



On Police Brutality

Principles of the "slaughter mentality."

By Chris Bracey
Contributor

Poor Rodney King. Shot with a "stun gun" and electrocuted until he collapsed onto the asphalt, he lay while five officers of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) proceeded to kick and beat him with nightsticks, breaking his leg, shattering his jaw, knocking out his teeth and bruising his kidneys while other officers watched and snickered with glee. With each of King's pleas to stop the abuse, the officers responded with more brutality, like sharks in a feeding frenzy. Rodney King now sits in his wheelchair, vindicated from all police charges, but suffers from permanent brain damage after being "arrested and taken into custody" by these officers of the law.

The following week, another group of officers in the Los Angeles Police Department responded to a reported domestic dispute. What incidents occurred upon their arrival are unclear, but their visit resulted in the shooting deaths of two Samoan men. What is more interesting is that these men were each shot more than eight times. Most of their wounds were in their backs. Like King, these two men were both unarmed.

What is going on here? What possessed these officers to commit such atrocious acts of brutality? What has instigated this slaughter mentality?

Many people tend to write such incidents off as extraordinary occurrences. Others tend to think

that it is a sign of the times — that hard times breed hard men. But these events can hardly be passed off as such. Surveys indicate that more than 60 percent of Los Angeles residents think their city's police department uses unreasonable force. Furthermore, their victims were unarmed and had no intention of responding with violence. Yet they were still brutalized. The defenseless nature of these victims means these officers were not merely in possession of a forceful mentality, but a slaughter mentality.

Dr. William Gault has compiled some horrific accounts of violence and information concerning the slaughter mentality internalized by the soldiers fighting in the Vietnam conflict. From these facts, he has developed six principles that contribute to the creation of a slaughter mentality. More importantly, however, is that these principles contributing to slaughter are not unique to combat soldiers but are applicable to the officers of the LAPD as well. Given the LAPD's model status in law enforcement, the pervasiveness of this slaughter mentality in the United States is a frightening prospect. On inspection of the principles, it becomes terrifyingly clear that some, if not all, police departments in urban areas have embraced and implemented this model of enforcement. The principles are as follows:

1. *The enemy is everywhere.* It seems as though the white LAPD officer feels intense hatred for the residents of the urban districts.

With N.W.A's popularization of the phrase, "F— tha Police," and a growing sense of disrespect for the law in general, the officer may feel as if his life is always in peril. The officer quickly seizes upon a sense of trust with his fellow officers and "unswervingly identifies everything else, young or old, male or female, animate or inanimate, as his ubiquitous, murderous enemy."

2. *The enemy is not human.* The labeling of young, urban blacks as savage beasts or blood-lusting animals by the white press has done much to support official justification of violence against such individuals. Their perverse fascination with the dehumanization of the black male only serves to create a "us versus them" mentality among officers of the law. And after all, it is easier to sleep at night knowing we killed an animal instead of murdering a fellow human being.

3. *Dilution of responsibility.* The individual officer often believes the responsibility for the beating or slaughter of a particular victim rests not exclusively on his or her shoulders, but is shared by the other participants as well. In the group beating of Rodney King, rest assured that the officer who kicked him and beat him in his head will not step forward and claim responsibility for the brain damage Mr. King will suffer from for the rest of his life.

4. *The pressure to act.* Despite popular views of police officers as community servants and other whitewashed images, it is clear

that police officers generally expect each other to act aggressively. Like the military, cops are expected to act swiftly and decisively and maintain control of any situation. Images of "animals" running wild in the streets selling drugs, shooting innocent people and promoting the erosion of the Eurocentric moral structure of society inevitably force the hand of the law to take action.

5. *The natural dominance of the psychopath.* During a shoot-out, raid, or any violent confrontation, trust, decency, restraint and gentleness are of little use as the pressure to kill or be killed overrides civilized conventions. As Dr. Gault remarks, "In such an atmosphere, the man of blunted sensibilities and ready violence, unburdened by empathy or compassion and seeing others as merely objects [the psychopath] . . . often prevails." These types of situations re-assert the old notion that might is right and the rest is nonsense.

6. *Firepower.* Claims of being "outgunned" by the urban deviant subculture, LAPD officers instituted the 9mm automatic handgun as the standard weapon to be carried. But as we have seen, many of the killings by officers are committed against unarmed victims. This steady upgrading of technology in weaponry certainly in-

creases the chance of violent destruction. Often, this firepower is judiciously misused.

The slaughter mentality, as internalized by police officers everywhere, has manifest itself in the brutal and senseless beating of Rodney King and the shooting deaths of the two Samoans. Yet we are lucky that someone managed to videotape the beating of King and expose this tendency toward brutality. Often, complaints of police brutality and cases brought against the police go unheard precisely because they lack the necessary evidence for conviction. As a result, many people have been beaten and killed by the police with minimal repercussions. And guess who is most often on the receiving end of such brutality? However, the debate has been sparked. With the introduction of this videotape, we now have nationwide acknowledgment that there is something dreadfully wrong with our law enforcement system. More importantly, people have come out in large numbers against the police and the excessive use of force. We can only pray that something be done to stop this violence. Until then, many urban dwellers will continue to view an officer's badge as the mark of the beast.

The Mu Zeta Chapter of
ALPHA PHI ALPHA FRATERNITY, INC. presents
"An Evening on the Nile"
15th Anniversary Formal Ball



Saturday, April 6, 1991 - 8 p.m. - 1 a.m.
The Carolina Inn, Chapel Hill • \$8.00/single \$15.00/couple