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Group asks for investigation in Ville Platte
Black Men 7 claims civil rights violations
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A group of community activists pushing for sweeping changes in how blacks are treated in Louisiana's criminal justice system have asked the U.S. Attorney's Office to conduct a federal investigation into the Ville Platte Police Department.

The Rev. Raymond Brown, a member of Black Men 7 and the National Action Network, and several others met with U.S. Attorney Donald Washington at the federal courthouse in downtown Lafayette on Friday.

Brown said the purpose of the meeting was to discuss citizen complaints against the Ville Platte Police Department. He said there were also issues of false arrest, racial profiling, unfair bond practices and civil rights violations.

Washington promised those gathered that his office would send people to Evangeline Parish to discuss with the police and district attorney the concerns brought up at the meeting.

Washington also said he would contact the U.S. Department of Justice's community relations division to ask representatives from the division to come to the area to meet with citizens and agencies to work out their differences.

He said there was no formal investigation or federal inquiry regarding this matter.

Ville Platte Police Chief Neal Lartigue, who is black, did not return calls for comment Friday. However, in an interview earlier this month, just one day before Brown and company held a march in Ville Platte, Lartigue said that the group was trying to turn the city into a Jena, which has become a national touchpoint for racial relations as they relate to criminal justice.

"This is just some outside agitators coming into our town stirring up mess, trying to make a name for themselves," he had said.

One of Brown's main points is how bonds are arbitrarily set. He said he perceives bonds being set higher for black offenders than their white counterparts, even for the same crimes.

"We feel like it's the right time for a federal oversight," he said.
