

Tampa Bay Times

Biking Black | 1

LIVINGSTON AWARD FOR YOUNG JOURNALISTS



Bicyclists ride at night along Main Street in West Tampa, where Tampa police wrote dozens of tickets last year for offenses such as riding with no light.

Stopped, searched and ticketed. On a bike? **Odds are you're black**

By Alexandra Zayas and Kameel Stanley, Times Staff Writers

If the tickets are any indication, Tampa residents must be the lousiest bicyclists in Florida.

They don't use lights at night. Don't ride close enough to the curb. Can't manage to keep their hands on the handlebars.

In the past three years, Tampa police have written 2,504 bike tickets — more than Jacksonville, Miami, St. Petersburg and Orlando combined.

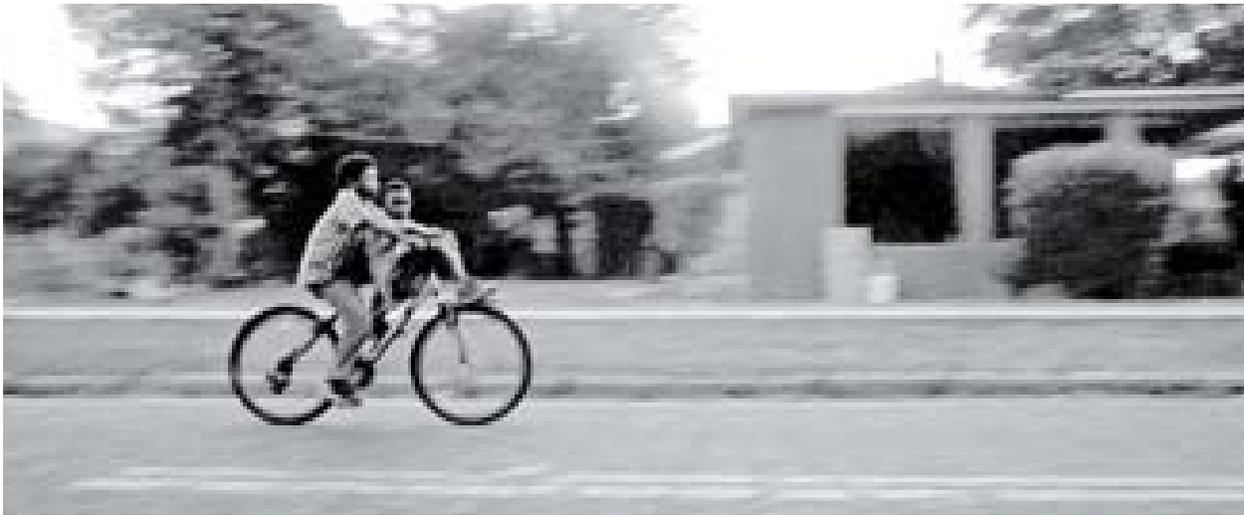
Police say they are gung ho about

bike safety and focused on stopping a plague of bike thefts.

But here's something they don't mention about the people they ticket:

Eight out of 10 are black.

A *Tampa Bay Times* investigation has found that Tampa police are targeting poor, black neighborhoods with obscure subsections of a Florida statute that outlaws things most people have tried on a bike, like riding with no light or carrying a friend on



Riding on handlebars is against state law, which Tampa police use as a reason to stop bicyclists. Judges remember cases in which kids were pulled over, then charged with other crimes.

the handlebars.

Officers use these minor violations as an excuse to stop, question and search almost anyone on wheels. The department doesn't just condone these stops, it encourages them, pushing officers who patrol high-crime neighborhoods to do as many as possible.

There was the 56-year-old man who rode his bike through a stop sign while pulling a lawnmower. Police handcuffed him while verifying he had, indeed, borrowed the mower from a friend.

There was the 54-year-old man whose bike was confiscated because he couldn't produce a receipt to prove it was his.

One woman was walking her bike home after cooking for an elderly neighbor. She said she was balancing a plate of fish and grits in one hand when an officer flagged her down and issued her a \$51 ticket for not having a light. With late fees, it has since ballooned to \$90. She doesn't have the money to pay.

The *Times* analyzed more than 10,000 bicycle tickets Tampa police issued in the past dozen years. The newspaper found that even though blacks make up about a quarter of the city's population, they received 79 percent of the bike tickets.

Some riders have been stopped more than a dozen times through the years, and issued as many as 17 tickets. Some have been ticketed three times in one day.

It's possible blacks in some areas use bicycles more than whites. But that's not what's driving the disparity.

Police are targeting certain high-crime neighborhoods and nitpicking cyclists as a way to curb crime. They hope they will catch someone with a stolen bike or with drugs or that they will scare thieves away.

"This is not a coincidence," said Police Chief Jane Castor. "Many individuals receiving bike citations are involved in criminal activity."

She said her department has done such a good job curbing auto theft that bikes have "become the most

common mode of transportation for criminals.”

Many of the tickets did go to convicted criminals, including some people interviewed for this story. And there are cases where police stopped someone under suspicious circumstances and found a gun or caught a burglar.

But most bike stops that led to a ticket turned up no illegal activity; only 20 percent of adults ticketed last year were arrested.

When police did arrest someone, it was almost always for a small amount of drugs or a misdemeanor like trespassing.

One man went to jail for refusing to sign a ticket.

On Davis Islands, where Mayor Bob Buckhorn lives near baseball star Derek Jeter, police could issue multiple tickets. But they don't. One recent night, the Times observed a couple leaving an ice cream shop on unlit beach cruisers and a cyclist riding along the dark coastline, visible only because of the reflectors on his pedals.

Only one ticket was written last year on Davis Islands. It went to a black man.

The same goes for Bayshore Boulevard, another of the city's main biking destinations. Only one person got a ticket there last year. He, too, is black.

“Each neighborhood has a unique set of issues,” Castor said. “What is a problem in one area of the city may not be in another. We have an obligation to address the individual issues that plague each neighborhood.”

For weeks, the *Times* asked Castor for an interview. But the police chief declined, instead providing written statements.

Mayor Buckhorn also declined comment, saying Castor's statement “speaks for itself.”



“Each neighborhood has a unique set of issues. What is a problem in one area of the city may not be in another. We have an obligation to address the individual issues that plague each neighborhood.”

Tampa police Chief **Jane Castor**



Alphonso Lee King had his bicycle confiscated by a Tampa police officer in West Tampa because he couldn't produce a receipt to prove it was his.

The *Times*' findings concern others — Hillsborough Circuit judges and the Public Defender, social rights advocates and some of the leading researchers in race and policing.

“You almost roll your eyes when you read the reports,” said Circuit Judge Tracy Sheehan. “Oh no, another bike stop, another kid riding on the handlebars, here we go. And certainly, we

have laws and we should all follow the law, but it occurred to me the stops were all occurring in certain neighborhoods and with certain children, and not in my neighborhood, and not with the white kids.”

Joyce Hamilton Henry, Director of Advocacy for ACLU of Florida, wants to know: “If it’s not racial profiling, what is it?”

When first asked about the bicycle tickets, Tampa police directed inquiries to Capt. Ruben Delgado, who provided reporters with a strategy created a few years ago to encourage cyclists to register their bikes so officers could identify them if they were stolen.

He denied bicycle law was being used primarily to root out drugs or fight crime unrelated to bikes.

“We want to see the thefts of bicycles go down. We want to see the safety get better so there are less crashes,” he said. “Whether it leads to something else or not is going to be secondary.”

He said when officers find people in violation of bike law, they hand out lights and give warnings. Tickets, he said, are a last resort.

But the *Times* found that the department has ticketed hundreds of black bicyclists each year for more than a decade.

The racial breakdown of the tickets suggests police are using their discretion differently when it comes to bikes. For more serious driving offenses, blacks were not more likely to be cited. For failing to stop at a red light in 2014, blacks got only 11 percent of tickets. Bike tickets that year, 81 percent.

Internal police department records show a sustained effort to encourage bike stops as a means to reduce more serious crimes.

Officers get yearly “productivity re-

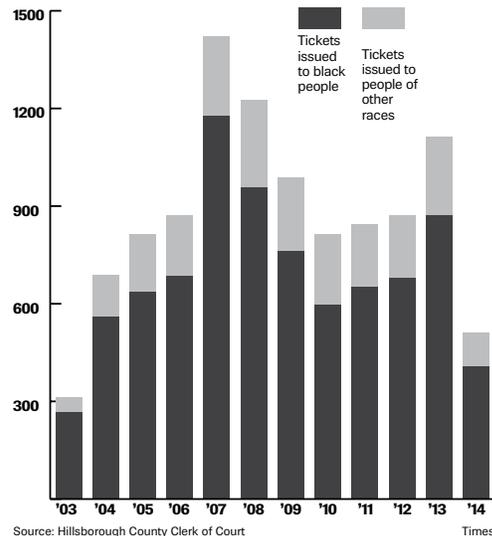


“Certainly, we have laws and we should all follow the law, but it occurred to me the stops were all occurring in certain neighborhoods and with certain children, and not in my neighborhood, and not with the white kids.”

Circuit Judge **Tracy Sheehan**

Racial disparity

The percentage of bike tickets issued to black people by the Tampa Police Department remains consistently high year to year even as the total number of tickets varies widely.



Source: Hillsborough County Clerk of Court

Times

ports,” calculating, in part, how many tickets they give. One personnel file detailed a “red grid patrol” in which officers are encouraged to “engage and identify offenders through street checks, bike stops and traffic stops.”

In another file, a supervisor told a new officer he should learn rarely used traffic statutes. The fact that he wasn’t familiar with them was noted as a “significant weakness” in his 2012 performance review. The next year, the new officer impressed his bosses with his “dramatic increase” in “self-initiated activity.”

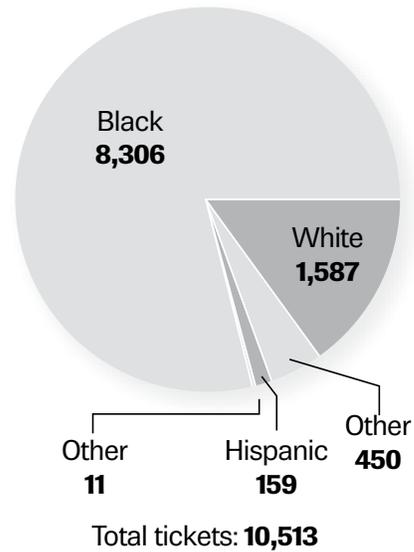
He wrote 111 bike tickets, the most in the department. All but four of the cyclists were black.

Bike tickets got special attention in 2007 when a squad set out on a mission dubbed “Bicycle Blitzkrieg.”

The goal, according to a department memo, was “to aggressively enforce bicycle infractions ... where

Breakdown of bicycle tickets issued by Tampa police

From 2003 to 2014



Source: Hillsborough County Clerk of Court

Times



Jamarcus Randolph, left, watches his friends Angel Johnson, 17, center, and Alex Carter talk at the North Boulevard Homes, where bike tickets have often been issued.



Bicyclists ride after sunset on Bayshore Boulevard in South Tampa where, last year, only one ticket was given to a bicyclist without a light. He was black.

there has been increased criminal activity.”

Stopping people on bikes, especially at night, would introduce officers to “potential criminals, thus opening more avenues to make arrests and clear the streets of the subjects that are committing the crimes.”

During the three-month blitz, officers arrested dozens and issued 266 citations and the squad was given an award lauding its “significant impact in reducing crime.”

For the past three years, no law enforcement agency in the state has given as many bicycle tickets as the Tampa Police Department. It is responsible for 12 percent of all bike tickets written in Florida.

Last year, Tampa police wrote at least four tickets for something no longer illegal: riding a bike without holding the handlebars.

Former Sen. Ellyn Bogdanoff, R-Fort Lauderdale, re-members submitting the violation for

repeal back in 2012, when legislators were encouraged to weed out archaic and obsolete laws.

This one fit the bill.

“It was against the law,” she said. “I mean, really? ... As a kid, I used to ride without my hands all the time.”

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For many who live just west of downtown, in the blocks surrounding the city’s oldest, ugliest public housing complex, the world is only as large as the distance they can ride their bicycles. Residents pedal to work, to school, to pick up dinner and to attend church.

It isn’t hard to find people who have been stopped by police and issued tickets: The kid riding home from football practice, the guy detailing cars. They were cited last year along with dozens of their neighbors.

Then there was Alphonso Lee King, ordered to remove a bag of food and

a lock from his bicycle so an officer could confiscate it “due to the fact the bicycle is worth over \$500,” the officer wrote, “and King was not able to produce any type of documentation that he bought the bike legally.”

King said he and his brother, a scrapper, found the bike frame in a Dumpster and assembled it from parts. The bike was the only way he could get around after getting out of prison last summer for dealing drugs.

Tampa police impounded it for 90 days, advertising it as “found” property, even though it had not been reported stolen.

These types of stops also happen in other low-income, high-crime, predominantly black pockets, including Sulphur Springs and parts of East Tampa.

In Tampa Heights, police stopped 63-year-old Lloyd Brown for not having lights on his bike — except he did, and they almost immediately acknowledged that. “Well, I’m glad to see you’re in compliance today, sir,” an officer said as a dashboard camera recorded.

But the 2013 encounter didn’t end there. The officer kept Brown’s identification and questioned him about what he’d bought at the grocery store.

The interrogation escalated to whether he used drugs, and a search revealed a small amount of crack.

“Let me explain something to you, okay?” the officer said. “If you do anything dumb, your head will hit this ground very hard, okay? And you will go to the hospital before you go to jail.”

The felony charge, pleaded down to a misdemeanor, impeded Brown’s ability to get an apartment, forcing him to move in with relatives.

Brown was shuttling from one home to another one morning a few weeks ago in North Tampa, towing

Don’t want a bike ticket? Avoid these behaviors

Carrying a friend on the handlebars

The law forbids “carrying more persons at one time than the number for which it is designed.”

Riding without a light

You can’t rely on just the reflectors that come with your bike. Statute requires a white front light visible from 500 feet, and a back red light visible from 600 feet. Have neither? You can get two tickets.

Riding too slowly

If there is no bike lane, keep up with the speed of cars, or ride close to the right-hand curb. Bike law doesn’t specify how close.

No hands, ma!

Until 2012, it was illegal to ride without at least one hand on the grips. Though it’s legal now, Tampa Police still ticketed people last year for riding with no hands.

all of his belongings on his bike, when another officer stopped him for riding in the middle of the street.

The officer checked his identification and flipped his bike to look at the serial number. It bore a sticker: God’s Pedal Power Ministry. “I got it from a church!” Brown said.

The officer sent him on his way.

The scenario has become cliché in these parts, where kids as young as 12 describe the same dance grown men recall from growing up in Tampa.

“It’s always the light, or to run your VIN number,” said 31-year-old Anthony Gilbert of College Hill. “‘Let’s have your ID. Just stand in front of my cruiser.’ Now, you’re being humiliated. Your friend’s riding by. Your reverend might be riding by. Now, you’ve got to go to church. The pastor’s going to be like, ‘What happened, son?’”

Last year, officers stopped a man in Belmont Heights after he ran a stop sign on an unlit bike. They searched 33-year-old Artis Hancock, and when he tried to flee, a scuffle ensued. Hancock wound up on the ground as an officer punched, kicked and choked him to unconsciousness.

The officer said Hancock reached for his Taser. A public defender later argued the search was illegal and that Hancock’s charges, including drug possession, should be dismissed.

In Hillsborough Circuit Court, Judge Samantha Ward listened to the

officers try to justify their suspicion that Hancock may have had a weapon on him, which they said prompted them to search Hancock without consent.

“He was in a high-crime area,” said one officer.

“He had large clothing,” said another.

Before she dismissed all of Hancock’s criminal charges, Ward quipped:

“Was he black, too?”

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Tampa officers’ emphasis on bike stops is a logical extension of the department’s crime fighting philosophy.

Like many cities across the nation, Tampa for years has embraced “proactive” policing.

Instead of waiting to respond to 911 calls, officers now look for ways to ini-



Herbert Johnson is one of at least three workers at the West Fortune Street Fish Market in West Tampa who have been stopped on their bikes.

tiate contact with potential lawbreakers and head off crime before it happens.

Agencies across the country, including Tampa, credit the approach for a steep decrease in crime.

Earlier this year, Castor spoke in Washington in front of President Barack Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

She emphasized the importance of building trust in high crime neighborhoods.

"Every encounter with an officer is an opportunity to build a positive partnership in the community. It creates trust that must be the foundation of our relationship with our citizens," she said.

"I always remind them to never lose sight of the power they have in their badges, the power to not only take away someone's freedom, but possibly their life. This power must be used wisely and only when necessary."

Experts say the trust Castor references is not helped when communities feel they are being targeted by practices like Tampa's bike citation efforts. Police departments can — and have — gotten in trouble when proactive policing leads to racially lopsided enforcement of the law.

A federal judge in 2013 declared New York's "stop and frisk" program unconstitutional and ordered reforms.

And this year, the U.S. Justice Department declared illegal certain biased tactics used by police in Ferguson, Mo., where 18-year-old Michael Brown, shot dead by an officer, was initially stopped for walking in the middle of the street.

In their investigation, officials highlighted the percentage of citations police wrote to blacks in Ferguson. They got 90 percent of tickets even though they make up only 67 percent of the

population.

When it comes to bike tickets, Tampa's disparity is even more extreme.

In her written statement, Castor said the high number of tickets written to black cyclists in Tampa had nothing to do with their race.

As evidence, she cited the racial breakdown of people arrested in Tampa for driving drunk. Last year, 76 percent of them were white men.

"That does not mean we are targeting white males, it simply means that we are addressing a crime pattern," Castor wrote. "If those drivers weren't driving impaired, they would not be stopped. The same applies to bicyclists."

Sam Brooke, Deputy Legal Director of the Economic Justice Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, said *Times'* findings reminded him of both Ferguson and "stop and frisk."

"If we authorize police to stop everyone walking down the street at all times, they would, of course, find people violating the law," Brooke said. "The question is, if we, as a society, should be tolerating that."

Bike stops have led to enough arrests that some Hillsborough County judges have begun to notice the racial disparity.

Typical of their defendants is 14-year-old Antonio Barnes, who sped home past the broken windows of Belmont Heights a couple of years ago, hoping to return borrowed headphones to a relative before the last bus of the night. He pedaled his unlit bike as fast as he could until he felt the spotlight of a police cruiser.

"I was so scared," he remembers. He had a small amount of marijuana in his pocket.

Almost instantly, the cops were out of their cruiser, ordering him to get off the bike, get his hand out of his

pocket, tell them his name. Antonio couldn't even remember that. He was out of breath, soaked in sweat, staring at the light like a deer in traffic.

Did he have anything illegal on him they asked?

He told the truth and went to jail.

Circuit Judge Rex Barbas ultimately dismissed the case because officers didn't read Antonio his rights before questioning him. Most often, though, the cases stick, because officers can stop people for one reason even if they have another.

"It's legal," Barbas said. "But unfair."

Barbas spent three years hearing juvenile cases. He couldn't remember a single white kid arrested after a bike stop.

"We'd like to think we can all go about our lives without intrusion, without anybody looking in our pockets," said Judge Sheehan. "If we're all going to take a hard approach on bike riding without lights, then let's do it across the city and across the county."

Even if a stop amounts to no more than a bike ticket, it can still have lasting consequences.

Children as young as 11 have been ticketed and reported to collection agencies, the Times found.

The consequences worsen when they begin to drive.

Eric Davis, who grew up in one of the zones patrolled by the Bicycle Blitzkrieg squad, racked up 13 bike tickets as a teen.

The unpaid tickets triggered a driver's license suspension, which landed Davis in jail when he was caught behind the wheel of a car. Now 23, he has been deemed a "habitual traffic offender," even though he never got a single ticket for bad driving.

Davis said he didn't understand the implications when he got his first ticket at 15. "I didn't know it would go to my license," he said. "It's just nasty,

man."

Despite the thousands of hours spent by police, court clerks, public defenders, prosecutors and judges on enforcement of bicycle laws, it's hard to tell what Tampa gets out of them.

Even though 2013 was one of the department's highest ticketing years, bike crashes still rose the following year by 20 percent. Bike thefts, too, climbed 15 percent.

Ticketed bicyclists are being arrested mostly for small drug busts or for misdemeanor charges that stem from their interaction with police during the stop, the *Times* found.

Castor said many people guilty of serious crimes are not issued a bike ticket during a stop. For that reason, the Times' analysis would not capture them.

"We continue to believe that our enforcement practices have reduced crime in Tampa," Castor said.

Time will tell if it works for Raymond Contreras.

In 2013, two officers spotted the 53-year-old as he rode his bicycle through a stop sign on a residential street. He was an easy arrest.

The previous year, the same two officers had stopped him on his bike and found cocaine under the rim of his hat. He did a week in jail and walked away from the courthouse owing just court costs.

Now here he was again, riding a bike, wearing a hat.

Another piece of crack, another felony case. After five months of court hearings and a seven-page motion to suppress by his public defender, Contreras walked away with a down-pleaded misdemeanor and more court costs.

Since 2008, Tampa police officers have ticketed Contreras 17 times for bicycle offenses from riding a bike without a light to riding more than

“two abreast.” Chief Castor said he’s been stopped other times and issued only warnings.

Sometimes, they find a personal stash of drugs, sometimes they don’t. He owes more than \$1,000 in bike tickets and another \$1,000 in court costs.

No one has collected a dime.

Times computer-assisted reporting specialist Connie Humburg, researcher Caryn Baird, data specialist Alexis N. Sanchez and photojournalist Octavio Jones contributed to this report. Reach Alexandra Zayas at azayas@tampabay.com or 727-893-8413. Follow @alexandrazayas. Reach Kameel Stanley at kstanley@tampabay.com or 727-893-8643. Follow @cornandpotatoes. Designed by Alexis N. Sanchez.

In Tampa, ratio leads to tickets

Police in the city issue vastly more tickets because their job rating depends on it.

By Alexandra Zayas, Times Staff Writer

You may not know it, but your odds of getting in trouble skyrocket in Tampa.

No valid license? You're twice as likely to get a ticket than in the rest of Florida.

No proof of insurance? Also double the chance.

Tampa police wrote more tickets last year than sheriff's offices in Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco counties combined; more per capita than cops in Jacksonville, Miami, St. Petersburg and Orlando, the state's four other largest cities.

And no other law enforcement agency in the state arrests more people than the Tampa Police Department.

Once you understand how the department measures officer productivity, it's easy to see why.

Each arrest, each ticket, feeds into a formula that calculates an officer's "productivity ratio" — number of hours worked divided by the number of tickets and arrests.

The more officers do, the better they score.

But the formula doesn't discrim-

inate between a murder arrest and a jaywalking ticket; they carry the same weight.

For years, the policy has put pressure on officers to crank out arrests and tickets, leading to allegations of harassment, racial profiling and over-policing.

Case in point: this year's *Tampa Bay Times* investigation revealing how Tampa police wrote more tickets for bicycle offenses than any other law enforcement agency in the state, and that eight out of 10 of the cyclists were black.

In a series of community forums and public hearings that followed, complaints circled back to the idea that residents of high-crime neighborhoods — where the department allocates more officers — felt like the aggressive policing was something happening to them, not for them.

Jon Dengler, a white 35-year-old who runs a ministry to feed the poor, lives in Ybor Heights. In the past six years, he has gotten nine traffic tickets in Tampa, but not a single one for bad driving. In 2013, he got three from the same officer, adding up to

\$345, because his registration had expired and he didn't have his insurance card or license handy. Two of those tickets were dismissed.

"I love our neighborhood and I don't feel anxious or afraid," he told City Council earlier this year. "But when I see TPD on the street, I do get nervous. I don't get nervous because I'm up to no good, but because of who they are and represent in our community."

A shift is now underway at the department, one that could change the way officers do their jobs.

It involves the new chief, a new formula and a new definition for what it means to be "productive."

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Though the Tampa Police Department produces detailed statistics to make sure officers are doing their jobs — counting every report they write, tabulating every stolen penny they recover — the ratio has proven to be a powerful little number.

A good one glows on an evaluation. A bad one can stand in the way of a promotion, or even lead to a suspension.

"It was a good program set up to get rid of the guys who weren't producing, sitting under a tree all night," said Brian Reschke, a patrol officer who retired in 2011. "It just got carried away."

To understand how the department got to this point, you need to go back to 2001, when then-Police Chief Bennie Holder sought to come up with an answer to this question:

"You've got officers out there working for 40 hours," he told the Times. "How do you know you're getting 40 hours of work out of them?"

His administration implemented a series of measures modeled after

tools used to evaluate production in corporate America. There was one that calculated time spent on public aid and one that showed how often an officer found a case instead of waiting for a call to come in.

All of those metrics are still in place today, but the one officers now refer to simply as the productivity ratio calculates how long it takes for an officer to either arrest or ticket someone.

It wasn't supposed to be like a quota.

"This wasn't made to say you have to give X number of tickets, make X numbers of arrests," Holder told the Times. "You can be productive without writing 100 tickets or putting 100 people in jail."

A lot of things happened after Chief Holder retired in 2003.

Chief Stephen Hogue, and later Chief Jane Castor, embraced a proactive policing model tasking officers with finding crime instead of waiting for calls. Technology and statistics became increasingly important, with analysts studying crime patterns and districts deploying resources to hot spots.

Crime dropped.

It's dropped steadily across the nation, in part because of this kind of modern policing and in part because of societal factors outside of any one department's control.

But by 2005, the department's annual report attributed the lowest crime rate in 28 years to "productivity," including a 14 percent increase in citations and a 15 percent increase in arrests.

The department arrested 10,859 more people that year — enough to fill half the city's hockey arena — with growth mostly in the lowest category of offense, "miscellaneous" charges like driving with a suspended license.

"The assumption was, well if you go

out and make more arrests and you write more tickets, crime is going to drop more,” said Vincent Gericitano, president of the Tampa Police Benevolent Association.

By 2007, Tampa led the state in arrests; almost half the crimes were “miscellaneous.”

“Some supervisors looked at the productivity ratio as the only critique or metric on judging an officer’s productivity,” Gericitano said.

Officers who didn’t write many tickets were put on notice.

There was the officer “recognized by many children in the Belmont Heights area as a positive role model,” according to his evaluation.

Issue more traffic citations, his evaluation said.

There was one district’s “Officer of the Month,” also recognized for “catch of the month” twice in a year.

Improve traffic law enforcement ... by 30 percent, he was told.

Then there was the officer whose supervisor noted, “He knows the area he patrols, but more importantly, he knows the people and the people know him... He does not talk at them or down to them ... He is objective and leaves people feeling he was interested in serving them.”

Year after year, he was evaluated “below expectations” because of his poor productivity ratio.

He wrote letters to the administration calling the ratio “damaging... to the men and women who abandon their ideals to comply with it.”

If I could only change the way I treat people out here — see them less through the lens of sacred trust they place in us and more as stats to be harvested by us, resolution would be easy.

I could merely “play the game,” see what we do not as putting on a uniform but instead as wearing a cos-

tume, then achieve the magic number sought by my supervisors that could be — as one of my old captains said — “easily achieved within the first 10 minutes of each shift.”

The officer was ultimately cited with insubordination and violations of standards of conduct for refusing to increase traffic stops and failing to improve his productivity ratio.

He was suspended for three days.

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Eric Ward became chief of police at a critical time this past May, as his department grappled with a spate of inner-city shootings, lack of witness cooperation and calls for a civil rights investigation of the racial disparity the *Times* found in bicycle tickets.

The department’s relationship with Tampa’s black community was under a microscope, and here came a man who knew both sides of that experience.

He remembers how angry he felt as a kid after an officer questioned him in a convenience store as he tried to buy a jug of milk.

But he also remembers playing in the Police Athletic League.

As a first order of business, Ward told officers to stop worrying so much about their statistics and focus on getting to know the people they police.

He told supervisors to look at the many activities the department already tracks for each officer instead of just the ratio.

“That old fashioned ‘arrest, arrest, arrest, citation, citation, citation’ is not the key. It’s not going to solve our problem with the crime,” Ward told the *Times*. “Getting back in to the community, walking around, talking to people. That alone will reduce crime.”

He talks of “quality over quantity,” of arresting “the right people,” of “discretion.”

He recalls telling an officer patrolling a park that if he saw kids throwing a ball around, he should join the game. “If you worry about your uniform getting dirty,” the chief said, “I’ll buy you a new uniform.”

The current formula considers tag football a waste of time.

Ward is hoping to change the math with the help of Sgt. Felicia Pecora, who says she has been trying to come up with a better way to measure productivity for years.

She downplayed the ratio’s influence on today’s department, saying supervisors take a more nuanced view than they did when it was first implemented. Nonetheless, she likened the ratio to “when Ford put out the Pinto.”

“It’s a beta version” she said. “Everybody’s got to start somewhere.”

In February, the department made a significant change to the ratio, giving officers credit for written warnings instead of just citations.

It shows in the data. Unless something drastic happens, Tampa is on track to have its lowest ticketing year in at least a decade.

Pecora’s rough draft of a new series of formulas doesn’t count tickets at all.

Among actions counted: traffic stops, street checks, guns seized, stolen cars recovered, reports written and arrests made from reports.

Instead of measuring how long it takes to accomplish these actions, it calculates the percentage of each of those things an officer contributes to a squad. It would still allow supervisors to spot those who aren’t pulling their weight, but would reward the investigative types along with the enforcers.

She calls it a “contribution ratio” and is running versions of it by the chief and her colleagues.

Pecora told of an incident earlier this month in which she and one of her officers tried to track down the owner of an abandoned, broken-down car. Their search led to a home in Belmont Heights and a frail, elderly woman who answered the door.

She said the car belonged to her son, and that he hadn’t been home since the previous night. They asked if she had eaten since then, and she said she was hungry. Pecora heated up some rice and beans and bought groceries to stock the woman’s pantry. By the time the sergeant returned, the son had arrived.

The officers lectured him about keeping his mother fed, closed out the car case and referred the family for elderly services.

None of it counted toward the productivity ratio.

Times computer-assisted reporting specialist Connie Humburg and staff writer Anthony Cormier contributed to this report. Alexandra Zayas can be reached at azayas@tampabay.com.

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LIVINGSTON AWARD FOR YOUNG JOURNALISTS



Tampa police Chief Jane Castor defended her department's operations during a news conference Wednesday. She touted the reduction in crime in Tampa but acknowledged the ticket disparity shown in the *Tampa Bay Times* investigation.

Feds to look into black bike tickets

Tampa's mayor and police chief say numbers are troublesome.

By Kameel Stanley and Alexandra Zayas, Times Staff Writers

The U.S. Department of Justice will review the Tampa Police Department's enforcement of bicycle laws after a *Tampa Bay Times* investigation found 79 percent of the agency's bike tickets go to black residents.

Mayor Bob Buckhorn said Wednesday that he and police Chief Jane Castor asked federal officials to review the program because their expertise can "bring clarity to us and to the community and may help evolve our current strategies."

"Racial profiling is not just illegal, it is unjust and immoral. It is not — and has never been — tolerated in the Tampa Police Department or any city department or division," Buckhorn said in a statement that was his first public comment on the issue.

At a news conference, Castor defended her department's tactics and repeatedly touted the drop in crime in the city. But she acknowledged the stark disparity the *Times* investigation found.

“We agree that these statistics for bike citations are troublesome and we need to review this and we need to decide as a community what we need to do about this,” Castor said.

Beginning immediately, Buckhorn said, Tampa police will implement a new tracking system to monitor every traffic stop, ticket and warning issued, including those for cyclists.

All officers, he said, will be reminded of the appropriate policies and procedures for issuing citations to cyclists. Castor said there are plans to set up monthly meetings where the public can talk to a department representative and the NAACP about any issues with police treatment.

A *Times* investigation published over the weekend showed that Tampa police issue more bicycle tickets than any other agency in Florida, including those in Jacksonville, Miami, St. Petersburg and Orlando combined. Eight out of 10 go to blacks, even though blacks make up just 26 percent of the city’s population.

Most of these tickets cluster in the city’s poor, black neighborhoods. Some residents have received more than a dozen tickets; some have gotten more than three tickets in one day.

The *Times* found that, for years, Tampa police have used bike stops as a proactive policing strategy in high-crime neighborhoods. The department has encouraged officers to pull over people for infractions like riding without a light and carrying a rider on the handlebars in hopes of uncovering or preventing greater crimes.

City Council Chairman Frank Reddick said the newspaper’s findings are “embarrassing” and called for an investigation into whether civil rights had been violated.

Legal experts interviewed by the *Times* said there was strong evidence

to believe so.

Castor did not speak to these concerns in an op-ed published this week. She noted blacks receive 29 percent of tickets for all traffic offenses in Tampa, and reiterated her point that many who receive bike tickets are involved in criminal activity. She also gave examples of people on bikes committing crimes.

“Our tactics are very strategic and we’re also very surgical in the way we go out and enforce crime,” Castor said Wednesday at her news conference. “We don’t throw a net over an area.”

Community leaders said they are pleased with the decision to have an independent review of the department’s practices.

“I think that makes sense. It is a problem,” said W. James Favorite, pastor of the Beulah Baptist Institutional Church.

Favorite said local pastors and community leaders have been talking with law enforcement, schools and Justice Department officials in recent months about issues related to policing in the black community, including gun violence and police officer training.

Local pastor and former Tampa City Council and Hillsborough County Commission chairman Tom Scott said he has been attending similar meetings.

“This here is another issue that we must address to make sure there is justice and equality and to ensure that there is no profiling,” he said.

Since the *Times* story was published, Scott said, there has been a lot of discussion among black residents. When he went for his daily 5:30 a.m. workout at the Central City YMCA, “the minute I opened the door, there was a big discussion.”

Officials at the American Civil Liberties Union said they are analyzing

the ticket data to determine whether to file a lawsuit.

Buckhorn said the Justice Department review will be coordinated by assistant police Chief Eric Ward, a finalist for Castor's job. She is stepping down as chief May 8.

The city will share the report with the public.

"There are still people outraged in the black community," Reddick said. "I think a lot of people, including me, think this could have been handled a lot better. ... We're all about working with police, trying to bridge the gap. When these types of things (happen), it expands that gap instead of making us come closer."

Prior to publication, the *Times* repeatedly asked the Tampa Police Department for an interview with Castor. She declined, but issued written statements. Castor told reporters Wednesday that the department requested the *Times*' data, but was not allowed to see it.

The department has not asked the *Times* to provide bicycle ticket data, which is generated when officers write citations. The data is maintained by the court system and is available to the public.

Times staff writer Richard Danielson contributed to this report. Alexandra Zayas can be reached at azayas@tampabay.com. Kameel Stanley can be reached at kstanley@tampabay.com.

What was said

Mayor Bob Buckhorn's full statement on Tampa Police Department's bicycle ticket disparity

"Each day, the Tampa Police Department works to ensure that our families and our children are kept safe from gun violence, drug-activity, and other types of crime that threaten their well-being, as well as holding the individuals who commit the crimes accountable.

"Equally as important is that we do so in a manner that is reflective of the values and mission that we instill in our officers. Racial profiling is not just illegal, it is unjust and immoral. It is not — and has never been — tolerated in the Tampa Police Department or any city department or division.

"All of our officers are expected to know the zones they patrol. We train them to be deliberate and tactical in fighting the types of crime that plague those areas. In setting our strategy to do so, we consider a variety of factors; however, race is not one of them.

"As the dynamic of crime changes, we continue to adapt and change our ways of policing. Allegations of racial profiling create an emotionally charged discussion within the community, but so does crime, particularly in the neighborhoods that are most affected and for the victims who have suffered it firsthand.

"Toward that end, we recognize the importance of data and technology in our fight against crime and improving our accountability to those we serve. Beginning immediately, TPD will implement a new tracking system to monitor every traffic stop, ticket, and warning issued, including those for cyclists.

"All officers will also be reminded of the appropriate policies and procedures for issuing citations to cyclists.

"Additionally, Chief Castor and I have asked the Department of Justice office of Community Oriented Policing Services to review the program at issue, and they have agreed. Their expertise and objectivity will bring clarity to us and to the community and may help evolve our current strategies. The review will be coordinated by Assistant Chief of Police Eric Ward. Once complete, we will make the report and any recommendations public as well as share it with key stakeholders, including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

"Chief Jane Castor has led the Tampa Police Department with honor for the past five years, seeing it through some of its darkest days while building new relationships within the community. Working with members of the community, together, we have dramatically lowered crime — success that cities like Jacksonville, Orlando, St. Petersburg, and Miami have not had. In fact, while the East Tampa and Sulphur Springs neighborhoods generate nearly one quarter of all 911 calls for service made throughout the city, crime has continued to fall in those neighborhoods over the last 12 years by more than 60%.

"As we transition to new leadership in the coming weeks, the Tampa Police Department will continue to forge a path that builds on our success of fighting crime while strengthening the bonds with every neighborhood in our community."