

Rampart scandal not what it seems

IN reading the recent news stories regarding the Blue Ribbon Rampart Review Panel Report, it is clear that truth about the Rampart scandal has yet to be uncovered. The report, based on the findings of the Blue Ribbon Rampart Review Panel, continues to characterize the Rampart corruption scandal as "one of the most serious police corruption scandals in American history." This characterization perpetuates the 7-year-old myth that Rafael Perez exposed wide-scale corruption in the Rampart CRASH unit.

But the real truth of the Rampart scandal is reflected in a \$15 million malicious-prosecution award that a jury returned on behalf of three innocent police officers who were implicated by Perez during the scandal. As an attorney, I represented those three officers, and their story tells us much about Rampart that can't be found in the panel's report.

In one of the only times that the veracity of Perez's allegations and the Los Angeles Police Department's investigation were put to the test, a federal jury and judge concluded that Perez falsely implicated the three officers. Worse, they also found that the LAPD violated the officers' constitutional rights by falsely arresting them.

Rebuking the conduct of the LAPD, the judge remarked that the "LAPD ruined the lives of three dedicated and highly skilled police officers." The judge further concluded: "Based on the evidence presented at trial, the jury reasonably concluded that the LAPD had no probable cause for arresting the (officers)."

The Rampart scandal began with a media frenzy following reports of Perez's allegations, which convinced the citizens of Los Angeles that there was widespread corruption in the LAPD. Yet despite continuous revelations that Perez was fabricating his allegations and that there never really was endemic corruption in the Rampart CRASH unit, the illusion of wide-scale corruption continues.

A correct reporting of the final tally of the Rampart scandal is the best indicator of the true extent of the corruption in the unit:

Rafael Perez identified 93 officers involved in arrests which were allegedly tainted by corruption. From those 93 officers, excluding Perez, only eight officers were criminally charged. Of those eight officers, only four were convicted of the charges.

Three of those officers pleaded guilty to charges related to use of excessive force, and not to the corruption charges Perez alleged.

As to the 23 officers who were fired or suspended, the majority of those officers returned to work after they were found not guilty by administrative boards of rights.

The true Rampart scandal lies in the overreaction of city officials to the allegations of corruption by Perez.

In a rush to placate the public's false belief of extensive corruption in the LAPD, these officials caused 156 felony convictions to be overturned. These felony convictions were of dangerous gang members who were properly arrested and convicted. In what was labeled the "Rampart Lotto," these gang members profited from the scandal through civil-rights lawsuits, which were settled at a cost of \$70 million in taxpayer money.

This is the truth behind the Rampart scandal, a truth which was validated by a jury who awarded three innocent officers, who were the real victims of the scandal, \$15 million.

Joseph Y. Avrahamy was the trial attorney for the three police officers who were awarded \$15 million in their malicious-prosecution lawsuit against the LAPD.