

Outrage over police beating of black youth in Los Angeles suburb

Kim Saito
17 July 2002

The violent police assault of 16-year-old Donovan Jackson in the Los Angeles suburb of Inglewood, California on July 6 has drawn public outcries and charges of police brutality and civil rights violations. Its videotaped images appearing and reappearing in local and national newscasts throughout the week have evoked memories of the police beating of black motorist Rodney King in 1991. The acquittal of the police officers involved in King's beating sparked the Los Angeles riots in April 1992.

The July 6 incident occurred after police and deputies followed the young man's father—Coby Chavis, 41—as he pulled his car into a gas station. The police said they stopped Chavis for expired license plates and later found out his license had been suspended.

Jackson had gone into the convenience store to buy some potato chips and returned to see police questioning his father.

The youth, who is a special education student, suffers from a disability termed “auditory processing delays,” which makes it difficult for a person to promptly follow directions given orally. This appears to have enraged the officers, who probably took it as a sign of disrespect for the police and proceeded to beat him for it.

The *Los Angeles Times* obtained a police report in which Morse's partner, Officer Brian Darvish, admitted hitting the youth two times before he was handcuffed. “I yelled at Jackson to let go of my uniform; however, he refused,” Darvish said in the report. It was then that Darvish punched Jackson, according to his account. Two other officers handcuffed Jackson. What followed was captured on videotape.

The amateur videotape was made by Mitchell Crooks, an unemployed Northern California man, from across the street. Crooks was arrested by police a few days later, accused of being a fugitive since 1999 and whisked-off to Auburn, California to serve a seven-month sentence for driving under the influence, hit and run and petty theft.

The tape shows another officer, Jeremy Morse, body slamming a handcuffed Jackson on the trunk of a police car and punching him on the face. The attorney for Morse later justified the treatment, making the dubious allegation that the youth had grabbed the officer's genitals while his hands were handcuffed behind his back.

Morse, a three-year officer, is now suspended on paid leave during the inquiry. Meanwhile the cop's abusive history is beginning to emerge. In a previous incident, a woman filed a civil rights lawsuit against Morse and other police, claiming he assaulted her when officers stormed her home last October 20.

The Inglewood Police Department acknowledged that it is investigating another complaint of police beating. Neilson Williams, 32, made the second complaint, alleging that in late June, Inglewood police used a carotid restraint hold on him and beat him unconscious without provocation in a public park.

A July 15 report in the *Los Angeles Times* suggests that Morse's conduct was business as usual for the Inglewood Police Department. The report identified more than a dozen complaints against Inglewood officers in recent years. The accusations include reports of officers breaking noses and knocking out teeth of their victims. In many cases this treatment is merely for questioning an officer's command, a behavior police consider “contempt of cop,” which is sadistically punished. Among the victims are high school teachers and other working class people.

The police department has never charge the involved officers with any crimes. The *Times* interviews indicate that those who sought to complain were treated abusively and had their complaints ignored.

Inglewood is an economically depressed city of 100,000 people in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Its population is largely working class and most of its residents are black and Hispanic. The city and the surrounding region have lost tens of thousands of decent-paying aerospace jobs since the 1990s, and these have been replaced with low-wage service employment at places like the Hollywood Park Racetrack and Casino and the Los Angeles Airport.

Attorneys for Donovan Jackson and his father Coby Chavis filed a federal lawsuit on July 10, seeking unspecified damages and alleging negligence, misconduct and violation of constitutional rights to due process and against unreasonable search and seizure. The lawsuit names Los Angeles County and three sheriff's deputies, the City of Inglewood and four of its officers.

Attorneys Joe Hopkins and John Sweeney point out that both Jackson and his father were beaten and injured by officers from

Inglewood and the LA County Sheriff's Department even before the videotape began. Chavis sustained rib injuries and his son needed treatment from an oral surgeon because of a jaw injury. Both are receiving psychological care due to the trauma.

"It was Donovan today. It was Rodney King yesterday. It's untold people in the graveyard that cannot speak out that have been abused by police, and it's time to stop," said Jackson's cousin Talibah Shakir, a sixth grade teacher in LA, at the press conference announcing the lawsuit.

In an attempt to defuse a socially explosive situation, six investigations are now under way into the Inglewood police beating, including by the US Department of Justice, the FBI, internal disciplinary inquiries and criminal investigations by both the Inglewood Police Department and the LA County Sheriff's Department.

On July 12 hundreds of demonstrators rallied at the Inglewood police station to demand the immediate firing of the police. Political figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. III and Dick Gregory attended in an effort to contain popular anger within the confines of appeals to the Democratic Party and the courts.

In general, the substance of the protest leaders' demands has been for the reform the police department and not to address the fundamental cause of police brutality—the enormous growth of social inequality in America and the turn by the economic and political establishment to more and more repressive methods of rule. The 1992 riots was an explosion of great social tensions, which has only been intensified by the ensuing decade of stock market boom on the one side, and ever greater deprivation for working people on the other.

At a meeting last Saturday of 300 to 400 people who had come to protest the incident, *World Socialist Web Site* supporters distributed articles from the web site on the war in Afghanistan and the Bush administration's attack on democratic rights. Several people stopping to talk to discuss with WSWs reporters.

One person said, "Poverty is the connection. That's the common thread. Ashcroft gave that order to give the police more authority to do what they want; they have been doing it all the time. This is just one example that got caught on tape, on video. This happens all the time every day."

Gloria, a mental health worker, said, "They just beat up a child that was handicapped—he's a minor, under age and I think that was wrong. The politicians don't care. They are not representing us. If they really cared about us, we wouldn't have so much poverty. We wouldn't have as many people living out on the street, eating out of garbage cans. I work for the Department of Mental Health, and people eat out of garbage cans every day.

"Look at all the people out here who are homeless. The people are certainly not being represented. We have no say-so over what they do with our money. They take it and do whatever they want. And a lot of people over here are starving

to death, homeless—I mean it's so bad now that the children are homeless. Children living in shelters—I think it is horrible."

Donald McCall said, "My son Kendra was murdered by LAPD two months ago on April 12. So I am here to support the little youngster that had this [beating] happen. Police brutality has to stop. It's too much.

"I would call it terrorism. I really would because any time something like this is happening, they expect people to get beat up and killed, shot and just forget about it. The police are not above the law when they are breaking the law."

Another protester said, "If something doesn't change, they [the police] may kill me one day. I'm a 57-year-old man. I can't take a beating like that. If they were to beat me like that they would kill me. The police are paid to be terrorists and what they do has terrorized the community. They make us afraid to go anywhere or do anything. We're afraid that we might make a mistake like forget to register our car and get killed because we don't have registration.

"I believe those officers were a team whose job it is to terrorize the community. I believe what should happen is that each and every officer remotely involved in the beating of that kid should be tried for attempted murder and terrorism.

"The police officer's job is to keep us so afraid to say anything about what's happening in our communities, like what happened in Florida with those strange things that affected the way that election came out. We will be afraid to demand justice because we would be afraid if we demand justice just as the young man who took that videotape of the police beating was terrorized, beaten and thrown into prison because of his own participation in his own society.

"It's becoming a crime in this country to disagree with government policy. I believe a great deal of this so-called war effort was manufactured by our own government as a way of putting the mechanisms in place to move our country towards a fascist state. Whenever a country goes to war then they can declare behavior of its citizens 'anti-war behavior' so you can no longer even demand justice, because you lose your right to justice."



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact