*Los Angeles Police Officers' (Rodney King Beating) Trials*
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*1992 & 1993*

["Use of Force" Chart](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/lapd/kingforce.html)

[Chronology](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/lapd/kingchronology.html)

[Police Transmissions](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/lapd/Kingtransmissions.html)

[Police](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/lapd/kingreports.html)
[Reports](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/lapd/kingreports.html)



***by***  ***Douglas O. Linder***

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| It seemed like an open-and-shut case.  The George Holliday video, played on television so often that an executive at CNN called it "wallpaper," showed three Los Angeles police officers--as their supervisor watched-- kicking, stomping on, and beating with metal batons a seemingly defenseless African-American named Rodney King.  Polls taken shortly after the incident showed that over 90% of Los Angeles residents who saw the videotape believed that the police used excessive force in arresting King.  Despite the videotape, a jury in Simi Valley concluded a year later that the evidence was not sufficient to convict the officers.  Was the all-white jury racist, as some charged, or did they see something in the evidence that  [[CONTINUED](http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/lapd/lapdaccount.html)] |

LAPD & The Use of Force
The chart below explains the escalating use of force to subdue a suspect, as used by the LAPD in 1991 and in the Rodney King case. To see scanned images of the Use of Force Report prepared in the King case, click here: [**USE OF FORCE REPORTS IN KING CASE**.](http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/lapd/kingforce.html#Use)

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| **Level 1: Physical Presence** **Normally, just the physical presence of police officers is enough to convince suspects to cooperate.  The likelihood of cooperation generally goes up when the physical presence becomes overwhelming.  In the King case, however, the presence of four squad cars ( with lights on and sirens blaring), a police helicopter overhead, and several officers with guns drawn and pointing at King failed to produce the desired level of cooperation.** |

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| **Level 2: Verbalization** **When physical presence is not enough to ensure cooperation, LAPD officers were taught to issue verbal commands to suspects.  The Holliday videotape indicates that King received at least fourteen commands to "get down." Officers wanted King to lie in a prone position on his belly with his head down and hands behind his back.  King did not comply with the commands.** |

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| **Level 3:  Swarming** **Confrontations usually can be ended with a group of officers swarming the suspect and bringing him to the ground.  In the King case, Sergeant Koon ordered his officers to swarm the suspect.  King succeeded, however, in repelling the attack.** |

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| **Level 4: TASER (Tom A Swift Electric Rifle) Use** **Tasing a suspect will usually knock a suspect to the ground, enabling him to be subdued and arrested.  In the King case, Sgt. Koon zapped King with two Tasers (each zap carrying 50,000 volts).  The TASER knocked King to his knees, but he was able to rise again and charge at one of the LAPD officers (Powell).** |

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| **Level 5: Use of PR 24 Metal Batons** **The Holliday videotape shows LAPD officers repeatedly striking (by one count 56 swings, resulting in 31 hits) King with PR 24 metal batons.  Officers are instructed to use the batons against the body mass of the suspect, then step back to evaluate whether the suspect has been sufficiently incapacitated to be arrested.** |

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| **Level 6: Use of Deadly Force** **When none of the above options succeed in subduing a suspect (or for some reason are not available as options), LAPD policy authorized the use of deadly force--usually a gun--in felony cases where some imminent safety risk was presented by the suspect.** |

**Note: Other law enforcement tools, not employed by LAPD, were in use by police in other jurisdictions.  These tools include a net that could be thrown around a suspect, a velcro blanket that could be wrapped around a suspect, and a "leg-grabber" that could be used to pull a suspect to the ground. (Source: Koon, *Presumed Guilty*)**

The Rodney King Beating (LAPD Officers') Trial: In Their Own Words

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| "I was scared of going back to prison and I just kind of thought the problem would just go away." --Rodney King explaining why he led officers on a high-speed chase (trial testimony) |

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| "I know if he gets hold of me and grabs me in the neck...it's going to be like a death grip, and you can have all 8,300 members of this police department pull this guy off and it's not going to work." --Officer Laurence Powell describing to Internal Affairs his fear in confronting King |

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| "It's like he's [King's] looking at me, doesn't see me, he's just looking right through me." --Sgt. Stacey Koon describing to Internal Affairs investigators why he thought King was on PCP |

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| "When [King] cut loose, he hit me in the chest and I see Powell flying off his side.  I don't know what's going on...but I'm thinking, man, this sucker is on something.  This is a bad ass." --Officer Theodore Briseno (Cannon, *Official Negligence*) |

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| "I haven't beaten anyone this bad in a long time." --Officer Laurence Powell (MDT message from Powell to another officer) |

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| "This is great!  They got it on tape!  Now we'll have a live, in-the-field film to show police recruits.  It can be a real life example of how to use escalating force properly." --Sergeant Stacey Koon (Koon, *Presumed Guilty*) |

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| "Television used the tape like wallpaper." --Ed Turner, Vice President of CNN (Cannon, *Official Negligence*) |

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| "It was a very, very extreme use of force--extreme for any police department in America.  But for the LAPD, considered by many to be the finest, most professional police department in the world, it was more than extreme.  It was impossible." --Police Chief Daryl Gates after watching Holliday video |

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| "I have seen uses of force with considerable violence, but I have not seen anything that is as violent as this in my fourteen and a half years." --Sgt. Stacey Koon (testimony) |

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| "You wanted to hit him [King] in the head, didn't you?" --Prosecutor Terry White cross-examining Officer Powell  |

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| "I saw the blood come out of his face.  I heard the driver [King] scream.  There is no doubt in my mind that he [Powell] hit Mr. King repeatedly in the face.  I will never forget it to the day I die." --CHP Officer Melanie Singer (testimony) |

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| "I felt beat up and like a crushed can.  That's what I felt like, like a crushed can all over, and my spirits were down real low." --Rodney King (grand jury testimony) |

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| "I think possibly [Koon] was overwhelmed by this situation where nothing seemed to work.  I think he went brain-dead." --Detective Taky Tzimeas, LA Police Internal Affairs Investigator (Cannon, *Official Negligence*) |

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| "Powell was an overaggressive and slightly sadistic police officer of questionable judgment." --Jack White, investigator for district attorney (Cannon, *Official Negligence*) |

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| "Take a look at some of the pictures of the riot.  They were out there stealing and looting and assaulting, and while they were looting most of them were laughing.  Where was the 'rage' over Rodney King and the verdict." --LA Police Chief Daryl Gates (Boyer, *Looking for Justice in L.A.*, New Yorker) |

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| "People, I just want to say, can we all just get along?  Can we stop making it horrible?  We're all stuck here for a while.  Let's try to work it out." --Rodney King |

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| "The lynch mob howling for 'justice' in the Rodney King affair has not yet been satisfied, its bloodlust not yet satiated.  So political capital can be gained by pursuing the 'guilty.'" --Sergeant Stacey Koon (Koon, *Presumed Guilty*)(on the prospect of facing a federal trial) |

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| "I think it was a winnable case from the defense point of view with a slightly different defense strategy.  The defense should have been, 'People, after looking at the video we screwed up, we didn't intentionally hurt anyone, so it wasn't a civil rights violation." --Defense Attorney Harland Braun (Dietz, *Willful Injustice*) |

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| "The Rodney King videotape is true.  But it is not the truth.  The truth can only be found by viewing the videotape in the context of everything else that happened." --Sergeant Stacey Koon (Koon, *Presumed Guilty*) |