



Police photos by AP. Video by George Holliday. Courtesy KTLA, Los Angeles
 INDICTED: Los Angeles police officers, from top, Sgt. Stacey C. Koon, Theodore J. Briseno, Timothy E. Wind and Laurence Powell, on right. Hearings are being held today in Los Angeles and on Capitol Hill to try to determine the pervasiveness of police brutality.

"Unequal Justice"

African-Americans and Police Brutality

By Debbie Baker
 Assistant Editor

"An illegal attack, an unjust attack and an immoral attack can be made against you by anyone. Just because a person has on a uniform does not give him the right to come and shoot up your neighborhood."

—Malcolm X—

Law enforcement officers in this country do not provide equal protection for all citizens. Minorities characteristically have been the victims of harassment and police brutality by the very people hired to protect them. African-Americans in general should not call the local police or sheriff's department because they most likely will not be treated fairly. Studies indicate that African-Americans are more likely than whites to be harassed, brutalized or arrested without just cause by the police. One of the most publicized cases of brutality occurred March 3, when Rodney King was stopped and severely beaten by four police officers in Los Angeles. The videotaped beating stirred the consciousness of Americans citizens as it was broadcast across the country. The Rodney King case clearly indicates that the mistreatment of African-Americans by law enforcement officers is a case of unequal justice that is condoned in this society.

The mistreatment of blacks by police officers can be put into an historical context. In the Deep

South, a jail cell could mean death to a black person during certain time periods in this country. The Ku Klux Klan was not the only group of terrorists blacks had to deal with, because southern sheriffs' departments were notorious for their mistreatment of black people. Director of Public Safety Theodophilus "Bull" Connor in Birmingham, Ala., and Sheriff James G. Clark in Selma, Ala., were two examples of officials who specialized in training officers to violate the civil rights of black people. During the Civil Rights Movement, many blacks were harassed, beaten and brutalized for their participation in non-violent protest. Some blacks were arrested, taken to jail and never seen again. James Forman, executive secretary of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), discusses several cases of police brutality in his autobiography *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*.

Forman talks about the case of Robert Williams, head of the Union County, N.C. branch of the NAACP, who was run off the road by state troopers and constantly harassed by the police department in Monroe, the county seat. Williams was very active during the movement in Monroe, which is the home of Sen. Jesse Helms. Also, Bessie Turner was brutally beaten by two police officers with a leather strap for no apparent reason in Clarksdale, Miss. Al-

though the police told her to keep quiet, she released her story in a sworn affidavit to SNCC. Charles Sherrod, a SNCC field secretary in Albany, Ga., was beaten severely by a sheriff and his deputies while he was in jail. Johnnie Morris, a native of Larry, Ga., reminisced about the time two policemen broke down his door and arrested him without any charge. The two officers put him in chains, kicked him in the eye, stomped him in the stomach and then beat him some more with an iron blackjack. Instances of police brutality especially during the Civil Rights Movement were very common. One tactic of civil rights organizations was to fill the jails; but it was very dangerous for black people to be left in the hands of southern police departments when they were arrested. Local citizens in towns in the Deep South could not depend upon the police to protect them because they were just as violent as the Klan. Police misconduct and brutality is not a new occurrence; blacks have always had to worry about whether law enforcement officials would violate their civil rights.

Statistics compiled over the past two decades support the notion that blacks are the victims of police harassment and brutality. From 1973 to 1983, 2,000 minority citizens were killed by police in the U.S. The U.S. Justice Department estimates that 45 percent of the 6,000 women and children

killed by the police from 1969 to 1979 were black people. About 50 percent of the civilians killed by police from 1970-76 were African-American. Over the past 30 years, African-Americans have been nine times more likely than whites to be killed by police officers. Figures such as these may explain why only 53 percent of blacks said they were satisfied with police protection, as compared to

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71 percent of whites. Statistics show that Americans have good reasons for not trusting the police.

Some of the incidents of police brutality that have occurred over the past several years show unequal justice does still exist in America. White police officers are using excessive force to deal with situations involving African-Americans. In Washington, N.C., a black man was killed by two white police officers this month. The Rev. David Moore, a local minister, said that more black police officers were needed to protect black people. On Jan. 24 Tony Farrell, a WRAL-TV engineer, was shot by a white police officer who thought he was a robber. On March 20, a court awarded a black man an undisclosed amount of money after he was pinned to a car by four white deputies in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. In November

1990, Mary Mitchell was shot to death by a police officer after he answered a call to calm a domestic dispute in the Bronx. The officer was charged with manslaughter because he said he feared for his life. In January 1990, a Black Muslim was killed by police in Los Angeles after clashes between the Nation of Islam and the sheriff's department. In addition to those cases, 500 members of New York's Joint Terrorist Task Force searched the home of Wanda Wareham in 1984. She nor her husband was ever charged with any crime. The use of 500 officers does seem like excessive force. In 1979, Eula Love was killed in Los Angeles by two officers who came to her house to check on an unpaid utility bill. Also in 1979, four policemen from the Miami police department beat Arthur McDuffie to death after they stopped him for a minor traffic violation. In 1985, Michael Stewart was beaten to death by 11 officers from the New York City Transit Police Force. Eleanor Bumpurs, a 66-year-old woman, was killed in 1984 by a New York City police officer who claimed he was trying to protect himself. African-Americans have no rights that white officers feel they should respect.

The Los Angeles Police Department has a history of police violence and brutality towards minorities. The L.A.P.D. is supposed to be tough because of the

high incidence of gang violence in that city. But some residents feel the crackdown on gang violence has become a war against minority communities. In the July 16, 1990 issue of *Time*, Sylvester Monroe wrote an article titled "Complaints About a Crackdown," which dealt with the violence by the L.A.P.D. Patricia Erickson of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) said in the article, "When it comes to probable cause, youth, especially minority youth, are guilty until proven innocent." And she appears to be correct. The *Los Angeles Times* investigated police brutality in the city and reported that 151 excessive force cases had been filed against the sheriff's department in 1989. In addition, the paper found that \$8.5 million had been paid by the sheriff's department to settle brutality cases. And when the ACLU and the Legal Defense