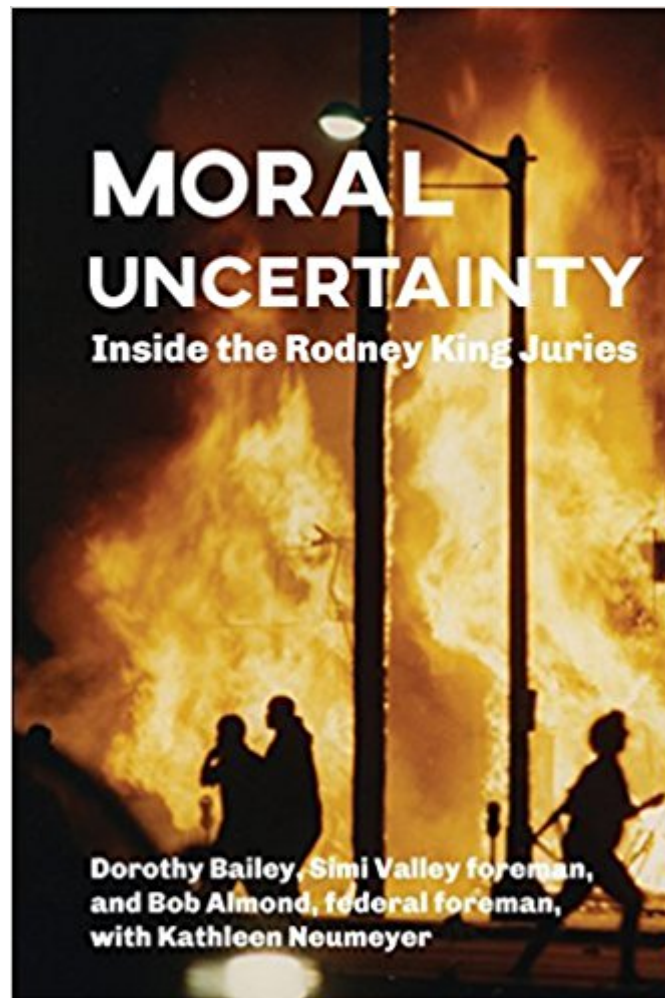




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# Moral Uncertainty: Inside The Rodney King Juries



## Synopsis

In 1991 the world recoiled from a shocking videotape showing white Los Angeles police officers brutally beating a black man caught speeding on the freeway. A jury's failure to convict them of excessive use of force triggered the worst urban rioting in U.S. history. A year later, a federal jury looking at the same facts found two officers guilty of violating Rodney King's civil rights while exonerating two others. Twenty-five years later, *Moral Uncertainty* tells the story for the first time of what went on inside both of those jury rooms.

## Book Information

Paperback: 362 pages

Publisher: Andalou Books (March 9, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0990466434

ISBN-13: 978-0990466437

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.9 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,959,038 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #88 in Books > Law > Rules & Procedures > Jury

## Customer Reviews

The first Rodney King trial nearly destroyed Los Angeles. The verdict was inexplicable to many. King was shocked with a Taser, kicked, clubbed and beaten by police officers whose actions were videotaped by a neighbor. When the video was shown on TV, viewers were stunned. They were even more stunned when a jury in the suburb of Simi Valley acquitted the policemen of most charges. As the news spread, rioting broke out, fires were set and Los Angeles was on the verge of anarchy. A year later, a second jury hearing federal charges convicted two of the officers, who went to prison. As a special correspondent for The Associated Press, I became familiar with all of the facts except one. The question that lingered for me over the decades was how the two juries could have come to such different conclusions. Now, twenty-five years after the case changed policing in the nation's second largest city and focused world attention on a toxic racial divide, jurors from the two cases reveal the secret deliberations that led them to their historic verdicts. This book contains surprising details of the personal interactions and legal interpretations that led to the devastating verdicts. - Linda Deutsch, Associated Press

BOB ALMOND, a professional engineer for the Port of Los Angeles, was forty-nine when this book was written. Born in Glendale, California, Bob Almond lived in the Los Angeles area until 2006 when he moved to Bellingham, Washington. He studied engineering at California State University, Los Angeles, where he met his wife, Clairene, a retired Los Angeles County librarian. Their daughter Kelly and her husband Sean also live in Bellingham. The Almonds have one grandson, Ian.

DOROTHY BAILEY was sixty-seven years old when she wrote her account of her experience as foreman of the first Rodney King trial, using the comprehensive shorthand notes she had taken during the testimony. She and her husband of twenty-eight years had eight children between them, twenty-seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Before her retirement two weeks after the verdict in the Rodney King trial, she had held the position of Program Manager for a small, black-owned business engaged primarily in government contracts to supply newly constructed U.S. Navy and foreign military ships with technical manuals for each piece of equipment aboard. The trial of the four officers accused of beating Rodney King was the first trial Bailey ever observed. Prior to being foreman of the jury, her only courtroom experience was when she was a plaintiff in the uneventful dissolution of her first marriage three decades earlier. Dorothy Bailey died in 2012.

KATHLEEN NEUMEYER, as a trial reporter for United Press International, covered the murder trials of Sirhan B. Sirhan for the assassination of United States Senator Robert F. Kennedy, and of Charles Manson and the Manson Family, as well as the Daniel Ellsberg Pentagon Papers trial. Later she covered the federal drug trial of John DeLorean for The Times of London; and the murder trial of Elisabeth Broderick, a San Diego woman who killed her ex-husband and his new bride, for Ladies Home Journal. She has written extensively about the law for California Lawyer, Lawyers Weekly of Canada, the Massachusetts Law Quarterly, Los Angeles Lawyer and the Western Law Quarterly. She was a contributing editor of Los Angeles Magazine for twenty years and taught journalism for forty-two years. Former California Attorney General John Van de Kamp praised Kathleen Neumeyer's writing about allegations of police brutality in the Los Angeles Police Department as "excellent, both informative and balanced. That can't be said for much written about this volatile issue."

Too many black men have been battered or shot by the police in the twenty-five years since the Rodney King beating. Many of these beatings and shootings are captured on videotape; I think this was the first. My initial reaction to *Moral Uncertainty: Inside the Rodney King Juries*, was incredulity. How could any jury have been in doubt about the morality of tasing and beating Rodney King

sufficiently to break bones? How could the jury disregard the brutality recorded on videotape? The first and longer section of *Moral Uncertainty*, which describes the first trial of four police officers from the perspective of Dorothy Bailey, the jury foreman, was revealing on many levels. Unlike a courtroom drama, with its structured build to a climax, this tale shows us how a careful and caring person would perceive repeated viewing of the violent video, evidence (dramatic and banal), as it was given, people as they appeared in court, and fellow jurors with whom she was closeted for many hours. There is surrealism sometimes, as parts get separated from the whole. However, the tale of how a reasonable group of twelve could come to the conclusion that there was a reasonable doubt, making their deliberations in a vacuum, is worth reading. Those outside the jury room, including the President of the US and the rioters who torched parts of Los Angeles, shared the feeling that the acquittal of all four officers was a miscarriage of justice, rather than a careful obedience to the law and judicial instructions as presented to this jury. The second trial, a federal trial, was to determine whether Rodney King had been deprived of his civil rights. Here the perspective is that of Bob Almond, jury foreman this time around. One of the fascinating elements of *Moral Uncertainty* is the contrasting perceptions, style and methodology of the two foremen. The same four policemen were on trial. The jury was sequestered for the entire period of the trial. Though the charges were different, many of the same issues were key to this trial, as was the videotape. The outcome, though, was very different. The chilling pattern of black men beaten and shot by police officers continues. *Moral Uncertainty* may not entirely explain this dynamic, but it offers partial answers, as well as insights into the strengths and weaknesses of our judicial system and the jurors charged the responsibility of deciding guilt and non-guilt.

This book puts you right in the middle of the decision-making process of both trials of Rodney King. It offers a look at what the juries saw and did not see, which turns out to be quite a bit different than what the public saw and did not see. More importantly, it gives you a glance into police procedures that are, frankly, shocking even if they are legal. I was completely surprised by the details of police training with regard to arresting a person who is resisting. I think this is a very important book in terms of coming to some understanding of how the police are likely to interpret behavior and how they are taught to respond to it. It also gives the reader a pretty clear picture of two jury foremen, who are very different people. They attended to different things and made different assumptions. I was fascinated by the questions they felt went unanswered and the ideas they formed about why those questions were never asked during the trial. The foreperson of the first trial is especially vivid. You end up with a real sense of her personality, her concerns and are much better able to

understand her decision. It's fascinating to see how the way they thought going into the trial was affected by the legalities from approved police procedures to the instructions the judge handed the jury. All in all, a great read.

This book is an intriguing inside look into our justice system as well as a reminder of the clash between police procedures and black lives that continues today. Having lived through the time of these trials, I remembered finding it difficult to explain how the 1st jury justified their verdict. After reading this account, I understood. Through the trials' details and impressions, related by the 2 unique voices of the jury 'forewoman' and foreman, we experience the huge gap between what a jury is entrusted with and what we the public know from news sources. For those of us who lived through the beating video, the riots, and the trials, it's an inside look at that particular case, but it is also a lesson in our judicial system and the manipulations of court procedures. Anyone interested in civil rights, law, court procedure, and/or jury experience will find this a fascinating personal behind-the-scenes account from a layperson's perspective.

Whether you lived through the Rodney King trials and the aftermath of the verdicts, "Moral Uncertainty" is a compelling read from a unique perspective -- from inside the jury room. Dorothy Bailey and Bob Almond take us through the deliberations of both trials (with some subtle touches of humor) and offer a fascinating insight into the trial system. This should be on the must-read list for lawyers, students of law and those who remember the events.

Excellent look into jurist interaction in the two Rodney King trials. I would recommend this book to anyone facing trial duty, as well as those interested in the historical significance of police action with racial overtones. This was especially a great read for those interested in the Rodney King trials and the aftermath of those trials.

A valuable historical answer to the question: "What were they thinkin'?"

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