

## 15 Years Ago Today Hip-Hop Wasn't Surprised

Written by Robert ID2383

Thursday, 02 March 2006 23:38 -

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The nation watched in amazement as the video beating of Rodney King was being shown on all major news networks. The hip-hop community watched in amazement also but the astonishment was not because of the beating or the actions police had taken; we all knew about that before this – but the bewilderment that major news organizations were actually showing a 'black man' being beat down. They actually aired that – that is what amazed the hip-hop community.

If you dress hip-hop or are a person of color you already knew that the police do many underhanded things so this did not amaze anyone in hip-hop. It happens everyday, maybe not to this extent; but be black or Latino and have a new car and try to drive a half a mile without getting stopped to 'check you out'; claiming some ill reason.

The beating of Rodney King has been mentioned in various hip-hop and rap songs ever since, it is something we all can relate to; in one way or another.

Here is an account of what happened 15 years ago today March 3, 1991 courtesy of the [www.historychannel.com](http://www.historychannel.com)

If you would like to read of how the Rodney King incident led to the LA Riots and what happened the night the riots started visit <http://www.citivu.com/ktla/sc-ch1.html>

### POLICE BRUTALITY CAUGHT ON VIDEO:

March 3, 1991

At 12:45 a.m. on March 3, 1991, robbery parolee Rodney G. King stops his car after leading police on a nearly 8-mile pursuit through the streets of Los Angeles, California. The chase began after King, who was intoxicated, was caught speeding on a freeway by a California Highway Patrol cruiser but refused to pull over.

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Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) cruisers and a police helicopter joined the pursuit, and when King was finally stopped by Hansen Dam Park, several police cars descended on his white Hyundai.

A group of LAPD officers led by Sergeant Stacey Koon ordered King and the other two occupants of the car to exit the vehicle and lie flat on the ground. King's two friends complied, but King himself was slower to respond, getting on his hands and knees rather than lying flat.

Officers Laurence Powell, Timothy Wind, Ted Briseno, and Roland Solano tried to force King down, but he resisted, and the officers stepped back and shot King twice with an electric stun gun known as a Taser, which fires darts carrying a charge of 50,000 volts.

At this moment, civilian George Holliday, standing on a balcony in an apartment complex across the street, focused the lens of his new video camera on the commotion unfolding by Hansen Dam Park. In the first few seconds of what would become a very famous 89-second video,

King is seen rising after the Taser shots and running in the direction of Officer Powell. The officers alleged that King was charging Powell, while King himself later claimed that an officer told him, "We're going to kill you, nigger. Run!" and he tried to flee.

All the arresting officers were white, along with all but one of the other two dozen or so law enforcement officers present at the scene. With the roar of the helicopter above, very few commands or remarks are audible in the video. With King running in his direction, Powell swung his baton, hitting him on the side of the head and knocking him to the ground. This action was captured by the video, but the next 10 seconds were blurry as Holliday shifted the camera.

From the 18- to 30-second mark in the video, King attempted to rise, and Powell and Wind attacked him with a torrent of baton blows that prevented him from doing so. From the 35- to 51-second mark, Powell administered repeated baton blows to King's lower body.

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At 55 seconds, Powell struck King on the chest, and King rolled over and lay prone. At that point, the officers stepped back and observed King for about 10 seconds. Powell began to reach for his handcuffs.

At 65 seconds on the video, Officer Briseno stepped roughly on King's upper back or neck, and King's body writhed in response. Two seconds later, Powell and Wind again began to strike King with a series of baton blows, and Wind kicked him in the neck six times until 86 seconds into the video.

At about 89 seconds, King put his hands behind his back and was handcuffed. Sergeant Koon never made an effort to stop the beating, and only one of the many officers present briefly intervened, raising his left arm in front of a baton-swinging colleague in the opening moments of the videotape, to no discernible effect. An ambulance was called, and King was taken to the hospital. Struck as many as 56 times with the batons, he suffered a fractured leg, multiple facial fractures, and numerous bruises and contusions.

Unaware that the arrest was videotaped, the officers downplayed the level of violence used to arrest King and filed official reports in which they claimed he suffered only cuts and bruises "of a minor nature." George Holliday sold his video of the beating to the local television station, KTLA, which broadcast the footage and sold it to the national Cable News Network (CNN).

The widely broadcast video caused outrage around the country and triggered a national debate on police brutality. Rodney King was released without charges, and on March 15 Sergeant Koon and officers Powell, Wind, and Briseno were indicted by a Los Angeles grand jury in connection with the beating. All four were charged with assault with a deadly weapon and excessive use of force by a police officer.

Though Koon did not actively participate in the beating, as the commanding officer he was charged with aiding and abetting it. Powell and Koon were also charged with filing false reports. Because of the uproar in Los Angeles surrounding the incident, the judge, Stanley Weisberg, was persuaded to move the trial outside Los Angeles County to Simi Valley in Ventura County. On April 29, 1992, the 12-person jury, which included 10 whites and no African Americans, issued its verdicts: not guilty on all counts, except for one assault charge against Powell that ended in a hung jury.

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The acquittals touched off rioting and looting in Los Angeles that grew into the most destructive U.S. civil disturbance of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In three days of violence, more than 50 people were killed, more than

2,000 were injured, and nearly \$1 billion in property was destroyed.

On May 1, President George H. Bush ordered military troops and riot-trained federal officers to Los Angeles to quell the riot. Under federal law, the officers could also be prosecuted for violating Rodney King's constitutional rights, and on April 17, 1993, a federal jury convicted Koon and Powell for violating King's rights by their unreasonable use of force under color of law.

Although Wind and Briseno were acquitted, most civil rights advocates considered the mixed verdict a victory. On August 4, Koon and Powell were sentenced to two and a half years in prison for the beating of King.