

April 13, 2001, Friday ,THIRD EDITION

SECTION: NATIONAL/FOREIGN; Pg. A1

LENGTH: 1153 words

HEADLINE: CINCINNATI UNDER CURFEW AFTER 3 DAYS OF VIOLENCE

BYLINE: By **Anne Michaud**, Globe Correspondent

BODY:

CINCINNATI - The mayor declared a state of emergency and ordered a citywide curfew yesterday after a week in which festering hostility between the police and African-American residents erupted in the streets.

Three hours into the curfew last night, 20 violators had been arrested but the streets were calm amid heavy police presence. The quiet was in contrast to the previous three days of violence, which came in reaction to the death of Timothy Thomas, 19, an unarmed black man who was shot by a white police officer Saturday morning after a brief chase. He was wanted on 14 misdemeanor warrants.

In this week's unrest, protesters broke windows, set fires, and looted stores, and police said witnesses told them that several white people had been dragged from their cars. Police responded to the violence with tear gas and rubber bullets.

Eighty-six people had been arrested as of yesterday, mostly men in their teens and early 20s, and more than 70 people had been injured.

"Black citizens are tired, they're scared in their homes," Mayor Charles Luken said as he announced the 8 p.m. to 6 a.m., indefinite curfew. "White citizens are tired, they're targeted in their cars. I think we have to exercise unprecedented, and a week ago unthinkable, measures to protect those citizens and protect our police officers."

Later, Governor Bob Taft announced that he was sending in an undisclosed number of Ohio Highway Patrol members, at the mayor's request, to help keep order.

Thomas was the 14th black man killed while in police custody since 1995, and the third since November. No white suspects have been killed by police during that period, though several were shot.

The deaths have prompted civil rights leaders to allege a 30-year pattern of racial profiling in which blacks are singled out by Cincinnati police.

"We feel like we are an occupied people," said the Rev. Damon Lynch Jr., a city resident and a well-known black Baptist minister. "The police come in, do their eight hours, and go back to [white, suburban] Delhi [Township.] They live somewhere else, they eat somewhere else, and they shop somewhere else. They come in to the city and do their dirt."

This week's disturbances are a symptom of antagonism between blacks and police in this usually quiet Midwestern city of 331,000.

A 1968 riot, a 1979 US Civil Rights Commission inquiry into the shooting death of a white policeman and a black man, and now the deaths of black suspects highlight a history of fear and

mistrust here. Efforts to overhaul police procedures and the 1999 formation of a citizens review panel have not restored confidence in the police department.

Cincinnati is a city with a black population of 43 percent. Racial divisions have long been felt in the Police Department, many of whose leaders live in mostly white suburbs. City residents elect Democrats, and many live in mixed neighborhoods. The suburbs that surround the city are mainly white, Republican, and some of the most conservative in the nation.

It makes for an explosive clash of cultures, said City Manager John Shirey. "To understand the unrest in this city is to understand what racism is all about," he said. "Half the people mistrust the Police Department, and the other half say we don't do enough to fight crime."

Shirey said the decade he has spent here, after leaving racially diverse Long Beach, Calif., has convinced him that Cincinnati has "serious racism issues" that are not being addressed.

"An awful lot of people in our city live in denial," he said. "I don't think things have ever been worse, at least not in the last decade."

Kweisi Mfume, president of the NAACP, spent yesterday in Cincinnati talking to community leaders and listening to the concerns of local residents.

"The violence must stop on both sides," Mfume said at a meeting that began earlier than planned so it wouldn't violate the curfew.

"These people have appealed for 10 years to show there's something wrong with the Police Department in Cincinnati. We're here to show that."

The NAACP and other organizations have called on the Department of Justice to initiate a broad investigation into police brutality in Cincinnati, similar to recent probes in Los Angeles and Columbus, Ohio. Sharon Zealey, US attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, said such an investigation is likely.

Yesterday, President Bush called US Attorney General John Ashcroft to discuss ways to help restore order in the city.

Already, the FBI has opened a probe of the Thomas shooting by a white police officer, Steve Roach, 27, and the local prosecutor has convened a grand jury to consider criminal charges in the shooting.

Roach told investigators he was trying to arrest Thomas on the misdemeanor charges and for traffic violations, including driving without a license and failing to wear a seat belt.

The officer said he fired because he thought Thomas was reaching for a gun in his waistband. The police union has said Roach was in fear of his life.

Last month, a coalition of black civil rights groups called the Cincinnati Black United Front and the American Civil Liberties Union sued Cincinnati in federal court over the deaths of 13 suspects, all black, in police custody from 1995 to 2000.

The police say that 11 of the suspects were armed or tried to wrest the officer's weapon. The department's policy allows officers to use deadly force to protect themselves and others if they fear for their lives.

Scott Greenwood of the ACLU said the figure of 11 sounded high, and noted that in many such cases, "the only witness is the officer."

Norma Hope Davis, leader of the NAACP chapter in Cincinnati, said a reasonable person could possibly justify just two of the shootings. "Clearly, the police are using excessive force, and the high number of deaths is not tolerable, and it has precipitated a big part of the crisis in this city," she said.

"We need to make sure the voice of the black community is heard," said Scotty Johnson, head of the Sentinels, an organization of black police officers in Cincinnati. "The black community and the Police Department both have a part to play in the healing."

This week's violence did not ignite immediately after Thomas's death; it followed a confrontation at City Hall on Monday.

Thomas's mother, Angela Leisure, said at the meeting that she had moved her family from Chicago to quieter Cincinnati to protect her son from involvement with gangs. "I never dreamed he'd be killed by the police," she said. "I demand to know why."

Today, leaders from black and white churches plan to gather at Fountain Square downtown to call for an end to the violence.

It is also Good Friday, a day normally reserved in Cincinnati for a 141-year-old tradition of climbing the 85 steps to Holy Cross-Immaculata Church on Mount Adams. Nearly 12,000 people make the climb each year, saying a prayer for each step.