

Prominent civil rights lawyer denies charges in Manhattan Beach incident

The man who represented Rodney King is accused of disorderly conduct.

By Denise Nix

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High-profile civil rights attorney Steven Lerman is facing public intoxication and disorderly conduct charges for a run-in with a Manhattan Beach restaurant manager, his staff and the police, according to authorities.

Lerman, who represented motorist Rodney King in his videotaped beating lawsuit against the Los Angeles Police Department, had a court appearance Wednesday and will return to Torrance Superior Court on May 31 for the misdemeanor charges.

His attorney, Mark Haushalter, denied Wednesday that his client was drunk and said he was targeted for arrest because of his work representing people who claim civil rights violations against police agencies.

"Absolutely they knew who he was," Haushalter said. "There's no question in my mind."

Lerman was arrested Christmas Eve outside Mangiamo's, according to Sgt. Steve Tobias.

Officers responding to a disturbance between a customer and a manager were met outside the downtown eatery by the manager, who explained that Lerman, a frequent customer, was "unruly and out of control and very drunk," said Tobias, citing the report.

The manager told officers he asked Lerman to leave, and Lerman used profanity toward the staff and threatened the manager, Tobias said.

Officers then asked him to leave and he eventually complied. However, outside he showed signs of intoxication and threatened a sergeant, Tobias said.

Lerman was arrested, booked and released on \$250 bond. He could face up to six months in jail if convicted, according to Deputy District Attorney Jill Jadon.

Haushalter said Lerman was not drunk, and his credit card bill and witnesses can verify that.

He said Lerman had a verbal altercation with the manager after the manager used profanity in front of Lerman's elderly mother and other family members.

The two stepped aside, exchanged words and Lerman sat back down and continued to eat, Haushalter said, adding that Lerman did not leave immediately when asked to because he wanted to pay the bill. Haushalter said Lerman was not given any field sobriety or Breathalyzer tests.