

Point of View

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TO BE EQUAL

KING CASE A TRAVESTY OF JUSTICE

By John E. Jacob

Justice was mugged twice in the Rodney King case.

Once in March, 1991, when the black motorist was savagely beaten by Los Angeles police officers, and again when a jury, that did not include any African Americans, acquitted the offi-

cers of well-documented charges that included assault and excessive force.

The videotapes of the incident establish beyond any shadow of doubt that King was no threat to the arresting officers and that whatever force was necessary was exceeded within

seconds.

Certainly, there was no justification for police officers to continue slugging and kicking a defenseless, unarmed man lying in the street at their feet.

After the beating got nationwide attention, thanks to that videotape, a torrent of evidence

of racist attitudes and actions by police officers poured out of Los Angeles.

The King case will serve as a symbol of injustice for years to come. More important, it will be a catalyst for re-examining the racism that continues to pervade our criminal justice system.

That's already happened, as many police departments were spurred to institute safeguards to ensure that such incidents don't occur in their jurisdictions.

But even common-sense steps such as performance monitoring systems that try to identify and retrain police officers who exceed their authority will not be enough.

Racism is at the root of the King case, and police departments are going to have to deal with it.

So as long as officers presume that black men are dangerous and threatening, and that swift, excessive violence is the only way to control them, there will be more King cases.

Part of the answer lies in multicultural training to undermine the racist assumptions many recruits bring with them, and in continuing, on-going retraining of active officers.

Another part lies in aggressive recruitment of African American police officers. At least, the presence of black officers can act as a brake on the overt expression of racist attitudes, like those revealed by the transcripts of the police radio transmissions about the King arrest.

Strong civilian review boards with the power to discipline errant officers and to oversee police activities, is essential to counter the "us against them" mentality that all-too-often pervades police work. The new trend toward community policing can help as well.

Police officers should welcome those developments, because the L.A. cops who beat



JOHN E. JACOB

Rodney King inflicted damage to their own profession as well. I can't believe that most officers want to have an image of thugs with badges, but that's the inevitable outcome of repeated incidents where their authority is abused.

Cynics will say that the acquittal amounts to a license for police officers to abuse their authority without fear of punishment.

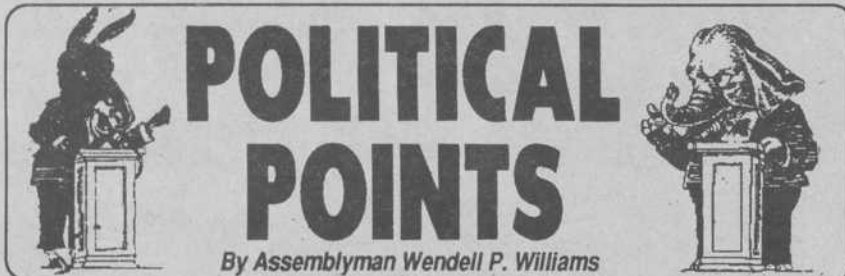
I prefer to see the verdict as an aberration — a miscarriage of justice by one jury that will not necessarily be repeated, especially if the African American community and all citizens who believe in justice keep up the pressure for reforming police departments and the justice system.

Washington has an important role to play in ensuring justice, and it should act fast.

The Justice Department's study of police brutality, inaugurated last March, should be swiftly concluded and should include strong recommendations for federal monitoring and intervention where there is a pattern of racial abuse.

And the Justice Department should attempt to correct the miscarriage of justice in the King case by bringing federal charges against the officers for violating Mr. King's civil rights.

The King case violates the most elementary principles of justice, and it's up to all of us to set the system right.



"GET A SECOND OPINION"

Even though most people don't, it is intelligently sound to seek a second opinion before making an important decision like having surgery. Countless people have been marred for life, and in many cases, lost their lives simply because they failed to take a little time out to attain a second opinion. We need not be reminded how far to many, especially the elderly have been victims of unnecessary operations and treatments from doctors solely because they did not seek additional opinions.

It must also be said that many doctors themselves have been removed from practice and lost millions of dollars through the legal system because they themselves, made hasty and unwise decisions about people's lives. However, the wise adage of obtaining a second opinion before making and proposing a final plan, also is very appropriate for other aspects of our lives as well.

Case in point in the unfortunate issue that transpired last week after the Rodney King verdict was handed down. Someone should have gotten a second opinion before releasing insensitive police officers to roam at will in West Las Vegas last Thursday evening. It just was not a good idea to dispatch officers in a situation like this without conferring with the mayor, city officials and a civilian assessment team be-

fore such a call. Nor was it wise to instruct the police officers to protect the livelihood of one segment of the community and do it at any cost, while allowing the livelihood and future of another to go up for grabs. This of course allowed the isolated area to receive the immediate perception of being a war zone. This also caused the removal of key services such as mail delivery, garbage removal, bus services, utilities and etc. Clearly making a bad situation worse.

This decision of course called for a series of other key decisions to be made which defiantly required a second opinion. The first, a curfew was imposed in West Las Vegas, as though it was some Zoo without walls. A second opinion may have prevented the senseless attempt to place a curfew on a select few who like everyone else has to function in a 24 hour city. By the way this is the same part of town where most who live there pay the greatest amount of taxes from their income. The part who depends more on public transportation to get to work, and who depends on the gaming industry to make a living. This isolated curfew damages the community with even a greater perception problem; and in politics, perception is reality. Those who are already in despair should be the last to be given forced disparity.

Next - the National Guards. With a troop of police on every corner, young and old locked in

a geographic box, plus a curfew, why decide to call out the National Guards to intensify an already moralistic nightmare. This decision without a second opinion could have been a holocaust.

The decision to close the schools or not to close them, should have been an easier call. One of the main problems that we saw in Los Angeles was the fact that they created greater problems for themselves because all the schools were closed and resulted in many youth having nowhere to go except the streets. Our decision was worst however, because someone for some reason selected to close some schools including all 6th grade centers, while others in other areas remained open. The result? Since West Las Vegas students are bussed 11 of 12 years, all grades except 6th were denied transportation to school. Which meant all African-American students of West Las Vegas had no transportation to school. Once again West Las Vegas students carried the bulk of the burden for all. I wonder if we have a policy for situations like what occurred last week. If not, maybe its time to take a look.

EXTRA POINT: Many people are concerned throughout society about the need to restructure some police departments. The police department here in Las Vegas has steadfastly refused to entertain the idea of input from the public that



Assemblyman
Wendell P. Williams

it is paid to serve. There are three basic approaches to creating a civilian control board. First, the Nevada State Legislature which currently has policy on the books that disallows citizen input boards. During the 1989 and 1991 sessions of the legislature, I sponsored bills to change that law, and legislators other than seven supporters, strongly refused to even entertain the idea. The second approach is what the National Alliance Against Racist & Political Repression is currently doing. The Alliance is currently gathering signatures to qualify to place the question of creating a citizens control board on the ballot in the upcoming November elections. This is a smart move, however it will take 7,000 signatures to qualify to be placed on the ballot. So take this as a second opinion and call Dr. Tate so you can sign the petition. The third way to create the board is from public unrest. This means utilizing an option that is granted by the constitution, and that is physically taking it to the streets. One down two to go!

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

1. Thirty-one years ago on May 4th, Freedom Riders Begin Through the South.

2. Ninety-three years ago on May 9th, the African-American A.J. Burr received the patent on the lawn mower.

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