, with the goal to improve the relationship between law enforcement and Black community members, as well as to protect and advocate for Black law enforcement officers.



How did you get involved in the AAPL?

I joined the Chicago Police Department in November 1965 and when I reported to work on the first day, I was immediately told by the district commander that I was only the second Black officer working in the district. Over the course of three years, I witnessed several incidents of abuse against Black and Latino members of the community and was myself the target of discrimination within the department, leading to my request for transfer in 1968.

Around that time I heard about an organization of Black officers that was challenging the police department regarding the treatment of Black people in Chicago. I did not know what they could deal with. I was just glad to hear somebody had the fortitude to speak out against what I had been witnessing and I attended their first meeting.





AFRO-AMERICAN POLICE LEAGUE

Our Goals are:

- • • TO WORK FOR HIGH STANDARDS OF POLICE PERFORMANCE IN ALL COMMUNITIES.
- • • TO STRIVE FOR IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE POLICE OFFICERS.
- • • TO MAINTAIN AN IMAGE OF DIGNITY AND RESPECT FOR BLACK OFFICERS.
- • • TO FIGHT FOR FAIR & EQUITABLE TREATMENT OF BLACKS IN THE AREAS OF HIRING, PROMOTIONS, ASSIGNMENTS & DISCIPLINE.
- • • TO IMPROVE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE POLICE DEPARTMENT AS AN INSTITUTION AND THE BLACK COMMUNITY.

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The Official Newsletter of the
AFRO-AMERICAN PATROLMEN'S LEAGUE

7126 SOUTH JEFFERY
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60649
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August - 1974

HOWARD SAFFOLD
PRESIDENT

RENAULT A. ROBINSON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SPECIAL ISSUE

THE LAW SUIT IN REVIEW

AFRO-AMERICAN PATROLMEN'S LEAGUE VS THE CITY OF CHICAGO AND THE CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Afro-American Patrolmen's League filed suit against the Chicago Police Department in September, 1970 charging racial discrimination in hiring, promotions, and discipline of Black and also charged that its officers and members were being harassed and punished because of their membership in the Afro-American Patrolmen's League. Part one of the lawsuit is now being heard before Federal Judge Prentiss Marshall in Federal Court. We expect a ruling on September, 16, 1974, on that date. The outcome of this case will have National significance because it will affect hiring and promoting of minority police officers throughout the United States.

When we talked about the relationship between the police department and the Black Community, we came to the conclusion that any paramilitary structure cannot police itself. There is oversight of the U.S. Army by the Congress and we thought that the police department also needed to have an oversight body.

We wanted police reform from the perspective of civilian oversight that would honestly and impartially record incidents of police misconduct. So, we started a file of reports on police brutality and this is an important part of the AAPL Records.

From the beginning I was very vocal in terms of raising important issues and questions regarding mistreatment of police officers and about conditions I had seen in the Black community. And because of my position with the Area 4 Task Force, I moved around more than other officers and I met other officers. So, for these reasons, the Afro-American Patrolmen's League asked me to be the vice president in charge of recruiting.

How did the Chicago Police Department respond to the AAPL?

The ways we were mistreated by the police department after we became members of the AAPL is extensively documented in the case of Robinson versus the Chicago Police Department [papers from this case are included in the AAPL Papers collection].

Immediately after that first press conference [by the AAPL], the Chicago Police Department decided that we'd broken a code of silence. For us to have the nerve as Black officers to speak out against the policies of the very people we were employed by – they were so incensed.

There was an almost immediate reaction depending on where you were stationed or who your supervisor was. Some of the supervisors did not hold back at all. As they began to react to us, they did everything to stop us and they got more ambitious and egregious to stop us as time went on. Right off the bat, they wanted to make sure we knew that we would not be tolerated as an organization challenging the Chicago Police Department and that we could expect pushback just because we had spoken out. We were pressured by the police department to back down and we did not have any idea how strong the resistance to us would be.

How did these events lead to the formation of the National Black Police Association?

The National Black Police Associate [NBPA] formed a result of the the Afro-American Patrolmen's League reaching out to network with other major cities dealing with the same struggles we were.

Representatives from 13 cities across the U.S. came to the first NBPA conference in St. Louis in 1972. We did not know what was going to happen, but everyone there knew we had one thing in common: taking on a system that was abusing its employees because we objected to the ways Black citizens were treated by police in cities like New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, Louisville and Atlanta.

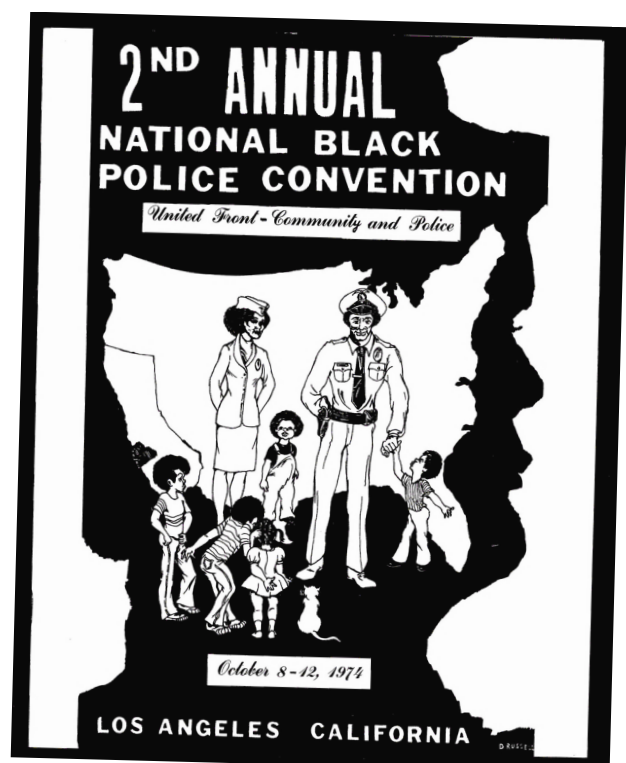
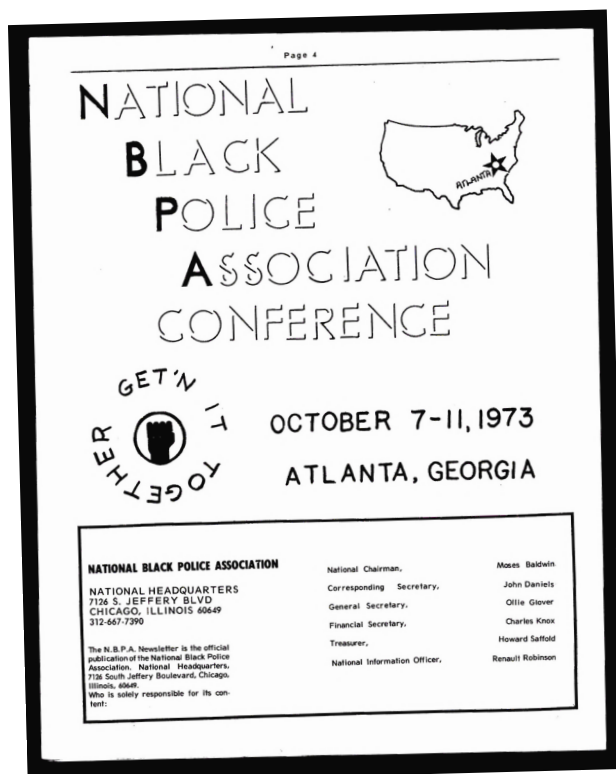
In St. Louis, representatives spent three days, almost nonstop 11-12 hour days, working out by-laws and ways to communicate between police departments. We drafted some guidelines, put some rules and objectives in place and elected some temporary officers. We were determined to put into place a national organization to deal with an area where Black people were taking heck in – from the police departments in the U.S.

The collection of AAPL Papers is comprehensive. How did your organization manage to keep such excellent records? How did they end up being housed at the Chicago History Museum?

Keeping of the records was not any deep insight on our part. We were just following a pattern because we were part of the civil rights movement activity. Record keeping was an important part of police work and we saw that we needed to document our work because of the lawsuits that we were involved in.

Coming out of the meeting in St. Louis, Renault Robinson [the original president of the AAPL] was nominated to be the National Information Officer. In this role, Renault began to keep the records of the organization. And we did not know they would be significant, but we knew that we needed to document our work and our operations on a day-to-day basis. We also knew that we needed to keep things straight in our organization.

We had a flood in the basement of our office at 71st and Jeffery Boulevard in Chicago. The piping was old. We tried to preserve the records in the file cabinets, and after the flood we decided to send the records to the Chicago History Museum beginning in about 1977. That donation to the museum came about because Renault and others knew we needed to store the records in a secure place.



Tell us about the non-profit work you are doing these days

The Positive Anti-Crime Thrust (PACT) is a 501(c) (3) organization that was founded as the non-profit educational arm of the AAPL in 1979. What we needed to do was to educate our community on ways to use government agencies, including police and the court system to serve them better. But we didn't really do much with PACT until my retirement from the Chicago Police Department in 1991.

With PACT, I wanted to take the things I had learned with the police department and with AAPL and direct them toward keeping young people away from the criminal justice system. This is accomplished by working with churches and local community organizations to have dialogue with young people about how to stay out of trouble.

We were learning to do police-community relations work, so I got more involved in the community and this self-help approach. I loved volunteering because we contributed to how we can look at ourselves as a community of families and really focus on helping our children.

Another part of my work with PACT is to intervene and interact with people who were already in the system and help them successfully reenter into the community. We also wanted to make sure people understand the value of the court system as registered voters who can participate by being available for jury duty. This empowers people to feel more like owners of the system.

We make ourselves available as resources for how governments work and how can we make government work better for us, with a special emphasis on courts and police. So, it's really a continuation of what we were doing as police officers.

NATIONAL BLACK POLICE ASSOCIATION

In November of 1972, the *National Black Police Association* was chartered as a not-for-profit corporation in the State of Illinois. At that time there were eleven Black Police Associations which made up the N.B.P.A. The cities involved were: New York, New York; Newark, New Jersey; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Denver, Colorado; New Orleans, Louisiana; Detroit, Michigan, and Chicago, Illinois.

The NBPA currently has 64 member associations in metropolitan areas. Individual members (members within metropolitan areas).

The National Black Police Association was established

- to improve the relationship between Police Department and Black Community;
- to evaluate the effects of the policies and programs of the Black community;
- to establish a free and rapid flow of information through a network;
- to increase and enhance Black police performance through education;
- to act as a mechanism to recruit minority police officers;
- to work toward a police reform in order to eliminate racial discrimination.

The National Black Police Association has established a regional structure of regional breakdown program interrelation (see regional plan of organization below). Each region has a chairman and four regional delegates and each region appoints an information officer. These elected and appointed officers represent their respective regions.

The organization is governed by a National Board of Directors which consists of the five regional chairmen and twenty regional delegates.

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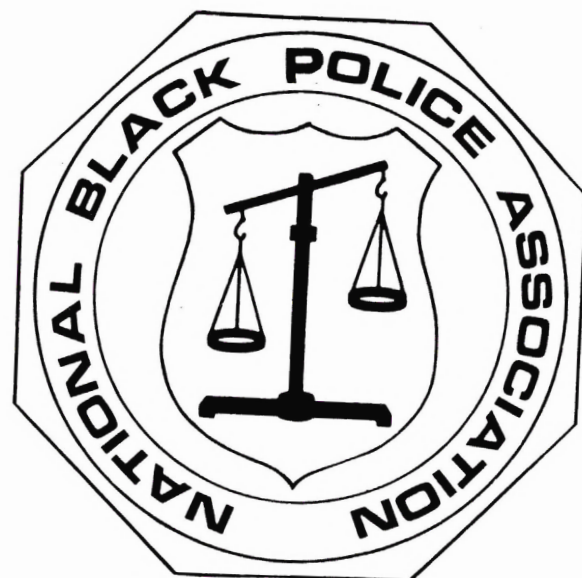
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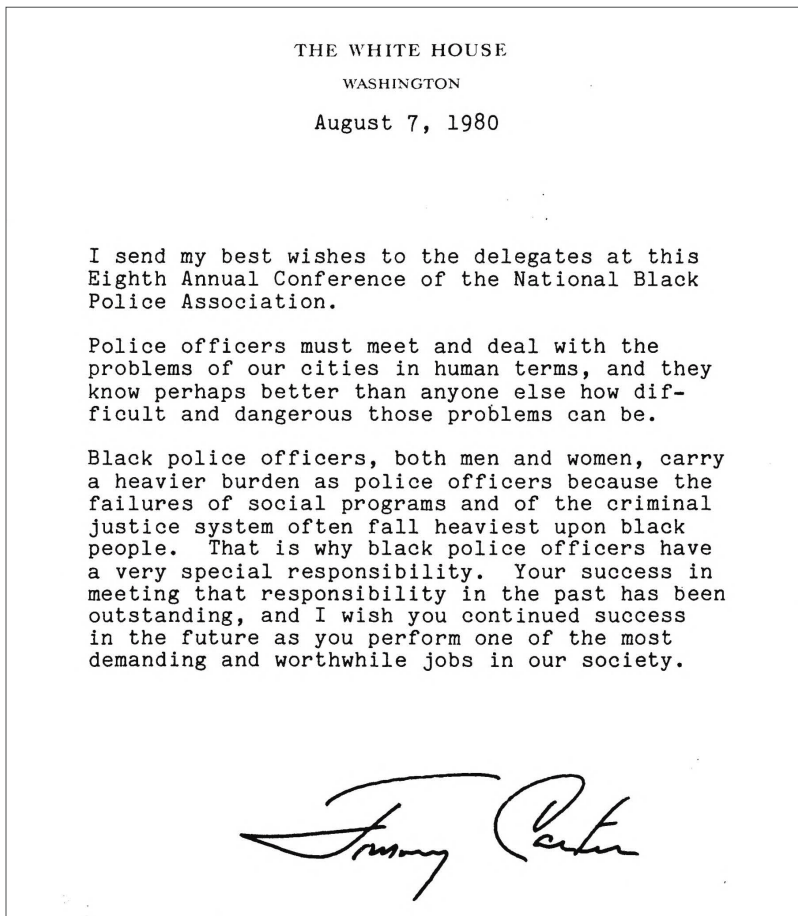
OCTOBER 17, 18 and 19, 1980

Why do you think having access to these documents will be of value to students and researchers?

Situations like the Eric Garner and Sandra Bland cases [two African Americans who in recent years were killed by police in New York and Texas, respectively] are going to continue until things change. That is one reason why the digitization of the AAPL Records is so important, to show people this history and that there is a long pattern of violence against the Black community.

That's what makes the work ProQuest is doing is valuable. We want to make these documents available so people can use the AAPL Records to see how long these problems with police have been going on, how people have worked to stop this violence and abuse, and how many people have sacrificed in this effort. And hopefully people can learn from these records to make changes in the future.

We want the AAPL collection to be part of the conversation of how we can learn from this history. I hope students will be able to learn from our collection and from the National Black Police Association records, and that these records will be a springboard to make our world a better place.



The African American Police League is a valuable primary source collection for:

- African American studies
- American history
- Civil rights movement
- Community activism
- Employment discrimination
- Human rights and incarceration
- Labor relations
- Legal studies
- Police brutality
- Police-community relations
- Race relations

