

More Los Angeles Police Department violence and frame-ups exposed

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A Los Angeles Police Department officer facing five years in prison for stealing eight pounds of cocaine revealed last week that he and his partner handcuffed and then shot an unarmed young man three years ago, planted a gun on him, and lied in court to convict him of a felony. The victim, Javier Francisco Ovando, now 22 and confined to a wheelchair for life, received a draconian 23-year sentence from the trial judge, who increased the penalty because Ovando did not show “remorse” for his crime. Ovando has no other criminal history.

The new revelation by Officer Rafael A. Perez appears to be the tip of a very large iceberg. At least 12 other officers from Rampart Division CRASH, an acronym for Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums, have been taken off duty because of the widening scandal. Already there are at least one apparent police murder and numerous other beatings and frame-ups linked to the unit. Another one of Perez's ex-partners, David A. Mack, was sentenced last week to more than 14 years in prison for robbing a bank of \$722,000.

Rampart includes one of the most dense population concentrations in the western United States. Stretching due west from downtown Los Angeles, the impoverished area is home to tens of thousands of immigrant workers, mostly from central America, who work for starvation wages in restaurants, as janitors, and in light manufacturing. Police can act with impunity because so many are undocumented and live in fear of even worse oppression from US-backed military killers in their native Guatemala and El Salvador. Ovando himself, although he is disabled for life and just spent three years in prison for a crime he did not commit, now faces deportation to Honduras.

Ovando was shot on October 12, 1996 by Perez and

his partner, Nino Durden, an LAPD training officer. The officers' phony report claimed that they were staking out gang members by waiting inside a vacant apartment house when Ovando burst in, brandishing an assault rifle. Durden shouted, “Police! Drop the gun!” When Ovando didn't comply, both Perez and Durden opened fire, hitting the suspect in the head, chest and hip. Former Chief of Police Willie L. Williams approved the shooting, and praised the officers' teamwork.

Perez now says that Ovando was unarmed, and that he and Durden planted an AK-47 on Ovando. The officers had seized the weapon during a gang sweep a few days before and Durden filed off the weapon's serial number. According to Ovando's statement to investigators, Perez and Durden handcuffed him before shooting him, first in the chest and then point-blank in the head. The officers' motives for their attempted murder of Ovando no doubt relate to the allegations that both officers were engaged in systematically stealing money and drugs from local dealers.

Durden was relieved of duty last month because of charges that he planted evidence in a case unrelated to the Ovando shooting.

While Ovando sat in prison without the medical treatment needed to recover properly from his wounds, Perez, Mack and their LAPD associates flaunted opulent lifestyles—expensive cars, designer suits, extravagant cigars, Las Vegas vacations—without even raising eyebrows about how they could afford such luxuries on police officer salaries. The clear implication is that corruption and outright criminality is widespread within the LAPD and tolerated by supervisors and upper management.

Perez apparently is also lifting the cover-up of a similar police shooting some three months earlier. On

July 20, 1996, at about 9:40 p.m., nine officers from the Rampart Division confronted several local youths, opening fire. One young man, Juan Manuel Saldana, was killed; another, 19-year-old Jose Perez, was shot but survived; and an innocent bystander was shot in the arm. Four officers fired a total of 10 rounds; none of the young men fired a shot. Three of those officers are among the 12 relieved of duty, while the fourth was fired earlier this year for severely beating a handcuffed man, Ismael Jimenez, 22, at the Rampart police station.

One of the victims in the second shooting, Jose Perez, was forced to plead guilty to assault with a deadly weapon on a police officer for a sentence of “time served.” He says he had to plead guilty, even though he was innocent, because the District Attorney said that otherwise he would be charged with the murder of his dead friend and exposed to a sentence of life in prison. California's felony murder law provides that someone can be found criminally liable for the death of an accomplice at the hands of police. Although the reports state that the officers shot Perez in the chest, Perez has shown the media scars on his back from the police bullets' entry into his body.

In a much bally-hooed media stunt last year, the Los Angeles District Attorney's office obtained an injunction against the 18th Street Gang, which makes it criminal for alleged members to do all sorts of activities that are legal for everyone else, such as congregate, wear beepers, and the like. Most of the affidavits submitted were from the Rampart Division, including one that repeats the lies about the Ovando shooting. The District Attorney has had to suspend enforcement of the injunction.



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