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# Hastings Law News

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## College Rocked by Verdict Violence Touches Hastings Campus

More than 300 Hastings students gathered in the Old Commons Friday for an emotional meeting on the acquittal of the Los Angeles police officers who beat Rodney King and what that verdict should mean to the legal profession.

Dean Tom Read began the discussion with a call for faith in the legal system, saying the alternatives were either anarchy or police rule. "What do we have in the middle? The law," he said.

But second year Rita Johnson said the law did not protect Rodney King, and she feared it would not protect her brother, who she said was in danger of arrest and abuse at any moment for being a young African American man.

Watching television images of angry crowds beating whites at random, Johnson said she thought, "For a few hours, white people knew what it was like to be black in this country...to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, with the wrong skin color."

"No, I will not study constitutional law, because it means nothing!"

Algers Tucker shouted, "I'm not angry, I'm tired!"

"I started marching when I was five years old. I'm 37 years old. I'm still marching."

Referring to the videotape of King's vicious beating, Tucker said, "You can't tell me I didn't see what I saw. This is like 1984. It's like doublespeak."

But Professor Eileen Scallen argued that the U.S. legal system has not failed yet. "The test of what I do as a teacher is not that verdict. It is what we do with that verdict."

Scallen urged those angered by the acquittal to channel their fury into efforts for reform.

Incoming Black Law Students' Association president Jason Taylor said King's beating, the acquittal and the charge of venue to conservative Simi Valley were all "a side issue" compared to

the underlying problem: that of African American men "being under siege across the nation."

Alison Bernstein, the editor of Hastings' *Women's Law Journal*, said, "We need to stop telling people of color what it's like for them and say what it's like for us."

"I feel like a gentle German in 1928 watching fascism on the rise, and what do you say? And what do you do?"

Before the forum, outgoing ASH president Karen Carrera said the Hastings administration ought to "take a stand—make a commitment to affirmative action and people of color, the underrepresented at the school."

And second year Lisa Ross said the sympathized with the demonstrators who turned to destruction in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

"They wonder why the little people are breaking the laws," Ross said. According to Ross, people without power see President Bush and Congress acting as though they are above the law, and "they see the Supreme Court walking across the Constitution."

"Tell them I'm not going down like Rodney King," Ross added. "I've never touched a gun in my life, but I promise, if I had one today, I'd shoot it," she said.

Read issued a letter to "all members of the Hastings community" Friday morning. It read in part, "Most of us came to school sickened, outraged and shocked by a jury's verdict." Read expressed distress at both the verdict and the subsequent violence. The letter described the decision to close the school and the subsequent damage.

Read wrote, "The actions we witnessed from the windows of our buildings are too distressing to describe." The letter thanked the Hastings security force, saying, "We will not forget how our officers protected us from uncontrolled mob violence until the San Francisco police arrived."

Newly elected ASH vice president Babak Naficy said he and incoming ASH president Phil Ginsburg negotiated over the language of the letter at a Friday morning meeting with Read and other administrators.

Hastings spokesman Tom Debley said no institutional response to the acquittal, such as a renewed commitment to affirmative action, was discussed at the meeting. He said the administration believed the first thing to do was to "bring people together," and discuss the verdict's implications for "a community like this, where everybody is connected with the [legal] institution from which this thing has emanated."

Anger overflowed in the Civic Center Thursday evening over the acquittal of the four Los Angeles police officers whose videotaped assault on Los Angeles motorist Rodney King shocked the nation.

Several Hastings students joined the protests, and at least two were taken into custody by police. The college buildings themselves were briefly besieged by a violent group of demonstrators, some of whom hit a student several times as he tried to protect his car from damage. College spokesman Tom Debley said the student who was attacked did not appear to be hurt badly.

Hastings closed its doors around 4 p.m. Thursday as demonstrators marched from orally outside the government buildings towards downtown Market Street. The closure canceled the third year class reception. Debley said the awards ceremony may be postponed until graduation.

About an hour after the closure, at least 200 protesters came down McAllister St., some of them smashing car windshields. College spokesperson Tom Debley said they dented the glass front of the 200 building with chunks of concrete. He said a side door to the 198 building was broken later that night by a different group.

ASH vice president Babak Naficy said several students were trapped inside the 200 building when the demonstrators passed down McAllister. He said Patsy Oppenheim led several students up to the library, where they waited in windowless offices, afraid the angry group might break into the building.

According to Hastings officers, a San Francisco policeman broke his wrist when he fell or was knocked from his motorcycle on Hyde St. between the two Hastings buildings.

Third year Naren Hanery was walking home past the intersection of Geary and Leavenworth around 8:30 p.m. Thursday when city police grabbed him, drew him to the sidewalk and put a gun to his head. He said a group of reporters asked the police, "Is he a looter?"

Hunter said he was released only after he started taking badge numbers. "They said I fit the description of someone who was causing trouble," he said.

Second year student Lisa Ross said she was near Glendale Memorial Church with a group of protesters from Hastings when one classmate was arrested. "They pushed this man into the street, then arrested him. He wasn't doing anything," she said. It was not clear whether the student was detained overnight or whether he would face charges.

### Hastings Law News

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