

Posted 10/28/07

WHO RIOTED IN MAC ARTHUR PARK?

Bratton, who wasn't there, moves swiftly to censure those who were

By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Within hours of the May Day melee at MacArthur Park, Chief Bratton warmed the cockles of every plaintiff's attorney in town when he spanked L.A.'s finest, publicly refusing to "defend the indefensible." Videotapes clearly showed Metro officers firing rubber projectiles and whacking away at ordinary citizens whose most heinous crime was assembling for a picnic. A few newsies got a full dose of equal treatment, a big no-no considering that LAPD's rough handling of the media during the 2000 Democratic Convention led it to enter into a consent agreement allowing reporters safe access to police lines.

Then came the LAPD's own report, which took commanders to task for failing to anticipate problems and coordinate and control the response. LAPD agreed that its crowd control techniques were poor, the decision to disperse overbroad if not totally unnecessary, the order -- done from a helicopter! -- inaudible, the force used likely excessive (ka-ching!) and training inadequate.

Now, to admit one or two little mistakes is one thing, but LAPD's mea culpa ([click here](#)), which runs to more than one-hundred pages, so broadly indicts the agency's management and training functions that one must wonder whether anyone at Parker Center has ever cracked open a book on policing. In a flurry of activity, Chief Bratton promptly relieved a Deputy Chief of his duties and reassigned a Commander "pending the action of personnel complain investigations." The only thing apparently not being investigated is the Chief's decision to attend an entertainment industry function rather than be present to oversee his department's response to the largest planned demonstration in the City this year.

Only days ago, in an update to the report, LAPD brass informed its lapdogs at the Police Commission that the department is zeroing in on twenty-six officers for using excessive force. But the LAPPL claims that Bratton misconstrued his own department's use-of-force policies, which the union insists are so broad that it's perfectly OK to fire rubber bullets at demonstrators and slug them with batons to move them along.

Meanwhile, dozens of claims alleging police-inflicted injuries are themselves moving through the L.A. City Attorney's bureaucracy, many extensively documented with medical records and videotapes. And when it comes time for the plaintiffs to present their case, guess who'll be their number one witness? Chief "I wasn't there"

Bratton himself! Rest assured that he'll be in the same sparkling uniform that he wore to that important Hollywood function while his troops were preparing to do the "indefensible" at Pico-Union.

Ka-ching!