

What the RODNEY KING Video *Didn't* Show

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IT WAS shortly before midnight on Saturday, March 2, 1991. I was just leaving the Foothill Station, early in my 11 P.M. — 7:45 A.M. morning shift, when the California Highway Patrol pursuit went down. A CHIP unit had a major chase under way.¹ It was just a few miles away. The CHIPs had radioed a request for LAPD help. Two of my units had responded and an LAPD police helicopter had been dispatched. I began paralleling the pursuit, based on what was coming over the police radio band. The chase was happening fast, 70, maybe 80 miles an hour and faster.

It had started as the CHIP cruiser ap-

proached the end of a long, steep descent of the 210 Freeway. The driver, Officer Melanie Singer, a three-year veteran of the California Highway Patrol, had first noticed the suspect vehicle's headlights in her rearview mirror. The headlights of the approaching car were rapidly narrowing the gap between it and the CHIP cruiser. That wasn't unusual, given the steep incline. Still, it looked to Melanie Singer as though the vehicle was traveling not just at an excessive speed, but at a speed that was unusually dangerous. She told her partner, Tim Singer, who was also her husband, about the approaching car. To get a handle on the vehicle's estimated speed, Melanie and Tim Singer decided to exit at the Sunland Boulevard off-ramp. Then they'd re-enter the freeway immediately to gauge the suspect auto's speed. By the time the CHIP cruiser got back to the 210 Freeway, the suspect car had passed the off-ramp and was almost out of sight. To Officer Melanie Singer, that meant it had to be traveling at 100 miles per hour plus. Melanie Singer floored the accelerator of the cruiser — her speedometer read 115 miles per hour — but she wasn't getting closer to the suspect, she wasn't narrowing the gap.

The suspect's vehicle began to jam up in traffic and slow down. It was the break Officer Singer needed to close in on it. She neared to within a couple of car lengths of the speeding suspect, her speedometer now reading 80 miles per hour. She should have slowed to a safer speed and distance, but Melanie Singer was too wrapped up in the moment. It was a dangerous reaction, one that marks an inexperienced officer. She was eager, too eager, to turn on the lights and siren and force a traffic stop.

It was a poor police tactic. Stopping at

that point would have put her partner flush against a freeway sound wall (a high wall intended to confine the din of traffic to the roadway). This would have made it difficult for her partner to get out of the cruiser. It would have limited his ability to move and defend himself, if the need arose. Besides, Officer Tim Singer wanted to run a status check on the suspect's vehicle to see if it was stolen or involved in a recent felony. He waved his partner-wife away from forcing the suspect's vehicle to stop at that moment.

AS THEY approached the 118 Freeway Interchange — about three miles from where they first noticed the speeding vehicle — Melanie Singer turned on the lights and siren. The suspect didn't stop. Instead, he exited the freeway at Paxton Avenue. To make the exit, he had to turn sharply to the right across at

Sentencing is scheduled for August 4 for L.A.P.D. Sergeant Stacey C. Koon, the senior officer at Rodney King's March 3, 1991, arrest, and Officer Laurence Powell following their convictions in federal court on felony charges of violating King's civil rights. After Koon and Powell, with two other officers, were acquitted in state court, but before their federal trial, Koon wrote a book: Presumed Guilty, The Tragedy of the Rodney King Affair, giving his account of the entire incident. This excerpt from the book's first chapter covers the events of March 3. Federal prosecutors have recommended that Koon receive a nine-to-11-year prison term and Powell from seven-to-nine years. This is Koon's side of the story.

1. The California Highway Patrol is known as CHP to LAPD personnel. However, the CHP was popularized by the television show, CHIPs, a designation that is more familiar to most general readers. For that reason, CHP will become CHIP in this article.

least three lanes of traffic — at over 80 miles per hour. At the end of the exit ramp is a stop sign, with a blind curve to the right on Paxton. The suspect ran the stop sign and turned left onto Paxton at 35 miles per hour, ignoring traffic signs and stop lights, and pursuing police vehicles. By now the chase was in the Foothill Division of the LAPD. It was my territory.

Lights blinking and siren howling, the CHIP cruiser exited the freeway close behind the suspect vehicle. Melanie Singer was excited by the pursuit and her adrenal-in was pumping. CHIP assistance was rolling, but from a distance of 20 miles. The Singers needed help sooner. That's why they radioed for LAPD support. More help was on the way from two officers from the Los Angeles Unified School District Police who had observed the chase.

The suspect vehicle was making a large, horseshoe-shaped track of the city streets. Now it was paralleling the 210 Freeway on Foothill Boulevard. Melanie Singer had closed to within a car length and was staying on the suspect's bumper. At the intersection of Osborne and Foothill Boulevard, the suspect suddenly braked to a stop. Melanie Singer was caught off guard. She swerved to avoid a rear-end collision and stopped the cruiser alongside the suspect. Her partner-husband, Tim Singer, was directly beside the driver, whose name we learned later was Rodney Glen King (known to most of his friends as Glen, not Rodney). Officer Tim Singer and Rodney King stared at each other. Neither could fathom the other's intentions, although the CHIPs had made their wishes clearly known throughout the pursuit with lights flashing and siren howling.

The stop

MELANIE SINGER realized she had made a serious tactical error. Her partner was exposed, dangerously exposed, to the suspect. They were only about three feet apart. The driver of the 1988 white Hyundai Excel could have raised a pistol and made Melanie Singer an instant widow. So she shifted the car into reverse and backed away. The suspect suddenly gunned his car forward, starting the pursuit all over again. But he drove only

about 50 yards before rolling to a stop. His vehicle came to a halt on the right-hand shoulder of a curved portion of Foothill Boulevard, only a few yards away from the foliage of Hansen Dam Recreation Park. He stopped because a cable was across the entrance to the park and he could go no further. The park, known as a very bad area for drug dealing and associated violence, was on the right in front of the gas station and liquor store. The park followed the curve along Foothill Boulevard and swept farther around to the right, almost enclosing the scene on two sides. It was the park that had us worried. Why had the suspect continued on to the park after stopping earlier? Were we getting set up?

Melanie Singer had stopped the CHIP cruiser directly behind King's car. The school police pulled up and stopped to the right of and slightly behind the CHIP cruiser. An LAPD unit that had caught up with the chase just before the pause at the Osborne intersection pulled in to the left of the Singers' cruiser. The police helicopter was overhead, its dazzling spotlight illuminating a scene already made garish by the flashing lights of three police cruisers.

The officers got out of their cruisers, guns drawn, and took cover behind their car doors. Tim Singer, still in the patrol car, attempted to use the CHIP cruiser's loudspeaker to order the three suspects out of the car and onto the ground in the felony prone position.

"GET OUT OF THE VEHICLE. HANDS UP. GET ON YOUR STOMACH. PUT YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR BACK. NOW! MOVE IT!"

But the Singers' vehicle was only a couple of feet from Rodney King's rear bumper, causing a shrill feedback of the cruiser's public address system that made Tim Singer's commands unintelligible. He dropped the useless microphone, stepped out of the car, and began shouting commands over the noise of the school police's siren, which hadn't been turned off. The rotor blades of the LAPD helicopter overhead added to the pandemonium. Meanwhile, another LAPD unit pulled up. These officers also got out with guns drawn. They shouted at the school police to turn off their siren. It was quickly done.

Tim Singer now yelled a command for the driver, Rodney King, to get out of the

car. King didn't move. Frustrated, Tim Singer ordered the two passengers, later identified as Freddie Helms and Bryant Allen, out of the car and into the felony prone position. Helms and Allen quickly obeyed, getting on the ground, where they were eventually handcuffed without incident.

Tim Singer again shouted for King to get out of the vehicle. Now, slowly, King complied. But it was obvious that something was wrong. King seemed to be under the influence of either alcohol or a much stronger chemical agent. He had his own agenda. He was making light of a dangerous, potentially lethal situation. He danced around. He waved at the helicopter. Worse, he reached into his pockets, an exceptionally dangerous action since he hadn't been cuffed and searched and the officers on the scene had no idea whether he was armed. Not only were eight officers now there, all with guns drawn, but a crowd of civilians from the apartments across the street had begun gathering to witness the real-life drama. Traffic was backing up a block behind the scene, as motorists tried to see what was happening. Again, Tim Singer ordered Rodney King to get on his belly, face down, with his hands behind his back. King ignored the order.

Initial use of force

THAT WAS the tense situation when I arrived at the scene. I braked to a halt, pulling my squad car directly to the side of King's vehicle at a 45-degree angle about 20 feet away. That put the engine block between me and the scene, providing some protection if the suspect had a gun and wanted to start shooting. I got out of the car to survey what was going on.

This was when I made my first eye contact with Rodney King. He was by the open door of his vehicle, on his knees, swaying back and forth and from side to side. I estimated him to be a big man, very big, about six-feet, two-inches tall, and maybe 250 pounds. Even though he wasn't standing up, I could tell that he was huge.

Not only that, but he was "buffed out." That means he had enormous upper-body muscles — his torso had been pumped-up through rigorous, systematic exercise. It's a

physical condition often associated with ex-cons, who have a lot of time to spend working out in exercise yards while they're in the slammer.

So my initial suspicions were that this guy was an ex-con and either drunk or on drugs. As it turned out, both hunches were correct. Rodney King was at the very least drunk. And later we learned he was an ex-con who, if convicted of the felony traffic offenses he'd been seen committing, could be returned to prison.²

Both of these were important suspicions — that the suspect was either drunk or on drugs, and that he was an ex-con. These were especially significant in view of what had gone on in the prior minutes of the chase. In 15 years as an LAPD cop, 13 of them on the street, I'd been involved in about 50 high-speed pursuits, most of them at night. Of these, only one or two had been a speeding offense only. All of the others had involved unrelated felony violations. Which means, of course, that this situation had to be approached as multiple traffic violations committed in connection with another, more serious crime, perhaps a burglary or, worse, an armed robbery or shooting incident. And remember this: my suspicion, based upon the evidence I had to work with at the time, was that this was an ex-con and therefore knew all the tricks to take out a police officer.

The lights from the cruisers and helicopter revealed that King was sweating. His muscular torso was beaded with perspiration that glistened in the artificial lighting from the helicopter and black-and-white headlamps. That was kind of weird. It was a cold night, yet this guy's sweating. Then he reached out, still on his hands and knees, and I thought he was going to go into the compliance mode for a felony cuff-

ing. I thought he'd get on his belly, face into the pavement, hands behind his back. But King didn't do that. Instead, he started patting the ground — not like he was going to get on his stomach in a felony prone position, but like he did not know where the ground was, like he was feeling for something he couldn't quite reach.

That struck me as more than peculiar too. "Why can't this guy find the ground he's kneeling on?" I thought to myself. Then he started talking gibberish. Not jabbering a real language, like English, Spanish, French, German, or any of the Asian tongues — Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, or Thai — that I'd heard. Instead, it was a made-up language. He was mouthing unintelligible words, repeated over and over and over. I've seen it many times before. I'm beginning to get a bit concerned that we've got a "dusted" suspect here, not somebody just spaced out on booze or a drug like marijuana, but on something much more dangerous — like PCP.

What happened next increased my concern. What King now did was to crouch into the cocked position of a runner on the blocks or a football lineman getting in position to blitz an opposing tackle. I'm looking directly at this suspect, and he's looking at me — but he's looking through me. I've seen that look many times before. It's the look of somebody who's under the influence, specifically the influence of PCP. Now the suspicion that he's dusted gets stronger. But it still hasn't been confirmed.

He was 'buffed out.' That means he had enormous upper-body muscles — his torso had been pumped-up through rigorous, systematic exercise.

King gave no hint that he was going to comply with the officers' orders to spread on the ground with his hands behind his back. But I had a backup plan for that. So I reached into my squad car for a TASER,³ an electronic stun-gun that can fire two cassette cartridges, each capable of jolting a suspect with 50,000 volts of low-amperage electricity through wires that connect into clothing or skin with small darts. The manufacturers of the device have a film of the TASER in action. One cassette is shot into an adult bison and BOOM: the bison falls like it's been poleaxed.⁴ I'd used a TASER hundreds of times, especially when on duty as a sergeant in the jail where you're not allowed to carry a weapon or tie up physically with a prisoner. In the jail, a TASER was our only defense against prisoners. It is a formidable, nonlethal tool.

I unholstered the TASER and returned to my position behind the engine block. Melanie Singer decided her command presence was required. She shouted at King to show her his hands. Recognizing the voice as female, King grinned and turned his back to Melanie Singer. Then he grabbed his butt with both hands and began to gyrate his hips in

2. At the time of this incident, Rodney King was on parole for robbery. In 1989 he had stuffed a two-foot-long tire iron into his jacket and used it as a weapon to rob a Korean storeowner in the Los Angeles suburb of Monterey Park. After buying a package of chewing gum, King ordered the storeowner to open the cash register, then struck him with a metal rod after he objected. King fled with about \$200 but was quickly caught, tried, and convicted. He was paroled in December 1990 after serving half of a two-year term. Conviction for another offense would have meant a forced return to prison. Rodney King's prior record was less than clean. He was arrested in January 1989 for soliciting sex from an undercover Pasadena policewoman. Two years earlier, in 1987, he was sentenced to two years probation after pleading no contest to a misdemeanor battery charge filed by his wife. Earlier, in June 1983, at age 18, King was convicted of reckless driving after allegedly attempting to run over his future wife following an argument. And only

two months later, in August 1983, he was convicted on a charge of trespassing, reduced from a theft charge, when he failed to pay for \$251.87 worth of auto parts allegedly stolen from a Pep Boys outlet in Pasadena. Long before March 3, 1991, Rodney King was compiling a record as ugly as a mail-order suit.

3. The acronym stands for "Thomas A. Swift Electric Rifle," a wry use of the name of a fictional juvenile-book hero of inventive nature.

4. At the trial, one of the attorneys suggested we use the film as evidence. But my attorney and I feared we might have an animal-rights lover on the jury who might resent seeing a buffalo being TASED. As it turned out, we did have an animal lover on the jury. So the film showing a bison falling to his knees after getting TASED with one 50,000-volt charge and then toppling over like a bag of bricks was never screened for the Simi Valley jurors.



a sexually suggestive fashion. Actually, it was more explicit than suggestive. Melanie Singer wasn't so much fearful as offended. She was being mocked in front of her peers. She was a female officer and she would be damned if a suspect was going to make fun of her and be so blatantly disrespectful in front of other officers, one of them her husband. Control and common sense were cast aside. Melanie's Jane Wayne and Dirty Harriet hormones kicked in. She drew her pistol, and advanced to within five feet of the suspect.

HAD SHE proceeded, either she was going to shoot Rodney King, or he was going to take her gun away and shoot her. If not her, then he might shoot some other officer or a civilian bystander. By drawing her gun and advancing on the suspect, Melanie Singer was unnecessarily raising the level of force. I don't know what CHIP training is, but the LAPD won't permit an advance on a suspect with a gun. The idea is to de-escalate before pulling your gun, if possible. So I ordered her to stop, telling her that we would handle the situation. Although the CHIPS had initiated the pursuit, my two cruisers were the primary and secondary units on the scene. And the incident was now on LAPD territory. As far as I was concerned, LAPD was in charge, not the CHIPS. I quickly formed a tactical plan. "Put your guns away. Put your guns away!" I yelled.

The officers, all that I could see, holstered their pistols. Now deadly force was not imminent. I shouted at Melanie Singer

to back away. I was the ranking officer on the scene, and she prudently obeyed my orders. Now, before using a TASER, I could go to the next part of my plan: a "swarm" on the suspect.

Through body language and verbal commands I ordered the four LAPD officers nearest Rodney King to surround him. The idea was to force him into the felony prone position through what's known as a "swarm." That means two officers would each grab an arm, and two others a leg. The suspect is then slammed down face first into the ground, his arms twisted behind the back, and the handcuffs put on. The "swarm" is a police device that has proved useful with thousands of violently reluctant suspects — white as well as black, brown, or yellow; women as well as men; and any combination of race or gender in between. It's a technique that is neither racist nor sexist. And it was within LAPD policies governing the use of force.

The question occurs: Why weren't more than four officers directed to take King down? When more than four or five officers are used to swarm a suspect, the extra bodies increase the danger of getting tangled up with the person you're trying to arrest. Then you might lose a wrestling match for a weapon. That's how somebody gets hurt, maybe even killed. It's why the LAPD has a stay-away policy for subduing violent suspects: you don't get physically entangled with a suspect unless it's absolutely unavoidable.

Powell and the three other officers had formed a semicircle around King. I indicated for them to flank this guy from the rear, for them to swarm him. But I specifically ordered them to back off if he resisted. Then I'd TASE the guy. I didn't want my cops tangling with the big guy I suspected was an ex-con and dusted with PCP.

The officers moved forward on King, who was in the runner-on-the-blocks position. Powell grabbed King's left arm. On the legs — I didn't know it at the time, but I do now — were Officer Ronaldo Solano who took the left leg and Officer Timothy Wind who took the right one. On the right arm was Officer Ted Briseno.

Officers Powell and Briseno were attempting to pull King's arms apart, but his arms were very rigid, straight in front of him like a couple of steel poles. Finally,

King shoved his arms voluntarily. Then he went down, WHAM SPLAT face-first into the asphalt. Later evidence demonstrated that this may have been when Rodney King broke his cheekbone, an injury falsely ascribed to officers' batons. It's hard to tell precisely when King's cheekbone was fractured, because he went face-first into the asphalt three different times. At this point Rodney King did kind of a twist. Powell had his knee on King's back and was trying to twist his left arm back to be cuffed. Briseno was struggling to get King's right arm back for the cuffs. Officers Solano and Wind were on his legs. Then something happened that really scared me.

BECAUSE WHAT happened then is that Powell gets thrown off. Then Briseno gets thrown off. Now Rodney King's arms are out in front of him. He's thrown off two officers. He's kind of weaving left and right. It's moving quickly now — all of this happens in split seconds — then Rodney King shakes his legs and throws off Solano and Wind. I think to myself, "He's turned into the Hulk!" The situation has turned deadly serious now. My officers are in immediate danger. No question of it.

Now Rodney King's on his knees, and I order the officers:

"BACK AWAY, BACK AWAY!"

That's part of the game plan, the tactic I had developed. If the guy starts to fight, back away, don't tangle up with him. That's how somebody gets hurt. Just back away and I'll TASE him. That's my tactic.

So we go to the next part of the plan. Now I know that the suspect is under the influence of PCP. If I had a suspicion before, now the suspicion is confirmed. It's not just a single piece of evidence but an accumulated body of knowledge, based on 13 years as a street cop.

It's not just the chase. That's over. It's not just the sweating on a cold night. I remember that, and how weird it is. It's not just the bizarre behavior, the dancing

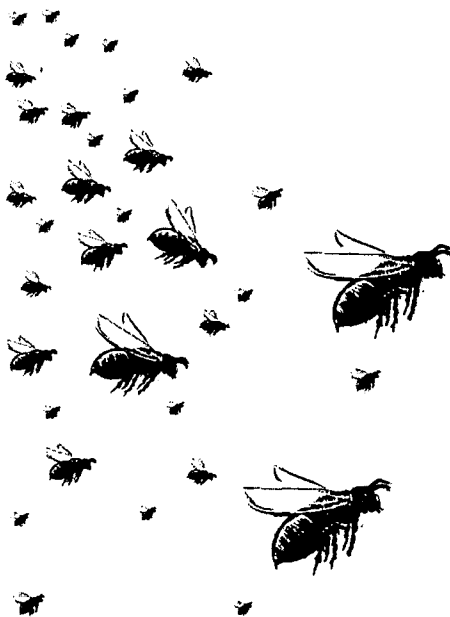
5. Some minority leaders have criticized my description of a PCP suspect as having "Hulk-like" strength. They have suggested it has racial overtones. As I recall, Lou Ferrigno, the star of "The Incredible Hulk," is Caucasian, and his color was a greenish-blue tint when transformed into the "Hulk." If there is a racial connotation here it escapes me.

around, waving at the helicopter, shaking his butt at Officer Melanie Singer. That's all just part of the picture. It's not the glassy eyes, the gibberish he's been spouting. It's everything. Put it all together with the superhuman strength to throw off four cops — they're not small cops either — and bingo: you've got a PCP suspect. Now it's confirmed. He's got this Hulk-like strength. And you don't find all this with somebody who's not on PCP. I can't throw off four officers, and I don't know many people who can. And I'm getting scared.

Now I order all the officers away and I try to talk to Rodney King, I give him verbal commands. Verbalization — giving orders by voice — is an essential part of LAPD policy on using force. So I tell Rodney King to get down, get down in felony prone position, get on your belly and your hands behind your back, or I'm going to TASE you. "GET DOWN. LIE [sic] ON THE GROUND. GET YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR BACK! DO IT NOW OR I'LL TASE YOU!" I shout.

But he doesn't seem to hear. Instead, his torso's up, his legs are cocked, it looks like he's getting up to come after me or one of the other officers. And this is just after he's had his face slammed into the pavement and then thrown off four cops. "GET DOWN, LIE [sic] DOWN!" I shout again. "GET DOWN OR I'M GOING TO TASE YOU!"

But he kept moving up. And so I



TASED him. Got him right in the back. A nice spread with the darts. They don't have to touch the skin. All they have to do is hang up in the clothing. I've TASED people hundreds of times, and I know this TASER's working. I can see the darts hanging in his shirt, I can hear the activity of the TASER. It's zapping him with 50,000 volts. Rodney King is on his knees. He's kind of grimacing and making a bear-like groan. He sags briefly, then he starts coming up again. He has overcome the first TASER.

This thing isn't working like it's supposed to, like they teach you at the academy, and like I'd seen with hundreds of suspects. You TASE a guy and he's supposed to fall down like a bag of potatoes. That had mostly been my experience. Except with two kinds of people. One is a psycho and the other is somebody who's dusted on PCP. If I had any doubts about this guy's drug of choice, all of those doubts were gone now. Rodney King was wired better than the TASER.

But I didn't have anything else to work with in that split second. Now he's up on his knees again, he's turned 180 degrees and I order him again:

"GET DOWN OR YOU'RE GOING TO GET TASED!"

It's like talking to that bag of potatoes. Because Rodney King's up again. He's groaning like a wounded animal, and I can see the vibrations on him. I know the TASER's working, and he knows it's working, too. So I TASE him again, this time in the left side. The barbs strike King's torso. The TASER's rapid clicking sound begins. Another 50,000 volts, enough to put down a second buffalo. And this time the TASER's working again, too. I can see the vibrations, I can hear the sound of a TASER emitting its electrical discharge. Now Rodney King's down on the ground, and I'm thinking that maybe this guy's going to stay down and get in the felony prone position like we'd been ordering.

Once again, King let out a loud groan. Then, incredibly, he leaned to his right, braced himself on his right elbow, and began rising. The TASER hadn't stopped him. Two TASER blasts could put down two buffaloes, but Rodney King hadn't stopped. I yelled orders again for King to prone out on the ground. Again he ignored

the command. King righted himself to a sitting position.

I kept shooting the TASER. This last burst of electricity seemed to work. Rodney King was now lying on the ground, and I believed he might be willing to comply with our orders. Even so, I yelled to the officers present, "Does anybody have another TASER?" It seemed a prudent thing to do, even if King appeared finally to be complying.

The videotape

ONE OF the officers had another TASER. But somebody — not an officer — did have a video-camera. It was George Holliday, a resident at the apartment complex across the street. He had just purchased a new camcorder and hadn't yet had a chance to try it out. The scene being played out about 50 yards across the street was a perfect opportunity to see what the videocamera could do at night. He began taping.

All that had already taken place — the challenge to Officer Melanie Singer, the refusal to obey lawful commands, the bizarre behavior, the gibberish language, the incredible act of strength in throwing off four officers, and, finally, the survival of two 50,000-volt shots of nonlethal electricity — none of this was captured on the Holliday videotape. The next 82 seconds, shot out of context and edited as a complete account of the arrest, would determine public reaction to the Rodney King affair, as it quickly became known.⁶

And even this vastly shortened account of the incident, given the media's interpretation, was misleading, leaving the public

6. After videotaping the incident, George Holliday approached the LAPD to learn what had happened and to offer a taped record of the incident. Rebuffed by the police — he apparently got a desk officer in a bad mood that day — Holliday went to KTLA Channel 5, which, after some negotiations, bought the tape for \$500. Next to the purchase of Manhattan Island from the Indians for \$24 in glass beads and trinkets, the \$500 paid for the Holliday videotape must rank as one of the best bargains in American history. As soon as it was purchased by KTLA and shared with CNN, it became one of the most watched news videotapes in history, along with the explosion of the Challenger space shuttle and the funeral of President John F. Kennedy.

with a completely skewed view of the entire episode.

More force

BUT KING was on the ground for only a second. After the second TASER blast, King continued to right himself. In an instant, he was on his feet. His arms outstretched, King rushed Officer Powell. If he had wanted to escape, there were plenty of avenues available. He could have fled across the street into the crowd of bystanders, or to his right into the park. But King didn't do that. He chose to collide into Officer Powell, and the two grappled for a split second. That's why all of the officers present interpreted it as an assault on a policeman instead of an attempt to escape. Powell was terrified; police officers get scared, too. He defended himself with his metal PR 24 baton, unleashing a furious series of power strokes. The first one hit King's collarbone. King was knocked to the ground, doing a one-point landing, face first, into the asphalt. This was the second time his face had been roughly introduced to the pavement, and most of us at the scene believe this is when the cheekbone was fractured.

But, incredibly again, King rebounded as if he hadn't been touched. He was back up on his knees, trying to rise again, and Powell continued to strike him in the arms, hoping to take out King's support so he'd fall back to the ground. The blows were coming perilously close to King's head, but I didn't want that. Powell was moving, King was moving, the baton was moving.

"DON'T HIT HIM IN THE HEAD!" I shouted to Powell. "DON'T HIT HIM IN THE HEAD!"

I believed that King, because of PCP intoxication, was an extraordinarily dangerous suspect. I wanted a managed, controlled use of force. I wanted LAPD policies and procedures followed. I did not want a group beat. I did not want officers injured by fellow officers, which is a frequent danger in a group beat.

So I decided to have only two officers, Powell and Wind, use force. As long as Rodney King failed to comply with the orders to get in a felony prone position, as long as he tried to get up and make another

assault on an officer, Wind and Powell were to keep hitting him. King was ordered again to get down. I told him to lie down, several times. He refused and began rising again. Powell and Wind unleashed a series of strokes to King's torso, arms, and legs. Powell and Wind performed exactly as they had been trained to do. Bursts of powerful blows were applied, three or four at a time. But King was still getting up.

I activated the second TASER cassette a second time. Although its initial electrical discharge had been drained, the TASER retains a certain momentary, final burst of current that can be coaxed out. The TASER threw a new rush of voltage into King. Officer Briseno stepped in to warn away Wind and Powell. He was doing so because training at the Police Academy with the TASER is hands on. Recruits are TASED, and others are in physical contact with them. The result is that whoever's getting TASED and whoever's touching him at the time get zapped. They don't become unconscious; that's one of the benefits of the TASER. They just go down. Briseno was trying to keep Wind and Powell from going down from absorbing the TASER charge being applied to King.⁷

Then the officers stepped back to evaluate the effect the blows were having on the suspect. That's strictly procedure. It gives the officers an opportunity to determine whether the suspect intends to comply.

MORE IMPORTANTLY, the pause gives the suspect an outlet to avoid further blows by obeying the command to prone out, hands behind the back. These pauses are known as "pulsations" in police language. Yet they were interpreted by many viewers of the videotape as policemen simply taking turns beating an innocent suspect. That wasn't the case. They were following my orders and strict procedure: deliver the baton blows, then back off to see what effect they're having on the suspect. Are you beginning to get an idea about how your eyes can deceive you?

As long as King was lying still, making no effort to rise, he was not hit. He was commanded time and again to lie down flat, to put his hands behind his back. An enhancement of the George Holliday videotape later would reveal that 14 commands were issued in 82 seconds — an average of about one every six seconds. But King would not lie still. He kept trying to rise. Once, in one of the more tense moments that is captured in stark clarity on the Holliday videotape, King began rolling toward Officer Wind. Wind backed quickly away. He knew what was happening. Rodney King was doing the "Folsom Roll." To the casual viewer of the videotape, it appeared as though King were rolling away from the officers in an effort to avoid getting hit. But he wasn't being hit at the time.

King wasn't avoiding blows. He was rolling toward Officer Wind — he was doing the "Folsom Roll." Any LAPD cop who's dealt with ex-cons is familiar with the "Folsom Roll." Prisoners at California's Folsom Prison and correction units in other states have been photographed teaching it to one another in the prison yard. It's a technique for disarming an officer while prone out on the ground. The idea is to roll into an officer and tangle up his legs, then reach up and grab a gun belt and holster while the officer is off-balance. Then the officer is down and the suspect has the weapon. You can see where that leads. Although a probationer on the LAPD, Tim Wind had several years' experience under his belt as a police officer in Kansas. He recognized the "Folsom Roll" when he saw it. So he wisely backed out of King's reach, then moved forward to deliver a series of powerful strikes to King's arms and legs.

By now King had been subjected to a torrent of baton violence, at least 25 blows or more.⁸ I had monitored the action of the officers and King's reaction. I was flabbergasted. Rodney King had demonstrated a complete lack of pain. It was as if his entire body had been anesthetized. My officers and I exchanged glances of amaze-

7. Later, at the trial, Briseno claimed that he was trying to restrain Wind and Powell from beating King further. The jury didn't buy that argument anymore than I, Powell, or Wind did. Briseno wasn't trying to stop the violence; he was trying to prevent the TASER charge from hitting Powell and Wind.

8. In his suit against the city of Los Angeles, Rodney King and his attorney claimed that 56 blows were struck and King sought compensation of \$1 million for each hit, or \$56 million in all. A count from the Holliday videotape indicates that 33 blows were struck, and 23 missed. The misses aren't a compliment to LAPD training with the baton. But the point is this: the numbers aren't really important, since King's claims of innocent injury were and are, at best, self-serving.

ment. We were astonished. We had never seen anything like it before. We had never encountered a suspect who could absorb the number of power strokes Rodney King had taken to his legs, arms, and torso and not show any pain. This was a nightmarish reality, completely contrary to our training.

I REALIZED another plan of action had to be taken. I considered another swarm, but rejected it immediately. In the first place, the prior swarm hadn't worked. Rodney King was superstrong. There was no way I would risk the officers' safety by tying them up again with King. Besides, the officers were getting fatigued. And they probably would have told me to go to hell. I wasn't about to risk disobedience from my officers because of a stupid order. In addition to being swarmed, King had been TASED and batoned. The next level of force was deadly — either a chokehold or pistol. I wasn't comfortable with either option. The chokehold had been classified as deadly force, equal to a pistol, because of pressure from Los Angeles's minority communities, who believed it was used too frequently on blacks and Hispanics. And I had already dismissed the use of a pistol. I wanted to avoid the possibility of unnecessarily escalating the incident. But something had to be done. Rodney King was on the rise again.

"What can we do?" I asked myself in that split second. We had gone through the entire use of permissible force, from officers' presence through verbal commands, the swarm, TASER, and baton. Nothing had worked. All the tools from the grab bag of tricks the LAPD had given me to subdue a resisting suspect had been used.

I was about to turn to deadly force and order a chokehold on King — an action that would have ended the entire affair in about 15 seconds if it had been employed with the initial swarm — when another option occurred to me.

Maybe if the officers worked their batons on King's joints — his wrists, elbows, knees, and ankles — he would comply. I didn't like this option. I knew it would be even more painful than the prior blows. I knew it could cause serious injury, perhaps even cripple the suspect. But I was in a dilemma. Do I order the joint blows or move on to deadly force? I had to make an immediate decision. I opted to go with the

risk of severe pain and potentially serious injury to the suspect. He might be crippled, but at least the guy wouldn't be dead. So I issued the order.

"HIT THE JOINTS!" I shouted. "HIT HIS WRISTS! HIT HIS ELBOWS! HIT HIS ANKLES! HIT HIS KNEES!"

Wind and Powell followed the orders and began power-stroking the suspect. I didn't see every blow that landed, but I do know that King was struck multiple times on his joints. Larry Powell began to reach for his cuffs. Then Briseno noticed that King was reaching in his waistband, where weapons ordinarily are concealed. That's when he stepped forward to deliver a sharp



kick to the upper middle of King's shoulders, right between the shoulder blades, to stop him from reaching into his trousers. Powell and Wind started hitting King again, as ordered. Also, Tim Wind was kicking King, trying to keep him down. It wasn't so much a kick as it was a shove, with his feet, to get Rodney King down on the ground. King went prone, but then again tried to rise. After a few seconds, King got to his knees, raised his hands above his head, and said, "Please stop."

Those were the first intelligible words he had uttered. The strategy had worked. I directed the officers to stop hitting the suspect, and the blows ceased. But I wasn't happy with King's compliance. He was on his knees, still able to attack us or flee. He still had his hands free — and hands can kill. His feet were still free — and he could kick us. He could also still see the officers — and I didn't want him to be able to see us, to be able to form a plan to assault us or escape. What I wanted was for Rodney King to be prone on his stomach, face down on the ground, his heels flush against the pavement, his feet at 45-degree angles, and his hands behind his back, cuffed.

He wasn't doing what I wanted or what I had ordered. But at this point I was will-

ing to take anything I could get from Rodney King. So I interpreted his action as compliance. I had been in charge of the officers, but Rodney King had been in control of the situation. Now, I chose to see his actions, unsatisfactory as they were, as an indication that he was turning control of the situation over to the officers he had been resisting.

Ted Briseno moved in to cuff him. King began to struggle and resist. But now more LAPD officers were on the scene, eight of them. I ordered the officers to swarm King. They did so, in one of the sloppiest swarms I'd ever seen. King was forced to the ground and his face once again smashed into the asphalt, for the third time. But Rodney King was finally double-cuffed, up behind his back.⁹ I directed that we use a nylon rope to tie up his ankles, then connect that rope to his wrists in what is known as the "hog-tie" position.

At last Rodney King was controlled and in custody. He was no longer a danger to himself, to the officers, or to the community. I ordered King to be removed from the roadway, and had an officer request an ambulance for the suspect so he could be taken to a hospital for medical treatment. The treatment was necessary, not because we'd hurt him, but because it's mandated by LAPD procedure. The officers present began to joke and laugh, a sign of relief. It wasn't the joviality of a party atmosphere. It was the release of the pressures of the incident. It was gallows humor. The officers had faced a very stressful situation and prevailed. They were on a high.

AFTER THE ambulance had come for King, we dealt with the two passengers in the car, Bryant Allen and Freddie Helms. We checked them for outstanding warrants. There were none. So there was no reason to hold them any longer. They were uncuffed and released. Allen and Helms later filed a lawsuit against the city of Los Angeles, claiming they had been "traumatized" by witnessing the beating of Rodney King. On the Phil Donahue Show and other programs, appearing as instant celebrities following the King videotape, Allen and Helms insisted that they believed

9. This is standard operating procedure for a suspect believed to be on PCP. "Dusted" suspects have been known to break one pair of perfectly good handcuffs.

the incident was premeditated. They spoke of the psychological pain they'd felt from seeing their friend, Rodney King, beaten by the police.¹⁰ If, indeed, they were "traumatized," neither gave a sign of it that night. Allen and Helms got "traumatized" only after they had become talk-show celebrities pursued by lawyers sniffing an opportunity to cash in on the widespread publicity. "Trauma," it seems, is something that can sneak up on you when the scent of a lawsuit is in the air.¹¹

The hospital

AT PACIFICA Hospital, where the ambulance had taken him, Rodney King was in leather restraints that bound his hands and feet securely, preventing any aggressive action. The restraints had been ordered by the Emergency Room physician, Dr. Antonio Mancía, because the hospital staffers considered King to be a dangerous patient. They didn't want him exploding into a drug-induced rage while being examined for injuries. The leather restraints were a safeguard in addition to the presence of several officers.

I asked Dr. Mancía for an assessment of King's injuries. The doctor's diagnosis confirmed my belief that King was dusted. He diagnosed King's condition as "(1) PCP overdose and (2) facial lacerations, superficial."¹²

The examination of King's injuries showed that he had a bloody mouth from an interior cut on his lip, and swelling and abrasions on his right cheek. King was mentally aware of where he was and what had happened. He didn't complain of any pain and didn't appear to be seriously injured. I had expected to find numerous broken bones and severe bruises and swelling, but the doctor's visual examination revealed only minor injuries.

I was in a state of disbelief. "PCP is some heavy duty stuff," I thought to my-

self. Based on the doctor's assessment, my log entry stated that King's injuries were minor. After all, he'd been examined by a doctor. There was no need for me to speculate, not when I had a professional opinion for my log.

I stayed at the hospital about an hour, continuing to monitor King. It appeared that he had recovered from whatever drug he was using. He was going to have to be booked because he was a felony evader. But the jail won't accept PCP suspects. So he had to go to the Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center (LACUSCMC). On the 13th floor is the hospital ward where jailed offenders requiring medical supervision are held.

That was the last I saw of Rodney King that night. He was taken to LACUSCMC by Officers Powell and Wind without incident and examined by Dr. David Giannetto about 6:30 A.M. The exam indicated that King had bruises and soft-tissue swelling on the right side of his face. There were some facial lacerations on his right cheekbone area and right side of the chin; these had been sutured at the Pacifica Hospital emergency room. His jaw was intact. No teeth were loose. He had a good range of motion in his neck, and it was not tender. The lungs were fine, heart normal. He had bruises on his chest and back. There were no internal injuries.

Dr. Giannetto said King was neurologically sound, mildly intoxicated but able to provide his name, date, time, and what was happening. The only injury requiring treatment wasn't discovered until almost 24 hours after the Foothill arrest. It took that long for X-rays to be examined. The X-rays disclosed a small, spiderweb-like fracture to his fibula, a small, non-weight bearing bone in the right leg. Rodney King was placed in a short leg cast and put on crutches. The X-rays also revealed a fractured right cheekbone, but no treatment was rendered. That is customary with this injury; it usually heals itself quickly.

A urinalysis test for PCP usage was negative. But, as Dr. Giannetto testified later at the trial, the results of that test were inconclusive. According to Dr. Giannetto, that was because a negative urine test could not reveal the presence of PCP if the urine had a high alkaline content, as Rodney King's did. Also, PCP apparently can be stored in fatty tissues of the body for years, then released when the body draws upon stored energy to support unusual physical activity — like resisting arrest. Medical authorities say it is possible for some users to have a PCP flashback years after taking the drug only once. So even if Rodney King hadn't popped some PCP that night, he still could have had a flashback if he'd ever taken the drug in his adult life.¹³ And if he had such a flashback, it wouldn't have shown up in a blood or urine test, anyway.

It was remarkable that Rodney King hadn't been hurt worse than he was. Our use of force was unusually powerful. But he had come through it without serious injury. He hurt, but he was alive and in custody. Neither were any officers injured. And that's what a cop's use of force is supposed to accomplish.

AT THE station, while Rodney King was undergoing further examinations at LACUSCMC, I completed my log entry on the incident. The entry related what had happened as you have just read it. I concluded the log entry on the Rodney King arrest with this notation:

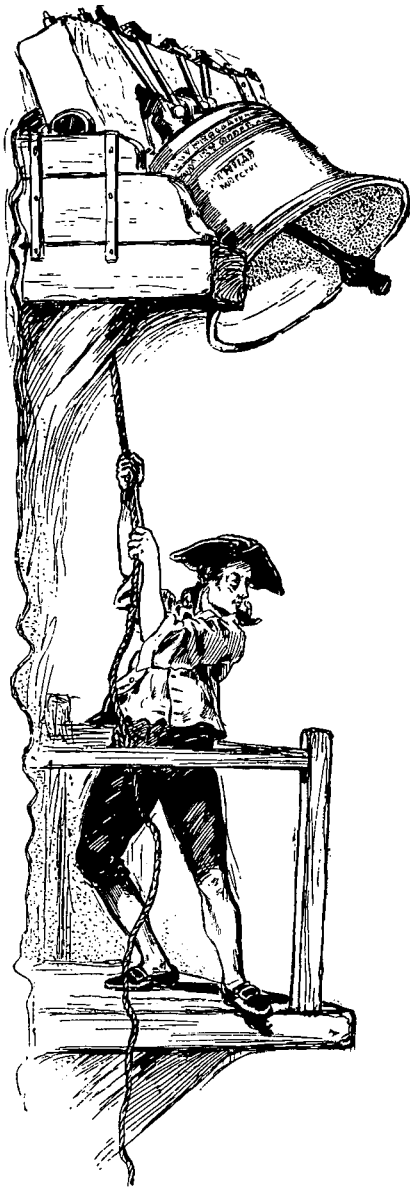
IMPORTANT NOTE FOR R/C [roll call] TRAINING — ALWAYS HAVE A B/U [back-up] WITH A USE OF FORCE. IT DOESN'T ALWAYS IMMOBILIZE. PR 24 [baton] DOESN'T ALWAYS CRIPPLE, ETC. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A FRAME OF REFERENCE, OFFICERS TEND TO PANIC WHEN THINGS DON'T WORK THE WAY THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO. A B/U PLAN PREVENTS PANIC. AND IT DON'T [sic] HURT TO HAVE LOTS OF B/U — ESPECIALLY WITH PCP SUSPECTS. CPR

10. Never mind that Allen and Helms were face down on the ground on the other side of King's vehicle, their hands cuffed behind them. The two were unable to see anything of the incident or hear anything other than our repeated commands for Rodney King to get on his belly and put his hands behind his back.

11. Freddie Helms was killed in an alcohol-related automobile accident shortly after March 3, 1991.

12. Pacifica Hospital ER Record 579511, March 3, 1991.

13. A test using hair samples can determine whether PCP has ever been used, but that test was not administered at the hospital. Today, King's attorney will not permit the test to be taken. One would imagine that if such a test would prove King free of the substance, his attorney would be eager to have it substantiated.



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Criticus

Take Us to Our Ghetto

G. B. Tennyson

IT MIGHT seem an act of journalistic onanism to spill more ink on a subject so extensively covered in the press as the recent spat over the establishment of a Chicana/o Studies Department at UCLA. Even inconstant readers and sporadic television viewers will numbly recall that after all the posturing in a tent city on the UCLA campus and all the sound bites from haltingly articulate students, from chancellor and vice-chancellors, the upshot was one of those face-saving accommodations that enabled both sides to claim victory while leaving most outsiders mildly confused about what had really happened.

After an alleged fast of 14 days, nine (count 'em, nine) hunger-strikers, their supporters and hangers-on, and their various spokesmen, ranging from state assemblymen to an all-purpose citywide Latino busybody, were rewarded for their pains with not *quite* the creation of a full-scale *Department* of Chicana/o Studies but with the creation of a *Center*, specifically the Cesar Chavez Center for Interdisciplinary Instruction in Chicana and Chicano Studies.

ACCORDING TO this formulation a center is held to be more than a program (which already existed) but less than a full-scale department (which was demanded), hence a victory for both sides. Or,

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seen another way, a failure for both. The administration did and did not concede; the strikers did and did not succeed. Take your choice. In these matters, as in all politics these days, perception is everything.

The really interesting points about this entire charade are those that weren't reported or appeared only in the small print or in obscure feature stories. These are enough like Evelyn Waugh for us to think of this whole enterprise as a kind of Southern-California-style *Black Mischief*. For your delectation Criticus offers ruminations on a few of these, first in the form of little known sidelights and carnival acts, and second in the form of some unasked questions, all concluding with

the real meaning behind the entire rumpus.

SIDELIGHTS AND SIDESHOWS

AT THE time of the protest the 20-year-old Chicana/o studies program had, officially, a total of 50 majors, of which 17 are said to have dropped the program, leaving 33, which as a percentage of students at UCLA works out to about one-tenth of one percent. The budget for the existing program is \$272,000 per year, or just under \$8,250 per major, though of course others than majors take some of the courses. The protesters demanded a 15-faculty department with a \$2 million budget, about a 735 percent increase, this at a time of severe budget cuts for the entire university.

In the existing Chicana/o studies program, 55.3 percent of all upper-division grades are A-, A, or A+. Only Asian American Studies at 64.6 percent A's has a more gifted enrollment, but African-American Studies is closing in fast with 51.8 percent of its grades being A's. (For comparative purposes it may be helpful to know that the largest majors on campus seem to attract less brilliant students; their percentages of A's weigh in as follows: English — 32 percent; History — 32.7 percent; Political Science — 33.3 percent; and Psychology — 34 percent; down among the dullards we find students of biology who gain only 24.5 percent A's.)

The nine hunger strikers were composed of an assistant professor of biology in the UCLA Medical School (teaching, we trust, Chicano biology), three female and two male UCLA students (unknown whether they are Chicana/o studies majors

