

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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PRESS CONFERENCE

on the

Rodney King Trial Jury Verdicts

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ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO

Saturday April 17, 1993

11:10 a.m.

Conference Room B
Department of Justice
Washington, D.C.

P R O C E E D I N G S

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Good morning.

The jury has spoken, and justice has prevailed in Los Angeles. I want to particularly thank the very dedicated prosecutors -- Steve Kleimer, Barry Kowalski, Alan Tiger and Lawrence Middleton. They did a great job, and I am indebted to them for the excellence and professionalism that they brought to this prosecution.

The agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation did excellent work to see that justice was done, and the jury has got to be thanked for the sacrifices that they have made during these last weeks. Their work reflects the strength and the greatness of the jury system in America.

The Department of Justice is going to do everything it can to continue to bring prosecutions to ensure that the civil rights of all citizens throughout America are protected.

I want to join the citizens, local officials, the people who care, and with the hundreds and thousands of sensitive, caring police officers around this Nation, to do whatever we can to help heal the wounds which have been inflicted on Los Angeles, and to create a spirit of mutual trust in communities throughout America.

Let's work together to channel the frustration that so many feel into addressing the problems Los Angeles and communities throughout America face by ensuring equal opportunity for all citizens, by giving our children an opportunity to grow in a safe, constructive environment, and by working together rather than against each other to build a stronger, better Nation, and a government that reflects and represents all America.

Questions?

QUESTION: Have you spoken to President Clinton today, or was there any reaction from him?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, I have not spoken to the President. I've spoken to the White House.

QUESTION: And what was their reaction?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Their reaction is satisfaction, and deep satisfaction, that justice has been done.

QUESTION: Jessie Jackson wants the President to go to Los Angeles, to assure the people out there. Are there any plans for the President, or senior Cabinet people, to go to Los Angeles now?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: You'd have to check with

them on that?

QUESTION: How about you?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: What I hope to do is, I have been on the other end of the line, when Federal officials come into a community. Sometimes it helps and sometimes it doesn't.

I want to work with local leaders and citizens in Los Angeles, with people who understand what's needed in Los Angeles, and do everything I can to address the long-range problems for the future, to ensure equal opportunity, to address the issue of children, and what can be done to give them an opportunity to get off on the right foot, to work together in every way possible, and I will be in touch with local officials to see how I can best support community efforts.

QUESTION: At this point it all sounds like fairly general plans, nothing specific.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I have specific plans to talk to local leaders, but my plans will be very dependent on them, because I think -- again, I want to stress that communities know best what their problems are, and how best the Federal government can help, and I really want to create

a partnership, relying on their sense and their knowledge of their own community.

QUESTION: Given the considerable anxiety that was created by this situation, do you have any thoughts, have you been led to any conclusions about the climate of violence right now in our Nation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think before this verdict, and before Rodney King, I had some real sense of the climate of violence in America, and I think it's got to be addressed, both with vigorous enforcement against violence of any kind, strict punishment against those who are dangerous offenders.

As I've said on many occasions, we've got to get them arrested, prosecuted and put away and kept away; but we've also got to address how we can prevent violence.

There is not one single American who has been the victim of violence that wouldn't have preferred it to have been prevented in the first place, and I think to do that we've got to give people a sense of fairness in America, of equal opportunity of a chance, on the part of our children, to have a future, and that's what I want to work on with local leaders in Los Angeles and around this Nation in trying

to do for the future.

QUESTION: Drawing in particular from your experience in Miami, and your recognition of what impact verdicts and acquittals can have, do you have any ideas or views on what the impact of this outcome will be on the Denny trial, particularly since sentencing of Officers Koon and Powell will not probably be underway before that trial begins?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I wouldn't want to comment on that. I don't think that's right, since that prosecution is still pending.

QUESTION: Are you conferring with the officers in L.A. about how long they should stay on alert?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We have a representative in Los Angeles who has been coordinating with State and local authorities, and with Federal authorities, to try to see that every appropriate step is taken, and we will continue in that effort.

QUESTION: Do you know how long they may be on alert?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, I don't.

QUESTION: Are you going to keep in touch around the country with what is happening as a result of this? And

have there been any reports of violent reaction as of this time?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I haven't heard of any reports of violent reaction, but we are keeping in close touch with our community relations service offices around the Nation, to monitor this closely.

QUESTION: There was considerable "bracing," if you will, by law enforcement before the outcome of this trial. Do you think there may be a need for similar sorts of preparations for the Reginald Denny case?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We will review that as the time comes.

QUESTION: The Bush administration had said that it would not retry had there been a hung jury in this particular proceeding. Had you and the President conferred to decide whether or not there would have been a re prosecution had the jury come back and been deadlocked on one or more?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, we did not.

QUESTION: Did you find that wasn't necessary, or you had not because there had not been enough time, or --?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, I simply make judgments after problems occur.

QUESTION: Do you think the manner in which the jury operation was handled is something that should be done in future cases, such as secrecy and the privacy of the jurors, et cetera?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We will review that and see if anything should be done to change such procedures in the future.

QUESTION: Was the verdict in this case, which was delivered yesterday afternoon -- was that sealed, or did the judge or anyone else have knowledge of its contents?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The Federal government did not have knowledge of its contents.

QUESTION: I know you can't talk about the specific sentencing recommendations that will be made, but can you give us some sort of sense of the philosophy of what the Justice Department will ask for, in terms of its sentencing recommendations?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: No, that should be done in court.

QUESTION: This Federal prosecution was brought by the previous administration, after justice was not served, the Justice Department determined. Are there particular

things that you are looking at now? I can think of the hangings in Mississippi or whatever -- that you can tell us about, that you are looking at to see whether you might bring prosecution where State and local --?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: As I have indicated, we're reviewing the situation of the deaths in Mississippi to see if there is any basis for any prosecution. We want to make sure that it's carefully reviewed, and that we are accountable to the people for this review.

We're also in the process of doing that, looking to see whether we can make recommendations to local authorities as to what might be done -- if these deaths were indeed suicides, what might be done to prevent such occurrences in the future.

We want, again, where there is not a criminal situation, to work with local authorities to prevent problems such as this. We want to review any cases that people have questions about, to try to make sure that we are accountable to the people.

We are going to take our actions, do our actions, commence our prosecutions based on the evidence and the law.

QUESTION: Are there particular cities that the

Justice Department would like to see additional attention paid, and programs implemented, to work with police that would prevent the recurrence of the incidents such as occurred with Rodney King?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think communities throughout America -- I think we need, and the Department of Justice would like to do everything it can, to form a real partnership with communities throughout America, to address the range of problems -- of equal opportunity, of a sense of fairness, of opportunities for children.

I know a number of you have heard of examples that I have given of teams of community oriented police officers who are firm and fair, working with social workers, public health nurses and neighborhoods to address the problems of the neighborhood as a whole, not in a piecemeal and fragmented fashion, of utilizing the resources of the Federal government.

They are many in number in communities, that utilize them in a coordinated way. I've talked with Domestic Policy Council representatives, with Secretary Shalala, with Mr. Cisneros.

There is so much I think we can do if we coordinate our efforts in Washington with the communities, relying on the

communities to let us know what needs to be done, rather than Washington saying, we know best, from the top down.

I think we form a real dialogue, and a real sense of spirit of communication with communities, we can utilize the resources we have a lot better to address the long-range needs of America.

QUESTION: Nevertheless, cooperation would obviously be good, and coordination, but it seems to me that resources are scarce, and you would need to prioritize. Are you engaged in any activity like that -- trying to set your priorities?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think one of the first things, from my experience again, is that one of the first priorities in this particular effort is to make sure that resources are coordinated and not fragmented, duplicated and wasted, and I think that that's one of the efforts that I want to undertake.

QUESTION: Not prioritized geographically? In other words, no greater emphasis on these large urban areas, or anything like that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think communities throughout America are facing the problems of violence. I

think if you talk to people in rural America you'll see many of the problems. No part of America can be neglected, I think, in terms of trying to address these long-range issues.

QUESTION: Thank you.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 11:17 a.m., the press conference was concluded.]

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