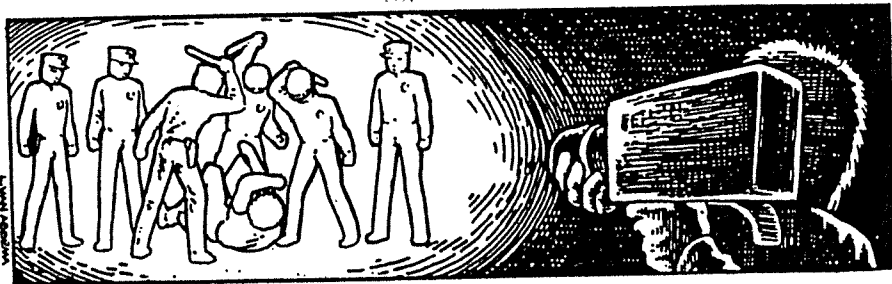


It was April 29th 1992 in Los Angeles California. Millions of people watched and listened as the verdicts on the four L.A.P.D officers, accused of beating Rodney King, were broadcast live from Simi Valley, several miles outside the city. A white middle class suburb, where the possibility of a inner city working class black man being tried by a "jury of his own peers" was virtually eliminated. Confirming that those that make the rules would once more prove that the rules are there only to be manipulated to their own advantage. The strings were again being pulled on the puppet that passes for justice.



As the not guilty verdicts were read out you could feel the tension in the city begin to build, and the scene was set for a battle to rage in L.A.'S streets that even Hollywood in its worst movie nightmare could not imagine. For although the jury had chosen to ignore the brutal videotaped assault on Rodney King by the L.A.P.D., they could not ignore the uprising in L.A's black ghettos which ignited almost immediately, and would blaze onwards for another 48 hours.

I had lived in Los Angeles for over 10 years and saw it as a city divided not only by class, but to a far greater extent by race, with the white minority using their wealth, power, and political influence to keep the black population in its South Central section, the Hispanics on the Eastside, and the Korean community at its centre, ensuring that these largely working class neighbourhoods could only turn their frustrations in on themselves, denying them the possibility of improving their living conditions, and at the same time keeping them down in the ghettos where the prejudices they had inflicted upon them could be ignored. But the explosion of anger that had been growing since the Watts uprisings in the 60's would leave no part of the city untouched - even the palm tree lined streets of Beverly Hills, where the white ruling classes stayed in their homes petrified that maybe this time the police could not do their "dirty work" for them.

It is unfortunate that in every conflict it is sometimes difficult to look beyond the initial heat of battle to separate those that are innocent, from those that are clearly guilty. But although the first publicised victim of the riots was a white truck driver, there had been many more black victims, over countless years, whose stories had until now been untold. But these uprisings were not anti-white, only anti-white authority,

the same authority that created the discrimination and injustice that the black population had subjected upon them on a daily basis by the police, the government, and biased economic structuring. And as the buildings began to burn, and the shots rang out in the night, it was for these acts that the people sought retribution.

As many of us are aware, the ballot box rarely serves a purpose in attempting to change a system, it only serves to give justification for the systems continuence, despite its failure. And in Los Angeles it was n't signing a petition or writing to a member of congress that offered even a partial solution. It was the inner city violence intruding not just onto peoples T.V sets but into their very homes. And if the rascism and oppression was not stopped out of conscience, then it would be made to do so through fear.

That night although I was several miles from South Central I could smell the buildings burning, and the smoke hung above the city as police cars raced down the streets to the riot zone. On the radio and television there was coverage throughout the night. Each update brought an increase in the number of fires and the areas the disturbances had spread to. And the bodycount was escalating. The motorway exits around the ghettos were blocked off, and despite statements to the contrary the police had been caught completely off guard.

The next morning not only was the situation not under control, but in the daylight thousands more people had taken to the streets. All over the city plumes of smoke rose above the skyline. As I headed towards the heart of the disturbances the roads were less crowded then usual, many businesses had closed for the day, and many of them were closed permanently by the flames or the mobs. On the car radio came reports of a vast office block fire burning out of control on Vermont Ave and 6th Street approximatley 3 miles North of where the rioting began the previous day.

Driving towards it I soon saw several police and news helicopters above me, and below 5 or 6 fire engines trying to put out what was now just 1 of over 800 buildings that were now burning or were smouldering ruins. About 3 streets down on my left were a dozen police cars cordoning off a supermarket which had been looted only minutes before hand. On the same side about 50 or so people, mostly black and hispanic, were streaming back out of the shattered glass doors of a large corporate owned record and video shop carrying armloads of C.D's, videos and tapes. One of the managers inside had the idea of putting up a sign which said "Black owned", and although this may have been enough to save the building from further damage had it been genuine, the crowd saw it for the blatent deception that it was. More windows were smashed, then they moved on up the street.

A few hundred yards away L.A riot police had spread out behind us, and were marching towards where we now were. The crowd used hit and run tactics, breaking into the shops and businesses along Vermont Ave, taking items they could use themselves or resell at a later date. I ran back down the street to get my car out of the way of the police. As I pulled out into the open, there were 3 gunshots to my right hand side, fired by one of the crowd at

several police officers about 50 yards away. Everyone hit the deck. I lay down flat across the seat of my car. The police dove to the ground, guns drawn. There was little time to be afraid, the only thing you can do is try and get out of the line of fire. This time no one got hit. I floored the accelerator heading back up the street to get out of range. I parked the car again and rejoined the crowd. The police tactics were not to arrest people at that point. Being greatly outnumbered and afraid it would provoke further resistance, they divided the crowd into smaller groups, forcing them down side streets but still unable to stop them. A squad car drove into one entrance of a small shopping mall being looted, trying to box people in. It was only seconds before one of the mob responded by throwing a brick through its windshield. Business after business was hit, including some deliberately burnt down by their owners in order to collect



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A few in the crowd had lengths of metal pipe which they used to smash doors and windows, and as the alarm systems were triggered several more forced open the iron security gates. A furniture shop was hit, then a clothing shop, then a car stereo business. The crowd moved up Vermont to Santa Monica Blvd and a pawnbrokers was looted. People helped themselves to cameras, V.C.R s, guitars and whatever else they could carry. "Ive found the guns" someone shouted. I watched as gangmembers ran out with several shotguns and rifles. A few moments later a van pulled up with no licence plates, and a young hispanic ran outside and loaded about 5 or 6 looted rifles into the open door of the vehicle, got in next to the driver, and drove off.

All this occurred within only a short distance of dozens of armed police officers, and undoubtedly these weapons would be put to use later that night as it had now been decided that the city would be put under a curfew from dusk till dawn, once again underlining the fact that America is anything but "the land of the free", unless of course you happened to be one of the privileged few living in its wealthy suburbs, where you could be assured the curfew wouldn't be enforced at gunpoint as it was in the less affluent parts of the city. But despite its attempted enforcement the curfew was in fact deliberately violated by many of L.A s residents in a mass show of refusal to be told when and how they could live by the government, police, or National Guard.

I returned to my car and headed over towards Western Ave and deep into the area the majority of the black population called home. Either side of the street, and for an area several square miles around me, almost every other building had been burnt or looted. A fire engine drove past followed by two police cars, I drove behind them through the traffic and watched as they simply passed by a huge shopping centre partially on fire and being looted by at least two hundred people. Another three squad cars were parked nearby, the officers inside knowing any effort to try and stop the crowd would be futile, realising the entire police force was outnumbered by the rioters several thousand to one. The theory that if people united with each other they could win was now being very successfully put into action. I pulled into the parking lot in front of the supermarket. People were loading up their cars and trucks with groceries, beer, and anything else they could lay their hands on, only in this instance there was no checkout line left to wait in.

I made my way across to the entrance of the supermarket. I was the only white person anywhere in the immediate area, apart from three punks helping themselves to some lager inside. But although the media portrayed it in many instances as an anti-white riot, I was never threatened or intimidated by anyone. On the contrary it was like a vast street party, to which everyone but the police were invited.

Outside a stolen car drove up with two black youths in it. On one of the doors was painted a large capital "A" with a circle around it, and you can be assured that the A didnt stand for America! I did see some apparently anti-white graffiti but again I don't believe it was directed at the entire white race, but only at

Los Angeles MAY 92

Los Riots - Los Uprising

Lost Rights - What Rights

Watts Riots - Lost Rights

Lost Civil Rights



Lost Human Rights

Not just America

It's Global

certain racist elements within it. The slogan of the day was "No justice, no peace", which appeared on hundreds of walls and buildings throughout the city. Another slogan of considerable interest was one saying "Crypts and Bloods Together". The Crypts and the Bloods are two of L.A.'s biggest and most violent street gangs, each with several thousand armed members. Until this point they had been sworn enemies, but again it was the realisation that only by uniting together, not fighting against each other would change occur. An unexpected alliance. It was later confirmed that members of these gangs were driving around South Central L.A. together solely with the purpose of gunning for the police, giving payback on behalf of Rodney King and many others, with a bullet.

Across the street from where I was a doughnut shop had been broken into, and standing on the corner a couple of young black men gave out freshly baked doughnuts at no charge to passing motorists. Inside the supermarket, the floor was about 3 inches deep in water and beer. I waited to see what would happen next. "Everybody out, the place is on fire", somebody shouted. I watched as a gangmember walked along a aisleway pouring lighter fluid on a row of greeting cards and setting fire to them. Within a few minutes thick dark grey smoke completely filled the building. My eyes watered, and I could hardly breathe, the smoke so dense I could barely see more than a few feet in front of me. From where I was there were at least a dozen shops and businesses enveloped in flames.

Throughout this entire time there were no police, no army and in effect no government to offer the crowd any opposition. And the encircled letter A I had seen earlier on, was at least for a while a reality. And unlike the establishments definition of that symbol being chaos and violence, amongst the flames there was unity and freedom. The alleged deployment of two to four thousand National Guard troops in the city was another myth being propagated. I travelled throughout the entire area several times over the next few days, and I never saw more than a few hundred guardsmen in total. The death toll attributed to the riot was well over 60, but what is not widely publicised is that this is about the same number of people that are killed or murdered on any average L.A. weekend, and almost all the victims were minorities. However, one of the most sickening aspects of the entire episode was the condemnation of the rioting by many of the white middle classes and the appeals for calm by several so called celebrities, who despite earning more in a month than many people in the ghetto areas make in a year, believed they were in a position to make judgement upon a reality which they helped create, but of which they have no concept. But despite the expected media editorials stating that civil disorder was not the way to promote change, they were soon being forced to eat their own words.

Millions of dollars are being channelled into South Central L.A. for community development and rebuilding, and extensive job creation and training programmes are being implemented throughout the area as well as the promise of improved education and housing. And unlike before, the consequences of not keeping a promise to the people are fresh in the minds of those that broke them in the past.

Also as a consequence of the Rodney King beating and of his mishandling of the L.A. riots the city's chief of police has been made to step down, and his entire force have come under more public scrutiny and accountability than ever they have previously. The authorities have been pressured to retry the four police officers accused in the King incident despite the not guilty verdicts, and the sense of urgency with which they began this process can only be attributed to the violent reaction immediately after the initial acquittal. On an international level the plight of L.A.'s black community has been brought to the attention of the entire world. And partially as a result of this and the attention focused upon him by his own country in an election year, even the possibility of re-election of the current United States President is in considerable doubt. It is important to remember that this disorder was not just about the beating of a blackman by four white police officers. This was merely the spark that lit the fire that had threatened to ignite for several years. But it is also an example of how a lesser incident can grow and intensify into a unstoppable national, and international force. One that has put a curb on police powers, given people hope where there was none before, and may even topple a president. This only came about because people showed solidarity with each other instead of turning their anger in on themselves. And instead of letting the authorities snuff out the sparks of rebellion, the people fanned them into flame. And in the aftermath of the fire they created, more than just a legacy of ashes will remain.

Blacks made their first public appearance on TV when the turned to violence. Suddenly they were no longer invisible. For one brief moment, they could be seen on TV. At which point they were also seen for the first time on the streets.

But that moment passed quickly. The media image soon shifted from real blacks – unemployed, uneducated, hungry – ‘media blacks’ – well-dressed, professionally employed, college educated. Real blacks once more became invisible.

*On teevee
see the looters run
With whiskey
and cartons
of cigarettes,
With wigs
and sofas
and teevee sets —
Running
after
the merchandise
All the
commercial
advertise
on teevee
on teevee
on teevee*

—Eve Merriam

At the Chicago riots of 1968, the demonstrators shouted, ‘The whole world is watching!’ And the whole world was. What they were watching was first-rate TV drama and they hadn’t the slightest interest in translating this into response.

So don't watch it. Just do it!