

Chief sees race issue in reactions to children's murders

KANKAKEE, Ill. — He was a white 10-year-old boy who disappeared from a riverbank. She was a black 13-year-old girl suspected of running away from home.

Different race, different families, same fate: Both ended up on the police blotter as young murder victims.

Christopher Meyer's case riveted the region for two weeks, prompting an extensive search and relentless news coverage. Ophelia Williams' death barely raised a cry.

In a candid assessment, Police Chief William Doster said his community is simply "numb" when it comes to black victims.

"I'm not trying to point fingers or diminish Chris' death," Doster, who is white, said in an interview. "I'm trying to energize the community. ... The community as a whole forgot Ophelia."

The police chief put his thoughts on paper Aug. 22, the same day a throng of media chronicled Christopher's burial. Kankakee's newspaper, The Daily Journal, published Doster's essay on Sunday in this town of 27,000 people, 37 percent of them black.

Doster said the blame must be shared by residents, the news media, even his own department.

"Christopher was white, and Ophelia was black. That in itself is enough reason for shame. But in a broad sense this racism has brought about in the community a more tragic attitude - indifference," Doster wrote.

"The disease of racism has brought about in the community a more tragic attitude - indifference. Indifference is exhibited in the entire community, both black and white, and is characterized by an unwillingness to become involved in the problem and not contribute to its solution."

Christopher was abducted Aug. 7 while playing at the boat launch in Aroma Park, a small community where he spent summer months living with his mother.

Investigators, divers, police dogs and volunteers searched the Kankakee River and a nearby park. Eight days after the boy's disappearance, his body was discovered in a shallow grave. He had been stabbed more than 40 times.

Chicago TV news crews traveled 70 miles to cover the story around the clock, parking their trucks and huge satellite dishes outside the courthouse.

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Kankakee police chief

There also was another stunning part of Christopher's tragedy: The alleged kidnapper, Timothy Buss, had served time for murder and was released from prison two years ago.

Ophelia lived with her mother, Regina Collins. The girl was reported as a runaway March 28, a day before her 13th birthday. A few days after she disappeared, her body was discovered in a burning garage in Kankakee. She had been sexually assaulted and stabbed, and her body had been set on fire.

"The firefighters had only found the body as they sifted through the debris for additional hot spots," Doster said.

There have been no arrests while police await results of tests on evidence. While the sheriff's department was inundated with calls after Christopher's abduction, Doster said he has not received any tips on Ophelia's killer.

"She had been telling people she couldn't stand it at home; there were too many people in and out," said Ophelia's grandmother, who lives 17 miles away in Hopkins Park and has the same name. "She was going to run away to my house. She didn't make it."

Ophelia's story didn't make any TV newscasts. The Daily Journal wrote three brief stories about her death. On the day the body's identity was reported, the demise of Whitey, a blind horse, got more ink.

The Associated Press has covered Christopher's case but did not report on Ophelia's.

Daily Journal news editor Raymond Bachar acknowledged that his paper's coverage of the cases appears unbalanced. But he said Christopher's disappearance had different elements, such as a public search for the boy and the alleged role of a convicted killer.

"I don't think the paper has done

enough with many of those cases," he said, referring to black crime victims. "Part of the problem is the paper. Part is the community. We run into suspicion, possibly reverse bias, and the syndrome of the closed mouth."

"We tend to become blasé to problems in the black community," Bachar said. "We tend to take them for granted."

Doster said attitudes throughout Kankakee must change. He noted the fatal shooting of a 23-year-old man during a basketball game in July in front of 400 people. A man was recently indicted, but only after one witness was willing to step forward.

"Many people are just afraid," said the Rev. William Copeland of Morning Star Baptist Church. "They figure if they tell what they know sometimes, it will be their own death. ... But I'm in total agreement with the chief."

Doster said he will take his message to area churches.

"I'm prepared to hear people say I'm not right," he said. "But that's the way it plays to me right now. We have a community that is numb and accepting. We don't have to be accepting of crime."

Pete Wilson is latest GOP presidential hopeful

NEW YORK — With the Statue of Liberty as a backdrop, California Gov. Pete Wilson formally entered the GOP presidential race Monday with a dark portrait of a federal government "out of step, out of touch and out of control."

Wilson pledged to restore fairness to a nation that he said has slipped into decline since his immigrant grandparents came from Ireland at the turn of the century. He said he would keep faith with Americans who "work hard, pay their taxes and raise their children to obey the law."

Wilson sought to portray himself as an activist governor who gets things done while Republican rivals merely debate the issues. He criticized affirmative action programs and expansion of welfare - central themes, along with crime, of his effort to tap into voter anger and fear.

Wilson accused President Clinton of blocking welfare reform and said the president has waved a "white flag" in the war on drugs and waffled on foreign policy.

"He can't balance our budget. He can't even secure our borders," he said.

Wilson's campaign has been slow to start, although he has announced his candidacy in several formats to reassure supporters that he is in fact in the race. Throat surgery and then state budget talks this summer postponed plans for a formal kickoff.

Although polls have shown him running well behind front-runner Bob Dole even in California, and faring poorly in the field nationally, Wilson on Monday noted he has come from behind before in his long political career. Last year he overcame a 23-point deficit to beat Democrat Kathleen Brown for governor.

"I have every confidence we will change this again," he said.

The Statue of Liberty provided a convenient prop for his crusade against illegal immigration and his bid to undercut Dole's perceived stranglehold on New York. Dole has secured endorsements from virtually all of the state's significant GOP officeholders.

Wilson's police officer grandfather was killed by drug dealers, leaving his grandmother to work as a maid, Wilson said, but she was guided by values that "are alive and well, maybe not in the halls of government but in the homes of Americans."

Noting the Liberty statue's famous

inscription - welcoming "your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," Wilson said:

"The tired have escaped foreign tyrants only to suffer the oppression of federal tyrants."

"Too many of the poor have traded poverty for welfare dependency," and today's huddled masses are "imprisoned by the fear of violent crime."

"The values that guided us for 200 years are under siege, and so is America," he said. "American optimism is being undermined by a federal government that is out of step, out of touch and out of control. It gives lip service to our values but doesn't seem to share them."

Wilson's announcement brought criticism from his opponents, including former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander, who views Wilson's entry as a threat to his own plodding campaign. Alexander on Monday began airing the first attack ad of the GOP primary race.

GOP race for the White House



Who's in on the 1996 presidential race:

- ✓ Gov. Pete Wilson, California: Supports abortion rights, announced his candidacy Aug. 28
- ✓ Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole: Officially announced his candidacy - his third - on April 10.
- ✓ Rep. Robert Dornan, California: Officially announced his candidacy on April 13.
- ✓ Sen. Richard Lugar, Indiana: Officially announced his presidential candidacy April 19.
- ✓ Sen. Arlen Specter, Pennsylvania: Favors abortion rights, announced March 30.
- ✓ Alan Keyes: Mid-level Reagan administration State Department official announced March 26.
- ✓ Pat Buchanan: Conservative commentator who challenged Bush in the 1992 announced March 20.
- ✓ Former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander: The Bush administration education secretary formally announced Feb. 28.
- ✓ Sen. Phil Gramm, Texas: Formally announced Feb. 24.

Heat prompting early dismissal in schools, exposure warnings

OMAHA — Humidity and temperatures soaring to around 100 prompted Omaha Public Schools to release students early Monday, and the National Weather Service said neither man nor beast should be outside.

The combination of humidity of 40 percent to 57 percent and temperatures approaching 100 pushed heat indexes, or "feels-like" conditions, to 110 or higher across eastern Nebraska by early Monday afternoon, forecasters said.

"I know the teachers sure are trying to alleviate the discomfort from the affects of the heat by giving as many water breaks as possible, allowing water bottles in class, ice and turning off the lights during the afternoon," said OPS spokeswoman Stacie Thomas Hamel.

Highs reached the 80s in the east by 9 a.m. Monday, the weather service said. Offutt Air Force Base reported 96 by 2 p.m., while Lincoln and Falls City had 95. The heat index reading was 112 at Offutt, 111 at Omaha and Falls City, and 110 at Ord and Lincoln.

The most-humid air was generally east of a line from O'Neill to Fairbury, the weather service said. The weather service noted Sidney had a temperature of 91 at 2 p.m. but a heat index of only 95 with 26 percent humidity.

Chadron had a high of 104 on Sunday, while Valentine had 102, Fairbury 101 and Lincoln and McCook 100.

The weather service said the hot weather was expected to continue through the week with highs mostly

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JERRY WEBER

NU physical trainer

in the 90s.

Mrs. Hamel said the school system has 34 schools without air conditioning but because of concerns for teacher and student equity, and because of busing of students in the district, all of OPS's 43,700 students were released two hours early Monday and would be again on Tuesday.

Prolonged exposure to the conditions, combined with physical activity, can cause heat exhaustion and heat stroke, the weather service warned. Forecasters said conditions can put at risk the elderly, very young, and people who are sick or those with heart conditions. People who were forced to work or be outdoors were encouraged to drink plenty of liquids and stay out of the sun.

Jerry Weber, head physical trainer for the defending national champion Nebraska Cornhuskers, said Monday that the football team and its training staff also had to take precautions during the final few practices before Thursday's season opener at Oklahoma State.

"The basic thing is you always are concerned about with this heat and humidity is the dehydration factor," he said. "Say for a player of

285 pounds, it would not be unusual for him to lose eight to 10 pounds in a single practice. If they lose that much weight, we try to get them rehydrated over a period of 12 hours or so to get that weight back."

Weber said cramping from loss of liquid during practice is the biggest problem. The Cornhuskers have been taking additional water breaks in the heat, he said.

The weather service also warned pet owners and livestock operators to watch their animals closely, providing adequate water and shade to combat the heat.

The hot weather was expected to continue much of the week. A cool front across Wyoming and South Dakota provided a chance of scattered showers and thunderstorms in Nebraska's Panhandle and northern counties.

However, Tuesday was expected to be mostly sunny and hot across the state with highs in the mid-90s to about 100 again. Wednesday was to bring back a chance of thunderstorms but more highs of 90 to 95. Lows Wednesday were expected to be in the upper 50s to mid-60s in the west and mid-60s to lower 70s in the east.

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