

REPORT

OF THE

INDEPENDENT

COMMISSION

ON THE

LOS ANGELES

POLICE

DEPARTMENT

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Foreword

The Rodney King beating stands as a landmark in the recent history of law enforcement, comparable to the Scottsboro case in 1931 and the Serpico case in 1967. Rightly called "sickening" by President Bush, and condemned by all segments of society, the King incident provides an opportunity for evaluation and reform of police procedures. Many saw the incident as particularly tragic because it happened in Los Angeles, whose police officers are among the most efficient and innovative in the nation.

Police violence is not a local problem. Recognizing its national character, police chiefs from 10 major cities convened soon after the King incident and emphasized that "the problem of excessive force in American policing is real." The same theme was stressed by Hubert Williams, President of the Police Foundation and former Chief of Police for Newark, New Jersey: "Police use of excessive force is a significant problem in this country, particularly in our inner cities." With the Knapp Commission on police corruption as a precedent, the most fundamental challenge for the Independent Commission is to recommend

reforms that will help insure that such an incident is not repeated in Los Angeles or elsewhere in the nation.

Our Commission owes its existence to the George Holliday videotape of the Rodney King incident. Whether there even would have been a Los Angeles Police Department investigation without the video is doubtful, since the efforts of King's brother, Paul, to file a complaint were frustrated, and the report of the involved officers was falsified. Even if there had been an investigation, our case-by-case review of the handling of over 700 complaints indicates that without the Holliday videotape the complaint might have been adjudged to be "not sustained," because the officers' version conflicted with the account by King and his two passengers, who typically would have been viewed as not "independent."

In the wake of the King incident and the public outcry, the Independent Commission was created by Mayor Tom Bradley on April 1, 1991, and soon merged with the Commission created by Los Angeles Chief of Police Daryl Gates. (See Appendix I for foundational documents.) Our efforts were endorsed by City Council President John Ferraro, District Attorney Ira Reiner, City Attorney James Hahn, and many other public officials.

Our Report concentrates on excessive force under color of law. We have sought to examine any aspect of the law enforcement structure in Los Angeles that might cause or contribute to the problem of excessive force, and this has led us to consider almost every aspect of the LAPD. We have tried, however, to avoid being drawn into issues that are only peripheral to our central inquiry.

Our Commission has conducted an unprecedented inquiry into the use of excessive force by a police department. More than 50 expert witnesses have been heard in 26 executive sessions. More than 150 representatives of community organizations and private citizens have been heard in five public hearings held by the full Commission in different sections of the City. Members of the Commission have taken many individual initiatives ranging from night time "ride-alongs" in patrol cars to meetings with groups of ministers and priests. More than 500 current and retired Los Angeles police officers have been interviewed. A staff of more than 60 lawyers, supported by three accounting and data analysis firms, has been at work for 100 days and many nights.