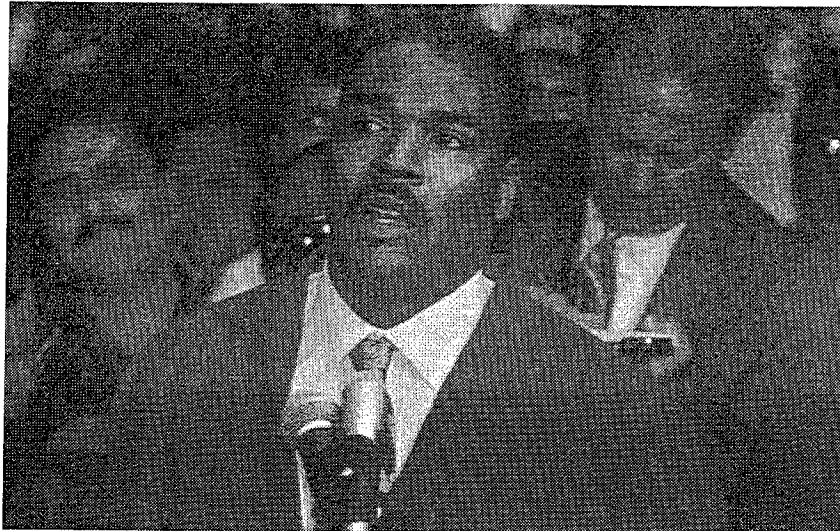


## 20 Years After Rodney King, Who's Holding Cops Accountable?



Rodney King Photo: Douglas Burrows/Liaison

by Julianne Hing

Thursday, March 3 2011, 4:41 PM EST

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Tags: police accountability, Rodney King

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Twenty years ago today Rodney King was dragged out of his Hyundai sedan just after midnight and beaten by Los Angeles police after an eight-mile chase through San Fernando Valley that ended in Lake View Terrace. Officers surrounded the 25-year-old taxi driver and construction worker and kicked, tased and beat him with their batons held like baseball bats. The attack was illuminated by the a spotlight provided by a LAPD helicopter hovering overhead, and the headlights of police cars that surrounded King's car.

King ended the night with nine skull fractures, a broken leg and shattered eye socket, a concussion, and permanent nerve damage that left part of his face paralyzed. Four of the officers who beat him that night were acquitted on all criminal charges. Two were later convicted of federal civil rights violations.

The beating was caught on camera by George Holliday, who turned on his new Sony camcorder after he was woken up by the blaring sirens outside his door. Just seconds of his 12-minute video were aired on the local news that night, but they were enough to galvanize the country and forever alter the culture of policing in Los Angeles.

In the years since King's beating was caught on film and broadcast around the world, the footage paved the way for dramatic overhauls of the Los Angeles Police Department. In 2001 the Los Angeles Police Department entered into a court-mandated five-year federal consent decree after a pileup of scandals and controversies, including King's beating, the fallout from the deadly uprising that followed the four police officers' acquittal, and the Rampart scandal.

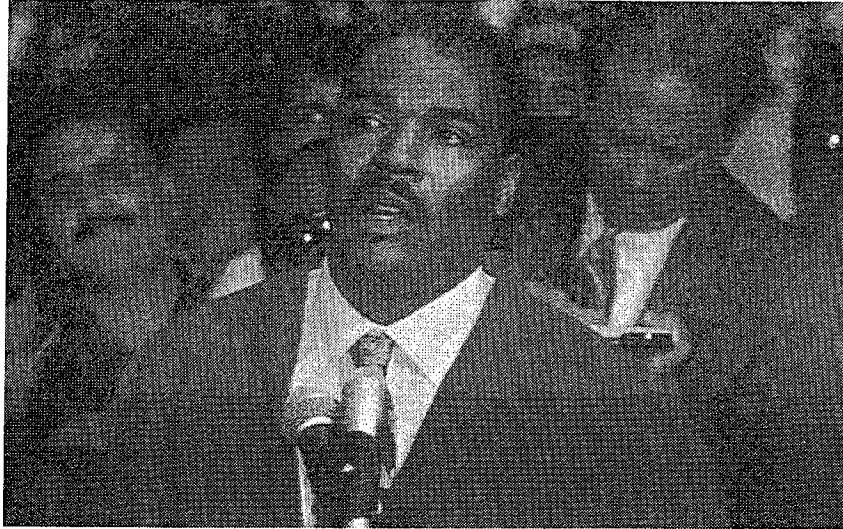
During the eight-year long oversight process, a judge and independent auditor monitored the department's progress in adopting and implementing reforms. The decree ended in 2009, and the department's improvements did not go unappreciated; independent watchers noted that the department had made some gains in improving its policing. But the city's Latino and black residents still reported lower levels of trust of police officers. Researchers found in 2009 that ten percent of black Los Angeles residents report that "almost none" of the LAPD officers they encounter treat them or their family and friends respectfully.

### Cop Watch 2.0

What has changed in the last twenty years is people's access to cameras in order to film everyday interactions with police. The medium has become a crucial tool for demanding accountability for violent acts of unwarranted brutality. Rates of police brutality may not be going up, but there's certainly much more undeniable proof of it today. In just the last year, Seattle police officer Shandy Cobane was caught on video kicking 21-year-old Martin Monetti and shouting, "I'll beat the fucking Mexican piss out of you, homey! You feel me?" Another Seattle cop, Ian Walsh, was filmed punching a black teen in the face during a scuffle after she jaywalked across the street. Last month Houston police were caught on video beating a 15-year-old black boy with kicks and punches, even after he was handcuffed on the ground. Last summer bystanders whipped out their cell phones in time to film a Border Patrol officer crossing into Mexican territory from Texas and shooting a 15-year-old boy named Sergio Adrian Hernandez Huereca, who died at the scene.

But even this irrefutable evidence is no guarantee that police officers will be charged, let alone sanctioned, for their brutality. Seattle's city prosecutor Dan Satterberg cleared Cobane of both criminal and hate crime charges. Houston police chief Charles McClelland defended his department against community criticism about

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