

**The
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**The LAPD Deputy Chief Who Made the "Hard Sell" of "Trust"
in the Black Community
Between the Lines**

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The passing of Los Angeles Deputy Chief of Police, Kenny Garner, last week has left a stunned community pondering the question, "Who do we call now, when we want answers from LAPD?" Kenny Garner was a friend to me, the community and most he met, and he had the hardest job of anyone in the community-convincing the community to trust "the new LAPD," which in many an instance looked like the old LAPD—with a new twist. It was, and still is, a tough sell. One sell few could pull off, but Kenny did it.

It was a difficult job that produced a great benefit, and a great amount of stress. Stress we surmise would lead to a fit, trim, purportedly healthy individual unexpectedly dropping dead at the age of 53. It was a shock in the sense that such a fate is undeserving such a good person-but God in his infinite wisdom...

Trusting the police in Los Angeles (and surrounding cities, including INGLEWOOD—certain people know what I'm talking about on that one) to give equal protection under the law is not something that is in historical evidence. In fact, it's a real contradiction. In community meetings, just having a police officer in the room is a point of deep consternation. Largely because LAPD has never acknowledged the disparate policing modalities that have become a common culture of abuse in black (and now Latino) communities.

The black community just "can't trust it" when it came to expecting the department to arrest abuse and misconduct in the same way it stopped and arrested black people. Even now, this department doesn't believe racial profiling is a problem to the extent it (the department) needs to dramatically modify its training practices. A "kinder, gentler," more racially sensitive LAPD is just a tough sell all the way around. The site of their uniforms makes our community nervous. Kenny Garner made you look past the police uniform. He made you (momentarily) look past LAPD's history. He made you

look at the progress and not the occasional regress, to note that change could happen if the trust was given a chance.

And even when you disagreed with him or rationalizations of LAPD behavior and whether trust was a remote possibility, you knew we revisit the conversation until we reached a mutual conclusion. Kenny had stars on his collar and stripes on his sleeves but he never made you feel like he had to pound his chest. His humility, and sincerity in wanting to move police-community relations forward, made you want to at least open up to him.

Most other police intermediaries usually found the community shutting down on them. Even if we didn't trust LAPD, we trusted Kenny to step in the gap between what we were hearing on the street and what LAPD was trying to sell us. Deputy Chief Garner was from this community. He never seemed to choose between "black" and "blue." He'd let you know he was both and he an investment in both the community and the Los Angeles Police Department respecting each other. Respect can only come about when trust is in evidence.

Change is in evidence when the people feel they are being respected by law enforcement. Change nor trust ever came fast in LAPD. It was a slow crawl. A lot of protests and hand-holding, not to mention a few lawsuits, a federal intervention and an Inspector General. Oversight is how trust was gained with LAPD. Kenny Garner was how trust was maintained with LAPD. No matter the inquiry, the question, or the call, Kenny got back to us on it. Trust us on that.

Now trust has taken a hit. Who will the community be asked to trust now that Deputy Chief Garner is gone? Both LAPD and the black community have to put their heads together on this one. A Kenny Garner is not easily replaced. That goes without saying. The next sell will be harder than the last. We will miss Kenny Garner, as a man, a brother and an ambassador for department. But we will miss him most as a trustee for our issues. Now who will return our calls?

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