

**LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE**

**LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE MEDIA:  
AN OVERVIEW OF POLICE AND MEDIA RELATIONS**

**RESEARCH PAPER**

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**EAGLE PASS, TEXAS**

**OCTOBER 12, 1993**



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## INTRODUCTION

Interaction between the police and the media is essential for those police departments which strive to maintain a firm link with their community. The media is a necessary form of communication which a police department can use to its advantage; however, it can also become a formidable opponent if a police department abuses its authority in any fashion.

Throughout history, the media has sensationalized every day occurrences within a police department. It is usually only through the media that the community is informed of local crimes and violence which occur within the vicinity. Although reporters should feel obligated to report only the facts, many find that factual accounts are not as well received as sensationalized accounts of a crime.

There are several forms of media available to the public. For example, there are local and national newspapers, magazines, television, and radio. Television has become one of the most effective forms of media in the United States. However, throughout the world, the most effective form of communication is the radio. The local and the national news are usually broadcast at least three times a day and their audience perceives the news as factual information. Thus, a biased report can lead to a biased community.

### RESEARCH PURPOSE

This paper will attempt to demonstrate several occurrences in which the media and the police have come into conflict concerning the media's right to information. This report will also attempt to show the influence the media has had not only on the community, but also on the nation's view of the police and violence. This is demonstrated by the significant effect that the media played in the recent Rodney King trial and the outcomes of those reports. It will also emphasize several key points that a police chief should follow in order to maintain a good relationship between a police department and the media.

The importance of this research is substantial because the community's support is vital to the success of a police department. The media is an effective means of communication and in many cases, influences the opinion of its readers and listeners by its reports. If a police department learns how to effectively utilize the media's resources, it is more likely to receive the support its community.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### THE MEDIA'S RIGHT TO INFORMATION

The News Media & The Law is a most useful source of information on the topic of conflicts between the police and the media concerning the right to information. It identifies several cases that have been brought to trial involving the police and the media. Many of the cases pertain to the media's rights concerning police reports. For example, in March of 1992 in Hawaii, a circuit court judge ordered the release of tapes and transcripts of emergency radio and telephone dispatches from the police and fire departments to a news organization ("Hawaii Judge Releases Tapes...38-39). This was the State's first case under Hawaii's three-year-old Uniform Information Practices Act.

The media demanded the tapes after a bicyclist was brutally attacked on Christmas Eve. Passersby found the victim and made numerous calls for help to the Hawaii County police and fire departments. An ambulance arrived 40 minutes after the first call and the victim was taken to Hilo Hospital where she later died of internal

bleeding. The police denied that the time lapse was so long and the press demanded the release of the tapes in order to prove how inefficient the police had been in responding to the call. The police also argued that the release of the tapes would lead to the obstruction of a fair trial for the yet indicted criminal ("Hawaii Judge Releases Tapes...38-39). The court awarded the release of the records and payment of court fees to the media.

Another source of information on this topic is The Editor and Publisher. In December of 1992, the Texas Appeals court ruled that *The Dallas Morning News* did not have to disclose its sources of information used in preparing a series of stories that are now the subject of a libel suit.

*The Dallas Morning News* had run a series of stories in October, 1990, on the drug smuggling problem in Starr County, along the Texas-Mexico border. The article featured Starr County Sheriff Gene Falcon, who had been involved in drug-related controversies which were documented in official public records. *The News* reported that Falcon had allegedly committed a murder in Mexico and that the charges were illegally dismissed. It also alleged that Falcon had bought a house from a drug dealer for less than its appraised value and was directly and indirectly responsible for facilitating the trafficking of drugs into the country. After the series was run,

Falcon sued the paper for libel and asked for **The News** to reveal all of its sources. The Starr County trial court ordered **The News** to reveal its sources. **The News** appealed the decision and went to the Texas Court of Appeals. **The News** argued that the First Amendment is "based on preserving the vitality of the press and its role in an open society" ("Reporters Not Required to Disclose Sources, 5). Additionally, they argued that the First Amendment privilege can only be overthrown in a libel case "if the plaintiff shows by substantial evidence that the challenged statement is false and defamatory"(5). The Texas Court of Appeals ruled in favor of **The Dallas Morning News** because the plaintiffs failed to demonstrate that the sources' information was false and defamatory ("Reporters Not Required to Disclose Sources, 5). Thus, in both these instances the media's right to information has been upheld in appellate courts.

#### **THE REALITY OF "COPS"**

John Katz is of the opinion that the police have been increasingly isolated and abandoned by journalists as they try to deal with the horrifying levels of social decay, hatred and bloodshed which surrounds them everyday (Katz, 25). The media's right to information has been challenged in many ways and recently journalists are moving toward a more common position. This new common

position is called "unfiltered television." Some might consider Fox's syndicated **COPS**, the epitome of what a real police reporter should report. The syndicated show **COPS** is one of the most successful new telecasts which offers Americans a new reality in their viewing. The show is taped by crews carrying mobile shoulder-held video cameras. There is no reporter or narrator that reports events occurring on **COPS**; the camera rides in the patrol car and records dispatcher calls and follows officers to film arrests ranging from domestic disputes, burglar chases, stolen vehicles, and drunk drivers.

Various departments participate in the filming of **COPS**: Kansas City, Hoboken, San Diego, Pittsburgh, Houston and Boston. However, New York City and Los Angeles have declined to allow **COPS** to ride in their police cars for fear of legal concerns and fears for the safety of camera crews (Katz,26). The officers selected by their departments to participate are articulate, extremely professional, and very solicitous (Katz,26). However, they are also very revealing. "They almost pleadingly make their case to a public they know is skeptical" (Katz,26). The show is successful at showing the real danger that police officers face every day. There have been episodes of **COPS** where the cameras follow officers into dark alleys in pursuit of a suspect, which the dispatcher has reported, is carrying a gun.



**COPS** reminds the community that a police officer's job is dangerous, terrifying and complex. The audience rides with the officers and see firsthand the variety of calls received and the degrees of danger a police officer is exposed to daily. It also emphasizes how the media is too quick to judge police officers when they themselves are safe at their desk writing their next sensationalized article.

#### **THE "KIKO" GARCIA SHOOTING**

A prime example of the media's influence in forming public opinion is the 1992 shooting of Jose "Kiko" Garcia by police officer Michael O'Keefe in Washington Heights, New York. O'Keefe was part of a unit known as Local Motion, a specialized police unit assigned to patrol Washington Heights' drug infested streets. (Hellman, 42).

According to the police, on the night of July 3, plainclothes detective Michael O'Keefe and two other officers spotted Jose Garcia on a crowded street and thought they saw a gun in his pocket (Katz, 27). They decided to divide into two teams. According to their plan, O'Keefe would approach the suspect while the other two officers provided back-up from the unmarked police car (Hellman, 42). The other two officers would drive to the end of the road and make a U-turn; "sandwiching" Garcia between them (Hellman, 42). Unexpectedly, a man

with a .357 Magnum revolver jumped in front of the police car and the other officers were forced to stop and disarm the man. This left O'Keefe without back-up and within minutes he was screaming on the police radio for help (Hellman, 42). When the other officers arrived, Garcia lay dead.

For several days after the event, local news media and television aired the account of the shooting, suggesting that Garcia had been killed without reason. (Katz, 27). A deputy mayor was even quoted as stating that Garcia did not have a previous record of arrests and was not carrying a gun, and that O'Keefe had a reputation of "abusing people for a long time" (Katz, 27). There were also several eye-witnesses that told reporters that O'Keefe had beat and kicked Garcia in the inner hallways and lobby of the apartment building into which he had pursued him; then shot him three times as he lay helpless on the floor. Several people said they saw O'Keefe "using his radio" to beat Garcia and heard Garcia screaming "Mommy, " and "Why are you doing this to me?" in Spanish (Katz, 27). Some neighbors even claimed that O'Keefe had a reputation for stealing from drug dealers (Katz, 27).

The reports aired daily and several days of rioting and disorder, looting, and destruction followed. Washington Heights residents threw trash cans, smashed

windows, and burned police cars. They were outraged at the police and their treatment of the Hispanic and black community. Mayor David Dinkins feared that these riots would threaten the Democratic Convention which was to be held in the city. Thus, two days after the shooting, in an effort to calm the Washington Heights community, Mayor David Dinkins visited the Garcia family and had the city pay for Garcia's funeral (Hellman, 42); enraging many of the City's police officers. The mayor's call for an all-civilian review board enraged them further; in September more than 10,000 police officers and supporters demonstrated at City Hall in protest. They stormed police barricades, blocked the Brooklyn Bridge, and shoved reporters and photographers. Journalists launched another wave of condemnation, with one headline reading "THUGS IN BLUE" (Katz, 29). Columnists and editorial writers wrote that the behavior of the police officers was yet another example of "why minority groups were right to distrust and fear the police" (Katz, 29).

Two months later, a Manhattan grand jury cleared Officer Michael O'Keefe of any wrongdoing in the shooting of Garcia. Garcia was proven to have a criminal record involving drugs. The shooting occurred in a building sometimes used by drug dealers. Garcia also had a gun and the grand jury believed O'Keefe was justified in feeling that his life was in danger (Katz, 27).

Pathologists also found traces of cocaine in Garcia's system during the autopsy. Garcia's body was also absent of any bruises or marks; dispelling the notion that O'Keefe had beaten Garcia with his radio. The jury also found the accounts from eyewitnesses impossible to verify because of the poor lighting and poor sight lines from the witnesses supposed locations (Katz, 27). The grand jury could also find no evidence of a history of brutality or corruption by O'Keefe.

The media failed to reveal the grand jury's findings to the public, and O'Keefe's version of the events were not publicized until two months after he had been acquitted. In *New York* magazine, O'Keefe described being cut off from his partners in a brutal battle with Garcia. The two men fought for Garcia's gun, O'Keefe screamed for help over his radio as Garcia pointed the barrel of the gun into O'Keefe's face. "O'Keefe found himself staring into the barrel of Kiko's gun" (Hellman,43). It had an oversize barrel. O'Keefe then "grabbed at Garcia's wrist, drew his gun, and fired a shot at point-blank range into Garcia's stomach" (Hellman,43). Kiko Garcia was pronounced dead at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center. O'Keefe was treated for mild injuries and bruises and was released.

Although the investigation following Garcia's death resulted in a 45-page report clearing O'Keefe and

justifying his use of deadly force, the media did not acknowledge that they had made a severe mistake in their coverage of the Garcia shooting. Nor did they apologize to O'Keefe, or explain to their readers and viewers why much of their reporting had been false and misleading.

### **THE RODNEY KING INCIDENT**

The recent Rodney King verdict is another example of how the public can be swayed by the media's biased reporting. For example, Newsweek ran an article in their May 11, 1992 edition which depicted the frame by frame action of the beating. The tape shows that at 12:52:41 am, roughly 30 seconds into the beating, King struggles to his knees, even as the four police officers order him to lie face first on the ground so he can be handcuffed (36). Twenty five seconds beforehand, King had made it to his feet and lunged at Officer Powell. At 12:53:20 am the tape shows King lying on the ground after having maintained numerous blows from the four policemen and their batons (37). Officer Theodore Briseno has his leg on King's neck. Officer Powell moves his baton to his left hand and reaches for his handcuffs. However, King again begins to struggle and Powell shifts the baton back to his right hand and delivers more blows to subdue him (37). A few minutes later, King finally asks the officers to "Please stop," and Sergeant Koon instructs

the other officers to "cuff him" (37). 12:53:29, the latter part of the videotape, is the most damaging to the four police officers. King is virtually motionless on the ground and is offering no visible resistance. But, the officers continue to beat King because he had refused to comply with their demands (Mathews, 36-38). These last frames were the only ones played by the news media and relayed to the public.

The public was outraged at the horrible scenes shown nightly by the media. They witnessed a motionless victim being brutally beaten by four police officers. However, the media did not stress that King "had consumed enough eightballs-roughly the equivalent of a case of regular 12-ounce beers- to put his blood alcohol level at twice the legal limit." (Whitman, 35). The media also did not enlighten the public of the high-speed chase at 80 mph that went on for 8 miles. Nor did they report his defiant behavior: "he threw a kiss and wiggled his butt at a female officer who had ordered him, at gunpoint, to lie down" (Whitman, 36). The video camera did not capture when he heaved four male officers off his back and struggled with them to be free. King stood 6 feet 3 and weighed 250 pounds. He had already been hit with two Taser darts, each carrying 50,000 volts of electricity. These events were not captured on video because George Holliday, the man who videotaped the beating, did not

begin to record until approximately 30 seconds into the beating (Whitman, 36). Another aspect which the media failed to report to the public was that under LAPD regulations, officers are permitted to use force to subdue a suspect or overcome resistance (Mathews, 36). Such force is "reasonable" if the typical officer would use it under similar circumstances. Police are trained to use the baton first to cause pain. This usually will subdue the suspect. If the pain does not deter the suspect, the officers are trained to use the baton to break bones-wrists, elbows, and clavicles-bones that break easily (Mathews, 36). However, such force should only be used when necessary. The use of force does not apply to motionless arrestee.

According to the Editor and Publisher, the California appellate court ordered that due to "massive local media coverage" a change of venue was necessary for the trial of the four Los Angeles police officers (Stein, 13). A **Los Angeles Times** poll found that 94 percent of all respondents were upset by the beating, and 75 percent described themselves as "very upset." The survey also revealed that two-thirds of the city's residents believed the beating was racially motivated. The media in Southern California had massive daily coverage of the beating. Two radio stations, KNOX and KFVB, with a combined audience of over three million listeners, and

other radio outlets, gave 24-hour coverage to the beating.

### **THE LOS ANGELES RIOTS**

Once the announcement was made of the officers' acquittal, havoc broke loose in Los Angeles. A violent riot erupted which left 58 people dead. Much of the commotion was due to the massive news coverage before and after the actual verdict. The method which the media used to make the announcement of the acquittal ignited the already the smoldering tempers of the Los Angeles community. The television news played the home video of the Rodney King beating numerous times throughout the announcement of the jury's verdict. Before the fires even started, seven Los Angeles TV stations had already begun wall-to-wall coverage of the south-central Los Angeles area (Alter,43). Several local TV reporters described both the exact locations of looting and the fact that police were doing little to stop it. This was seen by many as an open invitation to join the looting. Independent television station KCOP equipped its reporters with bulletproof vest; KABC used plainclothes security guards to protect its crews; editors and news directors used warlike terms such as: "front lines" and "safer ground" (Rice, 8). The riotous protest at the Los Angeles Police Department headquarters spilled over into Times Mirror Square only blocks away, as more than 200



rioters broke doors and windows at the Times building and stole computers and other office equipment.

The six days of violence that erupted after the April 29 verdict prompted a string of accounts from journalists who were attacked in Los Angeles and Atlanta. Jim Herron Zamora, of the *Los Angeles Times*, said that looters beat him and attempted to take his notes and press credentials when they saw he was a reporter (Zamora,8). Ron Milligan, a reporter for several weeklies in south central Los Angeles, was heading toward the corner where gang members battered truck driver Reginald Denny when "a loud bang like the blast of a hand grenade, filled the inside of my car and a shower of glass exploded around me." A large piece of concrete had been thrown into his rear window (Milligan, 8). In Atlanta, Associated Press reporter Marc Rice wrote about trying to return to his bureau on the first night after the verdict. Just outside the building he encountered a crowd of protesters. "About 10 to 15 people jumped on me, threw me to the ground, and started kicking and punching me with their fists and feet (Rice,8). An older member of the crowd pulled him to safety.

In a recent U.S. News & World Report article, the actions of the police at the beginning and during the Los Angeles riots are reported and suggest that the reason the riot became so violent was the lack of police action.

The riot basically began after Mayor Tom Bradley went on the air stating that "we will not tolerate the savage beating of our citizens by a few renegade cops" (Whitman,52). A few minutes after his speech, LAPD dispatcher reported that a group of eight black males were using baseball bats to break the car window of passing motorists at Florence and Halldale avenues. The youths were shouting "Rodney, Rodney," as they attacked two whites who had driven an old Cadillac through the area.

When officers arrived to interrogate the group, they were encountered with insults: "F--- y'all," one of the men screamed, "What you gonna do, beat me?" or "You sold out to the white man, Uncle Tom," another screamed to a black police officer on duty (Whitman,52). The sergeant on the scene made a decision to only arrest the youth who still had the baseball bat and let the others go. A small crowd had gathered, but quickly and quietly dispersed. However, a few minutes later, only a few blocks away, a police vehicle was calling for help because it was being subjected to flying rocks and bottles at the corner of Florence and Normandie. LAPD responded with 18 cars and 35 officers. However, the crowd had begun to grow, and eventually more than 100 residents surrounded the police (Whitman,44).

At the scene, two black police officers had caught

a 16 year old black male who had thrown rocks at them. The officers pressed him to the ground to arrest him and he claimed he could not breathe. As the police officers wrestled with the youth, the crowd became more incensed. They began to throw rocks and bottles at the police. As the police arrested more rioters the crowd began to try to wrestle the arrested rioters from the police. The officers quickly formed a skirmish line to separate the arrested rioters from the crowd. Two men were standing at the corner of the scene taping the happenings with their video cameras. The officers were acutely aware of this, and dared not use their batons to keep the crowd back. Instead, "they stood stoically, merely asking people to step back and calm down" (Whitman,44).

Lt. Mike Moulin, the supervisor on the scene, decided that things were getting out of hand, and once the three arrestees were loaded into the squad cars he hollered, "Let's go!" Many of the officers were embarrassed to be ordered to back-down. As they walked to their patrol cars, they were pelted with rocks and bottles and the crowd's jeering approval (Whitman, 44).

When the police vanished at 5:34 p.m., the crowd became an "out-of-control mob" (Whitman,46). Residents began throwing rocks and bottles at passing cars and began pulling motorists out of the vehicles to beat and rob them. Only black motorist were safe among this

throng. Many of the victims were Hispanics and Asians who spoke little or no English. By 6 p.m., the crowd had risen to over 200 participants.

The entire 77th precinct had been instructed to disregard emergency calls at Florence and Normandie and all police cars were ordered to stay away from the area (Whitman,52). However, two squad cars did barrel through the intersection at gunpoint, to rescue beaten-up motorists who were left injured and stranded on the street. Even a half hour after the entire nation had witnessed the horrible Reginald Denny beating, Lt. Moulin and other supervisors were still instructing their officers to "stay put" because they had squads forming at a bus depot that was serving as the command post (Whitman,54).

The special "command post" was a sham. It did not have a TV in it, so while hundreds of thousands of Americans watched the looting of Tom's Liquor and the beating of Reginald Denny live, none of the officers of the 77th did. Its few telephones were set up to receive incoming calls only. There were no computers present to track the multiple emergency calls. Officers stood disgusted beside their squad cars, listening with impatience to increasingly more urgent calls on the police radio, while LAPD supervisors debated whether they had sufficient officers and riot equipment to intervene

(Whitman, 54).

In the hour that followed Lt. Moulin's orders of retreat, the LAPD officers "failed to implement virtually every time-honored crowd-control tactic" (Whitman,52). They failed to initially seal off traffic to Florence and Normandie by blocking nearby streets. They failed to confront the mob with a squadron of 50 or so officers marching in riot gear-"which ordinarily will make even a rowdy crowd disperse" (Whitman,54). They had no field-jail units and buses in place; which would have enabled officers to arrest unruly crowd member and then turn them over to detectives without having to leave the scene to take arrestees to the station. They also failed to use tear gas or pepper gas to disperse the mob. The did not send their vice and narcotics cops undercover to spy on the mob, nor did they place police snipers atop tall buildings in the area. They failed to secure local gun stores (one of which lost 1,150 firearms during the first night of the riot). Not until 6:43 p.m., an hour after the police retreat, did LAPD dispatchers even issue a tactical alert for south-central Los Angeles, which finally freed supervisors to assign emergency calls to units from other parts of the city (Whitman, 54).

Much of the 77th precincts lack of preparation was due to the gaps in the chain of command. Police Chief Darryl Gates had left police headquarters to attend a

fund-raiser in Brentwood about 6:20 p.m., and temporarily turned over command to a deputy. Two-thirds of the LAPD's 18 patrol captains were out of commission, and were returning from a training seminar outside of the city (Whitman, 54).

The response of the 77th precinct could have prevented many of the injuries that occurred during the riot. The LAPD Foothill division, the actual precinct which housed the officers who had beat Rodney King, responded quickly and accordingly to the verdict. They were able to subdue the crowd before it became a riot. By early evening, a crowd numbering 400 people--twice the size of the mob at Florence and Normandie--had started a fire outside the station and were throwing rocks and bottles (Whitman, 54). But unlike the officers at the 77th, the Foothill officers had completed some serious riot training that taught them crowd-control techniques. They went into the crowd in formation, employed a skirmish line to push the crowd back, and sensibly dropped to their knees when someone in the crowd fired a couple of shots in the air (instead of returning fire) and dispelled the crowd after arresting individuals who had started fires or thrown rocks. "It was a critical mistake not to go back in to Florence and Normandie, " (Whitman, 54) said Robert Vernon, the former assistant chief of the LAPD, who retired from the force

just days before the riots.

Many blacks saw the riots as a necessary step to inform the public of the racial injustice they had suffered due to the acquittal of the four police officers. They idealized the riots as an expression of their frustration and anger at the white community. Many believe the media played a great role in "adding fuel to the fire."

The media in New York took a different approach to the reports from Los Angeles about the Rodney King verdict. They worked with City Hall and tried to report the occurrences with calmness (Diamond,34). They did not break regular broadcasts and waited until regular newstime to reveal the verdict. They showed scenes of peaceful protest at Times Square. The mayor commended the news stations on their good judgement. All news directors from the major stations worked together with City Hall and the police department to call for calm and peace. The stations worked together and put aside competitiveness to be good citizens.

New York's approach to the Los Angeles riots is a prime example of how the media can be beneficial to the community and the police department. If only the media of Los Angeles had been as responsible in their reporting perhaps the events of the April riots could have been prevented.

### THE SECOND TRIAL

The country's outrage and the appeal from Rodney King's lawyers led to a second trial. This trial was held in a federal appeals court and the charges focused on the violation of the victims civil rights (Henry, 32). There was much speculation that the judgement in the second trial would be harsh to the officers because of the threat of another riot (Henry, 32).

The prosecution had learned from their past mistakes and now relied on expert witnesses. For example, a defense witness Sergeant Charles Duke, asserted that the use of force in the incident was "within department guidelines" and there were no "head shots" (Henry, 33). In the first trial, the prosecution rebuked this testimony with the testimony of a career desk officer (Henry, 33). In the second trial, the rebuttal came from the local police academy's trainer in the use of force, Sergeant Mark Conta, and a California Highway Patrol officer who witnessed the King beating, Melanie Singer.

Conta reviewed the video and testified that the academy "never teach(es) to break bones. I see excessive force here. The picture I see is that of a beaten man who is not combative or aggressive" (Henry, 33). Additionally, he reported that all four officers involved in the beating had used excessive force. Officer Singer's testimony also became key to the verdict.



During her testimony, she "began crying on the witness stand as she described the ferocity of the beating" (Girdner, 16) . She described the officers on the scene as "standing around" and "joking." She also dispelled the claim that King showed signs of being high on PCP, saying that he had none of the signs which accompany use of the drug (Henry, 33). Another mistake the first prosecution failed to do in the first trial was to let Rodney King testify.

In the second trial, King was put on the witness stand, "which humanized him and discredited the defense portrayal of him as a PCP crazed monster. He came across as a beaten man" (Girdner, 16). Also, the defense clearly made a severe mistake in the cross-examination. The defense lawyer was determined to humiliate King and dwell on his failure to earn a high school diploma. He "repeatedly asked King,...to read from a grand jury transcript" (Girdner, 16). King would not admit to his illiteracy, but it was painfully clear to the jurors that he could not read. After the trial, one juror said, "We were disgusted with Stone (the defense lawyer), for embarrassing the guy." (Girdner, 16). King was by far the most significant witness in the trial. William Henry of Time Magazine, compares King to a rape victim- "There is no question, beyond niggling over details, about what was done to him. The issue is whether he, by his

character and behavior, somehow invited and justified the abuse" (Henry, 33). Although King cannot be made into a hero, he was definitely the victim in this situation.

During the first trial, the defense had shown the video of the beating over-and-over again, frame-by-frame, which resulted in the over analysis and the "violence lost its impact" (Girdner, 16). However, in the second trial, the prosecution dissected the tape and stretched the beating to emphasize its brutality.

Sergeant Stacey Koon's testimony was also an important factor to the verdict. When cross-examined by the prosecution Koon was asked if he had finally beaten King into submission. Koon responded, "Yes. That's correct. He was beaten into submission, and he was giving up" (Girdner, 16). After the trial, one juror recalled the statement and responded, "That could have been my son. That could have been me. Just because a man was driving drunk -he should be punished, he shouldn't be driving drunk-but you don't beat him into submission" (Girdner, 16). Much to the defense's dismay, the trial resulted in a split verdict: Officer Theodore Briseno and Officer Timothy Wind were acquitted. Officer Stacey Koon and Laurence Powell were convicted and await sentencing.

## STEPS TO CREATING A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA

As proven in the above report, the media is a powerful means of communication with the nation. In many instances the media can be used positively to promote peace and calm in tense situations. Thus, it is essential for a police department to develop a good working relationship with the media.

Robert Trojanowicz, Ph.D., author of Building Support for Community Policing: An Effective Strategy emphasizes that a police department can enlist the media to educate the public about the good things the department is doing. When dealing with the media, police administrators must have a plan in place before going public (7). By making a concentrated effort to reach the media, police administrators demonstrate that this group plays an important role in the success of community policing. The challenge for police administrators is to make media representatives realize that this is part of their civic duty (8). Although it requires time to cultivate media contacts, the effort will pay off in the long run. Police administrators should provide every opportunity to provide information on community policing to the media. This means holding press conferences, inviting media representatives to walk the beat with patrol officers, and issuing news releases on recognition and awards programs that reinforce the commitment to

community policing (10).

In a recent *Police Chief* article: A Guide to Effective Interaction with the News Media, there are several helpful tips given by several police chiefs on handling the media effectively:

1. Help select the site for the press conference. Make sure there is an exit located near the speaker which will permit him to exit quickly.
2. Maintain good eye contact with the audience. Keep your gaze moving; do not let your eyes rest on one face.
3. Limit the opening statement to about 10 minutes. Then open the floor to questions.
4. Repeat each question to the audience. This will convey to the questioner that you understood his question and also gives you time to formulate your response.
5. Keep your responses short and to the point. This will prevent you from disclosing any information that you did not intend to disclose.
6. Remain responsive and open to your audience. Choose your words carefully. Once you say something it cannot be retracted.
7. Do not focus on one particular member of the audience as a questioner. Shift your attention. Involve the whole audience.
8. Keep the conference on the subject. Do not stray into "grey" areas.
9. Let your audience know that prepared copies of your statement or news release will be available at the conclusion of the conference.
10. Provide an after-conference contact. This is done in case some audience members were unable to ask a question or have other questions they need answered. (Whitman, 10-12)

These pointers will help in preparing for planned police

and media encounters. However, some encounters are unplanned and occasionally an officer may encounter an individual who is more interested in sensationalism, exaggeration and self-promotion than the truth (12). In this case an officer must remain courteous, accurate and honest. An officer may also find himself struggling with his composure, but must strive to remain calm and in control.

## SUMMARY

Thus, there is much evidence which supports the idea that the police and the media relationship is one that may at times be difficult to maintain, but is nonetheless essential. The rights of the media have always conflicted with certain police goals, especially when the victims rights are in jeopardy. And, as witnessed in the case of the bicyclist who was brutally attacked on Christmas Eve in Hawaii, the police have also been guilty of interfering with the media when their reputation is at stake. In both cases, both the media and the police must find a common ground.

**COPS** is certainly a step in the right direction. The reality of the danger that each police officer encounters on every single call only enhances the public's view of them. This show gives a viewer a snapshot of what everyday is like for a police officer. It also dispels the biased reporting the public occasionally receives from the media.

Two examples of biased reporting were the "Kiko" Garcia incident in Washington Heights and the Rodney King incident in south-central California. The press was extremely influential in provoking the public's opinion, and setting both of the "victims" on pedestals. The King incident emphasized the importance of a police officer's responsibility to always realize that his behavior must be "above the law." He must reason before he acts and presume that his actions will be questioned. It is when his actions are questionable, that the media is able to present bias coverage.

The outcome of both incidents was rioting, vandalism. In the Garcia incident, the police lost the support of the Washington Heights community as a result of the biased media reports. The Rodney King incident brutally enlightened the nation of the abuse of force from those in law enforcement. The media's coverage of the riots uncovered the racial tensions which exploded as a result of the first verdict, and the victorious spirit felt by the Los Angeles community which resulted from the second trial.

Thus, it is logical for the police to understand the power of the press and try to reach a certain ground for compromise. If the police are successful in making the press their allies, they will then win the support of the large majority of the community who are directly influenced by the media. They will not only win the support of their community, but also make the community safer by enlisting the help of the press. Only when the media and the police decide to work together will incidents such as the "Kiko" Garcia incident and the Rodney King incident cease to occur. This will build a stronger community and prevent the barbaric riots which occurred during these incidents and left many innocent lives in shambles.

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