

Videos capture extreme police brutality in Los Angeles

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More than twenty years ago, an amateur video captured four Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers sadistically beating a helpless Rodney King, while more than a dozen other law enforcement officers watched. The violent images triggered popular outrage, followed by hand wringing in the political establishment, which promised reforms.

Over the last few weeks three videos have surfaced showing that nothing has changed. If anything, the LAPD, like other police agencies throughout the US, has become even more brazen in its contempt for the constitutional rights of the population.

The first video, made August 18, shows four LAPD officers, including one with the rank of sergeant, piling on top of 20-year-old college student Ronald Weekley, Jr. One officer is seen clearly punching the helpless young man squarely in the face, breaking his nose, while he is pinned to the ground.

Weekley was being detained because he was allegedly skateboarding on the wrong side of the street. The charge was upgraded to resisting arrest, and Weekley spent the night in jail.

The second video, recorded by a parking lot surveillance camera three days later, captured two male LAPD officers slamming Michelle Jordan, a 34-year-old registered nurse and mother, face first into the asphalt. After she was cuffed and stood up, the officers

slammed her to the asphalt again. The two LAPD officers placed the woman in a patrol car and then bumped fists, in a show of mutual congratulations.

Jordan, it turns out, was being investigated for talking on her cell phone while driving. Covered with bruises and abrasions, she too was arrested for resisting arrest.

The existence of a video depicting a third violent incident at the hands of the LAPD was revealed on August 30. Made by an LAPD in-car camera, the video recording itself has yet to be released.

According to witnesses and a belated statement issued by LAPD Deputy Chief Bob Green, 35-year old Alecia Thomas left her 3-year-old and 12-year-old children at the LAPD's Southeast Division station during the early morning hours of July 22. She told the children to go inside and tell the police that she was addicted to drugs, destitute and no longer able to care for them.

Later that day, five LAPD officers tracked Thomas down at her home and placed her under arrest for child endangerment. During the ensuing struggle, officers knocked Thomas to the ground with a "leg sweep." A female officer threatened to kick Thomas in the genitals, and then did so. Finally the officers "hogtied" Thomas by roping her ankles together and then hooking the strap behind her back to handcuffs. Thomas was thrown in the back of a police cruiser, where a video camera captured her breathing shallowly before she stopped breathing altogether, dead at the hands of the LAPD.

The barbaric hogtie restraint has been banned by

many police departments, including the LAPD, because it inhibits breathing and can cause death by “restraint asphyxiation.” Nevertheless it continues to be employed by officers for “attitude adjustment” and “contempt of cop.”

All three incidents, which occurred in working class neighborhoods in broad daylight, expose the barbarism underlying the current state of US society. The brutality meted out to the working population occurs across racial lines, with Weekley and Thomas being black, while Jordan is white.

These latest displays of police brutality follow the July 12 LAPD assault on “Art Walk,” a monthly event in downtown Los Angeles, where some demonstrators armed with chalk were writing slogans on the pavement amongst the many people in attendance. Squads of riot equipped officers fired supposedly “less lethal” shotgun rounds into a crowd, hitting bystanders as well as demonstrators.

Last week, Los Angeles Chief of Police Charlie Beck expressed his full confidence in the police force, telling the *Los Angeles Times*, “I was in the field last night and visited half a dozen police stations. I looked hundreds of police officers in the eye as I discussed their responsibilities. I have faith in them.”

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, an ex-labor bureaucrat scheduled to give the opening speech at this week’s Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, has made no public statement on the police violence.

The vicious methods of the LAPD can also be found in other institutions within the state’s vast law and order system. Last year, the ACLU of Southern California documented widespread brutality and indifference within the Los Angeles County jail system, managed by the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, in a report titled “Cruel and Usual Punishment: How a Savage Gang of Deputies Controls LA County Jails.”

The report included testimonials by numerous jail volunteers who witnessed deputies brutally assaulting

inmates, including one by a chaplain, Paulino Juarez, who told the ACLU, “To this day, recalling the beating brings tears to my eyes, and I cannot finish talking about it without taking a few moments to compose myself.”

One “savage beating” was observed by the ACLU’s own Jail Project Coordinator, Esther Lim, who saw two deputies repeatedly punch and knee an inmate who lay face down on the floor. The inmate was inert, so still that he looked like “a mannequin that was being used as a punching bag.” But the deputies persisted in their attack, with one of them shocking the inmate again and again with a Taser gun. Although the inmate never moved from his spot on the ground, the deputies repeatedly yelled, “stop fighting!” and “stop resisting!”

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors responded to the ACLU report with yet another citizen commission. A year later, no report has been issued.

In his classic *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Frederick Engels traced the origins of modern police power to the split of the population into classes, famously explaining that class rule necessarily “consists not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons, and institutions of coercion of all kinds.”

The LAPD videos bear out the truth of Engels’ observation. As social inequality grows and opposition to the domination of society by the super rich intensifies, the state will resort to ever more violent methods to terrorize and suppress the working class.



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