

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

Darius Rejali: Torture and Democracy

is published by Princeton University Press and copyrighted, © 2007, by Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

Follow links for Class Use and other Permissions. For more information send email to: permissions@pupress.princeton.edu

In general, men judge more by sight than by touch. Everyone sees what is happening but not everyone feels its consequences.

—Niccolò Machiavelli¹

■ Introduction

On March 3, 1991, police pulled over Rodney King and two other passengers in Los Angeles. Most Americans saw how that incident ended. LAPD officers beat King senseless with metal batons. Many will remember that police fractured King's face and legs. How many remember the number of times police fired electric stun weapons at King during the incident? How many can say how much shock passed through his body as he lay on the ground?

From the start, the King incident was about the sudden remarkable visibility of police violence captured, by happenstance, on amateur video. As the Christopher Commission stated, "Whether there even would have been a Los Angeles Police Department investigation without the video is doubtful, since the efforts of King's brother, Paul, to file a complaint were frustrated, and the report of the involved officers was falsified."²

Even a careful viewer of the amateur video would not see the police using electroshock. Sergeant Stacey Koon tased Rodney King thrice, twice prior to when the video started running and once in the course of the video. *To tase* means to use a Tommy A. Swift Electric Rifle (T.A.S.E.R). Tasers fire two darts trailed by long wires. Once the darts catch onto the clothing or body, the operator depresses a button, releasing electric charge from the batteries along the wires to the target. Koon's Taser model possessed two dart cartridges. Koon lodged the first pair of darts on King's back and the second on his upper chest. Each discharge delivered short pulses of 50,000 volts, eight to fifteen pulses per second.³

The pain was not trivial. The California Highway Patrol officer said King was "writhing."⁴ LAPD officer Timothy Wind stated that King "was shouting incoherently from the *pain* of the taser."⁵ Even Koon, who was nine feet away,

