

Rally has different, peaceful tone

By Daralyn Trappe
Oregon Daily Emerald

Although many people at a Sunday rally in Eugene expressed relief that some measure of justice came from the trial of four Los Angeles police officers, there was also agreement that little justice exists for minorities in everyday life.

The rally was organized by several groups to give community members a chance to express their feelings following Saturday's verdict in which two officers were found guilty in federal court of violating Rodney King's civil rights. Two others were acquitted.

This year's rally had a decidedly different, more peaceful tone than the one that took place locally April 29, 1992, the day after a California state jury handed down not guilty verdicts. That day, a crowd marched from the University to the Federal Building, also the site of Sunday's rally, and the riot that ensued resulted in thousands of dollars



Photo by Anthony Forney

About 80 people were at the Federal Building Sunday afternoon in Eugene to peacefully voice their opinions on the LA trial verdict.

in damage to the building.

Marshall Saucedo, director of the University's Office of Multicultural Affairs, said the riots that took place here and in LA last year were understandable.

"For many of us, we could not condone the violence, but we understood the source of the anger and frustration," he said.

"Now, there is a glimmer of hope that justice is alive."

Thomas Coley, president of the African-American Community Coalition, began the rally with words others would echo. Coley told the crowd of about 80 he hopes the closing of this chapter prompts the beginning of a better local effort in race relations.

VERDICT

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"Whether the actions last year were right or wrong, they have significantly increased awareness of racial conflict in Eugene," Hoop said.

While demonstrations aren't unusual at the Federal Building, last year's protest was taken seriously by occupants of the building, said Noel Ness, physical security specialist for the federal protective service.

Ness believes the rally changed the opinion of many federal employees about protests.

"The employees on the first wing were traumatized and very upset," Ness said. "We have just a different attitude toward demonstrations. We're a lot more cautious."

Prior to the announcement of this year's verdict, Ness said the building was preparing for a possible evacuation of the first floor if the officers were acquitted again.

The Federal Building's biggest struggle when it becomes the target of protest is that people forget there are regular people inside of the building, he said.

Ness said the building represents the policy of the government, and people don't realize they are

attacking individuals when protesting the government.

"I would wish the protesters in the future see the humanity inside the building," Ness said.

Eugene police department spokesman Tim Birr said he expected there wouldn't be any major disorder in Eugene following the announcement of the verdict. People in Eugene have better relations with the local police department than in LA, he said.


"Eugene is a very different community in terms of police-community relations than Los Angeles," Birr said.

The police department, Birr said, took what happened last year seriously, and for three weeks prior to Saturday's verdict, police worked with federal officials and community leaders to organize a peaceful rally and march to the Federal Building.

When an open forum is established for venting opinions, Birr said, people tend to take advantage of the opportunity and no longer rely on violence to prove a point.

"We will do whatever we can to facilitate any orderly march, rally or demonstration in a non-violent, non-criminal manner," Birr said before the verdict was announced.

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