

Briefly

Court Denies King His Lawyer's Fees

A state appellate court in Los Angeles has ruled that Rodney G. King, whose 1991 beating at the hands of Los Angeles Police Department officers was captured on videotape, cannot collect court-awarded attorney fees in a lawsuit stemming from the event.

In an unpublished decision, the 2nd District Court of Appeal ruled Monday that the one-year statute of limitations on legal malpractice cases barred King from collecting \$1.6 million in court-awarded attorney fees. *King v. Lerman*, B139783 (Cal. App. 2nd Dist., Oct. 2, 2001).

In April 1994, King won \$3.8 million in a civil-rights case against the city of Los Angeles. *King v. Los Angeles*, CV91-2497 (C.D. Cal., 1994). Since then, he has been embroiled in civil suits over fees, in part because of vagueness in their compensation agreements.

Although Tuesday's ruling is a victory for Steven A. Lerman, the Beverly Hills lawyer remains outraged that he was sued at all, and he lambasted other attorneys who have represented King since the beating.

"I'm the only lawyer who ever helped him who didn't screw him," Lerman said. "There are some bottom-feeders out there who think that suing other lawyers is a good way to get a day's pay."

He said he plans to go after King for his "\$75,000-plus" in appellate costs.

King's appellate attorneys, Renee L. Campbell and Alvin L. Pittman, both of Los Angeles, were not immediately available Wednesday. They are among more than two dozen attorneys King has hired since the beating.

Lerman's attorney, legal fees expert Keith Fink, argued that federal civil rights statute 42 U.S.C. Section 1988 allows courts to grant attorney fees to prevailing parties as a means of encouraging lawyers to take civil-rights cases.

"It wasn't meant to be a windfall to plaintiffs," Fink said.

Nonetheless, Fink said, attorneys taking civil-rights cases should specify in their compensation agreements that court-awarded fees belong to the attorneys.

— Chris Ford