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The Rampart Scandal

▣ RAMPART SCANDAL TIMELINE

A chronology of the unfolding events and discoveries of police misconduct which eventually blew up into the Rampart scandal. The scandal was ignited by one L.A.P.D. officer, Rafael Perez, who charged that dozens of his fellow officers regularly were involved in making false arrests, giving perjured testimony and framing innocent people.

▣ RAFAEL PEREZ: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

The Rampart scandal was ignited by the allegations of one man, L.A.P.D. officer Rafael Perez. Here's a profile of Perez and exclusive audio excerpts from his confessions.

▣ THE ISSUE OF RAFAEL PEREZ'S CREDIBILITY

Perez claimed the Rampart CRASH unit was filled with drug-dealing rogue cops who were shaking down gang members and framing innocent people. But Perez's credibility is now turning out to be a very large question. Here are the views of L.A.P.D. Chief Bernard Parks, Former L.A.P.D. Chief Daryl Gates, Judge Larry Fidler, former L.A. District Attorney Gil Garcetti, and Detective Mike Hohan.

▣ COVER UP?

Even before **Perez's allegations** surfaced, the L.A.P.D. was investigating suspicious activity among some officers in the Rampart CRASH unit. However, critics like Detective Russell Poole claim the L.A.P.D. wasn't really interested in getting to the bottom of what was happening. Poole claims crucial leads were ignored in the early stages of the investigation. Others say administrative decisions taken after the scandal surfaced discouraged officers with critical information from coming forward. Here are the views of Detective Poole, L.A.P.D. Chief Bernard Parks, Gerald Chaleff, former president of the L.A. Police Commission, and Gil Garcetti, former L.A. District Attorney.

▣ CRASH CULTURE

CRASH was the group of elite anti-gang units set up within the L.A.P.D. to tackle rising gang-related crime. CRASH officers were required to get to know gang members and

keep on top of their activities. Although CRASH was successful, city-wide, in reducing gang crime, critics say officers harassed and abused suspects and falsified reports. Here are the views of former L.A.P.D. Chief Daryl Gates, Sgt. Brian Liddy, Ruben Rojas, a Temple Street gang member, Gerald Chaleff, former president of the L.A. Police Commission, and Detective Mike Hohan, principal investigator on the Rampart Corruption Task Force

□ CONNECTING THE DOTS

Officials investigating the L.A.P.D.'s Rampart CRASH unit uncovered a tangled web linking officers with street gangs, drug dealing, and the gangsta rap underworld. Here's a picture chart.

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March 18, 1997 - Road Rage Shootout

Undercover L.A.P.D. officer Frank Lyga shot and killed off-duty L.A.P.D. officer Kevin Gaines in a case of apparent road rage. The shooting of a black officer -- Gaines -- by a white cop -- Lyga -- created a highly publicized police controversy. Lyga told FRONTLINE that Gaines threatened him with a gun and that he responded in self-defense, adding, "In my training experience this guy had 'I'm a gang member' written all over him." Investigators on the case discovered that Gaines had allegedly been involved in similar road rage incidents, threatening drivers and brandishing his gun. They also discovered troubling connections between Gaines and **Death Row Records**, a rap recording label owned by Marion "Suge" Knight that, investigators came to find, was hiring off-duty police officers as security guards.



Lyga, who had been reassigned to desk duty while the L.A.P.D. reviewed the circumstances of the shooting, including whether his actions had been racially motivated, was ultimately exonerated a year later. Three separate internal investigations determined that the shooting was "in policy."

After the shooting, the Gaines family, represented by attorney Johnnie Cochran, filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the city of Los Angeles for \$25 million. The city later settled the suit for \$250,000.

November 6, 1997 - Bank Robbery

Robbers targeted a Los Angeles branch of Bank of America, making off with \$722,000. Investigating officers were immediately suspicious of assistant bank manager Errollyn Romero, who had had more cash than was necessary delivered just ten minutes before the robbery. One month later Romero confessed to her role in the crime and implicated her boyfriend, L.A.P.D. officer David Mack, as the mastermind. A former track star, Mack was arrested and later convicted of the bank robbery. He was sentenced to 14 years and three months in federal prison. He has refused to reveal the whereabouts of the money, and while in prison has reportedly associated himself with the Mob Piru Bloods, a gang with ties to **Death Row Records**. Detectives investigating Mack discovered that two days after the robbery, Mack and two other police officers -- including a former partner, Rafael Perez -- spent the weekend

gambling in Las Vegas, spending thousands of dollars.

February 26, 1998 -- Station-House Beating

L.A.P.D. Officer Brian Hewitt, a member of L.A.P.D.'s elite anti-gang unit **CRASH** [Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums] in the Rampart division, brought 18th Street gang member Ismael Jimenez to the Rampart police station for questioning. Hewitt allegedly beat the hand-cuffed Jimenez in the chest and stomach, causing him to vomit blood. After being released, Jimenez went to the hospital, where officials notified the L.A.P.D. of his injuries and complaints. Subsequent internal investigations resulted in the firing of Hewitt and another officer, Ethan Cohan, who, the Department determined, knew about but failed to report the beating. Jimenez, who was awarded \$231,000 in a civil settlement with the city, is currently in federal custody pending a multiple count indictment for the distribution of drugs and conspiracy to commit murder.

March 27, 1998 -- Missing Cocaine

Officials in the L.A.P.D. property room discovered that six pounds of cocaine evidence are missing. Within a week, detectives focused their investigation on L.A.P.D. officer **Rafael Perez**, a member of the Rampart CRASH unit.

May 1998 -- Task Force Created

Concerned about a possible clique of officers involved in criminal misconduct -- working off-duty for **Death Row Records**, robbing banks and stealing cocaine -- **L.A.P.D. Chief Bernard Parks** established an internal investigative task force. The investigative team, later named the Rampart Corruption Task Force, focused primarily on the prosecution of **Rafael Perez**. Further audit of the L.A.P.D. property room identified another pound of missing cocaine -- evidence that had been booked on a prior arrest made by Det. Frank Lyga, the officer who had shot Kevin Gaines. At the time, investigators speculated that Perez may have stolen the cocaine booked by Lyga in retaliation for the shooting of Gaines.

August 25, 1998 -- Perez Arrested

When first stopped and arrested by detectives, Perez asked, "Is this about the bank robbery?" It wasn't. It was about the 6 pounds of missing cocaine, which investigators believed had been checked out by Perez, under another officer's name, and sold on the streets of Rampart through a girlfriend.

In December, Perez was brought to trial on charges of possession of cocaine with intent to sell, grand theft and forgery. After five days of deliberations, the jury announced that it was hopelessly deadlocked, with a final vote of 8-4 favoring conviction.

In preparing to bolster their case for a retrial, investigators discovered an additional eleven instances of suspicious cocaine transfers. Detectives were able to identify dope "switches," where Perez had ordered the cocaine evidence out of property and replaced it with Bisquick.

September 8, 1999 -- Perez Cuts a Deal

Rafael Perez made a deal with prosecutors under which he pled guilty to cocaine theft and agreed to provide prosecutors with information about two "bad" shootings and three other Rampart CRASH officers involved in illegal activity. In exchange, Perez received a five-year prison sentence and immunity from further prosecution of misconduct short of murder.

Among his first revelations, Perez told investigators of how he and his partner Nino Durden had shot, framed, and testified against Javier Ovando, an unarmed gang member who was left paralyzed as a result of the incident. At the time of Perez's admission, Ovando was in jail, serving the 23 year sentence he had received for allegedly assaulting the two officers.

Thus began a nine-month **confessional** during which time Perez met with investigators more than 50 times and provided more than 4,000 pages in sworn testimony. Before he was done, Perez implicated about 70 officers in misconduct, from bad shootings to drinking beer on the job.



September 16, 1999 -- Ovando Released

With Perez recanting his 1996 testimony about the shooting of Javier Ovando, the District Attorney's Office filed a writ of habeas corpus seeking to overturn his conviction. Ovando was released from prison after serving two and a half years.

Based upon Perez's allegations of wrongful arrests, and investigations by the Task Force, nearly 100 more convictions were eventually **overturned**.

September 21, 1999 -- Board of Inquiry

L.A.P.D. chief Bernard Parks formed a Board of Inquiry comprised of L.A.P.D. command staff to analyze management failures and investigate the depth of the corruption scandal. The **Board's report**, released in March 2000, blames, in large measure, lax departmental management for allowing misconduct within the Rampart Division to occur. The report offers 108 recommendations, including the improvement of hiring practices, supervisory oversight and police training.

March 3, 2000 -- CRASH Disbanded

L.A.P.D. chief Bernard Parks announced that he was disbanding the department's CRASH units and creating new anti-gang details that that would include more rigorous requirements for membership, stressing the officers' level of experience.

April 2000 -- Police Commission Review

The Police Commission formed the Rampart Independent Review Panel, comprised of citizens including attorneys, educators, and business executives. The panel issued a **report** in November 2000 with 72 findings and 86 recommendations. It concluded that officers need better and more supervision; that the department compromises criminal investigations of officer-involved shootings and major use-of-force incidents; and that the L.A.P.D. is viewed by the community as excessively hostile and confrontational.

July 28, 2000 -- Perez's Partner Arrested for Ovando Shooting

Perez's partner Nino Durden was arrested and charged with attempted murder for the shooting of Javier Ovando. He was also charged with perjury, filing false police reports and robbery. He pleaded innocent to all charges in November 2000.

September 11, 2000 -- Independent Report Critical of L.A.P.D.'s Handling of Scandal

Professor Erwin Chemerinsky of the University of Southern California, released an **analysis** of the L.A.P.D.'s Board of Inquiry report which he prepared at the request of the Police Protective League. He concluded that the L.A.P.D. minimized the magnitude of the Rampart scandal and failed to acknowledge the extent to which its internal culture allowed corruption to fester. Chemerinsky's report recommends more aggressive independent reviews and a permanent special prosecutor to investigate police misconduct.

September 19, 2000 -- Feds Take Over L.A.P.D.

The Los Angeles City Council voted 10 to 2 to accept a **consent decree** allowing a federal judge acting on behalf of the U.S. Department of Justice to oversee and monitor reforms within the L.A.P.D. for a period of five years. In agreeing to the consent decree, the Justice Department -- which had been investigating the L.A.P.D. since 1996 for excessive force violations -- agreed not to pursue a civil rights lawsuit against the city. Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan and L.A.P.D. Chief Bernard Parks initially opposed the consent decree, but backed down when it became clear that it was supported by the city council. Riordan signed the consent decree in November 2000.

September 26, 2000 -- Whistleblower Files Lawsuit Charging Cover Up

Former **L.A.P.D. detective Russell Poole** filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the city of Los Angeles and L.A.P.D. Chief Bernard Parks. Poole, a detective with the Robbery/Homicide Division, was a lead investigator on the Lyga-Gaines shooting and was later assigned to the Rampart Corruption Task Force, where he investigated the station-house beating of Ismael Jimenez. Poole resigned from the Department after 18 years and claims in his civil suit that Chief Parks shut down his efforts to fully investigate the extent of corruption within the Department, including possible criminal activities of Kevin Gaines and David Mack, as well as the breadth of officer misconduct within Rampart. **Chief Parks has denied** Poole's allegations in the lawsuit, calling them "totally false."

October 4, 2000 -- Three CRASH Cops Convicted

In the first **criminal case** stemming from Perez's allegations, Sgt. Edward Ortiz, Brian Liddy, Paul Harper and Michael Buchanan, all of the Rampart CRASH unit, were tried on charges of perjury, fabricating arrests and filing false police reports. Perez did not testify at the trial, due to **concerns about his credibility**. All four officers pleaded not guilty. On November 15, 2000, Ortiz, Liddy and Buchanan were convicted of conspiracy to obstruct justice and filing false police reports, while Harper was acquitted of all charges.

November 21, 2000 -- Record Settlement Reached

In the largest police misconduct settlement in city history, Javier Ovando was awarded \$15 million. An additional 29 civil suits were settled for nearly \$11 million. The city, faced with more than 140 civil suits stemming from the corruption scandal, estimates that total settlement costs will be about \$125 million.

Four months after his settlement, Ovando was arrested in Nevada and charged with the possession and trafficking of drugs.

December 22, 2000 -- CRASH Cop Convictions Overturned

After a series of hearings investigating allegations of juror misconduct, Superior Court Judge Jacqueline Connor **overturned the convictions** of Rampart CRASH cops Ortiz, Liddy and Buchanan. Judge Connor called the verdict unfair because in post-trial interviews the jurors disclosed that they had determined guilt based on a reporting issue not raised in the trial. In January 2001, the new D.A., Steve Cooley, announced that he would appeal Judge Connor's decision.

March 23, 2001 -- Three More CRASH Cops Indicted; Two Plead Out

The District Attorney's office brought felony indictments against three former Rampart CRASH officers: Ethan Cohan, Manuel Chavez and Shawn Gomez. The complaints charge the officers with assaulting two gang members and filing false police reports. Chavez and Gomez have reached plea agreements, including cooperation with prosecutors. Cohan has pleaded innocent and awaits trial.

March 30, 2001 -- Perez's Partner Pleads Guilty

Perez's former partner Nino Durden cut a deal with state and federal prosecutors in which he agreed to plead guilty to ten state and federal charges, including fabricating evidence, false arrest and presenting false testimony. Durden is expected to receive a prison sentence of 7-8 years, and the deal requires that he fully cooperate with federal prosecutors, who, using Durden's testimony, may bring additional indictments against Rafael Perez.

July 24, 2001 -- Perez Released

After serving three years of his five-year sentence, Rafael Perez was released from prison and placed on parole. Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Robert Perry ruled that due to safety concerns, Perez could serve his parole outside the state of California.

December 17, 2001 -- Perez Pleads Guilty to Federal Charges

Perez pled guilty to federal civil rights and firearms violations resulting from the shooting of Javier Ovando. He admitted to one count of conspiracy to violate Ovando's civil rights, and one count of possessing a firearm with an obliterated serial number. He is scheduled for

sentencing in March 2002, and is expected to serve two years in federal prison under the plea agreement.

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