

White Cop Sues Police Force after He Learns He Has African Ancestry

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Sergeant Cleon Brown. Photo courtesy of *New York Daily News*.[/caption]

Summary: When a white cop learned he was part black, he said his colleagues started to harass him.

When does joking at work go too far? For one white Michigan cop, his coworkers' taunts became too much when the barbs turned racial after he learned that he was 18% African. Fed up with the racism, he filed a lawsuit against his department and supervisors.

Sergeant Cleon Brown of Hastings, Michigan lived his life as a happy white guy, and he had worked at the police station for twenty years with no problems. Then he decided to bite the apple and learn about his ancestral DNA. After getting his results from Ancestry.com, the white-looking cop learned that he was actually 18% African!

Brown shared the surprising news with his colleagues, and that's when the racist jokes began. In his lawsuit, he said that his police chief called him Kunta, the lead character of the slavery movie *Roots*, and that his fellow cops whispered "Black Lives Matters" in a taunting way as he walked down the halls, according to MLive.com. Basically, once Brown learned that he was a partially black man, the Hastings Police Department started acting like bullies from a 1980s teen comedy.

Brown also described an incident during Christmas when a fellow cop put a black Santa in his stocking that had "18%" written on it. Additionally, Brown said that he had a meeting with the Hastings mayor, and when the mayor of the 97% white town learned that he had African lineage, the mayor allegedly told a joke using the N-word!

"As soon as my client told the others, the higher-ups in the city, that he was African-American, they thought it was a joke.... They treated him as though he was less than them," Brown's lawyer, Karie Boylan, said to a CBS affiliate in Detroit.

Boylan added that it was disturbing that people who were hired to keep the peace were so culturally insensitive.

"These are law enforcement officers. These are people who are supposed to understand cultural sensitivities," Boylan told WOOD TV.

According to *The New York Daily News*, Brown was so fed up by the teasing that he had filed a complaint with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in January. This complaint resulted in his coworkers retaliating against him. Many unfriended him off of Facebook, and he was blocked from the department social media pages. Brown's supervisor also allegedly asked him to step down as a sergeant to a patrol officer.

Brown said that his civil rights were violated; and he filed his lawsuit against the city of Hastings, Police Chief Jeff Pratt, Deputy Chief Dale Boulter, Sergeant Kris Miller and Hastings City Manager Jeff Mansfield. He is seeking \$500,000 in damages, according to *Newsweek*.

The city has acknowledged that the Santa incident *did* happen, and they said that the officer involved has already said sorry to Brown. When asked for further comment, however, the city blamed Brown for his treatment, instead of apologizing.

"The topic of Brown's heritage was basically forgotten by the members of the Department until Brown would bring it up again so as to joke about it," the city said.

Brown, an army veteran, suffers from emotional grief and stress from an injury during the Gulf War, according to court documents.

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