

Fund finish their cases, the L.A.P.D. will have to pay even more money than that to Rodney King.

America was shocked at the highly publicized beating of Rodney King. The videotaped recording of the police brutality has been played on newscasts nationwide over the past three weeks. Rodney King was stopped for an alleged traffic violation and was clubbed 56 times by four police officers in uniform. King was beaten so severely that he suffered many injuries, including deep bruises, a head injury, a broken ankle, a black eye, internal bleeding and optical nerve problems. The entire incident was videotaped by George Holliday as he stood nearby the scene. What is even more disturbing about the brutality is that 25 officers watched the beating occur and did not try to stop it. The four officers indicted in the case are Sgt. Stacey Koon, Theodore Briseno, Timothy Wind and Laurence Powell. Civil rights groups have called for the resignation of L.A. Police Chief Darryl Gates, but he has refused to quit his job. Rodney King is suing the police department for \$56 million dollars, which equals the number of times he was hit. However, no amount of money can compensate him for the way those police officers blatantly and publicly denied King his civil rights. Citizens across the nation still cannot believe that law enforcement officers could beat an unarmed man the way Rodney King was beaten.

Since the Rodney King incident, the *Los Angeles Times* has conducted a survey to find out whether the public is aware of police brutality. Some of the responses to the poll were disturbing. The poll, which appeared in the March 10 issue of the L.A. Times, reported that two thirds of those surveyed said they felt police brutality was common by the L.A. Police Department. One out of four persons polled said they had either seen or been involved in an incident of brutality by the police in L.A. In addition, Karol Heppe of the Police Misconduct Lawyers Referral Service says they receive 200 complaints against the L.A.P.D. every month. Heppe's organization provides counseling to police brutality victims.

African-Americans who are victims of police brutality need to know that the justice system is biased against them. It is almost impossible to prove police brutality because it is your word against

the police. In the March 20 issue of *USA Today*, John Dunne, assistant attorney general for civil rights, discussed the difficulty of winning police brutality cases. "I don't think the public is aware how difficult it is to prove these cases. Our problem is getting witnesses to come forward and testify."

The U.S. Justice Department has the power to prosecute local police if they violate an individual's civil rights. Statistics indicate that most police brutality cases never reach the courts. Only 2 percent of the 2,500 annual cases that the Justice department investigates each year can be prosecuted. Since 1985, the Justice Department has received 45,554 civil complaints against police officers. Only 17,707 of those complaints were investigated, and only 201 indictments were handed down in those cases. Once again, blacks should take note of the system of unequal justice in this country.

African-Americans ought to question a justice system that does not investigate all complaints against police departments. How in the world can the Justice Department judge which cases are more important than others? It seems that indictments against the police are issued only when the brutality can be seen on videotape. It would take a lot of blank tapes to record all the brutality and harassment that blacks face in this country on a daily basis. But what about the times when there is just a victim and the police? In 1991, African-American citizens are still treated according to different standards than whites, which can be seen in the misconduct of police departments nationwide.

Blacks are often the victims of police brutality because white officers naturally assume that they are more likely than whites to commit crimes. Probably every black person in this country knows of young black boys who are stopped by the police because they're driving sports cars. Police usually equate sports cars with drug dealing because they cannot believe that a young black male could afford a sports car. Alan Davis and Deborah Worthy of the New York Police Department spoke out against the excessive force used by law enforcement officials in the September 1985 issue of *Essence*. They said that blacks are the victims of brutality because white police see them as "symbolic assailants." White officers

have a set perception of black men as dangerous human beings, so they react to them more violently than they do towards whites. Davis said, "They bring their native perceptions of inner-city blacks from their outlying suburbs and they act out those perceptions on patrol."

Despite the number of incidents of police brutality, some people are trying very desperately to address the problem. Their efforts are a step in the right direction. For example, the ACLU has created a list of guidelines for people to follow to deal with police harassment and brutality. The ACLU says that people should act in certain ways if they are harassed by the police: 1) Be civil. 2) Don't resist. 3) Ask witnesses to remain. 4) Take mental notes. 5) Never hit the police. The ACLU says that following these simple tips may save the life of a person who is the victim of harassment. The formation of several organizations to study police brutality may help African-Americans. In Chicago, Renault Robinson formed the Afro-American Police League to help blacks deal with instances of police brutality. The Jackson-Lynn-Travers agency in Los Angeles is a private detective agency that specializes in exposing police brutality cases against minorities. In addition, Michigan

Congressman John Conyers has headed the House Subcommittee on police violence since 1980. The committee has held hearings to investigate charges of police violence in cities such as Miami and, of course, Los Angeles. Since the Rodney King beating, new hearings have been held on Capitol Hill to determine the frequency of police brutality. All of these examples indicate that something is being done to deal with brutality; however, it is not enough. While hearings are going on in Washington, D.C., some police officer somewhere is violating the civil rights of a citizen.

The responsibility of stopping police brutality falls in part on the shoulders of local police departments. It is obvious that some of these departments are filled with bad cops. Police departments must take steps to prevent harassment and brutality. First of all, police departments should identify those officers who receive constant complaints from the public. Secondly, the departments should make sure they properly screen applicants to weed out potentially bad cops. In addition to these, police department heads should create a work ethic that says brutality is unacceptable so that people are not beaten by law enforcement officials.

In addition to police responsibility, African-Americans must make the law enforcement officers accountable for their actions. Blacks who are brutalized and beaten must should use the court system to fight against their mistreatment at the hands of police officers. The leaders of civil rights organizations must take the lead in solving the problem of police brutality. They should not wait for a highly publicized case to occur such as Rodney King's so they can shine in the media. When the publicity dies down, so do the efforts of black leaders. The Rev. Joseph Lowery of SCLC should organize his members to speak out against police brutality and not be quiet on this issue. Benjamin Hooks of the NAACP should offer Rodney King legal assistance. John Jacob of the National Urban League and Roy Innis of CORE have members in chapters across the country who can protest the brutality.

Black people are the victims of police brutality, so they cannot wait for the oppressor to totally solve the problem for them. Civil rights groups must work together on the issue of police brutality to ensure that African-Americans are given some measure of equal protection under the law.

**THE LOS ANGELES TIMES POLL**  
 How Angelenos View the Police  
 The following are results from a Los Angeles Times poll of 718 adult Los Angeles city residents contacted by telephone Thursday and Friday. Past comparatives are from Times polls conducted in March of 1988 and April of 1979.  
 Do you think certain groups tend to be victimized by police brutality more than other groups, or not? If yes, which group or groups? (Respondents could name up to two groups)

Group	All City Residents	Anglos	Blacks	Latinos
Blacks	51%	57%	73%	45%
Latinos	47	46	61	47
Whites	2	1	3	2
Greys	1	1	1	1
Asians	14	13	12	18
Others	22	20	9	20
No Group	10	12	11	8
Don't Know				

Do you think incidents of police brutality involving the Los Angeles Police Department are:

Response	All City Residents	Anglos	Blacks	Latinos
Very Common	28%	19%	44%	33%
Fairly Common	35	39	36	27
Fairly Uncommon	23	30	10	22
Very Uncommon	10	7	6	14
Don't Know	4	5	4	4

**Police Chief Darryl Gates should:**

Response	All City Residents	Anglos	Blacks	Latinos
Resign immediately over the King incident	13%	9%	18%	17%
Resign if investigation proves police wrongdoing	27	24	32	32
Should not resign over the incident	48	59	43	35
Don't Know	2	1		1

**Approve the way Gates handling job**

Year	All City Residents	Anglos	Blacks	Latinos
April, 1979	55%	66%	36%	54%
March, 1988	61	65	51	61
March, 1991	33	36	23	32

**Approve the way LAPD handling job**

Year	All City Residents	Anglos	Blacks	Latinos
April, 1979	52%	62%	29%	48%
March, 1988	74	74	64	67
March, 1991	45	47	26	45

Beating victim Rodney King, with Robert Rentzer, one of his attorneys, shows reporters a large bruise on his chest.