

RUBICON THEATRE COMPANY TWILIGHT: LOS ANGELES, 1992



CHRONOLOGY

THE RODNEY KING BEATING AND RELATED EVENTS LEADING UP TO APRIL 29, 1992

MARCH 3, 1991

Rodney King, a Black motorist, is pulled over by California Highway Patrol officers for speeding on the 210 Freeway. King later admits he tried to elude authorities because he had been drinking and was on probation for a robbery conviction. He eventually pulls off the freeway and stops his car in front of a San Fernando Valley apartment building. George Holliday, who lives in the building, is awakened by the noise. He sees and videotapes four white officers beating and kicking King dozens of times, even after he is subdued and on the ground. Holliday turns over the video to a local TV station, and it airs over and over again on broadcast news, causing an international outcry.

A few days later, LAPD Chief Daryl F. Gates calls the Rodney King beating an “aberration” as the community clamors for his resignation. King is released from custody.



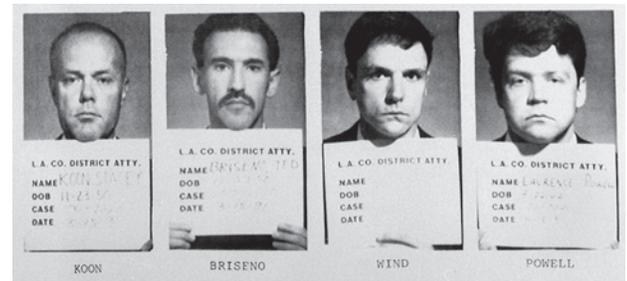
The Beating of Rodney King. Photo: George Holliday/KTLA via AP

MARCH 15, 1991

A grand jury charges the four officers seen in the video with felony assault and other offenses.



The same night, 15-year-old African-American teenager Latasha Harlins is shot in the back of the head by Korean-American Soon Ja Du in a South L.A. convenience store at 91st and Figueroa. Du states she believes the Westchester High School student was stealing a \$1.79 bottle of orange juice. Harlins dies with \$2 in her hand.



Left to right: Sgt. Stacey C. Koon, Officer Theodore J. Briseno, Officer Timothy E. Wind and Officer Laurence Powell. Photo: L.A. County District Attorney via AP

MARCH 26, 1991

The four officers charged in the King beating enter their innocent pleas on March 26, the same day Soon Ja Du is arraigned for murder.

APRIL 1, 1991

L.A. Mayor Tom Bradley empowers a special commission under Warren Christopher to investigate the LAPD.

APRIL 4, 1991

The LA Police Commission places Gates on leave. He is immediately reinstated by the City Council and Gates takes disciplinary action against the four indicted officers, firing Wind and suspending the other three.



Police Chief Daryl Gates and Mayor Tom Bradley
Photo: Sidney Brink, L.A. Herald Examiner Collection of L.A. Public Library

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MAY 10, 1991

A grand jury refuses to indict 17 officers who stood by at the King beating and did nothing.

JULY 9, 1991

The Christopher Commission releases its report on July 9, recommending that Gates and the whole Police Commission resign.

JULY 16, 1991

The Police Commission orders Gates to reinstate his assistant chief David D. Dotson, whom Gates had forced to step down after Dotson complained of the chief's failures to discipline police officers. About a week later, Gates announces his intention of retiring in 1992.

NOVEMBER 15, 1991

After a court finds Soon Ja Du guilty of involuntary manslaughter, she is sentenced to five years' probation, four-hundred hours of community service and a \$500 fine.

NOVEMBER 26, 1991

Based on the massive publicity and the highly charged political environment surrounding the case, Judge Stanley Weisberg of the California Court of Appeals approves a change of venue to Ventura County, and the Rodney King Trial is planned to take place in Simi Valley. As racial tensions continue to grow, the choice is criticized because Simi Valley is largely populated by Caucasian-Americans and because of the large number of L.A. Police officers who live there.

NOVEMBER 29, 1991

Tensions continue to rise when LAPD officers kill a black man, leading to a confrontation with nearly a hundred housing-projects residents in the Watts area of L.A.

FEBRUARY 3-APRIL 28, 1992

Pretrial motions precede the actual trial of the four LAPD officers in the Rodney King case, which begins with opening arguments on March 4, before a jury which includes ten white people, one Filipino person and one Hispanic woman. None are African-American. And none are Simi Valley residents. Two weeks later, the prosecution rests its arguments. On April 13, Briseno admits that King was never a threat to the arresting officers. Meanwhile, on April 16, Willie L. Williams is named as Gates' successor as Police Commissioner. On April 23, the King-trial jury begins its deliberations.

APRIL 29, 1992

The jury returns a verdict on April 29. The officers are found innocent, except for one charge against Officer Powell for the excessive use of force. The verdict, which results in a mistrial, is widely publicized on television.

Shortly after the verdict, Mayor Tom Bradley calls the verdict "senseless," and states, "The jury's verdict will never blind the world to what we saw on the videotape."



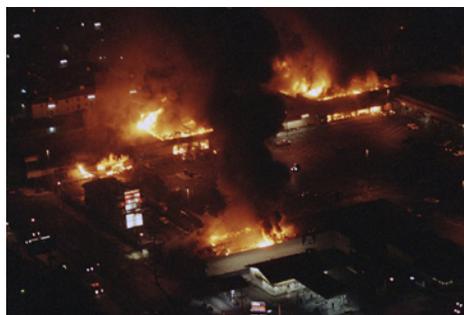
Mark J. Terrill/AP - Officer Briseno defends his actions during court testimony in Simi Valley on April 3, 1992. A scene from the video of the assault is shown at left.

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The feared reaction comes the same day. A peaceful protest rally of over two-thousand people at a South-Central L.A. church breaks into violence, spreading in a widening circle of shootings, beatings, and looting. Vandalism eventually leads to arson, engulfing a large section of Central L.A. in fire. Reginald Denny, a Caucasian truck driver, is pulled from his cab and severely beaten in an episode caught on video tape and broadcast on television. L.A. Mayor Bradley declares a local emergency, and Governor Pete Wilson brings in the National Guard.

Mass protests break out around the country. A week later, the L.A. Times announces the toll paid by the community: more than 150 fires, 58 dead, almost 2,400 injured, over 12,000 arrested, 3,100 businesses damaged, and property losses in excess of \$1 billion.



Several buildings in a shopping center are engulfed in flames on April 30, 1992. Photo: AP/Reed Saxon



A fire burns out of control in South Central L.A. on April 30, 1992. Photo: AP/Paul Sakuma

MAY 1, 1992

Rodney King pleads for calm, stating, "People, I just want to say, can we all get along? Can we get along? Can we stop making it horrible for the older people and the kids?"

JUNE 28, 1992

Under massive public pressure to resign, Police Chief Daryl Gates retires from the LAPD after 43 years on the force, and 14 as chief.

AUGUST 4, 1992

LAPD Sgt. Stacey Koon, and Officers Laurence Powell, Theodore Briseno and Timothy Wind are indicted on federal charges of violating Rodney King's civil rights.



Photo: Pool/AFP/Getty Images

FEBRUARY 25, 1993

The federal trial begins.

DECEMBER 7, 1993

Damian "Football" Williams, who was seen in the video assaulting white trucker Reginald Denny with a brick, is convicted of assault and other charges and sentenced to ten years in prison.



Jonathan Nourok/AFP/Getty Images

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APRIL 7, 1993

Koon and Powell are convicted of civil rights violations. Briseno and Wind are acquitted. No civil disturbances follow the verdict.

AUGUST 3, 1994

After a long legal battle between King and the city, the City of L.A. agrees to a \$3.8 million dollar settlement to King for medical bills, pain and suffering sustained as a result of the beating.



Photo: Chris Pizzello/AP



Photo: Douglas C. Pizac/AP

JUNE 1, 1994

Rodney King is awarded nothing in punitive damages in a civil trial against the police officers. He had asked for \$15 million.

AUGUST 4, 1994

Koon and Powell are sentenced to 2 ½ years in prison

APRIL 16, 2010

Daryl Gates succumbs to cancer at the age of 83.

JUNE 17, 2012

Just a few weeks after the 20th anniversary of the uprisings, and shortly after King's memoir "The Riot Within: My Journey from Rebellion to Redemption" is published, King drowns in his backyard swimming pool at age 47.



Police conduct an investigation at King's home in Rialto, Calif., on June 17, 2012.
Photo: Jae C. Hong/AP



Daryl Gates' Funeral Procession Photo: Frank Stoltze/KPCC

Rodney King becomes a symbol of police brutality and the events around his trial spark a flame that continues to burn. Since King's death, his daughter Lora King has worked on bridge building projects with the LAPD between the police and the African-American community. The Rodney King Foundation, the non-profit Lora started in his name, remains her father's legacy.

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RECENT EVENTS IN THE NEWS

In March of 2020, Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old emergency medical technician is shot eight times when officers raid her apartment in Louisville, Kentucky. Louisville police said they returned fire after one officer was shot and wounded. Taylor's family files a lawsuit, and in September of 2020 reaches a settlement of \$12 million with the city authorities. The lawsuit states that Ms. Taylor's partner - who was with her at the time - had fired in self-defense because the police did not identify themselves, and he thought the apartment was being burgled. A grand jury charges one police officer not with Ms. Taylor's death, but with "wanton endangerment" for firing into a neighboring apartment. Three officers involved in the raid are eventually dismissed from the police force.

In May of 2020, George Floyd dies after being arrested in Minneapolis and held down by police officers, one of whom has his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes. Floyd pleads that he cannot breathe, and after his death, protests break out across the U.S., with demonstrations in other parts of the world. Former police officer Derek Chauvin - who had knelt on Mr. Floyd - is convicted on charges of second-degree murder, third-degree murder and manslaughter after a three-week trial.

In April, 2021, Daunte Wright is shot and killed in Brooklyn Center, just north of Minneapolis. Police pull Wright over for a traffic violation and tell him he is being arrested for an outstanding warrant. He breaks free and tries to re-enter his car, at which point an officer is heard shouting "Taser" several times before firing a shot.

Local police say that the killing appears to be accidental, and the officer Kim Potter, meant to use her Taser and not her handgun. In December, Potter is found guilty of first- and second-degree manslaughter in the young Black man's death.

Earlier this month, Patrick Lloyla, a Black Congolese refugee was killed by a Grand Rapids, Michigan, police officer during a traffic stop earlier this month, sparking protests in the city. Lloyla was shot in the back of the head according to a forensic pathologist who performed an independent autopsy. The investigation is ongoing.



Rodney King. Photo: Joe Klamar/AFP/Getty Images



Protests and demonstrations in Minneapolis as the trial of Derek Chauvin gets underway. Photo: Getty Images



Clashes erupted following Daunte Wright's killing, which occurred during the trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin. Photo: Getty Images