Comments on OJ Simpson Case for Law Enforcement News

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October 29, 1995

The OJ Simpson case revealed that, although white and black Americans view Americas criminal justice system differently, they agree that the system cannot be relied upon to do justice, particularly when the defendant is black. Whites generally disapproved of Fuhrmanns racism and perjury. But to many, this was less important than that a (probably) guilty person went free due to technicalities, and a cynical, racist appeal to black jurors. Blacks, on the other hand, may have felt some hope that the American system of justice could provide justice for black Americans even when threatened by racist police. But they couldnt help but notice that such protection is available only when the defendant is rich and famous, and when black Americans are broadly represented on the jury. What they agree on is that Americas criminal justice system cannot perform its core function: namely, assign criminal culpability to those alleged to commit crimes in a fair, competent way. Two sobering implications follow.

First, because the legitimacy of the criminal justice system has been undermined, its effectiveness as an instrument for dealing with the bitter feelings associated with criminal offending has been lost. It is not clear what will replace it. One possible result is a growth in extra-legal action: both retribution for offending and resistance to what is perceived as unjust legal action.

Second, to regain its legitimacy, the institutions of the criminal justice system will have to reach out to the community in ways that have long proved difficult. They will have to make their operations much more transparent to the public, ensure minority representation, and make themselves responsive and valuable in local communities. In short, the institutions of the criminal justice system must recreate their political legitimacy, as well as reclaim their professional and legal standing.