

Students protest verdict

Marchers smash windows, burn flag

By BOB SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Approximately 200 students from UC-Santa Cruz marched on Santa Cruz City Hall and the county Government Center early this morning, protesting the acquittal of four Los Angeles police officers in the videotaped beating of Rodney King.

A Santa Cruz police sergeant this morning said windows in the police station and in parked patrol cars on Locust Street were broken by the marauding students. A surveillance camera was broken and a support pillar was damaged when one of the demonstrators burned an American flag on the pillar.

Although the protests and violence in Los Angeles has been carried out mostly by blacks in black and Latino neighborhoods, the protesters in Santa Cruz were white, police said. Last night's demonstrations appeared to be spontaneous, with no apparent leaders or organization.

Police said the flag had been stolen from a McDonald's restaurant on Mission Street.

The demonstrators then moved on to the county Government Center a half-mile away. Heavy plate-glass doors at the center were smashed during the 2 a.m. demonstration there.

No arrests were made by officers from any of the three agencies involved this morning. Most of the debris had been cleaned up around the government center, and the most vivid evidence of the violence were sheets of plywood replacing the shattered glass.

The march began shortly after 1 a.m. from the UCSC campus to the city's downtown area.

Earlier, students said there were protests against the verdict on campus, with fire alarms set off in Porter College and vandalism on the campus.

University spokesman Jim Burns said this morning that students began gathering outside Kresge College — one of the university's eight colleges. The students then began moving from college to college, painting graffiti, setting off fire alarms and strewing trash.



Associated Press

A protester holds a sign that says, 'We Will Not Rest' as an LAPD kiosk burns outside Parker Center last night.

Local police shocked by verdict

By CHELA ZABIN
STAFF WRITER

Local police and community members were reacting with shock and surprise to yesterday's verdict in the Rodney King trial.

Some deputies at the Sheriff's Office this morning said they didn't understand how the Los Angeles County jury could acquit the Los Angeles officers of the beating that was aired on television stations across the nation last year.

In Watsonville, Capt. Chuck Carter wrote a note outlining his thoughts.

"I was stunned by their decision," he said. "They must not have seen the same videotape that I saw.

"I am not privy to all the proceedings, of course, but I think attorneys for the defense were able to manipulate the mostly white affluent suburban jury into ignoring what the tape showed and common sense dictated ... I think it was a flawed decision and justice was not served," he said.

Tony Hill, a member of the Alliance for the Improvement of Race Relations, and a group that is working to prevent hate crimes in Santa Cruz County, also said he was surprised.

"Even the most skeptical part of me was surprised by the verdict,"

he said.

Hill, who is black, said that when he was growing up in Harlem he and his friends often wished there was a way to show the world how black people were treated by police.

"And now we have it on tape and it's not enough," he said.

Hill said he thinks the protest and violence in Los Angeles is "an expected behavior of people who feel oppressed and powerless" in a system that could dismiss what is apparent on the video. He said he expects an increase in gang-type activity and other violent crime among all races as an expression of the lack of faith in the system.

Unable to sleep last night, Hill said he spent a lot of time thinking about the issue, and that he now believes it represents an opportunity for people to come together and work on the problems. He said he's hoping Santa Cruz County elected officials, police and community members will send a united message to Los Angeles.

Santa Cruz Police Chief Jack Bassett said everyone in his department was shocked by the outcome. He said the time the jury took in announcing its verdict led him to believe that acquittal was not in the works.

Bassett said the videotape convinced him of the L.A. officers'

guilt.

"We saw what we saw," he said. "Personally, I can't see anything there except people out of control."

He said every officer he knows, from the youngest rookie to the oldest old-timer, has looked at the tape and thought "that's really something I never thought I'd see to that degree."

But Bassett also condemned the behavior of the protesters both in L.A. and in Santa Cruz. Vandals in Santa Cruz attacked police cars and broke windows at the police station. The chief said that some of his officers' homes were also vandalized.

"It's very unfair ... to take law enforcement and weight it nationally against a few in Los Angeles," he said. He called last night's vandalism "a demonstration of immaturity."

"I don't think it was a proper decision," said a Watsonville police officer, who didn't want to be named, of the jury's decision. "I don't know if we can live with it ... I've never believed in that type of police activity anyway. That's an opinion shared by many police officers."

As to how the local community may view police now, he said, "I think only time will tell."

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At its peak the crowd was estimated at 400 students, university police chief Jan Tepper said.

The students began marching toward the campus's main entrance. Most of the students, Burns said, headed for downtown Santa Cruz, but about 30 went to the university police station near the entrance for a meeting with Tepper.

About 4 a.m. this morning, Burns confirmed, a university police sergeant sent two campus shuttle buses downtown and brought some of the protesters back to campus.

Students passed out flyers last night, calling for all-day protests at the government center today and a rally at noon.

Burns said a rally had been scheduled at the campus bookstore at 3 p.m. and a vigil at the County Government Center at 5 p.m.

A Sheriff's Office spokesman said the department's tactical squad was on alert for the noon rally.

One of the flyers passed out this morning said "F... THE POLICE. People are DYING and it's YOUR fault. ... until you do something about it!! Protest the outcome of the Rodney King trial and the state."

The second said, "Court condones Police Brutality. We do not! Acquittal = Injustice. Rodney King Trial = Injustice. Police Brutality = Injustice. Help stop further injustice. Protest at the County Courthouse steps."