



## ILLINOIS CHIEFS: BUILDING LONG, FRIENDLY BRIDGES EVER SINCE FERGUSON

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Mountains of statistics and studies tilting in law enforcement's favor haven't resolved much in the national discourse as police have tried to build bridges to minority communities in recent years. The shouting and banners with statements such as "Stop Killing Us" are counterproductive.

There has to be a better way, and the Illinois Chiefs have found it -- a third way, a productive way, to respond to new challenges of dealing with minority communities and the media since the infamous Ferguson incident in August 2014. Our efforts include:

- Reaching out to the state-level NAACP and NOBLE representatives and being warmly embraced;
- Inviting NAACP leaders to speak at our Annual Conference and Midwest Expo every year since 2015, and them returning the favor and having us attend their annual convention for more productive dialogue;
- Hosting a series of leadership-level gatherings called "World Cafés" in Bloomington, the College of Lake County, the Quad-Cities, and Champaign;
- Hearing ILACP President James R. Kruger say that expanding the success of the Unity Partnership in DuPage County throughout the state will be one of his top priorities as president in 2017-2018, and then backing that up with a hosted luncheon in Naperville, along with the Unity Partnership. The featured speaker was Naomi Ruth King, the sister-in-law of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;
- Finding about a dozen very localized community/law enforcement partnerships already thriving in different communities in the state, and hosting a lunch in Oak Brook with chiefs and minority leaders of these local initiatives;
- Collaborating with the NAACP on a set of "shared principles" regarding how police and minority communities view law enforcement. Some believe this could become a national model for state-level collaboration.

The result of all of these efforts, mostly behind the scenes and outside the headlines, is an increase in trust between law enforcement and leaders of minority groups in Illinois at the state level and in many communities. I have said at numerous meetings that we are witnessing two parallel narratives. One is the national discourse in which police are regularly depicted, falsely, as operating with discriminatory motives and practices. The other narrative, supported by a Gallup poll, is that Americans have a great deal of respect for the police in their area, and that level of respect is surging. Here is how the story has played out in Illinois.

Four months after Michael Brown was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, the ILACP Board of Officers talked about the national clamor at its December 2014 meeting. Then-ILACP President Fred Hayes followed up with a letter to then-NAACP Illinois State President George Mitchell of Evanston:

"We are keenly aware of the NAACP's concerns about racial profiling and widespread perceptions that African Americans are too frequently the victims of suspicion by police. Inflammatory rhetoric abounds from people on many sides of these issues. While it is raising awareness, I don't think it's helping to solve deep social problems. I think we can do better in Illinois. One thing that we in law enforcement have heard repeatedly in recent months is that we have not been listening enough. I am writing to request a private meeting between a small number of our association leaders and a small number of leaders from the Illinois State Conference of the NAACP. We want to listen to you. We are asking for the kind of conversation that we believe African American leaders have been seeking."



Regina Brent (center), President of the DuPage Unity Partnership, and some chiefs give a small-group report at the Oak Brook gathering on Nov. 17, 2018.

Early in 2015, four of us met in Evanston – Hayes, Mitchell, ILACP Past President Frank Kaminski, and I. Thus began a series of formal conversations between leaders of the Illinois Chiefs and the Illinois NAACP. Joining us in those conversations early on were Illinois leaders of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) and the Center for Public Safety and Justice at the University of Illinois Chicago, first with Laura Kunard and then with Juliana Stratton. Kunard led a workshop at Chicago's NAACP west side office and explained community policing and procedural justice. The response from many of the African American leaders was: We didn't know you are doing all of this; more people need to know about it.

In those early conversations, we made a strategic decision to gather **leaders** of law enforcement with **leaders** of the African American community to have candid conversations. We scheduled an invitation-only meeting for central Illinois chiefs and NAACP leaders at the Bloomington Police Department on May 10, 2016.

Juliana Stratton of UIC facilitated the Bloomington meeting and recommended a three-hour "World Café" format. The "café" – so named because the setting was like a comfortable café in which a good conversation can occur. It included an overview of procedural justice and three rounds of dialogue around small tables.



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Chiefs and community members exchange ideas at the World Café at the Champaign Police Department on July 12, 2017.

Twenty-eight people attended – eighteen from law enforcement and ten from the NAACP/NOBLE. At tables of four to six people each, they discussed three sets of questions:

1. What draws us together? To what degree might it be possible for me to see the world through your eyes?
2. What unique contribution can we each make? How can we support each other in taking the next steps?
3. What would it take to create change in this issue? What would engage more people in working toward change?

#### Some of the key takeaways from this meeting were:

- Chiefs must take the initiative;
- We are community. Stop saying “us vs. them”;
- Police need to start internal dialogues;
- Build better relationships with the media with shared messages;
- Legitimacy issues: Black community wants good quality professional policing. The police response: So do we!
- Honest dialogue is needed;
- Change evaluations of officers.
- Reduce barriers to hiring

The feedback from this first World Café was positive, and all parties agreed that additional World Cafés in other parts of the state would be beneficial for police-community relationships. With the help of Kaminski, chief in Park Ridge, the association received two grants from a foundation, which wishes to remain anonymous, to conduct additional World Cafés and other gatherings in 2017 and 2018.

#### Three more World Cafés were planned:

**June 7, 2017 – College of Lake County, Grayslake, Illinois**

**June 8, 2017 – The Heritage Center, Hampton, Illinois (Quad Cities area)**

**July 12, 2017 – Champaign Police Department**

The process from Bloomington a year earlier was repeated, again with rich conversation. Common themes emerged from all four locations:

#### 1. Continued communication

This came up in every meeting and people expressed it in different ways. In Champaign they said there needs to be ongoing communication because it takes time. People said let's talk to each other and not at each other. Some explicitly said there needs to be communication about biases.

#### 2. Relationship building

Police and minority leaders said they need to be seen together in other than bad times, and they need to be accessible to each other. They also need to be intentional about getting together. There were also expressions of a desire for more meeting with people from the community – not just leaders. One said, “Ask the question: What will it take for blacks to believe there is quality professional policing?”

The concept of community policing also came up several times, particularly at the Lake County session, which also included a number of leaders from DuPage County. Police should spend more time out of their cars and interacting with people, and police should be rewarded for advancing police-community relations.

*Stop saying “us vs. them.”*

#### 3. Trust and Respect

Juliana Stratton said: “You can have interaction without trust. You cannot have a relationship without trust.” The word “trust” was mentioned at every World Café, with emphasis on building trust and doing more to build trust in communities.

#### 4. Education of community

Some said the public needs to be trained on how to engage with the police. Examples of this is happening in the Quad Cities with the Village of



Facilitator Juliana Stratton of UIC (upper right) listens to a table discussion at the World Café in Hampton, Illinois, in the Quad-Cities area on June 8, 2017. In the foreground are the Rev. P. Wonder Harris, Hampton Chief Terry Engle and former Monmouth Chief Bill Feithen.





Group and Location	Number of Participants at 4 "World Café" Discussions and Oak Brook community meeting					Total
	Bloomington May 10, 2016	Lake County June 7, 2017	Quad Cities June 8, 2017	Champaign July 12, 2017	Oak Brook Nov 17, 2017	
Chiefs/law enforcement	18	22	7	6	16	69
NAACP/minorities	10	9	9	16	12	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>125</b>

a Thousand Elders, an information card in the Bloomington-Normal area, and the "Flex Your Rights" video discussion led by Bob Moore (retired U.S. marshal and retired police chief) in Springfield. The Springfield office of the FBI has also produced a video about what to do when stopped by the police.

Also, the community needs to be aware of community policing and procedural justice concepts and how departments are trying to implement them at the local level.

### 5. Recruiting of and training for police

Among the topics mentioned as needed for police training were procedural justice (a formal program), community policing, cultural competency, deleting the code of silence, training in mental health issues (sometimes called "mental health first aid"), and "guardian mindset" training. Also, the training that NOBLE has been doing for twenty years. Another topic raised at several of the tables was a need to modify processes for recruiting police, to give new recruits training in cultural competency, and to work together so that more police officers from communities of color are successfully recruited.

### 6. Media relations/public relations

This came up at the most of the World Cafés: Get law enforcement's positive stories out. Several said that professional public relations firms should be utilized to help police and community leaders tell their stories. Showcase local NAACP and departments that already have partnerships. Some said **the media create the biases** and this needs to be addressed. Some said the NAACP and the police need to release shared messages to the media to reinforce their collaboration and partnership.

Also during 2017, James R. Kruger, Jr., was installed as the ILACP President. As chief in Oak Brook, he has been active in the DuPage County Unity Partnership, dedicated to building bridges between law enforcement and minority communities. One of his major goals as president is to expand the reach of the Unity Partnership statewide.

So when Unity Partnership President Regina Brent enticed Naomi King, the sister-in-law of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to come to DuPage County in January 2018, she reached out to the Illinois Chiefs to be a partner with them. They planned a lunch in Naperville for January 16, 2018, and about seventy people attended, including a dozen police chiefs and command staff from the suburbs, as well as Springfield Police Chief Kenny Winslow.

Brent and others mentioned several times how Chief Dave Anderson of Lisle was so receptive and instrumental in building the Unity Partnership, but Anderson quickly credits other chiefs, such as Kruger, Woodridge Chief Brian Cunningham, and Darien Chief Greg Thomas. And others. Mrs. King inspired the audience with gentle pleas for relationship building, forgiveness,

reconciliation, and unity. She also said that access to education is a critical aspect of addressing race relations. The Unity Partnership and ILACP jointly gave Mrs. King a Distinguished Service Award.

This event occurred after another one in DuPage County – a daylong workshop in November 2017 on the McDonald's Corporation campus in Oak Brook. There was statewide representation of leaders, invited because of their local initiatives involving chiefs and minority community leaders. People attended from Bensenville, Northlake, Lake Zurich, Springfield, Champaign and Urbana, East Moline, Bloomington and Normal, Oak Brook, Lisle, Hazel Crest, the Peoria Park District, and the Union Pacific Railroad. Led by facilitators Maali Watts Carolyn and Deanna Shoss, they exchanged ideas about what works at the local level in building relationships.



Sharing a lighter moment at the Oak Brook gathering at Hamburger University are Champaign Chief Anthony Cobb (in back) and Hazel Crest Chief Mitchell Davis III (in front).

The World Cafés succeeded in bringing together fifty-three law enforcement leaders and forty-four NAACP/minority group leaders in four different Illinois cities, for a total of ninety-seven participants. Then there were another twenty-eight in Oak Brook and seventy in Naperville.

None of the events were designed to produce a program or prescription for improved police-community relationships. Instead, they were designed to bring people together and build trust and relationships. The participants did indeed build trust with each other in the course of the conversations, and just as importantly, they wanted more of these conversations and they wanted to include more people.

An immediate next step is for ILACP and NAACP leaders to work collaboratively on a set of "shared principles" about what effective police-community

relationships would look like. As this magazine was going to the printer, several drafts had been shared and the Board of Officers had several robust conversations about them. After boards of both organizations have an agreed document, they will share it statewide.

There is reason for optimism that police-community relationships in Illinois will enjoy continuous improvement due to the formal and informal relationships being developed by the police at the local and state levels, and by a growing number of local partnerships. The Illinois Chiefs, the Illinois NAACP, NOBLE and many community leaders are committed to following up on the success of these activities in 2018 and beyond.

It seems clear that building stronger relationships of trust is the key. As ILACP President Kruger said at the Naperville lunch with Mrs. King: "What has become more apparent the more we work together is that we all want the same thing, to live in safe communities and the opportunity for everyone to be able to live out the American dream and prosper to their highest potential." ■