

# RODNEY KING SECTION

## ON BLAME AND VIOLENCE

by Barbara Beebe.

On April 29, 1992, twelve anonymous people unanimously voted that the 4 white police officers who beat Rodney King were not guilty of excessive force. To the contrary, the defense attorney was able to convince these 12 people that Rodney King was resisting arrest and because 12+ armed, white police officers feared for their lives, the amount of force utilized was not excessive, but within bounds of what was necessary.

Upon hearing the verdict, I immediately thought of George Orwell's ever-appropriate 1984. One of the few books I read diligently every year, Orwell's descriptions of the possible future are no longer just possible - they are here.

Orwell, with great care and precision, described the principles of INGSOC and the basis of Big Brother's power - the control of reality and history. Orwell introduced the concept of doublethink, which was the ability to skew all perceptions of language. For example, the platform of Big Brother's Ministry of Truth was "war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength." This contradiction in terms confuses the citizens. It makes us distrust our senses. Soon, we find ourselves waiting for the government to tell us what to see, think, feel.

The jury would have us believe we did not see what we saw. The jury would have us question our own eyes. This tampering of reality presents dangerous consequences for the future of America's psyche. And those poor residents of Los Angeles - 20 years of therapy will not help them.

### THE BLAME

Only the most inexperienced in social sciences would blame 'racism' for the brutality and subsequent verdict that befell Rodney King. Institutional racism is perpetrated not only as a cloud of evil but by powerful individuals as well. There are people, with names and positions, that must be held accountable for the brutality and verdict.

The first in the list of blame is surely Mayor Tom Bradley. Like any other politician, Bradley was overly concerned with keeping the monied vote of the white, middle class citizens of Los Angeles. The second largest city in the United States is also one filled with various ethnic groups that, due to their class position, did not have a voice in the policies of the city.

Tom Bradley was well aware of the many complaints of brutality and mistreatment levied against the LAPD and did nothing to remove Police Chief Darryl Gates from office. Now, it is too late. The damage has been done. Hundreds have been brutalized and murdered by the LAPD and Darryl Gates will retire next month, secure with his pension and his racism.

Running a close second is, of course, Police Chief Darryl Gates. The same man who believed all drug users should be put in prison or shot, is the same man President Bush declared to be an outstanding police chief. Gates term as police chief has left, in its wake, a police force which is comprised of an overwhelming number of white males who feel no sense of humanity or duty to the multi-racial population of greater Los Angeles. Hell, most of the police officers do not live in Los Angeles. They come to the city (prison) to guard over / boss around the populace (animals) then they retreat to their neighborhoods (white enclaves) with their families (real, white people). This is what Darryl Gates has given the world. He has done a great disservice to law enforcement because he has imbued in his officers the opinion that they are not only law enforcement but judges as well.

Beyond these 2 men, there are the officers themselves. Officers Powell, Wind, Koon and Briseno simply got caught. Remember, plenty of other officers stood by and watched their lawlessness occur. These officers are just as guilty. Their duty is to uphold the law at all times, but when their fellow officers engaged in their brutal lawlessness, they did nothing. Worse yet, they stood and watched and in essence became a silent cheerleading squad for their fellow officers.

The trial itself, and all those involved in its fruition, is to blame. The trial was moved from multicultural, multifaceted Los Angeles County to the predominantly white, officer retirement community of Ventura County. Surely, someone had to see this as a nail in the coffin of justice. But wait, it gets worse. Somewhere along the line, the judge decided that he would select the jurors. And what a fine selection, indeed. Ten whites, one Latino, and one Asian were selected to decide whether 4 white men beating a black man (and breaking his leg and facial bones) were guilty of excessive force.

The next in line is none other than King's legal representation, prosecutor Steve Lerman. I cannot image why his attorney decided not to bring King to court or let him take the stand. His legal neglect gave King a snowballs' chance in hell of winning. The court room was filled with police officers, their families and friends. Steve Lerman's grave mistake will go down in the annals of legal history as the mistake that paved the way for lawlessness.

### THE VIOLENCE

A RIOT IS THE LANGUAGE OF THE UNHEARD - Martin Luther King, Jr.

More than the blatant injustice heaped upon Rodney King (not once, but twice) people are concerned with the level and degree of violence that erupted after the

verdict. In Los Angeles, it took 2 hours for the verdict to sweep through the communities. Then came the media. The riots and violence that sprang up across the nation and globe were like the aftershocks of California's notorious quakes - no one knew when or where they would occur and no one could image the damage they would do.

George Bush, who until Saturday morning had not mentioned Rodney King's name or the verdict, was quick to call for an end to the violence. Bush informed the nation that "no one should rationalize the violence." He followed this misguided statement and intoned, "I will use whatever force is necessary to restore order."

It is this lack of understanding which has puzzled me since Thursday. Many of the people who understand the violence (an overwhelming number of whom are black) do not wish for it to continue. When CNN's entertainment crew interviewed Blair Underwood (also a victim of police brutality - when he was stopped for a speeding ticket, an LAPD officer put a loaded gun to his head) he promptly stated, "I'm pissed off and it's not just me. I understand the violence, but it's got to stop."

However, it is the lack, inability, unwillingness of the powers that be to understand the violence that in the long run will prove to be the smoking gun of racism. "People may be justified for being angry,

but there is no justification for the rioting and destruction of property." So said Patrick Buchanan, the ultra-right wing politician who thought he could be president of this multifaceted society.

The fact that Buchanan believes that "maybe" people have a justification for being angry is, in itself, the most telling thing about Buchanan's racism. It also goes back to the 'you-didn't-see-what-you-saw' mentality. Bush, Buchanan and many others would have us believe there are some missing pieces that if we just saw them/understood them, would make us change our minds about King's beating.

However, it is here that they are wrong. In its totality, the King beating is more than brutality - it is the manifestation of racism imbued in the white officers of the LAPD. The taped conversations from their car radios and the testimony of hospital personnel who treated King's wounds reveal racism at an institutional and personal level that was regarded as normal police procedure.

The inhumane and brutal language used to describe King to the jury was, as Rep. Maxine Waters concluded, "enough to lead the jury to believe (that)...this man was less than human and he got what he deserved."

Bush's call for order is, in itself, an indication of his failure to understand the nation he nominally leads. Benjamin Hooks, head of the NAACP who also

## Quotes from the Major Media

ANONYMOUS WHITE RESIDENT OF LOS ANGELES: "They're killing our cops."

GEORGE BUSH: "We know there is a cycle of poverty. If the system is causing the problem, then we have to change the system. But, we cannot condone violence as a way of changing the system."

REP. LUCIEN BLACKWELL, (D-PA): "This is about four policemen who broke the law."

REP. EDOLPHUS TOWNS, (D-NY, chairman of National Black Caucus): "When police officers . . . inflict violence . . . on the people . . . it is our imperative . . . to stand up."

REP. ESTEBAN TORRES, (D-CA, chairman of National Hispanic Caucus): "It is a shameful day in my state, California . . . the criminal justice system has failed Rodney King. The anarchy is symptomatic of a people unable to cope with a police department that's turned on them."

ANONYMOUS FEMALE JUROR: "He [King] was in control of the situation. He was not writhing in pain. He gave every indication of being on PCP. I don't know how anyone could come down with anything else."

ANONYMOUS SAN FRANCISCAN: "It's the kind of verdict that makes you hate America."

PROTEST SIGN SEEN IN SAN FRANCISCO: "Power to the people, not the pigs."

JAMIAN RASKIN, Professor at American University School of Law: "I believe there was a thirteenth juror --- and it was racism."

REP. DON EDWARDS, (D-CA): "This was a Jim Crow prosecution."

REP. MAXINE WATERS, (D-CA): "I encourage protest. We must tell people to stop the violence, but I encourage protest."

MAYNARD JACKSON, Mayor of Atlanta: "This justifiable anger is being expressed illegally. It is thoughtless violence and destruction."

PETER BART, Editor of *Variety* Magazine: "It's high-tech coverage that leaves people distanced from reality, because there is no analysis. But it's a great TV story."