

# The Rodney King Case and the Los Angeles Uprising

On March 3, 1991, officers from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) stopped motorist Rodney King for a traffic violation. During the arrest proceedings, King was struck over fifty times with nightsticks after initially resisting police orders. A witness to the event, George Holliday, videotaped the arrest, which was later broadcast on local station KTLA and commercial news networks nation wide.

Within a week following the incident, a Grand Jury returned indictments against the officers involved in the arrest, charging Sergeant Stacey Koon, Officers Laurence Powell, Theodore Briseno and Timothy Wind for the use of excessive force and assault with a deadly weapon.

Over a year after the night of the beating, the LAPD officers indicted in the trial were acquitted of the charges brought against them. As a result of the verdict, many residents of Los Angeles reacted with shock and anger. Some residents took to the streets to protest; others turned to their televisions to watch events unfold. From April 29 through May 15, 1992, television networks devoted extensive resources and airtime to the uprising. The center of much of the resulting activity took place in the South-Central area of Los Angeles, with events spreading rapidly across many parts of the city.

UCLA Film and Television Archive's News and Public Affairs Collection (NAPA) holds extensive television news coverage related to the Rodney King case and the events of the Los Angeles uprising. This material is available for on-site viewing at UCLA by advance arrangement through the Archive Research and Study Center.

For more information about the NAPA collection, please contact the Archive Research and Study Center at 310-206-5388, [arsc@cinema.ucla.edu](mailto:arsc@cinema.ucla.edu) or

- Consult the NAPA database online:
  - <http://www.cinema.ucla.edu/collections/NAPA/napasearch.html>
- Detailed abstracts of the contents of network newscasts are available to UCLA-based internet users through the Vanderbilt University Television News Archive:
  - <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>



May 1, 1992, Los Angeles. Standing next to his attorney, Steven Lerman (at left), Rodney King exhorts city residents to avoid violent clashes with police in his first televised news appearance.

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**THE RODNEY KING CASE AND THE LOS ANGELES UPRISING:  
A TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

1991

**March 3, 1991:** Motorist Rodney King leads California Highway Patrol officers on a high-speed chase. When officers apprehend King, they remove him from his car and use batons and taser guns to subdue him. George Holliday videotapes the incident from a nearby balcony.

**March 4, 1991:** Holliday's tape is broadcast on local television station KTLA.

<i>KTLA NEWS</i>	<i>NA31152</i>
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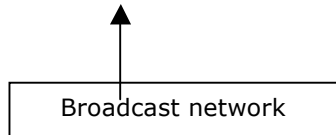
**March 5, 1991:** The Holliday tape is broadcast on Los Angeles television stations.

<i>KTTV NEWS</i>	<i>NA31162</i>
<i>KNBC, NBC, KCAL NEWS</i>	<i>NA31164</i>
<i>ABC WORLD NEWS</i>	<i>NA31166</i>

**March 15, 1991:** The four police officers involved in the King arrest, Lawrence Powell, Theodore Briesno, Stacey Koon and Timothy Wind are arraigned on charges of assault with a deadly weapon and the use of excessive force.

<i>KTTV NEWS</i>	<i>NA31256</i>
<i>KCOP NEWS</i>	<i>NA31259</i>
<i>CBS NEWS, KTLA NEWS</i>	<i>NA31260</i>
<i>KNBC and NBC NIGHTLY NEWS</i>	<i>NA31261</i>
<i>KCAL NEWS</i>	<i>NA31269</i>

NAPA call number: Use this number to search or request titles held in the NAPA collection.



**NAPA – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

*How do I search the NAPA collection?*

NAPA Holdings are searchable online via the UCLA Film & Television Archive's website:

- <http://www.cinema.ucla.edu/collections/NAPA/napasearch.html>

*How do I request NAPA items to view?*

From the UCLA Film & Television Archive website (<http://www.cinema.ucla.edu>) you can search NAPA holdings, compile a research request list, and submit your viewing requests to the Archive Research and Study Center via the online database.

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*KTTV NEWS* NA31256  
*KCOP NEWS* NA31259  
*CBS NEWS, KTLA NEWS* NA31260  
*KNBC and NBC NIGHTLY NEWS* NA31261  
*KCAL NEWS* NA31269

**November 26, 1991:** Lawyers for the defense are granted a change of venue that relocates the court proceedings from Los Angeles County to Simi Valley in Ventura County.

*KNBC NEWS, KCAL NEWS* NA33592  
*KCBS NEWS, KTLA NEWS* NA33591  
*KCOP NEWS* NA33590  
*KTTV NEWS* NA33589

## 1992

**March 4, 1992:** The trial begins. The jury consists of ten Caucasians, one Hispanic and one Filipino-American.

*Rodney King Pre-Trial Footage:*  
*COURT TV* NA34530

**April 29, 1992:** A jury acquits three of the four officers; one is partially acquitted. The verdict triggers six days of civic unrest in Los Angeles.

**3:15pm** – Mayor Tom Bradley and Police Chief Daryl Gates hold a press conference.

*KABC NEWS* NA35461  
*KCAL NEWS* NA35460  
*KCBS ACTION NEWS* NA35459  
*KNBC NEWS* NA35463  
*KTTV NEWS* NA35458

**4pm - 6:45pm** – Over three hundred people gather outside the Simi Valley courthouse in Ventura County, most protesting the verdicts. In Los Angeles, truck driver Reginald O. Denny is pulled from his cab and assaulted.

*KABC NEWS* NA35468  
*KTTV NEWS* NA35465

## TIMELINE (continued)

**6pm - 8pm** – Tom’s Liquor and Deli at Florence and Normandie is one of the first major targets of looting. Several businesses and various buildings around the Normandie and Slauson area are set on fire. Demonstrations at the downtown Los Angeles police headquarters, the Parker Center, climax as a crowd sets a booth on fire.

*KCAL NEWS* NA35467

*KNBC NEWS* NA35464

*KTLA SPECIAL REPORT* NA35469

**8:45pm** – Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley declares a local state of emergency. Governor Pete Wilson, at Bradley’s request, orders the National Guard to activate 2,000 reserve soldiers.

**9pm - Midnight** – Fires continue to surface throughout the city. Numerous businesses are vandalized and looted.

*KCBS NEWS* NA35466

*KTLA NEWS* NA35473

### April 30, 1992:

**Midnight** – Governor Wilson holds a news conference declaring a state of emergency and announces plans to dispatch the National Guard and the California Highway Patrol to Los Angeles.

*KCAL NEWS* NA35474

*KCBS NEWS* NA35470

*KNBC NEWS* NA35471

*KTTV NEWS* NA35440

**9:30am** – Mayor Bradley holds a news conference.

**12am - 12:30pm** – National Guard troops are officially deployed. By late afternoon, deployments of soldiers take up positions around Los Angeles.

*KNBC NEWS* NA35483

*KTLA NEWS* NA35484

*KTTV NEWS* NA35487

**5:10pm** – Governor Wilson holds a live televised news conference addressing city residents to avoid clashes with police and promising enough law enforcement to restore order.

*KCAL NEWS* NA35486

**Throughout the Day** – Business owners struggle to keep large crowds from their property.

*KABC NEWS* NA35491

*KCBS NEWS* NA35488

*KNBC NEWS* NA35489

*KTLA NEWS* NA35490

*KTTV NEWS* NA35492

### May 1, 1992:

**7:15am** – Official announcements declare that thousands of federal troops and riot-trained federal law officers will be sent to Los Angeles.

*KABC NEWS* NA35496

*KCBS NEWS* NA35493

*KNBC NEWS* NA35494

*KTLA NEWS* NA35495

## TIMELINE (continued)

**2:30pm** – Officials in Washington and Los Angeles announce that a federal grand jury will be convened in order to investigate criminal indictments against the four police officers involved in the King case.

**2:45pm** – In his first televised appearance, Rodney King exhorts city residents to avoid clashes with police.

<i>KCAL NEWS</i>	<i>NA35504</i>
<i>KCBS NEWS</i>	<i>NA35500</i>
<i>KNBC NEWS</i>	<i>NA35501</i>

**6pm** – In a televised speech broadcast from the White House, President George Bush addresses the nation on the situation in Los Angeles. During the speech, President Bush announces that he will place National Guard soldiers under federal control.

<i>KABC NEWS</i>	<i>NA35503</i>
<i>KCAL NEWS</i>	<i>NA35509</i>
<i>KCBS NEWS</i>	<i>NA35500</i>
<i>KNBC NEWS</i>	<i>NA35501</i>

### May 2, 1992:

**8am** – The first of thousands of suspected looters and arsonists are scheduled to begin appearing in court. Arraignments start during mid-afternoon.

<i>KABC NEWS</i>	<i>NA35514</i>
<i>KCAL NEWS</i>	<i>NA35515</i>
<i>KCBS NEWS</i>	<i>NA35511</i>
<i>KNBC NEWS</i>	<i>NA35512</i>
<i>KTLA NEWS</i>	<i>NA35513</i>
<i>KTTV NEWS</i>	<i>NA35516</i>

**4pm** – Marine Corps units arrive in Compton.

**Throughout the day** – Members of the community volunteer to clean the streets; they also help direct traffic, hand out food and shuttle residents without bus service.

### May 3, 1992:

**6am** – Rapid Transit District (RTD) bus service opens some routes into South-Central Los Angeles during the day.

<i>KTLA NEWS</i>	<i>NA35529</i>
<i>KCAL NEWS</i>	<i>NA35521</i>
<i>KCBS NEWS</i>	<i>NA35519</i>
<i>KNBC NEWS</i>	<i>NA35517</i>

**May 4, 1992:** Schools and college campuses resume normal schedules. The dusk-to-dawn curfew ends and RTD resumes its full service schedule.

**August 4, 1992:** The accused four officers are indicted by a federal grand jury on civil rights violations.

### 1993

**February 25, 1993:** King's civil suit begins.

**April 16, 1993:** A federal jury convicts Officers Koon and Powell on one charge of violating King's civil rights. Officers Wind and Briseno are found not guilty.

**April 19, 1993:** The jury awards King \$3.8 million in damages.

## RELATED RESOURCES

### PRINT RESOURCES

(for more information consult the UCLA Libraries collections)

- Baldassare, Mark. *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994.
- Cannon, Lou. *Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD*. Random House, 1997.
- Center for Media and Public Affairs. *The Rodney King Case. Part II: How TV News Covered the Los Angeles Riots*. Washington: Center for Media and Public Affairs, 1993.
- Delk, James. *Fires & Furies: The L.A. Riots, What Really Happened?* Palm Springs: ETC. Publishing, 1995.
- Gooding-Williams, Robert, ed. *Reading Rodney King / Reading Urban Uprising*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Hazen, Don, ed. *Inside the L.A. Riots: What Really Happened and Why It Will Happen Again*. New York: Institute for Alternative Journalism, 1992.
- Los Angeles Times. *Understanding the Riots: Los Angeles Before and After the Rodney King Case*. Los Angeles Times, 1992.

### AUDIOVISUAL RESOURCES

(the following materials are available through the Archive Research and Study Center)

- By the Year 2000. Policing the Police* (1991). KCET. Producers, Jim Kennedy, Jeffrey Kaye. Director, Cordelia Stone. NAPA Number: T38820
- Los Angeles Civil Unrest, 1992. Excerpts from Local News Coverage*.  
Study Copy: VA5865 T, VA6266 T, VA6267 T
- The Rodney King Case: What the Jury Saw in California v. Powell* (1992). Court TV. Producers, Stephen Cohen, Jamie Alter. Director, Dominic Palumbo. Study Copy: VA11818 T
- ABC Nightline. Broadcast from the First A.M.E. Church in Los Angeles following the Los Angeles Uprising* (1992-05-01). ABC Television. Study Copy: VA6268 T
- The Oprah Winfrey Show. Rodney King – The Aftermath and the Anger* (1992-05-05). Harpo. Producer, Peter Kimball. Study Copy: VA11998 T

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