

## L.A. PD

### A NOIR HISTORY OF LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT

By Chris Barber

#### WHOSE L.A.W?

The world was shocked when the savage beating of helpless youth Rodney King, by a gang of sadistic Los Angeles cops, flashed across our TV screens. When a racist jury freed the lawmen responsible, it provoked mass riots on city streets, causing over fifty deaths and millions of dollars worth of destruction. Recently L.A.'s blue knights were at it again, providing another episode of this reality TV cop soap-opera. But these events are merely a sit-com compared to what you didn't see. From its origins to today, Los Angeles Police Department has sanctioned racist rednecks, brutal psychos and killer cops, achieving a reputation in law enforcement that could have been the pride and envy of Hitler's SS/Storm Troopers.

#### LYNCH-MOB JUSTICE - L.A.P.D. 1850 to 1899

At the end of the Mexico verses United States war; Mexico ceded vast areas of land to the US, including the state of California. The Gold Rush caused thousands of crazy prospectors to go-west to the Pacific state; the pueblo town of Los Angeles was declared a 'City' (of Angels) in 1850, with 1,610 citizens.

The Los Angeles Rangers was the city's first Police Department, founded by Dr. A W Hope in 1853, in response to the murder of a City Marshall. Their uniform consisted of a white ribbon, but 'The Los Angeles City Guards' soon replaced them.

From the outset L.A. Law was dispensed inauspiciously by mob rule. In 1854, L.A. Mayor Stephen C Foster led a rambunctious mob of vigilantes, who busted a suspect from a makeshift prison and lynched him.

In the absence of a formal prison, convicts were chained to logs in a yard. A jail was considered less important than enforcing statutory racism, enshrined by The Supreme Court in 1850, stating: *'No black or mulatto person, or Indian, shall be permitted to give evidence in favour of, or against any white person. Every person who shall have one-eighth part or more of Negro blood shall be deemed a mulatto and every person who shall have one-half of Indian blood shall be deemed Indian.'* They forgot to include Asians, but amended this oversight shortly thereafter.

L.A. was a lawless, Wild West frontier town, brimming with casinos and saloons. When Sheriff James Barton was killed in 1857, suspects were arbitrarily rounded-up and eleven were sent to the gallows.

By 1869, the city's population had increased to 5,614, patronising 285 businesses (110 being saloons). The ramshackle of Bible-bashing peacekeepers, community vigilantes and rent-a-mob citizenry, was finally organised into a professional cop-squad. City Marshall William C. Warren established a police headquarters, employing six officers, paid for by civic fines and tariffs. The Marshall served as tax collector and dogcatcher, personally awarded two-and-a-half per cent of duties he collected.

Old habits die-hard and despite this reorganisation, mob-law continued to control the streets. One day alone in 1871, an angry posse, uninterrupted by law officers, lynched nineteen Chinese migrants. When eight suspects were eventually arrested for the hangings they were imprisoned in San Quentin, but released less than two years later.

From 1875 (until 1916), horseback patrols were deployed on city streets. Yet the City Marshall remained unable to impose discipline on subordinates; one Marshall was even shot-dead by his men. This provoked the City Council to orchestrate a massive shake-up, intent on instilling discipline. The first Board of Police Commissioners was established, electing Jacob T. Gerkins as Chief in 1876. A regulation uniform was made compulsory – a blue serge jacket and felt cap. Additionally officers themselves had to pay \$6 each, for a silver, eight-point badge.

Between 1876 and 1889, thirteen new Chiefs came and went. The earliest traffic squad hit the streets under Chief Geoge E. Gard in 1881, to control "horse, wagon and carriage" chaos. Robert William Stewart and Roy Green were the first two African Americans to join the force, in 1886 (then numbering eighteen officers)....