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Performance-conscious Activism and Activist-conscious Performance as Discourse in the Aftermath of the Los Angeles Rebellion of 1992

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation deploys an interdisciplinary methodology, extending what is conventionally understood as discourse to include performance. It brings together the fields of performance studies, discourse analysis and theatre studies to document, contextualize, and analyze the events after the Los Angeles rebellion of 1992. It examines gang youth who turned to community activism to help maintain truce between former warring gangs; small community-based organizations of mothers who worked to defend their incarcerated sons; and a variety of other groups that organized demonstrations, meetings, and gatherings to publicize the community's opposition to brutal police practices, unjust court procedures, and degrading media images. The dissertation also addresses the intersections between grassroots activism and the celebrated performance and video Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 by Anna Deavere Smith™.

Together, activists and performers developed new counter-public spaces and compelling counter-narratives that confronted the extremely negative media representations of the Los Angeles rebellion. In these spaces and narratives, the activists/performers nurtured and developed their oppositional identities and interests, often despite dire economic conditions and social dislocations. By examining their discourses in light of Victor Turner's model of the social drama, including social breach, crisis, and their redressive actions, this dissertation provides a theoretical context and an intertextual reading of performance-conscious activism and activist-conscious performance as discourse.

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I want to express love and gratitude to my family (my parents, sisters, and niece) and to my friends and colleagues who made it possible for me to complete this work.

I wish to dedicate this work to the many activists, scholars, and artists whose words and work is documented or reflected in this study. They are not named here but they are acknowledged throughout the dissertation.

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Chapter One

Introduction

For four days, from April 29 to May 2 1992, an unprecedented urban rebellion erupted in Los Angeles. The immediate cause of the revolt was the acquittal of four Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers, who had been charged in the beating of Rodney King, a black motorist. On March 3, 1991, officers Laurence Powell, Timothy Wind, Theodor Briseno, and Sergeant Stacey Koon, three of them white men and one Latino, were in a high-speed pursuit of Rodney King. King, who was on parole from prison from an earlier robbery conviction refused to stop, feared arrest and a return to prison on parole violation. He ignored the police lights and sirens behind him and eventually stopped at the Lake View Terrace district after going through several red lights. Soon after he stopped and left his car, the officers tackled and repeatedly beat him with their clubs and taser guns. Most of the incident was captured on video by a resident of Lake View Terrace and was subsequently shown on television. The repeated airing of the footage of the beating, as King laid prostrate on the ground, was then broadcast internationally, creating a media sensation that eventually led to the trial of the officers. Because of this enormous publicity, the trial was moved outside Los Angeles County, to predominantly white Simi Valley in Ventura County. The jury was composed of ten whites, one Asian, and one Latino. During the trial, a thirteen-second edited version of the tape of the beating was shown to the jury, on the basis of which the defense argued that King had attempted to get off the ground and charge one of the officers. The defense also claimed that initial police attempts at restraining King had been met with resistance, though these allegations could not be proven and were not

captured on tape. In the end, the jury acquitted three of the officers on all counts and could not agree on a verdict for the fourth one (Cannon 260).

The not-guilty verdict came as a shock to most people. The verdict appeared at a time when the inner city youth were already on the verge of an explosion for a variety of social and economic reasons. Los Angeles was in the midst of a deep economic recession, with double-digit unemployment rates in black and Latino communities. The end of the Cold War and the cuts in the defense industry, coupled with the transition in California from industrial manufacturing to low pay and service jobs had dried up many better-paying jobs for blue collar workers. In response, inner city crime rates had shot up and the police had reacted with a heavy hand. Four months after the King beating, the Christopher Commission, headed by former Secretary of State Warren Christopher, published a report on the LAPD. It concluded that a significant number of officers in the LAPD "repetitively used excessive force against the public, and persistently ignored the written guidelines of the department regarding the use of force." The report also indicated that there were a number of "repeat offenders" on the police force, with many having been charged multiple times with use of excessive force and improper tactics (see "Shielded from Justice").

Another incident in South Central Los Angeles involving a young teenage girl and a Korean store owner intensified the feeling that the criminal justice system was not protecting African-Americans. On March 16, 1991, forty-nine-year-old Soon Ja Doo shot fifteen-year-old Latasha Harlins to death. Harlins was stealing a small bottle of orange juice from the grocery store when Doo caught her. Harlins punched the store owner in the face and proceeded to walk out the door, after which Doo fatally shot her in the back. This incident further enraged the black community, because Doo received a minimal sentence of 400 hours of community service and a

$500 fine for the shooting (Cannon 192). Hence, even before the verdict on the four LAPD officers involved in the King beating was announced, there was a great deal of anger about the dismal economy, the Latasha Harlins murder, and the Christopher Commission Report, which had confirmed longstanding allegations about LAPD brutality and racism. With all these accumulated tensions and grievances, the verdict in the trial of the police officers was "the straw that broke the camel's back" (Gibbs 59).

The initial response to the verdict was, however, peaceful. On the afternoon of April 29, local activists and civil rights groups had called upon the community to gather in front of the Los Angeles Criminal Courts building and Parker Center--the LAPD's downtown headquarters--if the officers were acquitted. Meanwhile, an increasing number of protesters were also gathering at the corner of Florence and Normandie in South Central LA. After a confrontation with several residents that further inflamed the tensions, the LAPD officers present decided they were outnumbered and left the scene to regroup and return later with additional force. They never returned, however. In the absence of the police, the crowd soon became disorderly. A white truck driver, Reginald Denny, who had stopped at a red light, was pulled out of his truck and beaten by several black men. This incident was covered by television cameras in helicopters hovering above. Soon, four African-American residents who had seen the incident on television rushed to the aid of Denny. They took him to the hospital where he underwent brain surgery and was ultimately saved. At the same intersection, Fidel Lopez, a Guatemalan immigrant construction worker was also beaten; he survived only after surgery and months of rehab (Cannon 311).

By the evening of April 29, angry protestors were breaking the windows at the police headquarters, while looting and arson were spreading in vast areas of Los Angeles, including

South Central. A major controversy later developed around the fact that, on this same evening, Los Angeles chief of police Daryl Gates chose to attend a political fundraiser instead of tending to the riots. In the evening, Mayor Tom Bradley and Governor Pete Wilson called for a state of emergency and activated two thousand members of the National Guard (Cannon 336).

On the second day of what was now a full-blown uprising, a curfew was declared. President George H. W. Bush denounced the riots as "not about civil rights, . . . not about a message of protest, . . . but the brutality of a mob, pure and simple" (quoted in Ireland 118). By the fourth day of the unrest, thousands of members of the National Guard and Federal troops had moved into the city, where together with various law enforcement officers, they contained the unrest. Many residents who had fled the city returned and a peace rally was held, attended by thirty thousand people (Understanding the Riots).

In four days over fifty people had died, two thousand were injured, eight hundred sixty two buildings were set on fire, over two thousand businesses were destroyed, and damage was estimated at one billion dollars. In addition somewhere between ten and sixteen thousand people were arrested (sources disagree on this number), over ninety percent of them African-Americans and Latinos (Sears 238, Cannon). In the weeks that followed, the Justice Department announced the retrial of the four officers on federal charges. On April 17, 1993 a new verdict was reached. Two of the officers, Officer Laurence Powell, and Sergeant Stacy Koon were found guilty while the other two were acquitted (Cannon 485).

In the months that followed, the city and the nation tried to redress some of the grievances. One major initiative was to appoint Baseball Commissioner Peter Ueberroth as head of a newly created economic redevelopment agency called Rebuild Los Angeles (RLA), a project that received government funding and encouraged corporate investment and job creation in inner

city areas. It had limited success, in large part due to entrenched racism (Holland 1168). Reporters and journalists became more attentive to community minority issues. The Federal government helped to create local programs with input from Congresswoman Maxine Waters, who spearheaded some of the initiatives. Newly-elected President Bill Clinton even invited Los Angeles gang truce leaders to the White House for his inauguration ceremony in January 1993. This important symbolic gesture was a response to the fact that the long recession and the Los Angeles rebellion had helped Clinton to defeat Bush, who had been very popular only a year earlier, in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War. Some mainstream media outlets joined the calls for major social and economic aid to the ghettoes of Los Angeles. Remarks by Bush White House spokesperson Marlin Fitzwater, who blamed the riots on liberal social programs of the 1960s and on welfare recipients, were roundly denounced as divisive (Page 56).

Despite all the words of sympathy from local and national elite, the drive to cut social programs continued unabated in the 1990s. Welfare cuts gained momentum after 1992. Following the election of Clinton, funds for social programs were cut further, and social ills were once again attributed to a lack of "traditional moral values" in poor communities. In addition, in 1994 a majority vote in California ratified a ballot initiative to deny social services to undocumented immigrants. The LAPD continued to expand its urban warfare tactical readiness in preparation for another upheaval, even as its new chief, Willie Williams, emphasized the need to carry out the Christopher Commission Report's recommendations (Cannon 588-89). The Three Strikes legislation of 1994 stipulated that anyone who had committed three felonies should receive a life sentence. While there was much talk of combining social aid with law and order, in the end only the latter won out. African-American civil rights attorney Constance Rice

summarized some of the policies of this period in an op-ed piece published in the Los Angeles Times on 17 February 2000:

> We have passed "three strikes," inflated prosecutors' powers, and imposed rigid minimum sentences that have poor people serving life for possessing less dope than Bill Clinton and George W. Bush didn't inhale. We have reduced legal representation for the poor, removed hearings that safeguarded constitutional rights and limited federal review so that in the future the execution of innocents on death row will be more likely than their release. We have revved up the war-on-crime machine and given our warriors the green light to search and destroy. So what? Outlaw cops and mass imprisonment is what. So many urban men are now in jail that demographers in Los Angeles created a new migration category called "out-migration to institutions." (Rice A24)

This "out-migration" was combined with white flight from Los Angeles, as nearly half a million residents left the Los Angeles area in 1993 and 1994. Many left because they were apprehensive about "the angry, abandoned underclasses" (Davis Ecology 8). Videos of the rioting had become a vortex of shocking images of racial violence, unruly mobs, and looters. The video footage of the beating of Reginald Denny at Florence and Normandie became a banner in a crucial ideological struggle and a synecdoche for reinforcing macro-structures of oppression. As John Fiske has explained in Media Matters, Florence and Normandie became the image of the uprising, "a focal point upon which deeply significant lines of meaning converged" (149). Along with the exodus of large numbers of people came a retrenchment of conservative centers of power in the city. With the retirement of the largely ineffective African-American mayor, Tom

Bradley, and the election of a white Republican millionaire Richard Riordan, the Anglo power structure "reappeared from behind the mask of its black figurehead" (Abu Lughod 393).

This is a dissertation on the intersections of performance and activism. It documents performances by community activists and artists responding to the riots/rebellions that occurred in Los Angeles in 1992. The first part of this introductory chapter is a review of the literature on the riots. Next, I look at writings on Los Angeles, postmodernism, and global cities, and identify several authors and their works who have examined developments in Los Angeles as an indicator of larger social and even global urban trends. The plan of the dissertation begins with a multi-method approach to performance studies, and ends with an outline of the chapters.

Writings on the Uprising

The very naming of the events of April 1992 remained a controversy. Was it a riot or a rebellion? Legal scholar and critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw and Gary Peller, whose essay appeared in Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Uprising, took issue with the media images of a "mob riot" (67). Crenshaw and Peller preferred to use the term "insurrection" to call attention to the day-to-day subordination of the African-American community as a primary reason for the revolt, a situation that in their view was not unlike that of a revolt of a colonized people. Urban theorist Mike Davis put forward multiple definitions. In his view there were three dimensions to this hybrid revolt: (a) demands for food and justice; (b) calls for revolutionary-democratic social change. Both of these dimensions merited the designation of an urban uprising. But there were also (c) inter-ethnic conflicts that became violent, and these should be classified as riots (Uprising 142). For the most part, I have held to Davis' dual designation of the events, calling some aspects a rebellion and others a riot.

The literature on the Los Angeles rebellion/riot covers several major areas. There was only one detailed journalistic account of the events of 1991-1993, Lou Cannon's Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD. Cannon, a veteran Washington Post journalist, reported on the first trial of the LAPD officers. After the 1992 riots, he covered the trials in the Criminal Courts Building and other related events in City Hall. The cast of characters in his book included politicians, police officers, judges, attorneys, defendants, and other participants in the rebellion. Another journalistic compilation on the events, with no named editor, was Inside the L.A. Riots: What Really Happened and Why It Will Happen Again, published by the Institute for Alternative Journalism. This was a compendium of short articles, news reports, and op-ed essays that appeared during and shortly after the riots in newspapers such as the LA Weekly and the Village Voice, platforms for progressive journalists. There are also a few volumes of interviews with the participants in the April 1992 events. The two best-known were Jah and Shah'Keyah (ed.), Uprising: Crips and Bloods Tell the Story of America's Youth in the Crossfire and Anna Deavere Smith, Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992, each of which will be discussed in more detail later in this dissertation.

The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future, edited by Mark Baldassare, Chair of UC Irvine's Department of Urban Planning, contained essays by social scientists specializing in the study of local trends. Baldassare's collection covered the demographic setting, the ways in which the local political system failed to function, the statistical profile of those arrested, a comparison of the 1965 Watts Riot and 1992, and an analysis of public opinion. The 1992 events were also taken up in several book-length studies on regional urban developments. Critical theorists related the intensive and often brutal policing of public spaces to the process of capital accumulation. Their writings emphasized the new technologies of surveillance and

control that dehumanized the poor, inner-city residents. Authors such as Janet Abu-Lughod, Mike Davis (Ecology of Fear), Joan Didion, Roger Keil, and Edward Soja (Thirdspace, Postmetropolis) devoted sections of their books on the City of Los Angeles to an analysis of the 1992 events. Some of these works will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Race and ethnic studies figure prominently in the body of writings on the L.A. uprising. Most of the essays in Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising, edited by Robert Gooding-Williams, fell under the rubric of critical race and critical cultural studies. Most of the authors were prominent African-American intellectuals. Judith Butler was one of the few white authors in the collection. The Gooding-Williams volume was divided into six parts, with headings such as beating black bodies, acquitting white brutality, and assaulting America. It gives us analyses from some of the most well-known public intellectuals, such as Cornell West, Henry Louis Gates Jr, Houston Baker, Cedric Robinson, and Patricia Williams. A similar collection of essays, which also appeared soon after the rebellion, was Why L.A. Happened: Implications of the '92 Los Angeles Rebellion, edited by Black Nationalist poet Haki R Madhubuti. This volume contained over thirty short essays and comments by mostly African-American authors, public intellectuals, novelists, and poets. The writers focused on issues of race, evaluations of past successes and failures, and prognosis for future crises[1]. In the category of critical race studies Race and Justice: Rodney King and O.J. Simpson in a House Divided by Jewelle Gibbs should also be included. This book looked at the Rodney King trial and compiled a kaleidoscope of quotes from numerous locals, many of them articulate African-American professionals working in South Central Los Angeles.

[1] See also the collection of personal essays edited by Jervey Tervalon on the tenth anniversary of the riots.

A subsection of race and ethnic studies has focused on Asian-American communities, some of it specifically on Korean-Americans. These latter studies usually include a segment on ethnic tensions between Korean-Americans and African-Americans in Los Angeles. Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans, edited by Kwang Chung Kim included a discussion on the Los Angeles events. Kye Young Park's study of The Korean American Dream: Immigrants and Small Business in New York City argued that, while relations between Korean-American merchants and African-American customers were conflict ridden, media coverage of these tensions served to mask a more dominant tension involving the state. Park argued that state authorities often exacerbated the tensions between Korean-Americans and African-Americans by mishandling legal conflicts between the two and continuously siding with the "model citizen" Koreans (65). Park called for a Gramscian approach to the study of hyphenated American cultures, one that took into account the intervention of the hegemonic state and the more dominant forms of white racism (70-71). John Lie and Nancy Abelmann's Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots was an in-depth study of Korean-American immigrants in Los Angeles. The authors conducted formal and informal interviews with Korean-Americans and explored tensions with the African-American community. They also showed that ethnicity was not a major determinant of one's reactions to the events of 1992. For example, working-class Koreans who worked for Korean merchants tended to side with the grievances of the African-American customers. An individual's comprehension of the events of April 1992 varied depending on that person's politics, class affiliations, sex, age, social status, and position within the community.

This variation also appeared in the Latino community. In Latino Metropolis, Victor Valle and Rodolfo Torres raised a series of criticisms involving constructions of race in

narratives about Latinos in the Los Angeles riots. In a chapter entitled "Policing Race," the authors argued that self-proclaimed "spokespersons" for Latino communities who neither represented nor had an organic relationship to the populations that participated in the events often misappropriated the riots. They also argued that Latinos were not a race, though in American society they were constructed as a racialized subject and in that way caught at the intersection of multiple racializing dynamics. Central American immigrants, the main participants in the riots, did not have much in common with Latino (mostly Mexican-American) activists who later claimed to speak on their behalf (65).

At the intersection of media studies and ethnic studies, Darnell Hunt's Screening the Los Angeles 'riots': Race, Seeing, and Resistance reaches a very different conclusion. Hunt exposed groups of Latino, African-American, and white men and women from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds to a seventeen-minute extract from a local TV news coverage of the first days of the riots. He compared and contrasted the different groups' reactions to the screening. He concluded that black audiences were generally more tolerant of the looting and less supportive of the subsequent arrests, while the white and Latino audiences often exhibited a more negative attitude toward the events. He also argued that blacks and Latinos were more inclined to critically decode the text of the news footage (which criticized the riots), while white audiences for the most part sat passively through the screening (136).

How do we explain this discrepancy between Hunt's conclusion and those of Lie and Abelmann? First, Hunt's study did not include Korean-Americans, the group that had suffered disproportionately in the riots. Second, the two studies were conducted very differently. Hunt's subjects were questioned in a closed laboratory environment and were asked to respond to a highly-edited 17 minute selection of clips from television news footages of the riots. In contrast,

Lie and Abelmann's study was conducted in the Los Angeles Korean community only a year after Sa-i-gu (April 29 incidents), a region where a large number of Korean-American owned businesses were destroyed. Lie and Abelmann also designed their study to include differentiations based on political perspectives and social standing. Hunt's study tended to homogenize various ethnic and racial groups, while Lie and Abelmann or Valle and Torres tended to differentiate each ethnic and racial grouping.

Another media studies work on the events of Los Angeles, which uses critical media studies methodology, was John Fiske's Media Events: Everyday Culture and Political Change, which included a chapter entitled "A Tale of Three Videos." Fiske examined how media narratives that were constructed in the course of events took on a reality of their own. Fiske's essay will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Johan Callens made a similar argument in his essay "Staging the Televised Nation," where he showed how televised events that were repeatedly aired became akin to reality for viewers and materials for theatrical productions.

In the area of Media Studies and the public sphere, Ronald Jacobs' Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society looked at the role of LA's weekly black newspaper, The Sentinel, in providing an alternative to the corporate-owned local dailies. Benjamin Page's Who Deliberates? Mass Media in Modern Democracy examined the media's role in mediating the political debates on who was to blame for the riots. Page showed that the comments of White House spokesperson Marlin Fitzwater, who blamed the riots on liberal welfare policies, caused a flood of negative editorials in major newspapers across the country and damaged President Bush's political standing in the 1992 elections.

Finally, a few authors have centered on grassroots movements of this period, a topic closer to the main theme of this dissertation. Edward Soja commented on the multiple new forms of grassroots activism that emerged in the aftermath of the rebellion but were not captured in academic studies:

> An important and often neglected side effect of these intensified locality struggles has been to focus on grassroots political consciousness and energy, on what Michel Foucault, who first used the term Carceral City, described as "the little tactics of the habitat," or what contemporary urban scholars call "the politics of place." This recharging of locale and spatial location, with active political attachment and identity, has spread to the poorest neighborhoods and kindled what have been the most powerful forms of social resistance to the Carceral City and to the other oppressive effects of urban restructuring. . . . [N]ever before have the people of Los Angeles . . . been so politically involved . . . another of the major changes that have occurred between 1965 and 1992. (The City 450)[2]

Tom Hayden's recent book, Street Wars: Gangs and the Future of Violence, was a major contribution to the field of gang studies. It contained a chapter entitled "Hidden Histories," where he explored the early attempts at gang truce before 1992. Hayden's work is discussed further in chapter three. Susan Phillips' Wallbanging: Graffiti and Gangs in L.A. documented the history of gang graffiti in Los Angeles and included a few pages on political graffiti in the 1992 period. Joao H. Costa Vargas' Catching Hell in the City of Angels explored the meanings

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[2] Soja, drew heavily on Mike Davis' germinal work on the closing off of public spaces in Los Angeles--the creation of a "Fortress LA." Soja argued that Los Angeles is a "Carceral City, a geography of warlike fortification and enclosure, of ever-watchful surveillance, a place where *police* has become an insistent substitute for polis" (The City 448).

of blackness in Los Angeles and devoted a chapter to gang truce activities. Ruth W. Gilmore's Golden Gulag explored the development of the prison industry in California and devoted a chapter to the grass roots activism of Mothers Reclaiming Our Children. Los Angeles – Struggles Toward Multiethnic Community: Asian, American, African American and Latino Perspectives edited by Edward Chang and Russell Leong showed how ethnic groups influenced politics, funded civic and cultural organizations, and altered the face of the city through their activist work in the public sphere. Some of the performance pieces in this collection explore individual transformations as a result of shifting demographics and changes in the region's political economy. They allow the reader to see the gap between first and second generation immigrants in multiethnic families. They also capture the impact of the Los Angeles riots on individuals' lives as well as attempts at building bridges among ethnic communities. These projects soon came across the barriers set by old civic and political coalitions. Finally, Robert Gottlieb and his co-authors in The Next Los Angeles: The Struggle for a Livable City have shown how the backlash against the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 helped to energize a new Latino-Labor coalition that drastically changed the politics of the city. Their work focuses on an array of social movements that helped to achieve some progressive changes in Los Angeles during the twentieth century.

Los Angeles as a site of production of cultures and of economic activity has been part of an enduring and ongoing debate on the meanings of postmodernism. With the rise of a Los Angeles school of urban studies and the works of Edward Soja, Mike Davis, Janet Abu-Lughod, and Saskia Sassen there is also the added dimension of .the phenomenon of global cities. We will turn next to these works.

Writings on Los Angeles, Postmodernism, and global cities

Although the depiction of California as the land of the future and a forerunner of social trends is a well-worn cliché,[3] it still would be hard to overestimate the degree to which Los Angeles has been central to the debates on the rise of a post-industrial society. In the 1930s, the appearance of a large industry devoted to producing images and representations played a crucial role in destabilizing the theoretical certainties of an earlier generation of critical theorists who privileged the production of material goods and relegated the production of culture to a secondary role.[4] The culture industry, dominated by large studios, changed this simple binary. The factory discipline of the production line was extended into cultural production for mass consumption. This can be seen as early as 1944 in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's views on cultural production in their essay, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." Through a Marxist perspective that was also influenced by Hegel and Nietzsche, they singled out the United States—particularly Los Angeles—as the location for the highest development of the type of society they were describing in their scathing critique of the "culture industry." Movies, radio, and popular magazines had overwhelmed the old dichotomy between high culture and traditional working class culture, creating a seamless, uniform system of cultural domination. The culture industry, they argued, produced a flight not so much from

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[3] This in 2003 from a New York Times columnist: "From smog to silicon, from the sexual revolution to the tax revolt, the future has usually arrived in California first" (Krugman A23).

[4] See Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, who present a "new understanding of the continual production of cultural differences in the history of modernity" (32). In addition, see Roger Lancaster, who writes, "[T]he base/superstructure paradigm is in no sense a synecdoche for Marxist methods"(280) and argues for a methodology that begins always with "the conditions of everyday life and with an examination of power in its most mundane forms," while considering macro levels of social interaction (xviii).

reality, but from the last remaining thought of resistance, "freedom from thought and from negation" (166). The new construct was so potent that reality itself was being redefined in the popular imagination. "Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies," they concluded (126). At issue was what some postmodernists later would call the decentered subject. As Adorno wrote some years later in The Culture Industry Reconsidered, "the total effect of the culture industry" is that it "impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves" (135). The role of the culture industry in producing hegemonic images that shape desire, identity, and aspiration, while also setting limits to the imaginary, has continued to be the subject of much contentious and critical debate. But the impact that migration to Los Angeles had on Adorno and Horkheimer has never been disputed.

Horkheimer and Adorno wrote their essay on the culture industry in Los Angeles, after moving to Santa Monica from New York in the early 1940s. The essay is probably a product of the confrontation between an older Marxian European sociology and the new cultural forms and intellectual coalitions that had arisen in Los Angeles, a city they evidently saw as far removed from their European cultural sensibilities. That these perspectives were based heavily on United States experience is attested to by Douglas Kellner: "The group is sometimes referred to as the 'Frankfurt School,' but this term is misleading, because much of the group's most important work was done in exile in the United States" (1).

Indeed, Mike Davis claims in the City of Quartz that the German exiles are said to have added "a Hegelian polish to homegrown noir sensibility" (48). A more succinct formulation elsewhere in the book credits them with "integrating the specter of 'Los Angeles' into fundamental debates about the fate of modernism and the future of a postwar Europe, one that

was dominated by American Fordism" (22). Davis asserts that the critical theorists and other exiles intervened in the cultural life of Los Angeles by theorizing the contesting forces—the "indigenous process of city-myth production and its noir-ish antipode" —shaping popular imagination (22).

At another crucial theoretical juncture, the rise of the discourse of postmodernism in the 1980s, Los Angeles was again the focus. This can be seen in Fredric Jameson's germinal 1984 essay, "Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," later expanded into a book with the same title. As an example of the type of postmodern social world that he is describing, Jameson points above all to the Westin Bonaventure Hotel, "built in the new Los Angeles downtown by the architect and developer John Portman" (39). At first, Jameson is astounded by the lack of a clear-cut entrance to the hotel, but he soon realizes that, with its shops and theaters, "the Bonaventure aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city." It is "a new total space, a complete world . . . for it does not wish to be a part of the city but rather its equivalent and replacement or substitute" (40). He concludes that the hotel is a "postmodern hyperspace [that] has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world" (44). In short, this new form of urban space has decentered the human subject.

These two theoretical discourses, that of the older critical theory and that of postmodernism, have not only been shaped by Los Angeles. They have in turn exerted an influence, whether directly or indirectly, on new urban studies approaches in sociology,

anthropology, and media studies.[5] These also have become centered on Los Angeles. The cultural critiques of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Jameson situate Los Angeles as an implicit or explicit "other" to the older type of "high culture" city, as exemplified by Paris, Berlin, London, Rome, and even New York. But these new urban studies approaches situate Los Angeles as the "other" of what had been the "typical" modern capitalist urban center, Chicago. Chicago was considered to be a prototype for sociologists (as well as Marxists) not only because it was an industrial city par excellence, but also because it dominated the entire industrial region of the Great Lakes. It stretched from Cleveland through Detroit and Gary to Chicago itself and then on to Milwaukee and Duluth—an area that, during the first half of the twentieth century, constituted the world's greatest accumulation of industrial might. Chicago was the home of Jane Addams' Hull House, the Progressive project of uplifting the urban poor; it was where Upton Sinclair set The Jungle, his muckraking novel about capitalism; it was where the radical Industrial Workers of the World was founded in 1905; it was also where the Chicago School of urban studies was born at the University of Chicago, inside the United States' first major sociology department.[6] The Chicago School couched its findings in empirical language, based on close study of daily

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[5] Edward Soja, while acknowledging Davis' contributions, especially his originality in developing the concept of carceral city, laments his vehement opposition to postmodernists: "Too much [is] being closed off . . . in Davis's militant anti-postmodernism."(Thirdspace 93) Soja devotes space to both the Jameson essay and the "hard-line" confrontational stand that Davis took against Jameson. He scolds Davis for relying too heavily on causality: "a lingering *diachronomania* that draws too uncritically from that most historicist of . . . fallacies" (89). Several years later in Postmetropolis, Soja again criticizes Davis for his harsh attacks, especially on left postmodernists. Ironically, Soja argues, Davis may see the term "left postmodernist" as a political oxymoron—and Soja reiterates how "too much is being closed off here" (312).

[6] In Exploring the City: Inquiries toward an Urban Anthropology, Ulf Hannerz explores the strong influence of Social Darwinism on the works of the Chicago School in early twentieth century. The book critically evaluates Robert Ezra Park's views of human nature and morality that shaped the research agendas of Park and his students. The body of literature they produced includes studies of gangs and street dwellers (hobos). Others studied the social life of club dancers and the transformation of social bonds into ethnic neighborhoods by Chicago's then more recent non-German, immigrant Jews. See chapter two, "Chicago Ethnographers" (19-58).

life in Chicago's neighborhoods, or what were called the "natural settings"; nonetheless, many methodological and philosophic battles lurked in the background. For the Chicago School of urban sociology developed in the intellectual shadow of the pragmatist philosophers John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, who dominated the more established Department of Philosophy at the University of Chicago, and whose work, along with that of German sociologist Georg Simmel, strongly influenced the new urbanists' focus on everyday life in the modern metropolis.

Once that "Fordist" world of the great industrial city based on heavy manufacturing receded, it was Los Angeles, rather than Chicago, that increasingly became the typical (post)modern city in the eyes of social scientists. If the birth of the Chicago School was conditioned by philosophical pragmatism, the new Los Angeles School has emerged in the shadow of the debates over postmodernism. This strong postmodernist influence was not only part of the generalized postmodern turn of the past two decades. It also was connected more specifically and locally to the fact that in the 1980s, the University of California, Los Angeles and the University of Southern California brought in Edward Soja and many other geographers and urban planners who set out to study Los Angeles with a wide variety methodologies and case studies (Davis Quartz 84). The University of California, Irvine regularly invited the postmodernist philosophers Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard to teach as guest professors.[7]

The two most prominent figures of the Los Angeles School of urban studies are Mike Davis and Edward Soja. I will discuss each of their theoretical assumptions in a moment, but I

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[7] Indeed the criss-crossing extended in the other direction as well. This was illustrated by a prominently placed interview Jacques Derrida did with the Los Angeles Times, in which he playfully boasted about his credentials as a designer of park benches.

first will consider briefly the theoretical assumptions and findings of two other prominent urban sociologists: Saskia Sassen and Janet Abu-Lughod.

Sassen's 1991 study The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo did not focus on Los Angeles, but on three principal centers of global finance. Sassen's concentration on international finance and the particular intertwining of these three cities led her to conclude that the nation-state has begun to fade as an economic unit. This concentration on international finance has led to a newer and deeper economic and social polarization, which she terms "class and spatial polarization."

Sassen's central argument is about the changes that have taken place in the composition of capital as it becomes more concentrated and assumes increasingly larger areas of control. In such world cities as London, New York, and Tokyo, she studies the development of the real estate and finance sectors. These changes drained resources from large sectors of society and concentrated skills and human ingenuity in the service of global control. This has led, on the one hand, to the sharpest concentration of power in the hands of business executives, and on the other hand, catastrophic poverty in major urban centers.

> In the 1980s, the central areas of London, New York, and Tokyo increased their specialization as high-priced locations for firms and residences on a scale and with traits that diverged markedly from earlier periods. . . . But along with these developments, there has been a continuation and consolidation of concentrated poverty and extreme physical decay in the inner cities. . . . All three cities have long had a significant concentration of poor people. But the extent of the segmentation and spatial unevenness has reached dimensions not typical of earlier decades. (254-55)

Above all, Sassen's thesis refutes the liberal utopianism of earlier theories of the post-industrial society, especially that of Daniel Bell in his The Coming of Post-Industrial Society. In this work, Bell predicted that in the future, professionals, managers, and skilled technicians, groups that had mastered the process of accumulating capital, would dominate an affluent, middle-class society. Sassen undermines that argument by making a simple and ultimately decisive distinction by examining the increasing gap between the social resources received by sectors that command the development of the means of production and other areas of the economy, which anchors her empirical studies of three global cities. To Sassen, a major aspect of globalization, when viewed from the underside of the social order, has been an increasing reliance on low-wage immigrant and ethnic minority workers in the heart of the world's wealthiest cities. This has led not only to a social reconfiguration of these cities, but also to a spatial one, as capital becomes increasingly concentrated in smaller and smaller sectors, a process that helps capital expand its command exponentially. Sassen concludes that, over time, the post-Fordist global city courts dangerous social contradictions:

> At what point do these tensions become unbearable? At what point is the fact of homelessness a cost also for the leading growth sectors: How many times do high-income executives have to step over the bodies of homeless people till this becomes an unacceptable fact or discomfort? At what point does the increasing poverty of large numbers of workers begin to interfere with the performance of the core industries either directly or indirectly? (329)

To her immense credit, Sassen wrote these prophetic remarks in a book published a year before the Los Angeles rebellion.

Janet Abu-Lughod's 1999 study of the new urbanization concentrates on more traditional socio-economic issues. She focuses on three of the United States' largest cities—New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles—each of which is central to the overall globalization of the United States economy. Her approach differs from that of Sassen, as well as from the dominant view within the field of globalization studies more generally, in two major ways. First, Abu-Lughod argues that globalization is not a very new phenomenon, neither in these three cities nor for the United States economy as a whole. Second, she does not share the notion, frequently upheld in globalization studies, that the nation-state is drastically receding in importance. Abu-Lughod expresses even greater reservations about the literary-cultural approaches of those whose work emerges out of the postmodern turn. After citing Deyan Sudjic's poetic description of the postmodern city, especially Orange County's city of Irvine, as a "force field" where skyscrapers have "no visible connection" to the farmland out of which they "erupt" so suddenly, Abu-Lughod retorts:

> The simile cannot serve in lieu of a causal theory. It is unnecessarily mystical and therefore, in the last analysis merely obfuscatory, concealing the real driving forces that have yielded such apparently irrational "sudden eruptions" and "sheer risings." There is no abstract energy force that simply discharges itself capriciously (unless the calculated profit motives are demeaned in this manner), nor is the landscape upon which such "energy" is discharged featureless, independent of political jurisdictions, proprietary rights, and the game of politics. The "fields" are already inscribed. (358-59)

In this sense, Abu-Lughod seeks to restore a materialist and economic focus against what she sees as a rising tide of cultural approaches. To support her perspective, she draws on empirical data on land use, employment and occupation, population and ethnic change, and other socio-economic factors that she believes have determined the shape of modern American cities. She examines all of these factors historically as well, thus connecting her analysis of New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles to the overall development of the American economy and society during the twentieth century. One problem here, however, is the danger of reductionism. Are American cities simply reflections of larger socio-economic forces in American society, and if so, why are they so different from each other if they are part of the same socio-economic order?[8]

In contrast to both Sassen and Abu-Lughod, Edward Soja's work emphasizes a more robust cultural dimension. One of the best-known members of the Los Angeles School of urban studies, his trajectory blends a Marxist critique with a postmodernist sensibility, one that is strongly influenced by both Henri LeFebvre and the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard.[9] The concept of a hyperreality is only partially appropriated by Soja in Postmetropolis. Soja recoils from accepting Baudrillard's "ultimate endstate where the image 'bears no relation to any reality whatsoever, it is its own pure simulacrum." Soja writes this is "closing off too many opportunities for progressive resistance and reaction to the prevailing conditions of postmodernity and the contemporary postmetropolis" (Postmetropolis 329-30).

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[8] David Harvey has developed an extensive method for taking into account the drifting spatial contours of capital.

[9] Where Adorno and even Jameson saw the forms of capitalist cultural domination as alienated realities that masked deeper realities of oppression and domination, for Baudrillard, such notions carry with them vestiges of the autonomous, liberal subject—of a naive Marxist humanism—since they posit a fixed human essence from which people are alienated: "We are no longer even alienated, because for that it is necessary for the subject to be divided in itself" (210). Baudrillard's subjects are infinitely flexible. At the same time, they are complicit in the formation of what he calls the "hyperreality" of postmodern life.

At one level, hyperreality is part of the structures of domination. Here Soja refers to Baudrillard's famous thesis that the 1991 Gulf War took place more on the hyperreal CNN television screens than in the sands of Kuwait and southern Iraq. This is in part because many more millions "experienced" the war in this manner than on the ground. More importantly, CNN's narrative became the reality of the war, inscribing itself on the directly lived reality on the ground. To Soja, the hyperreality formed by the media coverage of Gulf War I was an outgrowth of more than a decade of conservative simulations that reached a high point during the Reagan era. During this time, a series of notions ranging from neoliberal economics to wars on crime became the dominant narratives of American culture, a "neoconservative postmodernism" that formed the right's hegemony in both national and local politics. In response, Soja argues that critical urbanists need to break with older (Marxian) forms of critique as demystification in order to comprehend and then critique this new hyperreality effectively:

> Another and strategically postmodern politics needs to be developed that goes beyond demystification and unmasking the continuities of capitalism to confront and contend more directly with the now entrenched successes of neoconservative and neoliberal postmodernism and the other new forms of contemporary global and local capitalist development. This will involve in part the creation of alternative and transgressive new imagery that can help to resist and subvert the established conditions of postmodernity, for so much now depends on these image wars. In particular, new spaces must be opened . . .to practice a strategically postmodern politics of social and spatial justice, building on the insights and actions of intercultural and hybridized coalitions that cross the boundaries of race,

> class, gender, and geography rather than being confined by them to separate channels of resistance. (348)

To Soja, the hyperreality of the dominant media images of the city, the cultural forms of its everyday life, and how both of these unfold across geographic space, need to become the locus of a new type of urban studies. In Thirdspace, Soja steers an alternative path to the categorical responses of either ignoring the economic and the political by abandoning modernism entirely or ignoring postmodernism's challenge (4). This involves recasting modernist "narratives" with a postmodernist sensibility. In this sense, the media narratives of the Rodney King trial and the various cultural forms developed by minorities, youth, and other disaffected groups in response to the dominant cultural narratives are the real or hyperreal story of Los Angeles and need to be understood as the framework in which the actual trial and rebellion unfolded. Over the last decade, Soja has included these and other more theoretical writings from critical theorists in a collage format. The final chapter in each of his books since the early 1990s has been a selection of passages on the "1992 Justice Riots," thus giving it the last word.

No one was more prescient about the various contours of the coming social crisis than Mike Davis, when his best-known, path-breaking City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles was published in 1990. It has had a major impact on the rise of the new Los Angeles urbanists. Davis is by conviction a Marxist imbued with a strong critique of postmodernism. He makes cultural critique central to his analysis of Los Angeles in a way not found in the work of Sassen or Abu-Lughod. Davis's foci on social institutions and cultural practices are organically related. While Davis attacks Adorno's cultural elitism, he nonetheless shows some affinity for the Frankfurt School's culture critiques, especially those of Herbert Marcuse, which he contrasts

with postmodernist approaches: “Yet the specter of Frankfurt Marxism (Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse) still haunts Southern California, even if their once ironic observations have been reduced to guidepost clichés for the benefit of Postmodernism’s Club Med” (54).

The book’s subtitle, “Excavating the Future in Los Angeles,” suggests that Davis sees his study of Los Angeles as one that concerns contemporary society as a whole. Davis paints a most somber picture, especially in his discussions of the “carceral city.” Here is an implicit debt to Foucault’s Discipline and Punish in Davis’s use of the image of the panopticon to help focus on Los Angeles as a “carceral city” (253). As with Foucault, the modern prison inscribes itself on other modern social institutions, impacting the school, the workplace, and the medical and psychiatric institutions, all as part of an overall “carceral network” that enforces its notion of the “normal.” In Discipline and Punish Foucault writes: “The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the ‘social worker’-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based” (304).

For Davis, however, the reach of the carceral society is even wider, including shopping malls and gated residential spaces. After discussing the “panopticon observatory” he finds in a mall in the Watts area equipped with almost a military level of security against the threat of crime, Davis turns to the city’s housing projects, where he draws an analogy to the Pentagon’s construction of “strategic hamlets” during the Vietnam War:

> The counterpart of the mall-as-panopticon-prison is the housing-project-as-strategic-hamlet. The Imperial Courts Housing Project . . . has recently been fortified with fencing, obligatory identity passes and a substation of the LAPD. Visitors are stopped and frisked, while the police routinely order residents back

> into their apartments at night. Such is the loss of freedom that public housing tenants must now endure as the price of "security." (244)

But Los Angeles also flaunts its actual jails, which is something very new.

Foucault had noted that modern penitentiaries and jails were hidden away from the urban centers (i.e., Alcatraz, Sing Sing, Riker's Island, Attica, Joliet) so that their control over the prisoners' bodies and minds could take place in silent regions, walled off from a public somewhat ashamed of their existence. In contrast, Davis notes, Los Angeles has placed a gigantic jail in the heart of downtown. With an aesthetically pleasing facade, the Metropolitan Detention Center, he reports, is a "postmodern Bastille" designed for high-level prisoners from the War on Drugs:

> This postmodern Bastille—the largest prison built in a major US urban center in generations—looks instead like a futuristic hotel or office block, with artistic charms (like the high-tech trellises on its bridge-balconies) comparable to any of Downtown's recent architecture. But its upscale ambience is more than a mere facade. The interior of the prison is designed to implement a sophisticated program of psychological manipulation and control: barless windows, a pastel color plan, prison staff in preppy blazers, well-tended patio shrubbery, a hotel-type reception areas, nine recreation areas with nautilus workout equipment, and so on. . . . But the psychic cost of so much attention to prison aesthetics is insidious. (257)

This last sentence shows another parallel with Foucault, and stresses the subtle forms of domination within the modern prison. In his subsequent work, Davis continued the theme of Los

Angeles as a carceral city that is moving in a totalitarian direction. In his view, this is the future of all cities in late-capitalism.

To develop a fuller picture of the impact of the Los Angeles rebellion, I will carefully examine, contextualize, and analyze the specific forms of activism from the period. The Los Angeles rebellion marked a defining moment in the cultural and political development of the United States as it ended the twentieth century. On the one hand, the event served as a rallying point for conservative politicians who focused on crime and violence in Los Angeles to buttress their claims that residents of poor communities were morally inferior and should be subject to greater police surveillance and incarceration. These policies justified the reshaping of inner-city environments to suit the needs of neo-liberal capitalism, encouraging the use of more repressive measures of control by the state and the building of more prisons. On the other hand, the rebellion ushered in a new generation of activists--both community activists and artists--who struggled to develop a compelling counter-narrative to the representations of themselves and their communities in the mainstream media.

The Plan of the Dissertation

In this dissertation I have analyzed two types of activisms that concentrated on, and took their initiatives from, the events of 1992. First, I look at the dedicated efforts of black and Latino men and women, who built the fragile truce initiative between the warring Bloods and Crips gangs and established organizations that monitored the criminal justice system and their handling of minority defendants. Second, I look at an artistic form of activism, a play by Anna Deavere Smith, which was able to explore numerous causes of the 1992 events, their representations in

the media, and the reaction of various ethnic communities of Los Angeles to these events. The two types of activism not only shared a deep concern for the rebellion of 1992, but also both involved a mix of performance and activism. On the one hand, the grassroots organizations of the inner city youth and women were forms of performance-conscious activism. Their relative success was partly due to this fact. On the other hand, Anna Deavere Smith's acclaimed play, which reached out to diverse audiences beyond its initial venue at the Mark Taper Forum, was a form of activist-conscious performance. My study aims to bring into critical focus this vibrant ensemble of performance-conscious grassroots activism and activist-conscious performance that aimed to empower and inform a broad community. In the section dealing with grassroots activism I will explore the ways that the participants conceptualized their own organizing efforts and political struggles. I will also examine some of the theoretical and practical problems that hampered the building of a multi-ethnic, performance-conscious activism.

The questions I explore in this dissertation are: How did these inner-city residents respond and develop their own forms of publicity and media intervention in order to gain support at the grassroots level? What kinds of narrative operations and performances did they deploy to undermine the overwhelming power of the Carceral City? How did activists challenge the consistently negative representations of themselves and their communities in the media? Finally, how did they negotiate a third space for themselves in an arena dominated by a binary discourse between the Left, which mostly viewed them as an apolitical underclass, and the Right, which regarded them as inherently criminal and barbaric?

The bulk of the present study draws on pamphlets, newsletters, and other published and unpublished tracts from small community, leftist, radical feminist, and Pan-Africanist groups and organizations of this period. Many of these works are discussed here for the first time, have

never been catalogued and are thus not accessible to other researchers in archival collections. I have referred to these in the dissertation by the name of the individual who gave their papers to me. In the near future these collections will be donated to a library to make them more widely available.

In addition to these materials, I have drawn on both formal and informal interviews, which I conducted on-site in Los Angeles, first in 1992-1997 and, subsequently, in 2000-2006. The interviews were open-ended and focused on the participants' process of politicization and commitment to struggle. Some interviews were videotaped for possible future use in the production of a documentary version of this dissertation.[10]

During the period covered in this dissertation, I lived in Los Angeles and worked as a reporter for KPFK radio, an alternative media outlet. Later, during research on this dissertation, I interviewed a large number of activists. Some of these activists were gang truce participants; some were African-American and Latina women who had been involved in support organizations, some were community programmers, organizers, and media activists. They included Teresa Allison, Mollie Bell, Bloodhound, Mike Davis, Dee, Don Gordon (Playmate), Michelle Gubbay, Denise Harlins, Tom Hayden, Dewayne Holmes, John Martinez, Mauricia Miranda, Olga Miranda, Gene R., Gene Ford, Marc Cooper, Frank Stoltze, T Rodgers, Twilight Bey, Judy Tanzawa, Mike Taylor, Tookie, Donna Warren, Georgiana Williams, Damien Williams, and Michael Zinzun. I am deeply grateful to each and every one of them for their interviews and the records and documents they shared with me.

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[10] Dwight Conquergood's "Heart Broken in Half," a video documentary on Chicago gang youth, serves as an exemplar for producing a video documentary for this future work.

A third source for the dissertation was newspapers, magazines, and scholarly publications that were available in the public domain. In particular, I accessed the government publications section of the Doheney Library at University of Southern California, a primary depository of documents on the Los Angeles rebellion.

A Multi-method Approach to Performance Studies

The performances discussed in the following chapters cover a wide range of activities: negotiating truces, maintaining grassroots organizations, and producing theatrical representations of social dramas. The field of Performance Studies, with its interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches, allows us to consider these widely divergent types of activities within a conceptual framework of purposeful human activity as performance. In the following pages I will discuss how a framework was developed from theorists whose works have influenced the way I map the interrelationships between performance and activism. These critical theorists not only identify social constructs that mask human subjectivity, but also provide theoretical formulations that help researchers reconstruct agency more robustly. Performance, a human activity requiring embodied enactment, the work of imagination, the development of new roles and identities, and the shaping of new realities are some of the common themes and characteristics that I have sought to research and document in this dissertation.

Theorizing Spaces of Domination: Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau

Michel Foucault's writings have had a pronounced impact on Performance Studies. Foucault problematized the relationship between power and knowledge. He argued that power permeates all relations, and that power relations determine what passes for knowledge. He wrote

extensively on how power relations correlate with a constitutive field of knowledge. Foucault argued that knowledge always presupposes and constitutes at the same time power relations.

This insight on the relations of power and knowledge has encouraged studies of rhetorical tactics that resist power on a local and micro-scale. In investigating forms of power and social discipline, Michel De Certeau was inspired by Foucault's analysis of disciplining practices. However, instead of focusing on the micro practices of bureaucracies, and their pervasive nature, de Certeau explored how individuals resisted the grid of discipline, how they reappropriated space through socio-cultural productions. In a chapter entitled "Walking in the City," de Certeau explored the tactics that inhabitants used to construct their own spaces through "walking." "Walking" was a metaphor for grasping the ways in which inhabitants read the spaces, and inscribed their own experiences onto the already written city, thereby creating new spaces. De Certeau's work has been important in my own work on alternative media spaces, youth performances, and grassroots community organizations. His notion of "walking" has helped me explore resistance in everyday life, or what he has called "the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the other routes into the functionalist and historical order of movement" (105).

Critical Media Studies: John Fiske

John Fiske has addressed the significance of media events in shaping larger cultural currents. On one level, Fiske's views were similar to those expressed in Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality. In a postmodern world, one can no longer rely on a clear distinction between what is real and what is a mediated representation. Media events generate their own realities and are not simply representations of what has happened. On another level, however, Fiske differed

from Jean Baudrillard by emphasizing the dimension of struggle. Here, Fiske turned to a theory of discourse that was deeply indebted to Foucault. Discourse is the means by which the specificity of social, historical, and political conditions makes sense. According to Fiske, discourse is language in social use, language that is infused with power struggles and resistances. Acknowledging the nexus of power/knowledge, Fiske wrote: "To make sense of the world is to exert power over it, and to circulate that sense socially is to exert power over those who use that sense as a way of coping with their daily lives" (3).

Fiske relied in part on Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams in theorizing the notion of a "media event." Discourse is always a terrain of struggle, whereby one set of meanings is preferred over others. Media events are discursive events; that is, they are not about an event, rather they <u>are</u> the event. Fiske identified culture as a river of discourses, at times calm, at other times turbulent. Media events, such as the videotapes that circulated in the course of the Los Angeles rebellion, helped bring to the surface a number of turbulent undercurrents. As Fiske pointed out, three short videos served as signposts in defining the meaning of the events which led to the 1992 upheaval. All three videos were used as evidence in divisive trials and shown repeatedly on television. Far more people --even among those living within the riot zone-- experienced the events through television rather than through actual participation. Thus the events of 1991-92 were media events in both senses used by Fiske. First, the videos were not <u>about</u> the events, but constituted the events themselves. The media events generated their own realities and were not mere representations of King's beating in Lake View Terrace, of a shooting in a Korean-owned liquor store, and a beating at Florence and Normandie. Second, the media events helped bring to the surface a number of turbulent cultural undercurrents that had remained dormant and unnoticed for some time.

Public and Counter-Public Spheres: Nancy Fraser and Houston Baker

In The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Jurgen Habermas explored the public sphere as an energizing principle that appeared in modern Europe, one that mediated between the state and society. The public sphere emerged as a social space for deliberations against absolutist states. Its goals were to provide information about state functioning and allow critical scrutiny by the public. For example, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution created some accountability for citizens and room for "public opinion" through freedom of the press, assembly, and other rights. Habermas argued that in these assemblies, private interests were set aside, hierarchies were bracketed, and discussion among deliberate peers flowed. According to Nancy Fraser in "Rethinking the Public Sphere," this utopian ideal was never realized. The institutions of public discourse were soon turned into institutions of public relations and manipulation of opinion. In Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, Mary Ryan has similarly argued that, from its beginning, the public sphere was built on the exclusion of gender and expressed hostility toward the woman-friendly salon culture. In her view, the public sphere evolved as an attempt to universalize an emerging male dominant class.

Nancy Fraser has argued for the recognition of multiple public spheres rather than a single one. Here, the creation of subaltern counter-publics is central. She held that the feminist movement successfully created such a sphere. In subaltern public spheres, people from subaltern groups can enact their identities and speak in their own voices relatively (but never totally) freely from forces of domination. Fraser also argued that what is private can become public in the course of struggle. For example, the issue of domestic violence became a public issue only after it became the focus of a major social movement. Therefore, the boundaries between public and

private cannot be, and should not be, drawn in advance (16-18). Fraser's critiques and her advocacy of multiple publics are important to this dissertation. I have documented and analyzed the spaces created by grassroots movements for developing new forms of cultural expression, both the gang truce efforts and the organizations founded by women.

I have also argued that the trauma and pain of mothers whose sons were incarcerated by the criminal justice system was yet one more issue that conventional American society viewed as "private." It was a pain that the women were expected to endure in silence, since the public had very little sympathy for them. But the LA4+ Committee and Mothers ROC broke this private/public boundary. They created new organizations that both helped the mothers survive the ordeal of their sons' incarceration and provided venues for the women to fight for reduced sentences for their sons.

These practices extended the bourgeois public sphere and helped create subaltern counter-public spaces, where members of subordinated groups were able to come together for "deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies" (66). At these gatherings, they were able to "undertake communicative processes that are not . . . under the supervision of dominant groups," and they could "formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (67).

Another work on the public sphere that has been crucial to this dissertation is Houston Baker's "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere." Baker has argued that in creating a black public sphere, imagination is central. Imagination here refers to a set of practices and negotiations between the given conditions and the space for agency. Baker traced the development of a black counter-public in the first decade of the civil rights movement (1955-65). Thousands were actively working to develop a voice, to transform their imagination into a

politics that took the form of protests, riots, and other outbreaks of rage; this was reflected in new forms of artistic expression. Baker also showed that even the southern jails were turned into a space for expressions of freedom. Black youth turned the machinery of policing and surveillance into a site of resistance; a space of criminality was transformed into an arena for justice.

Critical Ethnography: Victor Turner and Dwight Conquergood

Numerous ethnographers have attempted to reverse the earlier trend of exoticizing of the "other," both the so-called "primitives" of non-Western societies and the contemporary inner city residents in the United States. The latter have been labeled as criminals and deviants. Among these ethnographers, I would like to refer briefly to some of the writings of Victor Turner and Dwight Conquergood.

In the early 1990s, Dwight Conquergood credited Victor Turner for accomplishing the most "to open up space in ethnography for performance" (Rethinking 187). One of Turner's major contributions was to show that cultural performances not only reflect culture, but also act as agencies for change. Turner developed the concept of social drama as a process, one through which cultures negotiate and reproduce themselves. "In large-scale modern societies," Turner wrote, "social dramas may escalate from the local level to national revolutions" (10-11). Social drama entails the following stages: (1) breach, whereby a norm is violated and the fabric of normal life is ruptured; (2) crisis, which exposes an entire social fabric as arbitrary and therefore threatened; (3) redress, an inherently performative stage where rituals are theatricalized, where there is self-reflexivity, and where there is an awareness of these as redressive; and (4) reconfiguration, which leads to a return to the status quo and/or to new iteration and

configuration of social roles. Redress is a liminal stage, a threshold experience, a precarious moment, one of being "between and betwixt." It is often a sacred time when cultures can be healed or recreated (10-11).

Turner's concepts of social drama and liminality are important to the discussion of gang truce parties in this dissertation, in which I document a series of large gatherings in several housing projects in South Central Los Angeles during May and June 1992, I consider the series of redressive activities that took place at a liminal moment, shortly before and after the 1992 rebellion. These events, which were attended by thousands of youth and their families, forged a new spirit of camaraderie among many heretofore-warring gangs. I will discuss the festive atmosphere of struggle in the aftermath of the rebellion as an example of the ways in which gang youth challenged their day-to-day subordination. In chapters three and four I have placed the events of 1991-92 in Turner's four-stage categories of social drama and found his notion of redressive stage fruitful. Such redressive periods appeared in the gang truce parties and also in the mothers' committees. In both chapters I have devoted sections to performances of these redressive stages and the small rites developed around them.

Dwight Conquergood has carried Turner's discussion further by showing that there are many forms of resistance other than organized protests and explicit oppositional movements. Acts of resistance against existing forms of hegemony can also be expressed through silent gestures or tacit refusals. "Subordinated people," wrote Conquergood, "do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive norm of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the ruling classes take for granted" (Interdisciplinary, 3). Some examples of such silent gestures and tacit referrals appear in chapters three and four in my discussions of Georgiana Williams, who refused to speak to

unsympathetic reporters, and of T Rodgers, who adapted a highly unconventional and seemingly rude manner in gang studies conferences.

Conquergood argued against the traditional, empiricist practice of separating embodied experiences from mental faculties. He also raised questions about all that is lost in the process of translating field experience into scholarly writing. He articulated an ethical model of performance ethnography that called for embodied fieldwork, multiplex identities, border-crossings, process and improvisation. He proposed a model of ethnographic work that is based not on the traditional communication model of information gathering, but instead on a dialogic form of communication.

In many ways my own involvement with the individuals I interviewed for this dissertation can be characterized as dialogic communication rather than a traditional model of gathering information. For more than a decade I worked near downtown and routinely covered the news of South Central L.A. I became friends with many of the individuals discussed in this dissertation, went to their homes, shared meals with them, helped them with legal cases, and taught them how to present their cases to mainstream media. I encouraged a number of them to write short articles and essays about their lives and edited and prepared them for publication. It certainly helped that I was not an Anglo from California, but a Middle Eastern immigrant trying to make sense of what seemed to me an illogical and sometimes incomprehensible American society. In this process, I probably learned as much, if not more, from those I interviewed and befriended as they probably learned from me. Hence, we always perceived our relationships as a two-way one, which certainly opened up many doors to me and allowed me to see their way of interacting and resisting dominant norms.

Black Feminist Thought: Patricia Hill Collins and Carole Boyce Davies

In discussing the politics of black feminist thought, Patricia Hill Collins argued that black feminist intellectual traditions are often located and expressed in alternative institutional sites. The black women who embody these traditions are usually not considered intellectuals. The intellectual contributions of black feminist thinkers are often ignored because many of them did not receive formal education. The conditions for legitimacy in doing intellectual work are politically contested. Many black women nevertheless function as intellectuals in their communities by representing the interests of other women, or through the promotion of black feminist thought.

Collins argued that the unique knowledges embodied by black feminist thinkers are often "subjugated knowledges." This means they are not only ignored because of their location outside of the academy, but also because of a tendency to consider them as merely local, as naive. So that even when "subjugated knowledges" are recognized, they are seen as a "minor term" in the larger scheme of things.

Far from being merely "particulars," Collins argued that these knowledges contain within them a whole series of demands for institutional transformation that can change reality not only for black women, but also for everyone. Collins argued against Michel Foucault's designation of subjugated knowledges as merely local and particular, lacking the power of self-definition and formed only by the harshness of external surrounding environment.

In Black Women, Writing, and Identity, Carol Boyce Davies extended the notion of the counter-public sphere by highlighting what she called black women's "uprising textualities," texts written by black women that "destabilize established knowledge/authoritarian bases" (108). Academic theorists have grappled inadequately with questions of multiple marginality, and the

ways in which black and Latina women writers have become transformative figures through "strategies that traverse the boundaries of orality, writing, and performance" (61). Davies presented a variety of themes that black women have used in documenting their organizing efforts, redefining identities through critiques of home, origin, location, and displacement. In emphasizing "the performative/ activist basis of much of the creativity" that black women have expressed in these writings, Davies noted how these writings exist outside of academic and mainstream publishing contexts (112). Central to Davies's endeavor to develop a space for black women's expressions is the concept of "negotiating theories." Drawing on Zora Neale Hurston's pithy phrase, "going a piece of the way with them," Davies suggested that black women often tend to maintain a critical distance from theoretical positions that do not value their experiences (46). A good example of such critical distance appears in chapter four, in the LA4+ Committee's discussion of their relationship with the various leftist political activists who joined their meetings. The coordinators of LA4+ solicited the support of a variety of communist and revolutionary organizations in their activities, but always kept their distance from theoretical points that did not reflect the women's own concern and objectives. Davies proposed a concept of "resistance postmodernism" that does not foreclose the question of identity prematurely. While there is a tension in her work between the practice of literary or narrative creation, and the practice of grassroots activism in poor communities, her formulations on uprising textualities and negotiating theories have helped me develop new critical perspectives on the Los Angeles uprising.

In 1996, Anna Deavere Smith was awarded a McArthur Fellowship ("genius award") for creating a "new form of theatre—a blend of theatrical art, social commentary, journalism, and intimate reverie." As Director of the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue in 1997, Smith

brought people from multiple disciplines together to produce art for social change. A key focus of Smith's explorations has been the historical constructions of race and ethnicity in contemporary society. Sandra Richards has argued that by placing constructions of identity and fragmentation at the heart of struggles from different historical periods alongside each other, Smith has maintained differences, while also offering hope for an end to divisiveness and fragmentation (51). In Twilight: Los Angeles 1992 Smith poses shifts in identity as dilemmas in representation, suggesting perhaps that we were not simply witnessing a continuation of the struggles of an earlier era, but that we were standing on the brink of a new set of multi-dimensional struggles in the United States, when many new questions are posed. In Literature and Race in L.A., Julian Murphet applauded Smith's Twilight: Los Angeles 1992 for returning to "realism itself," while avoiding the earlier pitfalls of seeking to speak with realism's one "unifying voice" (Smith 1994 xxv). In Imagining the African American West, Blake Allmendinger sees Smith's work as not only a representation of a turbulent urban environment, but part of a "reconfiguration of the artistic landscape as well" (114). Smith's Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 provides us with a more comprehensive language to probe racial, gender, and class conflicts. No one voice can speak for the entire city. As Sandra Richards has pointed out about Smith's work: "Everyone—organizers, speakers, other community members, and performer as well—have been caught in an act whose high stakes leave no one unscathed" (Caught 47). It is that multiplicity of voices that I have sought to theorize in this dissertation.

The following chapter, entitled "Toward An Historical Political Economy of Los Angeles," builds on the earlier discussion in this chapter on the dynamic relationships between cultural production and political economy. It discusses several studies that help illuminate how an impoverished black and immigrant population has related to a city of shifting demographics,

mass immigration, and economic growth. Los Angeles' intersection with the global economy was likewise set in the context of the increasing criminalization and incarceration of the underclasses. These questions have shaped my query about how to construct more accurate representative studies of the post-1992 grassroots movements. I turn to the Los Angeles economy before and after 1992 and include a subsection on mapping the Watts and Compton areas, the sites of the gang truce movement. The chapter ends with a section on the political economy of the criminal justice system, which stresses its ideological functions.

Chapter Three, "Performing Peace: Gang Truce in the 1990s Watts and Beyond," explores the gang truce movement and its transformative character around the time of the Los Angeles rebellion. After reviewing previous work on the gang truce movement, I map out the housing projects of Watts and Compton, the primary site of the gang truce parties. I also briefly explore media representations of the truce movement. A major part of the chapter turns to the gang truce negotiation process and reconstructs a detailed account of truce performances and rituals in the months of May and June 1992, ceremonies and rites that were adapted by thousands of participants.

Chapter Four, "The Gang Truce Movement as a Space for Dialogue and Activism," is on the diversity of the gang truce movement. This includes a discussion of the multi-ethnic, multi-ideological character of the gang truce movement, as well as some discussion of how activists used performance to build healing bridges in the lives of gang activists. Finally, I sketch some of the actors and players in the larger gang truce community over the last fifteen years, individuals who worked with the movement and have continued to write about it.

Chapter Five, "Performing Motherhood: Reclaiming their Children, Creating Uprising Textualities," highlights the emergence of political activism among a group of working-class

black and Latina women in the years 1992 to 1997. It documents a number of protest performances spearheaded by two women's organizations: the "LA4+ Committee" and "Mothers Reclaiming Our Children" (MROC). Both organizations were formed in the aftermath of the rebellion in order to respond to a series of highly publicized court cases. These organizations saw the need to have a public presence in the media, in courtrooms, and in the neighborhoods, in order to speak out against police brutality and how it often continued into the criminal justice system with bogus charges and frame-ups of youth. Here, I provide a detailed narrative on how participants created new ceremonial spaces for their activities. I examine the roles that clothing, food, and religion played in their performances, as well as the nature of the tenuous bridges they built with other activists while maintaining their own agendas. The last part of the chapter considers some of the literary and artistic performances through which the activists rearticulated their personal tragedies. I argue that these women, through performing a feminine ethics of care, sought to influence the criminal justice system and to reconstruct the perception of black motherhood in American society.

Chapter Six, "Performing Twilight: Walking in the Words of a Sad and Beautiful Poem," is a study of Anna Deavere Smith's celebrated performance and video Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992. There are two parts in this chapter reflecting two types of presentations. For almost an entire decade, Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 was a theater performance and a book. Since 2001, however, it has also been a video documentary. This chapter carries out a textual analysis of Smith's productions by highlighting three themes, asking how each theme informs Smith's representational strategy. I examine how she addressed inequities of gender, class, and race. I also look at how participants deployed personal narratives and memories in order to shape the meanings of current social events. In addition, I explore the ways in which Smith incorporates

diverse structures of interpretation into her performance and the manner in which she addresses the outright failures of the rebellion, especially the plight of Korean-Americans. Part two contains a close textual reading and analysis of the video version of Twilight Los Angeles. One section examines the unique aspects of the video production by looking at camera techniques and ways in which documentary footage was inserted. Another section examines Twilight's script against other media accounts and narratives of 1992, in order to provide an intertextual reading of this activist-conscious performance.

Chapter Two

Toward an Historical Political Economy of Los Angeles

> The hegemonic stream of representation in the public sphere shunts off organically connected class relations from its smoothly flowing portraits of American race and gender at the end of this century. As in the flawed "culture and personality" tradition, and its postmodern and other inheritors in American anthropology, difference is divorced from power and history, mentalité from the material. Public culture makes lavish use of ethnographic fakery to create good and bad Others, model minorities, role model and reprobate dusky maidens—representations that just happen to suit the changing needs of differing fractions of capital in this era of flexible accumulation.
>
> Micaela di Leonardo

In their classic study of Los Angeles, Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place, John Logan and Harvey Molotch once observed: "The crux of poor people's urban problems is that their routines—indeed their very being—are often damaging to exchange values" (112). In the wake of the Los Angeles rebellion, a remarkable role reversal took place, for just a brief moment. The tables were turned on the production of exchange values by poor people who openly expressed their needs and demanded that they be met. These table-turning events included the sudden appearance of gang members—the bad Others—on television, presenting their legitimate grievances and offering plausible solutions. Previously, gang affiliation had been

synonymous with drive-by shootings, and gang youth only appeared in the media in courtrooms wearing handcuffs, or on sidewalks on their knees waiting for body searches. But now a group of articulate and sensible citizens were presenting their alternative plans for the economic revitalization of Los Angeles. To be sure, the Blood/Crips' plan drafted during the summer of 1992 (reprinted in Madhubuti as an Appendix) ended on an ominous note when it declared: "You have 72 hours for a response and a commitment, in writing . . . and 30 days to begin implementation." Their economic plan for rebuilding Los Angeles, valued at $2 billion, included:

- Burned-down corner buildings must become career centers
- Sidewalks must be repaired and have sufficient lighting
- Alleys must be cleaned up and painted, and
- Old trees must be trimmed properly and lots of new ones planted.

Other such "extortionist" demands included building more hospitals, schools, parks, and replacing welfare with decent jobs. Of course, neither the gang members' plans, nor the promises of the urban commissions appointed to propose economic alternatives, ever went into effect. But the fluidity of the moment, the role reversals, and the openings created during that period provided a counterpoint to the long history of critical debates.

This chapter will explore three aspects of the political economy of Los Angeles. Part I, "The Los Angeles Economy, before and after 1992," begins with a historical and geographic mapping of the Watts and Compton areas. It then analyzes several works produced since 1992 that indicate the direction of changes in the economy. These works paint a grim picture of the

economic transformations that have occurred over the last two decades. Part II, "Toward a Political Economy of the 1992 Rebellion," looks at economic studies showing that dramatic growth in the 1980s was accompanied by a lowering of the living standards for those at the bottom. It also includes a discussion of the late black feminist economist Rhonda Williams, who coined the apt expression "accumulation as evisceration." Williams's work indicated that revitalizing a region almost always has meant the loss of jobs for black and Latino/a youth, and the elimination of low income housing. Part III, "On the Political Economy of the Criminal Justice System," argues that the losses in employment and housing have been accompanied by the substantial growth of a prison-industrial complex. Thus, the growth of the LAPD and the prison economy has been theorized as part of Los Angeles's regional economic developments. Criminologist Richard Quinney and psychologist Erich Fromm explained this developmental pattern as a form of displacement of mass anger. This concluding section argues that the ideological entrapments of the prison-industrial complex aim to deflect this mass anger away from the dominant classes and toward the criminal. In this way, the population is provided gratification only by observing various forms of punishment and repression.

The Los Angeles Economy, before and after 1992

> The decayed conditions of American democracy is difficult to grasp, not because the facts are secret, but because the facts are visible everywhere.
>
> William Greyder (qtd. in Robinson 74)

Mapping Historically and Geographically the Watts Compton Area

One way to understand the events of 1992 is to map the parallelisms and differences between the 1992 and the 1965 Los Angeles riots. In 1965, residents lived in stark segregation in a narrow corridor connecting downtown Los Angeles to the port of San Pedro. This corridor was bordered on its east and west sides by predominantly white suburban neighborhoods. Lucrative large-scale manufacturing industries and a skilled white workforce populated these surrounding areas. As a result of the growth of the defense and aerospace industries in the post-World War II period, Downey, Carson, and South Gate had a standard of living dramatically higher than that of Watts [11] Poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy rates were higher in Watts than in any other part of Los Angeles. Those who participated in the 1965 Watts Riots were almost entirely African-Americans, many of them recent immigrants to Los Angeles from the South (Sears 240). Ethnically, the Watts community was primarily African-American, with the exception of a few Latino residents and Jewish store owners. Complicating matters and increasing tensions, only two percent of the police force was African-Americans. Influenced by the civil rights movements of the 1960s, the Watts Riots called for desegregation and a more equitable distribution of jobs and community resources. These opportunities were evident in neighboring white suburban communities but nonexistent in Watts.

After the 1965 Watts Riots, the general conditions of economic and social disenfranchisement gave rise to the formation of a new generation of street gangs, most notably the Bloods and the Crips which were founded in the late 1960s. Given the absence of security provided by state and local police, one of the functions of early gangs was neighborhood protection. Crips and Bloods modeled themselves after the Black Panther Party, and other self-

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[11] See also Chapter One on the political economy of Los Angeles where I discuss works by Davis, Keil, Didion, Soja, and Abu-Lughod and the segregated class, race, and ethnic boundaries maintained between South Central Los Angeles and these other suburban cities that comprised metropolitan Los Angeles.

organizing groups which had appeared during the civil rights era. In her Wallbanging: Graffiti and Gangs in L.A., Susan Phillips introduced Bloods and Crips in this way: "Getting to know the street people around South Central Los Angeles—crack addicts, prostitutes, homeless folks—I soon came to the conclusion that gang members are an extremely stable bunch." (234) Feuding between gangs combined elements of both petty fights and cycles of revenge that can be found in all kinship systems. It would be wrong, however, to attribute pathological or primordial tendencies of tribal kinship to the street gangs of Los Angeles. Gangs were not a "natural structural extension" of ethnic characteristics of peoples. The goals of gang members, their sense of belonging, and the do-or-die sense of self-importance they attached to their groups were directly proportional to the rate of social disintegration that surrounded them. We have to take into account that despite these early beginnings, individuals who founded the Bloods and the Crips did not establish themselves around a specifically articulated narrative of social change. Instead, their haphazard formation led the gangs to become enmeshed in a variety of power struggles both within and between different neighborhoods and sets (Phillips 245-297).

The 1992 uprisings were the result of a different set of circumstances and covered a much broader territory than the riots of 1965. By the 1990s, Watts and Compton had become much more ethnically diverse. South Central was no longer predominantly African-American but included increasing numbers of Latino and Asian immigrants. Similarly, the ethnic composition of surrounding suburban cities had changed. They were no longer predominantly white, but also contained Latinos and pockets of Asians. (Baldassare) As a result of a major economic restructuring which saw these areas turn from heavy industry to service and high technology, almost all large-scale automobile and aerospace assembly plants had closed down. The collapse of the Soviet Union also contributed to major cutbacks in the U.S. defense industry, which led to

the closing of military-related plants, and a severe economic recession in southern California. The flashpoints during the 1992 street riots were also spread over an area much larger that that of the1965 Watts Riots.

Unlike 1965 when the riots were limited to the area directly south of downtown Los Angeles, in 1992 areas west, north, and east of downtown also bore witness to scenes of rioting, looting, and arson. The Wilshire corridor, directly west of downtown—including the Pico Union, Rampart, Koreatown neighborhoods, populated by recent immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala—was also a site of rioting. North of downtown, including Santa Monica, Sunset, and Hollywood Boulevards, as well as areas farther west, like Vermont, Western, and La Brea Avenues, saw widespread looting of stores for food, furniture, and personal hygiene items.

	1965	1992
Incident that initiated the riots	August 11, 1965 arrest of Marquette Frye for drunk driving	April 29, 1992 Acquittal of police officers in beating of Rodney King
Duration of rioting	6 days	6 days
Deaths	34	52
Injuries (hospitalizations)	1030	2380
Arrests	4,000 (almost entirely African-Americans)	10-16,000 (51% Latinos, 36% blacks, 9% whites)
Buildings set on fire	1,000	830
Property Damage	$40 million	$1 billion
National guard brought in		14,000
Blamed on	“outside agitators”	“street hoodlums”
Area	Watts, around 103rd and Central	More widespread towards northwest

Table 3.1 Comparison of 1992 with 1965 (adapted from Cannon and Sears)

In 1992 the participants in store lootings included large populations of recent Latino immigrants from Central America, as distinguished from the more established Mexican-

American populations (Sears 238). The differences in the two events were rooted in the changing political economy of Los Angeles in the course of the twentieth century.

The last decades of the twentieth century placed Los Angeles at the forefront of the United States' economic and social development as never before. The 1990 United States Census reported that in the previous decade, the population of the Los Angeles-Long Beach metropolitan area had increased from 3 million to 3.5 million. This meant that Los Angeles had for the first time surpassed Chicago in population. Chicago's elite had long dubbed their metropolis the United States' "second city," after New York. The 1990 Census also reported that Los Angeles-Long Beach's population of 3.5 million had grown to nearly half that of New York's, which stood at 7.3 million, and Los Angeles was continuing to grow far more rapidly than New York.

Some historical population figures might help to put the rapidity of Los Angeles's emergence as a center of population and capital accumulation in better perspective. In the 1900 United States Census, the respective populations of the three cities were as follows: New York, 3.4 million; Chicago, 1.7 million; and Los Angeles, 102,000. In that year, Los Angeles was even smaller than Fort Wayne, Indiana. By 1950, however, due to the impact of the World War II war economy and the shift toward the South and the West as the centers of the United States economy, Los Angeles's population had surged to just below that of Philadelphia and just above that of Detroit, making it the fourth largest United States city. Those 1950 population figures were: New York, 7.9 million; Chicago, 3.6 million; Philadelphia 2.1 million; Los Angeles, 2 million; Detroit 1.9 million.

When one considers Los Angeles's economic weight, its increasing impact on the United States and the world during the last decades of the twentieth century was even more significant

than its population growth. This was already the case by 1990, but even more so by 2000. As reported by the DRI-WEFA[12] Corporation, the annual gross metropolitan output of Los Angeles-Long Beach had reached $303 billion by 1997 (Metro Economies 1). This was 83 percent of that of New York, the United States' largest urban economy, which stood at $363 billion that year.

Rank	Country or Metro Area	Gross Product
1	United States	$10 trillion
2	Japan	$ 4.6 trillion
3	Germany	$1.9 trillion
4	Britain	$1.4 trillion
5	France	$1.3 trillion
6	China	$1.1 trillion
7	Italy	$1.1 trillion
8	Canada	$699 billion
9	Brazil	$665 billion
10	Mexico	$578 billion
11	Spain	$557 billion
12	India	$510 billion
13	South Korea	$480 billion
14	New York City	$438 billion
15	Australia	$428 billion
16	**Los Angeles-Long Beach**	**$364 billion**
17	Netherlands	$360 billion
18	Chicago	$333 billion
19	Taiwan	$323 billion
20	Argentina	$284 billion
21	Russia	$247 billion

Table 2.2: Year 2000 Gross Products (Source: Adapted from the New York Times July 10, 2001)

The Los Angeles elite usually did not make that comparison with New York, but preferred to stress that Los Angeles-Long Beach's economic output was greater than the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of all but a dozen or so of the world's countries. By 2000, Los Angeles-Long Beach's $364 billion annual output was not too far behind the GDP of Australia and far ahead of Russia's. By 2001, Los Angeles's publicists proudly reported, their city had passed Australia,

[12] Acronym for Data Resources, Inc. and Wharton Econometric Forecasting Associates, an economic forecasting firm, in a study commissioned by the United States Conference of Mayors (earlier data of this sort do not seem to have been collected).

which meant that only thirteen countries had GDP's greater than their annual output of $390 billion. (Los Angeles Almanac)

Compared to New York and Chicago, Los Angeles retained a large manufacturing sector, much of it based on low-wage immigrant labor, particularly Latino labor. In 1985, writes Abu-Lughod, Los Angeles had more manufacturing jobs than Chicago and New York combined, and, unlike the other two cities, it was gaining rather than losing in this sector (366). She writes: "Los Angeles did not deindustrialize during the 1970s and 1980s but rather continued to generate new manufacturing jobs" (367). At the same time, Abu-Lughod notes that in Los Angeles, "the poverty rate rose from 10.9 percent to 15.1 percent between 1969 and 1989" (367) She reports further that, according to the gini Index, economic inequality in Los Angeles rose more rapidly than in the rest of the United States during the same two decades. Los Angeles did not stand alone in these developments, since a number of other cities in what has been termed the sunbelt—San Diego, Miami, Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Phoenix, and Las Vegas, for example—followed a similar pattern. The pattern of economic and social development that emerged in the Sunbelt cities was based on a large number of non-union and low-wage manufacturing and service jobs, many of them filled by a seemingly limitless pool of cheap immigrant labor, mostly from Latin America. These newer cities were fast outpacing in economic and population growth the older economic centers of the Northeast and the Midwest, not only Chicago and New York, but also Detroit, Philadelphia, and Boston.

One also can view the growth of the Sunbelt through the lens of population change. During the last decades of the twentieth century, California's population surged, as did that of Texas and Florida. By the 1990 United States Census, the most populous states were now, in rank order: (1) California, 29.8 million; (2) New York, 18.0 million, and (3) Texas, 16.0 million.

Florida was in fourth place, with 12.9 million. By the 2000 Census, Texas had for the first time pushed New York to third place, as follows: (1) California, 33.9 million; (2) Texas, 20.9 million, and (3) New York, 19.0 million. Florida was still in fourth place, with 16.0 million, but was gaining quickly on New York. Within California itself, the San Francisco Bay Area experienced substantial growth, as did Seattle in the northwest, but these urban areas followed the pattern of neither the older Midwestern and Northeastern cities nor the new Sunbelt cities. Nonetheless, even when viewed along the axis of West Coast development, Los Angeles stood out as a center of economic growth and strength during the latter decades of the twentieth century. This was true even when Los Angeles was compared to what the Bay Area and Silicon Valley achieved during this period.

Similar to other Sunbelt cities, Los Angeles has grown quickly in recent decades, but in an atmosphere of breathtaking social and economic inequality. Despite its overall growth, it was not the older type of relatively high-wage, "Fordist" manufacturing that predominated Los Angeles's economy by the last two decades of the twentieth century. Thus, although manufacturing jobs were relatively plentiful compared to a Detroit or a Chicago during the 1980s, a race-stratified economic system, as well as shifts in the overall economy, locked unskilled black and Latino workers increasingly into low-wage, sweatshop labor. Abu-Lughod concluded:

> In short, a strong industrial economy has not protected Los Angeles's minority workers. To some extent, this has been due to a substantial substitution in both the types of manufacturing and the locations of plants under restructuring. Gone are the unionized Fordist-type plants producing cars, tires, and so on, that were centrally located within easy commuting reach of areas inhabited by blacks and

> Hispanics. In their place, garment production, often under sweatshop conditions, has expanded, not only in central areas but in peripheral ones as well. (367)

Thus, the garment industry, often viewed as part of an early stage of industrial development in less developed countries, had returned in force to what was perhaps the most advanced urban economy in the most advanced capitalist country.

Viewed from a longer historical perspective, Los Angeles first boomed as a center of relatively high-wage manufacturing during World War II. The military-industrial complex continued to fuel the Los Angeles economy in the aftermath of the war, especially in aerospace. Once again, Janet Abu-Lughod calls attention to the crucial pattern:

> In the 1960s and even the 1970s and early 1980s, Los Angeles's economy continued its remarkable expansionary tendencies. . . . These trends were in marked contrast to Chicago's Fordist structure and the more gentle easing off, if not attrition, of job and population growth in the New York region. (365)

However, as Abu-Lughod also noted, by the late 1980s, as the Cold War drew to an end, the very factor that had spurred a mammoth military-industrial complex in the Los Angeles region, now served to spike up the area's unemployment rate to levels higher than the nation as a whole. Not only did employment contract, but as we saw above, it shifted from more Fordist defense industry jobs to low-wage sweatshop ones, at least for the unskilled.

This shift was accompanied by a major change in the racial and ethnic composition of Los Angeles. As Abu-Lughod reports, in 1970 non-Hispanic whites comprised two-thirds of Los Angeles's population. By 1990, this had dropped to 41 percent. During the same two decades, the Latino/a population surged from 18 percent to 35 percent, while the non-Hispanic black

population remained relatively constant at around 11 percent (376). This ethnic shift meant that the city's increasing economic polarization during this period of immense capital accumulation was leading to a highly racialized system of economic stratification that weighed deeply on the working classes and the poor, stuck as they were in the low-wage industries or lacking jobs altogether. Nonetheless, from the point of view of overall economic growth, these unskilled jobs also produced profits and thus the city's economy continued to grow, albeit by even greater economic exploitation of its poorer citizens.

In Where I Was From Joan Didion situated the 1992 riots in the near economic meltdown in the period between 1988 and 1993. She described her experience of growing up in Southern California where she was taught not to think of class differences in society but to adopt the imaginary of Smokey the Bear: "Keep California Green and Golden." Years later she interpreted this to mean: "put out the campfire, kill the rattlesnake and watch the money flow in. And it did. Even if it was somebody else's money" (128). The collapse of the aerospace industry and its impact on other sectors of the economy ended that imaginary. Citing the Commission on State Finance Report that 800,000 jobs were lost between 1988 and 1993 in California due to federal spending cutbacks, and further citing Bank of America's report that 600,000 to 800,000 jobs were lost between 1990 and 1993, as well as projecting a further 400,000 to 500,000 more jobs lost between 1993 and 1995, Didion concluded: "This was what people in Los Angeles were talking about when they talked about the 1992 riot."(134)

Toward a Political Economy of the 1992 Rebellion

On the eve of April 1992, what economic forces were driving the processes that would unleash the 1992 explosion? How did these economic factors condition the sharp rise in the growth of youth street organizations? According to black radical economist Rhonda M. Williams, the economic processes at work were substantially cutting off vital parts of people's lives. She calls this process "accumulation as evisceration" (82). Mainstream economists have viewed economic growth as the engine for reducing poverty. As we saw above, in reality, the dramatic economic growth in the 1980s was accompanied by lower living standards for those at the bottom, especially when seen in relative terms. Living standards must be viewed in both relative and absolute terms. Thus one needs to know, for example, whether real wages have increased or decreased to see if working people can still afford to live at the same level. However, relative terms are also important. In 1900, the urban working classes rarely had indoor plumbing, yet today that would be considered a basic necessity even for the poorest urbanites. In 1950, the urban working classes rarely owned a television, nor in many cases did they possess a telephone, but by 1992 those two items were considered basic necessities as well. The fact that the poor had indoor plumbing, televisions, and telephones by 1992 did not necessarily make them any less poor, either objectively (in relation to the standard of living of the dominant classes, or even of the better-off strata of the working classes) or subjectively (in their perception of their own position).

Let us now view this situation at a more concrete level, focusing more on the lived experience of those at the bottom of Los Angeles's generally expanding economy, although not without its downturns that included some severe recessions. Between 1979 and 1988, Rhonda Williams reports, the real earnings of those men aged 25 to 34 who lacked a college education declined dramatically. For white males without a high school diploma, average earnings

declined from $19,848 to $16,108 in constant 1988 dollars. For white male high school graduates, average earnings dropped from $24,889 to $21,776, again in 1988 dollars. For black males between 1979 and 1988, the overall figures are even lower. For black male high school dropouts earnings remained constant at $14,595. But earnings dropped precipitously, from $19,449 to $16,638, for black male high school graduates. In relative terms, a black male high school graduate's earnings were at about the level of those of a white high school dropout. In addition, Williams writes, there was a relative decrease in black male earnings "at every educational level between 1973 and 1989" (84). Black women also saw their real earnings fall, although not as rapidly as those of their male peers (84). Williams argues that these figures reveal a persistent pattern of labor market discrimination.

Most studies that focus on equality and poverty do not situate business and worker behaviors in the context of competitive capital accumulation. They do not adequately express the ongoing state of rivalry in the labor market to which most people must respond (90). According to Williams, during the 1980s, the attempt to return United States manufacturing to competitiveness in the face of international competition translated into an assault on the standard of living of most working people. During this period, both the technical and social relations of work were being rapidly restructured. This profoundly shaped the ways youth could search for jobs. Despite the growth of the economy's service sector in the 1980s, average wages in this sector dropped 18.2 percent and benefits dropped 26.1 percent during this period (92). As we saw earlier, it was in light of this pattern of capital accumulation and restructuring that Saskia Sassen argues that we can no longer assume that the growth of capital in the United States would automatically benefit a large segment of the population. Urban youth were among those most affected by this process.

Another important study, entitled Regions That Work: How Cities and Suburbs Can Grow Together (2000), resulted from the collaborative efforts of Los Angeles economists, sociologists, and ethnographers and was mainly funded to prevent yet another outbreak of street protests. The authors pointed out that in 1992 regional economic planning bodies expressed a momentary interest in addressing the problems of the poor. However, these problems were soon forgotten, as attention shifted to other pressing issues during southern California's economic downturn during the first half of the 1990s.

Throughout the early 1990s, Los Angeles suffered from near double-digit unemployment figures. As noted above, defense industry subsidies that had been the mainstay of the local industry were cut at the end of the Cold War, and large industrial facilities in auto steel and rubber were shut down throughout the 1980s and early 1990s and were replaced by smaller, non-union facilities (18). In the aftermath of the 1992 rebellion, regional strategic bodies in southern California did focus on poverty, but only momentarily. With the election of Republican Mayor Richard J. Riordan on a law-and-order platform in 1993, city agencies shifted to plans and potentials for the development of small businesses. During this period, the Southern California Association of Governments, the New Vision Business Council, and other city agencies were involved in the expenditure of nearly $70 billion to expand the area's transportation infrastructure. The gap between commuters' needs and the administrators' plans was so wide that a class-action lawsuit was initiated. The suit won a seat on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) Board of Directors for the Bus Riders Union, an organization of local activists.[13] With the help of a former MTA controller, who had become one of its biggest critics,

[13] For more on the Bus Riders Union see their website at www.busriders.org.

bus riders' priorities found a more prominent platform. This small group of university researchers and political activists was able to compel the MTA to purchase more buses for poorer areas of Los Angeles with funds that were allocated to service expensive (and often empty) trains for the outlying suburbs.

The literature discussed so far raises several critical questions: Who makes priorities and what value assumptions are more dominant? What needs are recognized and what needs are met? Can the dominant mode of urban production of space be brought to heel with rhetorical spaces and the politics of care created in grassroots acts of solidarity? How can such movements navigate through the dominant gaze of planners and the confining mazes of urban designs? The urban production of space produces not only pollution and smog, but also a stultifying atmosphere for the mind. The decisive contest between opposing views turns out to take place in the creation of meanings, in the production of value systems, and in the way that "structures of feeling"(Raymond Williams) are produced.

Mainstream economists and public administrators see poverty as a "drag" on the economy, or something "outside" it. However, an older functionalist sociology, and certainly the more recent radical or Marxian economics and sociology, have been well aware of the ways in which poverty can provide a cheap, flexible labor force to carry out less desirable but necessary forms of work, such as personal service, outdoor day labor in the hot sun, many forms of food service work, and the "all-volunteer" United States armed forces. And added to this are all the ways in which the poor help to furnish jobs for a whole host of far-better-paid occupations that

study and regulate them, from social workers and sociologists to the bulk of the criminal justice system.[14]

Regions That Work reveals that over 50 percent of Los Angeles households classed as "poor" have at least one working member, and over 30 percent have one member working full-time (19). Thus, the poor in Los Angeles are mostly working poor, many of them low-wage garment or service workers. The study also finds that many of those who are "welfare poor" and therefore assumed to be unemployed, often have to supplement from "irregular sources" the grossly inadequate aid moneys they receive (36). During the 1990s, a large, "informal" economy developed. However, its street vendors and sweatshops did not operate entirely outside of the formal economy. One example of this relationship between the informal and formal economy was broadcast throughout the world. In August 1995, a sweatshop in El Monte (just east of Los Angeles) was discovered to have kept over 70 garment workers from Thailand as indentured servants. Garments produced at this facility were under contract from several major department stores (39).

Regions That Work points out that there were two forces operating in the downward spiral of Los Angeles's working classes, especially its black and Latino working classes. This has meant both the decline of a large industrial manufacturing sector and a reindustrialization, especially in the apparel industry. One of the reasons that textile and garment manufacturing did not move outside of the Los Angeles area into third world countries was the immigration of large numbers of Central Americans into Los Angeles. There was a coupling of the high-wage fashion

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[14] See Herbert Gans' The War against the Poor.

design industry and the low-wage assembly facilities. A considerable widening of class and race differences has been one consequence of this reconfiguration of manufacturing (22).

As Regions That Work points out, the years 1991 to 1993 were marked by the downward restructuring that had been taking place for decades, as Los Angeles's economy was reconfigured away from Fordist productivism toward a more unequal distribution of income and wealth. But these years also were marked by a particularly devastating cyclical downturn, the deepest recession since World War II: "The wreckage left by economic restructuring and wage cuts left a scarred social landscape" (22). The impact of restructuring, which now took the additional form of increased unemployment and wage cuts, was especially pronounced and was felt most acutely in those neighborhoods with the least political and economic clout (23). From 1991 to 1992, total employment shrank by 8.1 percent. Manufacturing employment during 1992 and 1993 was cut by 16 percent on top of the cuts made in the 1980s. It was at the bleakest moment of that long recession that the 1992 rebellion exploded (53). This was the same deep recession that cost George H. W. Bush the presidency, bringing the Reagan-Bush era to an end. Bush saw his popularity during the 1991 Gulf War drop precipitously the following year, as Democrat Bill Clinton hammered away at him on the theme, "it's the economy, stupid."

Regions at Work explains that the numerous regional initiatives since 1992 in southern California have in no way changed the direction of capital outlays to address economic and geographic—not to mention racial and class—inequities that set the stage for the Los Angeles rebellion. It points out that "urban revitalization" programs traditionally focus on rejuvenating downtown commercial areas championed by developers and lawmakers. In Los Angeles, "urban revitalization" has had devastating effects for some. In an essay entitled "Disconnected Futures," the authors of Regions that Work claim that the common approach to revitalization in

Los Angeles has been to use bulldozers. As a result, in the 1980s alone, more than 7,000 units for low-income residents were eliminated without any attempts to replace them (58).[15]

In the aftermath of 1992, most economic researchers have centered their analyses on the conditions of increasing poverty and inequality during the 1980s, despite economic growth (Williams; Pastor; Dreir; Grigsby; Lopez-Garza). The late 1980s saw six years of economic boom, but this coincided with the worsening of employment conditions for the poorer sectors of the working classes, as Fordist manufacturing disappeared and blue collar and service jobs were restructured in a downward direction. Hardest hit, according to Rhonda Williams, were the younger workers with a high school education, whose job opportunities were drastically reduced (82). Mainstream sociological and social policy discourses that rely on the concept of an "underclass" consider youth criminality to be pathological. Thus, in a classic instance of blaming the victim, the decline in these youths' quality of life often is seen as a consequence of their "deviancy" or of coming from single-parent families. These discourses erase the role of the macro-economic forces discussed here.

The generation of youth that grew up in urban areas during the 1980s could no longer see itself as part of a continuing trend in upward mobility. As Rhonda Williams points out, however, it would be wrong to "reduce the Los Angeles revolt to economics alone" (83). Economic forces also were experienced subjectively by those subjected to them. Thus, Williams argues that mainstream economic analysis "represses discussion of socioeconomic agency" (83).

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[15] See Dwight Conquergood's ethnographic study of "Life in Big Red." Like the bulldozing of homes in the Temple Beaudry area of Los Angeles, the eviction of this Chicago tenement's residents resulted from a long process of manipulative tactics and supposed "trade-offs" for a better educational infrastructure. Conquergood calls attention to the long history and the grim reality of the rhetoric of transgression and redevelopment. This form of "secular discourse of urban 'renewal,' 'revitalization,' 'redevelopment,' and 'restoration,' like the puritan jeremiad, castigates the current state of decline and promises a shining future through correction and reform" (140). See also the next chapter, section on mapping the gang truce movement in Watts.

Sometimes those subjected to economic forces reacted strongly against those very forces. Thus, while youth are subjected to socioeconomic developments, there is also youth agency. The only concept of agency that mainstream economics recognizes is that of individual agents seeking to maximize their economic position through a process of market-based competition.

Most radical economists agree that optimal, capitalist production needs what Marx called an "industrial reserve army," i.e., a large pool of unemployed workers: "The industrial reserve army, during the periods of stagnation and average prosperity, weighs down the active army of workers; during the periods of over-production and feverish activity, it puts a curb on their pretensions" (792). In the United States today, the system probably needs a five percent or more unemployment rate so that the cost of labor does not go too high and production can be maintained at competitive global standards, as well as social control more generally. An unemployment rate of less than four percent may mean that there will be not enough workers available, and hence currently employed workers can demand higher wages, or even resist in other ways, with demands for improved working conditions or greater dignity and respect. Unemployment levels of ten percent or more run the danger of creating unrest or even rebellion, however. And such rates, and even higher ones, have typically affected such inner city communities as south central Los Angeles.

However, it must be stressed that economic factors and the particular way they affect black and Latino groups contributed to the Los Angeles rebellion. People make choices in the face of adversity. These choices may not always be what middle-class Americans regard as appropriate and proper. As economist Melvin Lyman wrote in a study of race and the United States economy that appeared a year after the Los Angeles rebellion:

> There is evidence that increasing numbers of black youths have become so discouraged by their disproportionate share of low-paying dead-end jobs, that they are no longer actively seeking employment. Many have drifted into the irregular economy of thievery, drugs, the numbers game and prostitution. The prospects for white youths are only slightly better. The potentially explosive character of this situation, particularly in the urban core areas of the large metropolitan centers, is all too obvious. (133)

These are expressions of resisting a society and a culture that have no interest in supporting poor black and Latino youth, and would never dare to incorporate their alternative visions in efforts toward economic restructuring.

At such an impasse, it becomes quite understandable that those at the bottom of society responded as they did, whether through day-to-day acts of resistance or in more explicit actions like the Los Angeles rebellion. From the viewpoint of the dominant classes, however, these social groups constitute what elites in the nineteenth century referred to as the "dangerous classes." The dominant classes have responded occasionally with reform measures, such as the War on Poverty during the 1960s. Far more often, however, the state has responded with repression. This has taken the form of a mammoth growth in what is increasingly being referred to as the prison-industrial complex. Again, the Sunbelt states, and especially California, have led the way, beginning with a vengeance during the period when Ronald Reagan was governor. In light of this, the criminal justice system needs to be considered part of the political economy, especially in Los Angeles. And this concerns not only the prison-industrial complex, but also the

police and its particular history and role in the city; a role that came under increasing public scrutiny after 1992.

On the Political Economy of the Criminal Justice System

During the past three decades, the number of people incarcerated in United States prisons and jails has increased from around half a million to over two million. An ever-widening proportion of these prisoners have been drawn from the black and Latino poor. By 2000, California alone had nearly as many prisoners as the entire United States had had three decades earlier. Two decades ago, an American radical criminologist, Richard Quinney, earned wide notoriety for connecting this process to the overall economy at a time when, as he also wrote, the United States already had "the highest rate of incarceration in the world":

> Prisons are institutions of control for the working class, especially the surplus population—that portion of the working class not needed for capitalist production. . . . Either new prisons have to be built to contain the growing number of people controlled by the system or something has to be done to reduce the prison population. . . . One direction calls for the construction of roughly 1,000 new prisons, at an estimated cost of $20 billion. The other direction in which the capitalist state can move is to reduce the prison population by means of sentencing reform. (150-51)

Today, it is clear which of those two paths was the one taken. In addition, the massive and unprecedented levels of incarceration have continued to increase despite a substantial drop in crime, an issue I will return to below.

In City of Quartz, Davis analyzed these processes at the local level on the eve of the 1992 rebellion, offering a portrait of Los Angeles's mushrooming criminal justice system, in both its economic and political dimensions. Here is how he discusses how the highly technocratic and modern LAPD has appropriated vast economic resources for the purpose of incarcerating more and more people:

> We have already seen their growing role as Downtown urban designers indispensable for their expertise in "security." But they also lobby incessantly to enlarge law-and-order land use: additional warehouse space for a burgeoning male population, and administrative-training facilities for themselves. In Los Angeles this has taken the form of a de facto urban renewal program, operated by police agencies, that threatens to convert an entire section of Downtown-East Los Angeles into a vast penal colony. Nearly 25,000 prisoners are presently held in six severely overcrowded county and federal facilities—not including Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) detention centers—within a three-mile radius of City Hall—the largest incarcerated population in the nation. Racing to meet the challenge of the current "War on Drugs" (which will double detained populations within the decade), authorities are forging ahead with the construction of a new state prison in East Los Angeles as well as a giant expansion of the County Jail near Chinatown. . . . Agencies like the Bureau of Prisons and County Jail, together with the innumerable private security companies, have become major community employers in the wake of plant closures and deindustrialization. . . . (254)

In this sense, the prison-industrial complex needs to be considered as a major part of Los Angeles's regional economy, similar to the place of the military-industrial complex that had operated in earlier years.

Prisons and jails are only one aspect of the criminal justice system, however. On a daily basis, it is the police who have the most direct dealings with the community. And it has been the LAPD that has had the greatest impact upon Los Angeles's rebellious minorities, both before and after 1992, part of a long history of police authoritarianism and abuse (Escobar). While Los Angeles's jails and prisons are on a proportionally larger and more modern scale than those of America's older cities like New York and Chicago, its police force has seemed to operate on a far more militaristic basis than its counterparts, left relatively unchecked by the normal compromises of urban politics. As Paul Chevigny, a longtime observer of police brutality (see Chevigny 1969), wrote in 1995:

> The governments of New York City and Los Angeles . . . have taken almost opposite approaches to policing. The Los Angeles police, both in the city and the county, have had a reputation as the quintessential anticrime force, with a semi-military attitude both to the job and the public. . . . The reasons for the divergence in the styles of policing in the two urban areas lie in the differences in municipal government and the history of the cities and the police. . . . Each of the cities has had endemic problems with the abuse of non-deadly force—police brutality—as have many other American cities. Los Angeles made no serious effort to control such violence before 1991, while New York yielded much earlier to pressure to set up at least some systems of accountability. New York long ago took the lead in the nation in trying to make officers accountable for and reduce the use of

> deadly force through stringent internal regulations, while the police in Los Angeles have continued to shoot more people than any other police department in the largest United States cities. (Cited in Abu-Lughod 394)

Davis notes that part of the reason for this militaristic stance is ideological, embedded within the self-generated mythology of the LAPD: "Especially in its own self-perpetuated myth, the LAPD is seen as the progressive antithesis to the traditional big-city police department with its patronage armies of patrolmen grafting off the beat" (251).

A second crucial difference separating the LAPD from the police forces of older, big cities is technical and administrative. The LAPD is considerably smaller than other comparable police departments, with only 7800 officers in 1993, considerably fewer officers than in New York's force, even when allowing for population differences (Abu-Lughod 394). In addition, the LAPD needs to cover a much wider geographic area than its counterparts in New York and Chicago.

A third difference is technological. The LAPD has a history of technological innovation, much of it with a military emphasis, as Davis underlines in a discussion of "the LAPD's path-breaking substitutions of technological capital for patrol manpower":

> Thus back in the 1920s the LAPD had pioneered the replacement of the flatfoot or mounted officer with the radio patrol car—the beginning of dispersed, mechanized policing. Under [Chief William] Parker, ever alert to spinoffs from military technology, the LAPD introduced the first police helicopters for systematic aerial surveillance. After the Watts Rebellion of 1965 this airborne effort became the cornerstone of a policing strategy for the entire inner city. As

> part of its "Astro" program LAPD helicopters maintain an average nineteen-hour-per-day vigil over "high-crime areas," tactically coordinated to patrol car forces, and exceeding even the British Army's surveillance of Belfast. The fifty-pilot LAPD air force was recently updated with French Aerospatiale helicopters equipped with futuristic surveillance technology. . . . A few years ago a veteran LAPD SWAT commander . . . accidentally shot his own helicopter out of the sky while practicing a strafing run with a machine-gun. (251-52)

In those days, on the eve of the 1992 rebellion, the LAPD was a more militaristic, more remote, and more impersonal law enforcement organization than those of New York and Chicago.

In terms of Los Angeles's overall political economy, it might seem that the LAPD would have a relatively minor impact, as compared with the more obvious one of the prison-industrial complex. I would like to suggest otherwise, however, for two reasons. First, as Davis suggests, the LAPD has had a "long and successful liaison with the military aerospace industry" (252). In this and other ways, its economic impact is far from negligible. A second and more important political economy dimension emerges in connection with the new urban economy that Los Angeles also represents. In such an "hourglass" economy, there is, as Sassen suggests, a wealthy elite at the top, a shrinking middle class and a decimated, Fordist, working class in the middle, and a burgeoning and impoverished mass of poorer and marginalized working class citizens, many of them black or Latino, at the bottom. Perhaps the militaristic, containment-oriented practices of the LAPD are compatible, albeit in a highly alienated way, with the overall political and economic structure of the city, in which the elites have little contact with the large, marginalized sectors at the bottom and wish simply to contain them.

There is another aspect of the criminal justice system that needs to be mentioned here, in light of where this chapter began, regarding the issue of mass culture as discussed by Horkheimer and Adorno, Jameson, Baudrillard, and Soja. I am referring to the fairly obvious, ideological role that the issues of crime, police, and the criminal justice system, more generally, play in the public discourse. There is no better example of what Baudrillard has called hyperreality than the daily media saturation with crime, criminals, and the police, which is even more pronounced in Los Angeles than in many other large cities. This discourse is in many ways a self-created world, since it seems to have little relationship to actual crime rates or the real dangers that citizens face. Nor does it seem to be impacted very much by a drop in crime, as seen in recent years.

All of this bears on the ideological issues concerning criminal justice, which has important cultural, as well as economic and political dimensions. As early as 1930, Adorno's colleague Erich Fromm developed a Freudian, Marxist critique of the ideological and cultural impact of a criminal justice system. Even then, the system was clearly failing in terms of its stated goals of crime reduction and rehabilitation of the criminal, something that social scientists had proved repeatedly, yet the system continued as before. Fromm reasoned, therefore, that the criminal justice system must serve larger purposes in modern capitalist society:

> It is clear therefore why there must be a criminal justice system, independent of its effect on criminals. It is an institution through which the state imposes its will as a father image on the unconscious of the masses. . . . This is most clearly visible in the death penalty. . . . Another function of the criminal justice system should also be mentioned briefly. It provides the masses with a form of gratification of their sadistic impulses. . . . The state likes to appeal to this

> popular sense of justice, because it can gratify those impulses in a manner that is harmless for the state. (Part of the function of war lies in the same direction.) (126)

In short, the criminal justice system had larger purposes than fighting crime, its stated goal. Even if one does not wish to adopt Fromm's Freudian terminology in its entirety, his larger point was that these additional functions of the criminal justice system included (1) creating a feeling that the state was protecting society, and (2) the displacement of mass anger at their social and economic conditions away from the dominant classes and toward the criminal, where the masses could receive gratification by observing various forms of punishment and repression. These processes had not disappeared and had in fact accelerated and deepened by the 1990s.

In the above sense, the whole discourse of crime could fit into what Soja and Baudrillard call hyperreality as well. Soja describes hyperreality in the media and other cultural institutions as "a different and more subtle form of social and spatial regulation, one that literally and figuratively 'plays with the mind,' manipulating civic consciousness and popular images of cityspace and urban life to maintain order" (324). With the LAPD as the most media-fictionalized department in the world, is there a better example of what Soja is describing than the whole "culture" of television crime news, television and film police melodramas, never mind the political debates on how to escalate the war on crime? This discourse evokes a Hobbesian mental world (and to some extent, creates an actual one as well), in which life on the streets runs the constant danger of reverting to the state of nature—with daily life threatening to become nasty, brutish, and short—and in which the forces of order attempt to create peace and mete out retribution. Such a discourse, if expressed with all of the skills honed by Hollywood, can go

some distance toward undermining what otherwise might be stronger and deeper grassroots movements by the dispossessed. In short, the discourse of crime as the dominant media discourse is the ideological and cultural counterpart to the overall political economy of Los Angeles.

However, like any dominant discourse, this one sometimes reaches its limits and is challenged, at least momentarily. This is what occurred in Los Angeles in 1991 and 1992, when there was an actual videotape of the savage beating of Rodney King by numerous LAPD officers that the mass media aired. Then, when the criminal justice system operated totally in keeping with its traditions by exonerating all of the officers in the state trial despite such strong evidence, for a short period the hold of the dominant discourse was broken. Not only did this unleash a massive urban rebellion that began in a black and Latino community, but also one that spread widely in immigrant Central American neighborhoods, among disaffected white and Asian youth, and to numerous other United States cities, in the first national urban rebellion since the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968. While the Rodney King affair and verdict severely undermined the dominant discourse about crime, this discourse soon reasserted itself, with some success, by repeatedly broadcasting a videotape of the beating of white truck driver, Reginald Denny, by a group of black males during the rebellion. Despite this, the dominant discourse on crime had suffered a major blow from the Rodney King incident.

At the beginning of this chapter I pointed out that in the wake of the Los Angeles rebellion, a remarkable role reversal took place, as poor people openly expressed their needs and demanded that they be met. The next chapter takes an in-depth look at one form in which gang members articulated their legitimate grievances and offered plausible solutions.

Chapter Three

Performing Peace: Gang Truce in the 1990s Watts and Beyond

A lasting legacy of the Los Angeles rebellion was the emergence of a series of seemingly impromptu urban festivities that celebrated the truce between heretofore warring Bloods and Crips. The gang truce negotiations began in 1991 soon after the media became saturated with images of Rodney King's beating. An initial truce, which was transformed into an impromptu celebration, occurred on April 27, 1992 at Imperial Courts. The festivities grew in size and intensity after the LA rebellion and lasted until late June when the parties were forcibly dispersed by baton-wielding police officers. Held in city parks and recreation areas at several housing projects in the Watts neighborhood of LA and in the adjacent City of Compton, the parties involved large-scale participation by many subsets of Bloods and Crips street gangs. The festivities were attended by youths active in gangs, as well as tens of thousands of their friends, relatives, neighbors, and supporters from outside the neighborhoods. Although police interference quickly dispersed the festivities, a viable network of activists survived in Watts and Compton, and the movement continued to mature for the next decade. Inspired by the Watts truce, Latino gangs in the greater-LA area initiated their own peace processes in 1992, activities which led to a separate gang truce that lasted from 1993 until 1998 (Hayden, Street Wars 67). By the end of the 1990s gang truce activists, also called "inner-city peacemakers," were found across the United States.[16] Watts and Compton, nationally recognized for its preponderance of gang violence, were now models for the widespread cessation of gang hostilities.

This chapter explores the transformative nature of the gang truce movement. It begins with a discussion of two contrasting scholarly responses to the 1992 Los Angeles events: Malcolm Klein's The American Street Gang: Its Nature, Prevalence, and Control (1993) and Tom Hayden's Street Wars: Gangs and the Future of Violence (2004). Part one then maps the housing projects of Watts and Compton, sites of significant gang truce activism in 1992. Part two discusses the media's contradictory presentation of the truce movement and the ways in which both sides—state and local authorities and the gang truce activists themselves—used media interventions to shape public views. Part three presents a detailed narrative of the gang truce negotiation process and reconstructs an account of the truce performances and rituals in the months of May and June 1992. Here I also look at how some activists used performance to build healing bridges for their community.

The "human ecology model," a paradigm developed by University of Chicago theorists in the mid-twentieth century, dominated the history of gang research. This paradigm viewed gang involvement as a form of adaptation in the face of social disorganization (Vankatesh 2003, 4). Malcolm Klein is perhaps the leading gang research authority of the past generation and the best representative of this approach. Klein's career-long research refutes popular and critical misconceptions that street gangs pattern themselves specifically after traditional organized crime syndicates. Historically, Los Angeles Police Department chiefs have characterized gang youth in inflammatory terms, calling them gangsters, terrorists, or infested vermin who must be exterminated. The Drug Enforcement Agency has also applied drug "cartel thinking to street gangs" (Klein 167). Following this strained logic, in 1988 the California legislature passed the Street Terrorism, Enforcement, and Prevention ACT (STEP). According to STEP guidelines,

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[16] See David Brotherton and Luis Barrios The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation: Street Politics and the Transformation of a New York City Gang.

mere affiliation with a gang is evidence that the person has broken the law. Laws of this nature reduce the burden of proof on prosecutors, who need not prove the commission of a criminal act in order to indict an individual. Guilt is established by association (Hayden, Street Wars 115).

Nevertheless, Klein maintained his stance that gang activity is a deviant social behavior and that gang identity should not be recognized by officials or by researchers. In his view, any form of outreach that "recognizes" gang membership will intensify gang cohesion since "to recognize is to legitimize." Gangs seek status and dignity as self-sufficient units. Programs that support that notion would unnecessarily inflate their self-importance. "To program [with gang members] is to solidify," according to Klein (167). Most disturbing about this line of argument was Klein's reaction to the 1992 truce movement. He argued that this was another form of gang-related activity, one that lent greater credence and legitimacy to gang identity. Klein refused to lend his support to gang truce activities and called for abstention from meetings, sports activities, truce efforts, and other formal outreach programs (150).

In contrast, Tom Hayden, who actively participated in the truce movement, presented a different assessment. Hayden offered several explanations for the proliferation of gang activity in the inner-cities in the mid 1960s. Most scholars cited the spread of the drug trade, immigration, fatherless families, extreme poverty, and social and economic isolation from mainstream society as the origins of present-day gang involvement. Hayden was particularly interested in the political and psychological roots of gang activity. Politically, he singled out two elements: "the failure of the civil rights movement to achieve progress against northern poverty and discrimination, and the decision by the US government to shelve the war on poverty for the war in Vietnam" (16). Psychologically, Hayden pointed to loss of self-esteem as the root-cause of violence. In his view, gang formation is born out of the profound attitude and message of

disrespect with which mainstream society regards impoverished minority youth. Drawing on the writings of Frantz Fanon (1963), James Gilligan (1996), and Franklin Zimring (2000), Hayden argued that the cause of inner-city violence is found in the perpetuation of a "permanent system of humiliation," driving individuals towards self-destructive rage and extreme anger. "The resulting danger is either a civil war within the oppressed self or the oppressed communities, unless there is transformation (39). Suffering communities need an "inner-peace process," which can be achieved with the help of grassroots leaders, and forums where members of the community can air their grievances, offer solutions, and receive respect. However, these efforts cannot succeed unless the broader community offers its social and economic support. Hayden has compared such potentially transformative processes to the kinds of therapeutic counseling offered to rape victims or combat veterans—individuals who have suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome (50).

Hayden's work is based in his personal involvement with the gang truce movement. In Street Wars: Gangs and the Future of Violence he commented on the alternative perspective he gained during the 1992 gang truce movement:

> After the 1992 Los Angeles riots I found myself outside the walls of mainstream perception. While the public was fed images of menacing and inexplicable violence, I was observing an alternative world of gang truces, where, suddenly, Crips and Bloods tied their blue and red rags in knots of peace, Mexican and Salvadoran gangs tried to banish drive-by shootings at about the same time. Many of those who had created the madness were involved in efforts to end it (18-19).

The 1992 truce movement not only became a major inspiration for Hayden, but also encouraged him to initiate similar efforts for more than a decade.

Mapping the 1992 Gang Truce Movement

African-American gangs of Los Angeles are divided loosely into two major territories: East and West sides. The line of demarcation is centered on Main Street, running north-south from downtown Los Angeles to Watts, and is parallel to the Harbor Freeway a mile to the west. Bloods and Crips claim territories on both the east and west sides. Individual subsets of gangs identify themselves by both the name of their affiliation and location, for example, Eastside 42nd Street Gangster Crips.

Although truce parties initially drew participants from throughout the Los Angeles area, truces proved to be more enduring in Watts and adjacent Compton, where treaties were negotiated and maintained between gangs, with the ongoing support of the community and gang truce activists. Illustrating the widespread influence of the truce parties, gatherings were held at public spaces in South Park and South Central proper, almost fifty blocks to the north of Watts. Truces in these neighborhoods did not develop into ongoing semi-institutional processes as they did in Watts and Compton.

The neighborhoods where these truce arrangements persisted were ones where large scale housing projects existed, particularly those adversely affected by government and industry mega projects in transportation, most notably the construction of the Century Freeway. Black studies scholar Cynthia Hamilton has pointed out that the construction of the freeway involved the demolition of thousands of homes in Watts and the forced separation of entire neighborhood arteries, beginning in 1965 and ending in 1994. The infrastructural project is an example of what Hamilton called the "destruction of the community by the state and the economy" (242). As

discussed in chapter two, these fractured neighborhoods received very little of the economic benefits from the large-scale government expenditures in their vicinity.

Unlike Chicago and New York, Los Angeles has few federal housing projects. Los Angeles' housing projects are not large high-rise buildings as their Chicago and New York counterparts, but one and two story complexes with open areas in between rows of apartments covering numerous blocks. Architecturally, the design was supposed to give the appearance of openness and to reduce the frustration and humiliation of boxed units, but living conditions are just as rough as in other housing projects. In Los Angles, the Jordan Downs, Nickerson Gardens, and Imperial Courts projects originally housed the workforce for the assembly line factories that were once the economic foundation of the surrounding areas (Keil 168). Remnants of the federal government's housing initiatives of the 1940s and 1950s, these buildings were three major sites of gang truce parties.

The housing projects also suffered from dilapidated conditions and disrepair. The hostile physical setting provided a social environment conducive to the proliferation of gang activity. Built in 1955 on the southern border of Watts, just north of Imperial Highway east of Central Avenue and west of Avalon Boulevard, Nickerson Gardens consists of one thousand units. The Bounty Hunters, a subset of Bloods, maintain a dominant presence in Nickerson Gardens, going as far as to claim it as the birthplace of the Bloods. For twenty-five years Nickerson Garden residents endured the noise, dust, and debris concomitant with the construction of Century Freeway. Local businesses suffered, school routes for children were disrupted, and shopping was made extremely difficult. Jordan Downs, a public housing project of over five hundred units, was built in the late 1940s. Located about a mile north of Nickerson Gardens and south of Century Boulevard near Watts Towers, Jordan Downs is nestled in a more residential

neighborhood, although an abandoned factory looms over its playing fields. The Grape Street Watts Crips are the dominant gang in Jordan Downs. Imperial Courts is a public housing project built in 1944 on Imperial Highway west of Nickerson Gardens. Underscoring its appearance and association with the PJ Watts Crips, part of the movie Training Day depicting a corrupt Rampart division officer of the LAPD was filmed there. Watts and Compton were "major losers" in the economic transformations that took place throughout southern California from the 1970s to the 1990s, even as the surrounding areas were being infused with investments from Asia (Davis, Quartz 87).

Although they suffered from a dearth of the economic growth experienced by neighboring Lynwood and Carson, frustrations with the social and economic deficits of these areas found a very public voice in the musical genre of gangsta rap. Watts and Compton gained notoriety and nationwide publicity as the self-proclaimed home of Ice-T and NWA (Niggaz With Attitude), rap artists whose lyrics reflected the rampant poverty and crime of these communities. Their songs highlighted the contempt and rage that their communities felt towards a society that blindly ignored their suffering, wrote them off as unfit for the rigors of the new economic realities, and presumed them undeserving of the fruits of the major economic expenditures. Together with other forms of gang communication such as graffiti and street art, gangsta rap was crucial to paving the way for the most widespread and enduring gang truce movements.

Media Coverage of Gang Truce

Gang truce activists were not simply passive objects of a hostile hegemonic media in the aftermath of the 1992 uprising. Many reporters both within mainstream media and even more so within the alternative media sympathized with activists. These media outlets made use of activists' print, visual, and audio narratives to disseminate positive images of the gang truce

movement. In this way the media actually helped facilitate dialogue and promote understanding about the truce movement. Rituals associated with the gang truce movement gained greater publicity and were quickly adopted in several other Los Angeles communities where Bloods and Crips had chapters. Later, such rituals spread among many Latino gangs of West Los Angeles (Hayden, Street Wars 61-85). Some gang truce activists learned about the truce gatherings from television reports. Through television, Bloods and Crips truce leaders called on residents of Watts and Compton to join their movement. Activists also used their own media performances to turn back the gaze of some confrontational mainstream publications. Despite their meager resources, activists benefited from the greater availability of information technology in the early 1990s. Equipment such as video cameras, photocopiers, and fax machines allowed activists to project the internal dynamics of the gang truce movement to a much broader audience and to encourage the adoption of similar truce tactics in cities throughout the country (Zinzun 2001).

An examination of twenty-seven articles in the Los Angeles Times, the New York Times, and several other major dailies published in 1992 reveals that for the most part Los Angeles Times' journalists pursued a balanced stance in their reporting of the truce movement.[17] Despite the supportive coverage in local media, the bulk of the US media ranged from ambivalent to hostile in their treatment of the gang truce events. Even when Los Angeles Times articles were reprinted verbatim in publications like the St. Petersburg Times, headings were altered to convey a more ominous view of the truce movement. For example, an article about the Nickerson Gardens truce party was reprinted from the May 6 1992 Los Angeles Times in St Petersburg Times (A13) on the following day. The Los Angeles Times article offered a generally positive

[17] See JHC Vargas' "The Los Angeles Times' Coverage of the 1992 Rebellion: Still Burning Matters of Race and Justice," for a critical analysis of the Times' narrative of events between April 30 and May 4, 1992. For examples of thoughtful reporting on the gang truce events, see articles by New York Times reporter Seth Mydans, and Los Angeles Times reporters Dunn and Hubler, Price, Ford and Rivera.

view of the Nickerson Gardens truce activists and their internal negotiations, as well as a brief reference to the negative reaction of a police spokesperson at the article's conclusion. The St. Petersburg Times' version was identical with the exception title, "Officials worry that gang truce could mean attacks on police." With a newly-slanted title, the St. Petersburg Times article predisposed its audience to read about the truce movements with skepticism (Officials Worry A13).

The effects of negative press coverage extend beyond the internal dynamics of gang truce activities to the efforts of elected officials and organizational heads to support the truce movement. One such article by Richard Price appeared in USA Today on February 17, 1993 (page A3). The Imperial Courts housing project hosted a major gang truce event in which Congresswoman Maxine Waters and NAACP President Benjamin Chavis participated. In a ritualized ceremony gang members relinquished their weapons in a symbolic "guns for jobs" exchange. The event was reported in USA Today, but with a different slant. The article reported that gang members were arming themselves and threatening another riot.[18] Many newspapers exaggerated the number of gang members in Los Angeles County. One report claiming to cite police figures, suggested that there were 150,000 gang members and nearly 950 gangs in southern California. Klein's research argued that the numbers were in fact much lower (47)

Positive coverage of gang truce was also evident in certain news programs and talk shows. These outlets allowed gang members to sit on panels with mayors, police chiefs, and other political figures. Receiving an unprecedented amount of recognition and even respect, gang members articulated their demands in these forums for better employment and more resources

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[18]See letter of protest by writer and activist Cashear in response to the USA Today published on 1 March 1993 (page 11A).

for training. Oprah Winfrey devoted several shows to the Los Angeles riots and the possible contribution of gang members to the project of rebuilding the city in the aftermath. Ted Koppel's news program "Nightline" gave several gang members the opportunity to respond to Peter Ueberroth, the head of the "Rebuild Los Angeles" project. The highlight of this positive media coverage was when President Clinton invited gang truce members to attend his first presidential inauguration ceremonies in January 1993 in Washington, DC. News of the invitation was widely reported by local and international media. Seth Mydens' report of the event for the New York Times bore the headline: "Crips, Watts, and Clintons: A. Veteran of Gang Wars Tastes Inaugural Glory" (9 January 1993, page A8).

Local media coverage of the gang truce movement involved the strong support of black-owned media outlets such as The Sentinel and KJLH radio.[19] Other alternative media included Pacifica Radio and the LA Weekly, the latter of which has a diverse and multi-ethnic staff and is committed to the ideal of social justice. KJLH's weekly program on the truce movement provided opportunities for many ordinary African-Americans to participate in an ongoing dialogue on the gang truce movement. The program also gave gang members a forum through which they could initiate truce activities in their local communities.

Gang Truce Negotiations and Festivities of 1992: A Stage of Redress

As a reporter for KPFK evening news, I did not appreciate the significance of the festive parties as they were occurring in May and June 1992, though I continued to cover them for my radio station. In June I was involved in defense work for a friend who was severely beaten and

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[19] See Ronald Jacobs' Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society: From Watts to Rodney King for a detailed study of coverage by The Sentinel. See also Phyllis Ann Johnson's unpublished dissertation on KJLH radio's community service coverage of events. Both works demonstrate the special contributions of local black-owned media to the viability of a public sphere dominated by the commercialism of mainstream media.

arrested by LAPD officers while attending a gang truce party. I investigated the LAPD assault at the Jordan Downs housing complex and interviewed witnesses on behalf of the defense attorney. The false charge of assault on a police officer brought against my friend was later dropped. He was released and exonerated, though the physical scars of the beatings, and the financial and emotional burdens of the defense, would hamper his life for another decade. In the process of working for his release I gained a new appreciation for the gang truce movement and the opportunity it provided to participants to learn tough negotiating skills and a positive political identity.[20]

The Sprouting of the Gang Truce Movement

A new form of urban festivity, gang truce parties were comprised of a series of rich improvisatory rituals and ceremonies that symbolized a community's willingness to deal with rapidly changing political situations. Opposition to police brutality in the late 1980s waned as rising crime rates instigated police departments to exercise less restraint. On 4 March 1991, at the end of the US-led war that drove Iraq's military out of Kuwait, two images dominated the

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[20] Initially I reported on the public meetings and political initiatives of the gang truce movement for KPFK radio in 1992. The coverage included interviews with Congresswoman Maxine Waters' gang liaisons; interviews with contacts provided by author Mike Davis and by anti-police brutality activist Michael Zinzun. During that period I also interviewed residents of Jordan Downs as part of the investigation for a criminal trial concerning police brutality at the truce party held on June 17, 1992. Those interviewed, included Tookie and Jim Hightower who have since passed away. From 1993 to 1998 I attended annual rallies that commemorated gang truce and covered these events for KPFK. My work involved taping the presentations by speakers, interviewing the attending audience to sample their responses, interviewing the organizers, inviting activists to the radio station for live programs which included listener call-ins. At T. Rodgers' invitation I also recorded conversations with a group of teenage gang members in his living room for a program on "Criminalization of Youth." During 1994-1998 I was a student and part-time instructor at Cal-State Los Angeles and regularly interacted with Pat Brown Institute's "Gang Youth Bridging Project," publicizing and sponsoring presentations by gang truce activists. I then moved to Evanston in 1998. In spring of 1999 I returned to Los Angeles to participate in a regional conference of gang truce activists and funding agencies. I conducted research as part of a course of study with performance studies scholar and gang ethnographer, Dwight Conquergood. After completing course work I returned to Los Angeles in the summer of 2000 and began meeting regularly with several truce activists. I also videotaped and interviewed numerous participants at the "Globalizing the Streets" Conference at John Jay College in May 2001. Formal interviews are listed in the Works Cited.

broadcast media. One was the hero's welcome given to returning US military personnel honoring them for their protection of Kuwait from a brutal Iraqi army invasion. The other image was taken from grainy home videos footage. The video showed a phalanx of uniformed men and women calmly standing by as four LAPD officers took turns beating Rodney King with batons and then kicking him as he lay on the ground. These television images were interwoven with President George Herbert Walker Bush's proclamations that the United States had reached the end of the "Vietnam syndrome" era.

Public perception of the US military's role in defending the Kuwaitis reframed the way that the Rodney King beating was understood. Through its defense of Kuwait, the United States arrogated to itself a role as defender of the helpless victims of an aggressive bully on an international stage. The moral authority that the US claimed was simultaneously challenged at home in the face of loose canons such as Daryl Gates, the bullying chief of the Los Angeles Police Department, as well as the officers under his command. If the United States military could be dispatched to intervene thousands of miles away, how could the United States government tolerate or condone the same kind of reckless aggression at home? It was a classic case of "breach" in Victor Turner's sense of the stages in a social drama. In one of the many ironies associated with the 1992 rebellion, the end of the Gulf War opened a space for confronting domestic bullying, focused specifically on the excesses of the LAPD.

Between March 4 1991 and April 29 1992, the breach deepened as the public's perception of urban policing in the United States went through several changes. Televised court sessions of the trial of the police officers who had participated in the beating of Rodney King attracted hundreds of thousands of avid followers. Repeated broadcasting of the videotaped beatings brought on more than a short-lived outrage. It opened the floodgates for others who had

been victimized by the abusive LAPD and encouraged the public airing of hundreds of abuse cases. Indeed, as the proceedings continued to be televised, a new space for dialogue among clusters of youth in different Los Angeles neighborhoods took shape. The idea and possibility of gang truce began taking hold among gang youth at this crucial moment. Before this time, there had been little reason for gang members to "go public" with their stories, because there was so little sympathy for them.[21] In the wake of Rodney King's beating, police brutality, all too common in the lives of many gang members, also became visible to a public finally ready to see it.

Warring gangs in Los Angeles, most prominently the Bloods and the Crips, had been engaged in murderous feuds, resulting in hundreds of deaths, some of them in the often-dramatized drive-by shootings, since the 1970s. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, several local therapists and counseling services, including former parole officers, cooperated with the juvenile courts to promote an end to rising hostilities between these two and other warring gangs. The programs were not limited to African-American communities. The Special Services for Groups (SSG), dating back to the Zoot Suit Riots during World War II, worked in predominantly Mexican-American neighborhoods. The SSG described its first decade in the 1940s and '50s as a period when it offered outreach services to 160 gangs in Los Angeles. The organization was the most intensive gang-counseling operation in the United States at the time. SSG social

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[21] See City of Quartz by Mike Davis (303-304) for a discussion of the late 1980s when civil rights organizations in Los Angeles turned away from their traditional watchdog role, some even calling for harsher police methods to suppress gangs. See also Michael Zinzun's interview with Nancy Stein in Social Justice discussing the flood of complaints from abused residents that his small organization received. Also, in a 2002 interview Twilight Bey recalled the widespread practice by LAPD officers of picking up suspected gang members and dropping them off in enemy gang territory.

workers intervened directly in the lives of gang members by helping to resolve the most severe gang problems (California Welfare Social Archives).

Two further initiatives provided the groundwork for the gang truce movement A life-skills workshop called AMER-I-CAN, headed by former football star Jim Brown, was organized to help instill confidence and self-esteem in young urban men. KJLH radio broadcast a weekly radio talk show program entitled "Peace Treaty." Hosted by truce proponents, the show became popular with gang members searching for a way out of the cycle of violence. "Peace Treaty" gave participants in AMER-I-CAN workshops a public outlet by opening its phone lines so listeners could phone in for discussion. Several visible gang truce activists, including Playmate, Jimel Barnes, T. Rogers, Q Bone, and Twilight Bey, have acknowledged the impact of Amer-I-CAN on their own personal development. Others, such as Big Phil and Red, credited KJLH and its truce programs for encouraging them to become truce activists (Jah, Yusuf and Sister Shah'Keyah 30-31, 145, 247). Red, an old gangster (OG) from Hoover, began his involvement and advocacy for truce activity in his neighborhood after hearing a live interview of an old friend from Shotgun Crips and a twenty-year veteran of gang wars on one such radio program:

> [I initiated the truce] believe it or not, [after] listening to KJLH, Stevie Wonder's radio station. He had a program called Peace Treaty that allowed us to come together and talk about changing things. My friend from Shotgun Crips and I had done time together. . . . He was real notorious during his days. For him to come out and stand for peace … I said "I can come out and stand up for peace too." That was like a dare thing to me. I'm from Aliso Village where the Santa Ana Freeway used to come around that bend. . . . When I was young, we used to dare each other: "I dare you to run across there." At any moment a car could have

> been hitting the corner. . . . So when I heard him say that, it was like a dare to me. (Jah and Shah'Keyah 47)

Tom Hayden has written about the 1992 gang truce in Watts as having a "Hidden History." He drew short sketches of several key players in the original gang truce negotiations. The meetings were held at various places, including Jim Brown's private home in the Hollywood Hills, several churches, and a mosque across the street from Nickerson Gardens. Hayden's description of truce activists included profiles of Dewayne Holmes, Tony Perry, and the brothers Aqueela and Daude Sherrells.

The Sherrells brothers asked Tony Perry to draft the first version of a truce agreement based on their meetings. Perry did library research and decided that parallels existed between Jews and Arabs fighting against each other in the Middle East and the inter-gang fights in Watts. Both situations involved "tribal bloodletting. . . . Jews and Arabs were Semitic, they were related . . . and I knew from gang members the same thing, that they were saying, 'man, he's my cousin' about their enemies in another gang" (Hayden, Street Wars 188). Perry based his draft on Ralphe Bunche's 1949 Arab-Israeli Armistice Agreement that influenced his thinking on cease fires and safe corridors as strategies for dealing with conflict over land rights and turf. The document was subsequently edited and revised by Daude Sherrells and Alisunn Walker. Here are similar passages in the two documents:[22]

Feb 24, 1949 Arab-Israeli Armistice Agreement	April 1992 Watts Gang Truce Agreement
The establishment of an armistice between the armed forces of the two parties is accepted as an indispensable step toward the liquidation of armed conflict and the restoration of peace in Palestine	The establishment of a cease-fire between the armed gangs of all parties is accepted as a necessary step toward the renewal of peace in Watts, California

[22] Information for this table was derived from Hayden's Street Wars pp 188-189

No element of the land, sea or air military or paramilitary forces of either parties, including non-regular forces, shall commit any warlike or hostile act against the military or paramilitary forces of the other party	No element of the land drive-by shootings and random slayings of any organization shall commit any warlike or hostile act against the other parties, or against civilians under the influences of that gang

Another participant in these meetings, Dewayne Holmes, later became a professional gang truce advocate, and I will discuss some of his work later in this chapter. Holmes's mother, Teresa Allison, who lived in Imperial Courts, founded Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (MROC), an organization discussed in the next chapter. Following a thunderstorm and a resulting electricity blackout at Imperial Courts in 1991, LAPD police officers killed Holmes's uncle, Henry Pico, execution-style. Shortly thereafter, Holmes became a gang truce activist. Teresa Allison has credited Holmes with attending his first gang truce meeting during his involvement in the protests against the killing of Henry Pico: "Our family was in a lot of pain and he just wanted to stop the war. Sometimes when you lose someone who's so special to you, it helps you make up your mind to do what you should have been doing long ago" (qtd. in Hayden Street Wars 182).

Until this time, serial incidents of rampant rage, gunfights, and periods of imprisonment characterized Dewayne Holmes's life. For Holmes, a fruit tree planted at the spot where Henry Pico was killed served as a symbolic reminder of his own transition from gangbanging to community mobilization. Instead of retaliating violently against the police, he joined those who advocated civil protests. He also credited his new work with Latino members of the neighborhood defense committee who suggested that the Henry Pico Defense Committee should organize as the East Los Angeles Chicano police reform groups had (Hayden, Street Wars 181-182).

Another key player was Aqueela Sherrells, who together with brother Daude from Jordan Downs, were Black Power advocates and protest march organizers. After years of involvement with gangs, both brothers made the transition, as did Holmes, as participants and initiators of gang truce activities. Aqueela attended California State University at Northridge in the San Fernando Valley where he was mentored by John Scott, a Black Studies professor. Later, he contributed time and resources to Jim Brown's Amer-I-Can workshops. Aqueela and Daude orchestrated marches and protests against police brutality at the Jordan Downs housing projects (Hayden 183-184).

According to several accounts, the first gang truce festivity happened on April 26 1992, predating the April 29 riots by only three days. Aqueela and Daude, accompanied by Playmate (Don Gordon) and several other Grape Street Crips from Jordan Downs drove to Imperial Courts to meet with Dewayne Holmes and interested members of the PJ Crips. As crowds gathered around them and tensions rose, Playmate took action. He soothed and refocused the nervous and curious people around him by turning up the music from his van and pulling out a video camera. Tony Bogard, another key player at this crucial moment, called the OGs (old gangsters) present to a meeting inside the gym and away from the crowd. In the intervening time, the younger gang members and neighborhood women started fraternizing and socializing with the visitors outside the gym. When the OGs emerged from their meeting, the crowd was ready to celebrate.

The next day, April 27 1992 saw another seminal step in the truce movement as AMER-I-Can sponsor Jim Brown led interested gang members to a City Council meeting. They planned to lobby members of the City Council for greater resources and employment opportunities for the gang youth. Over 200 people gathered for this meeting, at which both Dewayne Holmes and Aqueela Sherrells addressed the council. This was the first time in their lives that either Holmes

or Sherrells were able to calmly and rationally air their grievances in an official setting. Only two days before the end of the first trial of the LAPD officers gang truce activists called a press conference to declare a moratorium on warfare between the Bloods and Crips in Watts.[23]

Then came April 29 and the outburst against the injustice of the verdict. During the riots, while the city was burning, several hundred residents of Watts and surrounding housing projects took to the streets, holding marches and calling for a gang truce (Holmes personal interview). The parts of Los Angeles where the truce persisted were not universally problem areas during the riots. Five years after the fact, a feature article in the Los Angeles Times reported that during the riots, there were no gang killings and relatively few buildings set on fire in Watts (Hayden 191). The ferocious attacks on passing motorists occurred in single-family residential neighborhoods, in regions where homeowners could afford to maintain green lawns. From this, Los Angeles Times reporters Ashley Dunn and Shawn Hubler concluded that the rioting that erupted after the unexpected verdict of the Rodney King trial had "transcended mere economic despair" (5 July 1992, A1)

Truce Festivities[24]

By mid-May, gang truce parties in the projects had expanded in scope, bringing in gangs from as far away as Long Beach and Santa Ana.[25] My interviews with various participants in the

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[23] See 112th and Central: Through the Eyes of the Children a good documentary film on the initial truce gatherings. During the 10th anniversary events, Anthony H., a coach at Nickerson Gardens' recreational facility bitterly complained about those who "arrived after the fact, but claimed credit for the work others had done."

[24] I use the term festivities here in the sense discussed by Magliocco and Cardaval as the sites of multiple cultural and political negotiations to reflect on past, to bring conflicts into the open and negotiate and perform new identities.

gang truce parties of the last fifteen years suggest that these events were carefully planned and choreographed, with special attention to detail. Many of the key organizers were older gang members weary of perpetual violence who sought alternatives for their children. With the help of several social workers—girlfriends, sisters, and mothers of gang truce activists—truce leaders applied for and received city permits to hold public gatherings and picnics. Food offerings were elaborate, with older gang members again taking a leading role in meal preparations. In some cases, mothers, wives, and local restaurants such as Jordan Café (near Nickerson Gardens) also contributed (Dee, personal interview). The participation and presence of women, older residents, family members, and small children mitigated the potential for tension at these social gatherings. The women in particular helped create a sense of community. While gang truce leaders worked out the details of their agreements, negotiating peace behind closed doors, women representing both the Crips and the Bloods found themselves outside engaging in friendly chats and reducing hostility through familiarity.

The cessation of hostilities encouraged young male and female gang members to seek out one another. Gene R. called it "a feeling of Watts Love" (personal interview). This transformation of violence and hate into amorous relations was interpreted differently by the participants. According to Dee, who put it with a hearty laugh, "Make Love not War" became the new objective of gang truce activists. Dee worked several blocks away from Nickerson Gardens at a local café. She believed sex was a joyful motivation for the truce dialogues. It re-channeled physical energy and helped transgress territorial boundaries (Dee, personal interview).

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[25] See Los Angeles Times reports by Martinez and Young on Latino gang youth truce efforts by Fernando Leon, an activist from the city of Garden Grove in Orange County, who organized weekend-peace summits in Santa Ana parks and a larger summit in August 1992; and Art Romo, another activist, who was arrested by the Drug Enforcement Agency in September 1992; and Bobby Flores, a third prominent member, who died of cancer less than a year later.

T Rodgers had a different interpretation, one in which feelings of revenge still played a part in sexual desire. For him the Watts truce motivation was "to have sex with a member of the opposite rival gangs; for many that's pretty much what their motive was. They hadn't been able to go to a certain project in a number of years, so the truce actually allowed them to go into a rival gang territory and have sex with a woman from a rival gang member" (T Rodgers, personal interview).

Other participants described the gatherings as healing and inspiring. People, who years ago had stabbed or shot one another, now embraced. Families who lived in different housing projects, and had thus been separated for years, were able to reunite and reconnect. "Men who killed each other's brothers shared beer" (Price A3). Many people in the projects who had grown apart during a span of years in separate public housing communities were related to one another, or knew one another from school. Having grown apart because of affiliation with rival gangs, or from living in rival gang territory, it could be said of pre-truce Los Angeles that "gang ties were stronger than family ties" (Gene R, personal interview). Truce parties were thus often distinguishable from family reunions. Rival gang members filled playgrounds and streets by the thousands and ate together. A new, expanded sense of community was affirmed as the sounds of people hugging, crying and swapping high-fives replaced gunfire. T. Rodgers recalled, "the first thing that you would see was smiles. It wasn't a lot of mean-mugging. There wasn't a lot of stare-downs" (personal interview).

Throughout the summer of 1992, Jordan Downs, Nickerson Gardens, and Imperial Courts hosted gang-truce picnics. These parties attracted thousands of black and Latino residents. Compton gang youth soon adopted the trend, organizing and holding dozens of their own gatherings at local parks. Angelo, a Compton truce leader who was affiliated with a subset of

Bloods, recalled how he initiated his own truce gathering. He turned on the television and saw Bloods and Crips calling on Compton to "come get a bar of this." He thought it was a promising idea:

> I chuckled and . . . got on the phone, called a couple of my partners up, and went to the Crips over there in Compton. We got at them about it, and they said they was with it. . . . So we decided to have a press conference in Compton. (Jah and Shah'Keyah 73)

Angelo was able to circumvent bureaucratic procedures with the help of a woman who worked in community services. With her assistance Angelo rapidly received permission from Parks and Recreation Services for a meeting at Willowbrook Park:

> I was scared to death. We put out five thousand flyers, and we sat and we waited. I thought nobody was going to show up. . . . But Big Ed from Fam-Lee said "They're going to come." . . . [N]ext thing I know, that park was full. Compton was there in full force. (Jah and Shah'Keyah 78)

Nearly fifteen hundred Crips and Bloods from around the county converged at the Jordan Downs projects in Los Angeles. They hugged and exchanged tears of joy and grief. Declarations of unity were made that were unthinkable only weeks before (Ford and Rivera). As the walls of territorial gang warfare were razed, families that had been torn apart by gang feuds and territorial zoning of the city were reunited. One gang member talked about not having visited his brother for ten years while living less than a mile apart in a territory belonging to another gang (Ford and Rivera). Another had not seen a cousin in twenty years. Some said they were like little children who could not wait to come home. A 28-year-old gang member brought his two-year-old son to

visit his uncle, a minister, who lived only a mile away. The gang member and his uncle had not seen each other in a decade (Ford and Rivera).

The gang truce parties established new rules for the community. There would be no more drive-by shootings and no more "disrespectin'." These rules were drafted, debated, and voted on in large-scale meetings. Once agreed upon, the guidelines were promulgated through elaborate ceremonies. One such event took place at a recreation center's auditorium at the Imperial Courts Housing Project. Don Gordon (a.k.a. Playmate), a resident of Jordan Downs in Watts, described it:

> During the rebellion, nobody cared if you were a Crip or a Blood. Everybody was straight up together. So after the National Guard left out of the projects, out of the area . . . we sent a message that we were going to roll over there to Imperial Courts, and they gave us the okay to come on. . . . It was scary. . . . [T]here was a little argument that got started. . . . Someone said "Well, there can't be a peace treaty without me saying so." So, what they did was, they got brothers older than me, and put them together. They went in the gym and started talking. . . . Then a whole lot of their females came out, a whole lot of women, and mothers. (Jah and Shah'Keyah 94)

Playmate then described the scene after an agreement was reached between rival gangs:

> When they opened the gym up, it was the most beautiful thing that you could ever see in your life. It was what we had been working for. When they opened the gym up, and our homiez and their homiez came out hugging each other, and kissing each other, all the people started hollering, and everybody just collided …When they came out, everybody just collided. It was on. It was just beautiful.

> Talk about power. Talk about strength. Man, they made a long chain of all hugs and handshakes. (Jah and Shah'keyah 95)

The rituals and results of this new-found solidarity were evident everywhere throughout South Central Los Angeles. One participant told Los Angeles Times reporter Andrea Ford about an encounter he had with another gang member who had shot him ten years earlier: "He was leery. I told the brother he didn't have to be leery" (21 May 1992, A1). Many expressed unity by tying together their blue and red bandanas, clothing symbolic to the Crips and Bloods, respectively. Clearing the atmosphere of fear that had reigned for so long was no small accomplishment for the project residents. It was a time to tell stories, to talk about fears and hopes, and to discuss concerns about future steps. At these affairs, the focus was on letting one's guard down, on not having to watch one's back all the time, in short, to "feel good." (Dee, personal interview)

There was a new feeling of safety among the participants. Once inveterate enemies, members of rival gangs shared meals with each other. A huge spread was laid out at the picnics: pork ribs, barbecued chicken, links, potato salad, baked beans, macaroni and cheese, pizza, soul food, and many different kinds of pies. There was also ice-cold forty-ounce bottles of beer. Participants were charged a small amount for the food.

These changes in attire among the participants expressed the new spirit of friendship. At a typical gang member's funeral, mourners usually wore T-shirts airbrushed with tags such as "rest in peace Shorty." In honor of the gang truce parties, people had designed T-shirts sprayed with messages about truce, peace, and friendship. Some wore T-shirts with the insignias of both the Bloods and the Crips emblazoned on them. Others wore the colors of an opposite gang. Gene R. kept two old T-shirts from the truce parties as mementos. One was black with blue and red lettering and read: "United we stand. Divided we fall. Black men united." It had the image

of two men throwing away their guns and shaking hands. The man in blue was identified as "Cuz" (which is what Crips call each other). The other in red was identified as "Blood" (what Bloods call each other). There was also a 1960s style peace sign in the middle of the T-shirt. On the back was a logo: "Bloods-Crips United." Another T-shirt read: "Brother, soldier, remember our cause. United we stand. Divided we fall. If we don't stand together, it will destroy us all. This you must understand." On the back of the T-shirt was the slogan: "Watts Up!" Former rivals now manufactured new flags of solidarity, linking rags of the three gang colors--red for the Bloods, blue for the Imperial Crips, and purple for the Jordan Crips. (Price, Mydans) Many preferred to hang both blue and red rags from their back pockets (Andrea Ford).

At many large parties a DJ played the appropriate music, mostly oldies, rap, and some Rhythm and Blues. There was dancing when a particularly familiar song was played (Dee, personal interview). DJs had to be attentive to the associations as well as the content of the music they played. Certain artists that were identified with one gang might upset members of other gangs. For example Ice-T was identified as a Crip while DJ Quik was known as a Blood. As a gesture of friendship toward the guests in functions hosted by Bloods, DJ Quik songs were not played, while Crip functions avoided playing Ice-T. In some cases, however, music that was identified with an opposing gang was played as a welcoming gesture.

Often, recent victims of gang violence, or those who had lost a close friend or relative shortly before the truce did not participate in the events. Party participation assumed that everyone in attendance would behave according to the rules, including but not limited to the exclusion of all hostile and confrontational behavior. Each gang set up its own security and monitored the conduct of its own people. "Whenever anybody got out of hand they were escorted off the property until they cooled off" (Holmes, personal interview). This was a time,

as T Rodgers stated in an interview: “to let your guard down, to not worry about your safety, to not have to watch your back all the time” (personal interview). Since the truce party phenomenon was still quite new, participants often were concerned and carried themselves defensively. They did not mingle too widely in the park or in the picnic areas. After a few drinks, and some rounds of weed, they would relax and venture a bit beyond their immediate circles, attempting to break the ice by talking with others.

Conversation topics, like musical selections, were carefully chosen in an effort to avoid the renewal of any antagonisms. People talked about life before the inter-gang warfare had taken hold, rather than about current killings and ongoing feuds. They inquired about old relatives, marriages, and new babies (Dee, personal interview). Many conversations revolved around hopes and aspirations for the future. Maxine Russell talked about her desire to open a day-care center. Anthony Jackson sought a career in construction. Beatrice Clemons wanted to open a soul-food restaurant that she would name after her young brother who had been gunned down the year before. Topics of discussion ranged from the underlying social issues that contributed to gang violence, to joblessness, economic deprivation of neighborhood, police brutality, and of neighborhood cleanup. One person hoped to make “South Central Los Angeles look like Hollywood” (Price). Many talked about work and peace summits. New York Times reporter Seth Mydans wrote that this kind of conversation, engaging hundreds of participants, was seen as the road to resolution, as the only way these tentative truces would not “end up as a hoax” (“Trial and Error”). It is important to note that all of this conviviality and discussion took place under the eyes of three thousand National Guard members who remained in the area after the riots.

Together with intense media scrutiny on Los Angeles during this period, these events and gatherings transformed the character of the truce movement. From May 15 to May 21, 1992, a number of gang members held press conferences and unveiled a ten-page, multi-million-dollar Plan for Economic Revitalization. Former football star Jim Brown, head of the AMER-I-CAN workshops, and thirty members of the Crips and the Bloods, called upon city officials and businessmen to create jobs for unemployed gang members and to include them in their efforts to rebuild the city. Brown and his allies demanded priority in various contracts for rebuilding the city. Another key demand was that the LAPD end its mistreatment of suspects and curtail racial profiling, to end the constant harassment of black drivers, so often told to "get against the wall" (Katz).[26]

Responses to Truce Parties: Suppression and Support

In mid-May 1992, just as the National Guard was pulling out of the city, rumors began circulating that rival gangs were regrouping for a major assault on the LAPD. Scant evidence for such a major accusation existed. An anonymous police officer warned the police of an imminent attack by a coalition of gangs, based on a graffiti that called for an "open season [on] cops" (Katz).

Unfortunately much of the graffiti that appeared in that short period of time was not documented. However, from the few documented cases that remained Susan Phillips concluded that graffiti helped fuel the efforts for unity in 1992. According to her, graffiti went from being "encoded and inward-focused" aimed particularly at internal gang politics, to being overtly

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[26] Also see Michael Zinzun's remarks later in this chapter about how the work on police harassment of gangs left a trail of documents that allowed the ACLU to build a case against racial profiling on all citizens, not only gang members.

political, expressing the gangs' stake in community issues. Phillips reproduced the graffiti that most angered the LAPD containing the following message: "LAPD 187, Tonite 4/30" with "LAPD" crossed out with an X and the number "187," referring to the California penal code on homicide, placed next to it. Over the message appeared the words: "Crips, Bloods, Mexicans Together." According to Phillips:

> [T]he style of the composition marks its author as an older person (probably a Crip, listed first). The angular letters are no longer used by black gangs, and the "X" dotting the letter "I" in the word "Crips" is another rarity today. This is, however, precisely the style of lettering used by black gangs during the 1970s. It would make sense that an older member would write messages to foster more inclusive feelings of unity, linking not only different kinds of black gangs together, but calling for African-Americans and Mexicans to unite as well. (299)

Los Angeles residents expressed mixed reactions to police claims that gangs were using these parties to consolidate, organize, and launch a concentrated assault on the city. Many from outside South Central were also alarmed, fearing that the National Guard's departure, and an easing of police crackdowns on gangs, would encourage lawlessness. If gang warfare transformed into collective political action, would this not give influential gangs and powerful drug dealers free reign in Los Angeles? Church and community activists argued it would not. They maintained that the truce was a sign of hope. In their view, disaffected youth could now become involved in the task of rebuilding Los Angeles (Taylor and Johnson).

Residents of South Central's neighborhoods questioned the police's motivation for portraying the truce as a threat. As one man pointed out, "If the truce continues, the police will be out of a job" (Ford and Rivera). Still others argued that police could not end gang violence; it

was a job for the community itself. "This is not Daryl Gates' city. It's our city," said one gang member, Michael Watt. "We know how to bring gangs to an end, because we started them" (Ford and Rivera A1).

City officials tried to harness the energy that the truce's momentum had created, and this led to a new political discourse. Older gang members were pressed to show they could control their rank-and-file members and negotiate on their behalf with the city. But not all attempts at negotiation with gang members stemmed from altruistic motivations. In "Rethinking the Public Sphere," the philosopher Nancy Fraser has argued that there are moments when "deliberations can serve as a mask for domination" (14). Doubts and hesitations of this nature were typical among politicians who, faced with a new and more politicized grassroots movement, made promises and proposed endless negotiations, in the hope that the young activists would become tired of the arduous process of negotiation and return to the old and violent, if more predictable ways. In hindsight, we can argue that it would have taken much greater support from the community, from the city, and from the state, as well as self-organization and reliance on one's own forces, to build a lasting and successful movement and achieve the goals that were espoused at the gang truce parties.

As noted earlier, Victor Turner had argued that social dramas go through four stages. (1) A breach happens when a social norm is violated, and the fabric of ordinary life ruptures. The videotape of the 1991 beating of Rodney King and the vast media discussion on the subject had constituted one such breach in the social fabric of Los Angeles. (2) A crisis exposes the arbitrary nature of the social fabric and reveals its constructed nature. The not-guilty verdict of the four police officers, which led to the April 1992 uprising, resulted in a social crisis. For many minorities, this episode confirmed the arbitrary nature of the criminal justice system in Los

Angeles. For many whites, the riots showed they were not safe and the LAPD could not be trusted to curtail violence. Thus, the 1992 uprising had threatened the social fabric of American society in multiple ways. (3) A period of crisis can either reabsorb the norms and values of the old order and structure (when possibilities for change are closed), or it can recognize and celebrate a new set of values and social formations imbued with rich, creative, ritual practices and become a stage of redress (Turner 12). Redress is, thus, a liminal stage and a precious time during which cultures can be healed or reproduced. The gang truce festivities can be seen as a redressive stage, when new healing practices were initiated and new rituals created:

- Drive-by shootings were stopped
- For the first time in their lives, gang activists who felt some empathy in the air went public with stories of their lives. They appeared before the City Council, State Legislators, television talk shows, news programs, and even at the White House.
- New rituals such as the "guns for jobs" ceremonies were created, where guns were symbolically exchanged for the promise of future jobs and a better life.
- "Making truce" became a new ritual of the gang culture. It became a form of "dare." Thus, when a gang member from the Shotgun Crips saw his friend from the Hoover Crips initiate a truce, he also decided to take the challenge and prove to the Shotgun Crips that his group could also "do truce."
- Gang truce picnics modeled after family reunions with a large spread of food, music, and dancing were held around many housing projects.
- Efforts to heal the wounds of years of warfare took many forms. A sense of community was created in these subaltern public spheres, where gang activists reclaimed parts of

their lost lives, years that had been taken away from them as a result of the feuds. There was a great deal of crying, of hugging, of exchanging tales about old times

- There was a new set of rules of conduct: There was to be no "disrespectin'," no more stares, not much stare-downs, words were carefully chosen, gestures self-controlled, gang security enforced.
- The old 1960s motto "make love, not war" was another redressive and healing feature of the truce movement. Young men and women who had wistfully observed one another for years across gang divides, in the manner of West Side Story, now felt it was acceptable to transgress territorial boundaries, to walk into another project, and to make love with someone from across the divide.
- These redressive rites were accompanied by audio and visual signs. New graffiti celebrating truce appeared on the streets, while terms that signified hostility between gangs were crossed out or erased from walls. People walked about with red and blue rags and bandanas that were tied together as symbols of friendship among gangs. Truce activists made new T-shirts with signs of peace and friendship and sometimes wore the colors of the opposite gang. Truce parties played the music of an opposite gang.
- Truce parties played the music of a rival gang or stopped playing music of a band identified with their gang.

Activism as Performance

Poetry, theater and rap music have served as healing bridges in the lives of many gang activists. In his autobiography, Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A., Chicano community activist and poet Luis T. Rodriguez described the transforming role of the arts in his

life. As a young member of Lomas in Watts and East Los Angeles, Rodriguez had numerous run-ins with the police while he was in high school. Like many others in his generation, Rodriguez lived through the 1965 Watts rebellion and participated in the anti-Vietnam War Movement. When a few dedicated teachers recognized his talents as a budding artist, poet, and journalist, they helped him escape the tragic fate of many of his homies who never made it to age twenty one. Eventually Rodriguez continued his studies in journalism and literature and became a nationally-recognized poet and journalist. As a community leader, who wrote commentaries on the 1992 Los Angeles rebellion, Rodriguez worked with gang youth and helped to give voice to a new socially-conscious poetry through his publishing project Tia Chucha Press.

Some of the activists in the 1992 gang truce movement were likewise artists who chose to work with gang youth. Two found themselves in the middle of a major scandal because of their work with the Homies Unidos,[27] a predominantly Salvadoran immigrant street organization. Thom Vernon and Rana Raugen started a workshop called ArtsExpand,[28] which encouraged gang members to develop creative expressions of their lives. But ArtsExpand itself became a center of controversy in the Rampart Division Police Scandal after the anti-gang CRASH unit of the LAPD singled out participants in the workshop for harassment. The Rampart Division officers did not deny their policy of harassing gang youth.[29]

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[27] See "Deported: Weasel's Diary" for a program on the relationship between gang youth in El Salvador and the United States.

[28] ArtsExpand is a non-profit theater education program that operates in resource poor community centers. Its goal is to stimulate youth imagination and to bring about a sense of trust and community through the use of theatre games, improvisation, writing and other performance activities. ArtsExpand also conducts workshops at Juvenile Halls in Los Angeles "to foster trust and responsibility among the incarcerated youths" (ArtsExpand Brochure)

[29] See Connie Rice's op-ed piece in the Los Angeles Times. Rice drew parallels between the revelations on Rampart and the harassment of Black Panthers community arts programs in the late 1960s.

Performances of Rap and Hip-Hop greatly inspired the truce movement. Music radicalized and internationalized the movement and often acted as glue, binding diverse communities. Hip-hop encouraged a new discussion of what Tupac Shakur, the legendary hip-hop artist, has called "thug life." Tupac translated the term "thug life" as a subversive acronym: "The hate you gave little infants fucks everyone" (Dyson 115). Hip-hop helped to create an appreciation for the complexity of gang subcultures among youth. It also helped to unify what Toni Morrison has called "the 'others' within the empire":

> Hip-hop is changing the language, although nobody admits it. But that's where the energy comes from. . . . It is a necessity for young people to talk to one another in a language that is not the fake language of the press. That sort of conversation curtails thought altogether. So it is a dialogue." (qtd. in Dyson 116)

William Shaw has documented the ways in which West Coast hip-hop has mobilized young men and women into intense conversations. The lyricism and the poetic conversations have given new meaning to the verb to represent: "To represent is not only to portray something, but also to throw your whole self into doing it" (Shaw 16). Hip-hop also broke down some of the walls of ignorance that barricaded the lives of gang youth. It created an art-form out of the very negative stereotypes that were used to define gang members, terms such as diabolic predators, a favorite term of Los Angeles police chief Daryl Gates. As I will argue in the next chapter, despite the suppression of the initial festivities, gang truce grew into a multifaceted movement throughout the 1990s, where performances and creative presentations of the self became even more pronounced.

Chapter Four

The Gang Truce Movement as a Space for Dialogue and Activism

Following the Los Angeles uprising large numbers of South Central residents became active in their communities. They attended meetings, formed local organizations and clubs, and joined neighborhood-watch groups. Drive-by shootings ceased completely. Negotiations continued on a daily basis throughout southern California in dozens of locations, and the residents themselves undertook major initiatives. The new sense of identity and self-confidence born during this initial period grew into new political and cultural performance skills that had become so evident during the urban protests and festivities. 1992 posed new challenges and undermined much of the hitherto accepted political and cultural discourses on the role and nature of crime, reactions by the police, responses by the court systems, and the impact of the prison system. The new initiatives also questioned the results of the government's macro- and micro-level economic policies. These policies determined California's employment, urban redevelopment, and immigration policies.

This chapter begins with a narrative of the ways that government officials attempted to harness the energy created by the peace initiative or physically interfered to end the truce gatherings. It then turns to the diverse multi-ethnic, multi-ideological character of the gang truce movement in a later phase extending into the late 1990s. It concludes with sketches of several actors and players in the larger gang truce community.

Victor Turner ends his schema of social drama with the notion of reconfiguration, a reestablishment of social hierarchies. The spaces that had opened up in the liminal stage of redress, where new rites were created, closed up again and dominant order was restored. On

June 7, 1992 after the first confrontation between the police and the partygoers, the Tenant Advisory Council at Jordan Downs told city officials that they wanted any agency except the LAPD to respond to 911 calls made from the housing projects, because police officers were often needlessly provocative (Lacey and Hubler). Several people who called the police for minor public nuisances at the truce parties had ended up in confrontations with them. Residents demanded that the Federal Housing Authority police be dispatched instead. They felt that the LAPD had little tolerance and great skepticism for the truce festivities and looked for reasons to shut them down. Gene R. explained how he and many gang activists felt about police reaction:

> To the LAPD the gang truce was an attempt to organize crime on a larger scale. The LAPD used lies and misinformation to attempt to destroy the gang unity. It used violence to break up many truce parties while politicians stood by and watched in silence. I think when drugs and violence run rampant throughout the community the LAPD feeds off of that. They allow it to fester. They want to inflict control and feed off of our weaknesses. They "allow" it to happen. When something positive takes place, like the gang truce, they see it as a threat and attempt to crush it because it is out of their control. (Gene R 2005)

Despite the Resident Council's requests that the LAPD stay out of the Jordan Downs projects, a phalanx of police officers arrived at a truce party there on June 7, soon after the National Guard left the city. Wielding batons and shields, they formed a cordon just outside the playgrounds. They used noise complaints as an excuse to disrupt the gathering and ordered partygoers to leave. After the fact, they also attributed their interference to the amount of liquor on the grounds as well as to a number of drunken bouts on the streets around the project. When both residents and gang members complained that this was a peaceful event, the police turned a deaf

ear. As one eyewitness told reporters, it did not seem to matter that the parties and celebrations were rooted in a desire for peace and that any rowdiness was a lesser evil than the bloodshed that had torn the neighborhood apart.

Residents had planned for days for this event and had intended it to be a "reciprocation" to an earlier party, given by the rival neighborhood of Imperial Courts. "The crowd was munching hot links, ribs, and macaroni and cheese. Children romped, mothers chatted, while many were playing football, baseball, and dominoes" (Lacey and Hubler A1). At around eleven p.m. a helicopter arrived overhead and called on everyone to leave. In response, residents pelted the police with beer bottles and rocks. Someone played the rap group NWA's "Fuck the Police" over a sound system. Officers rushed the crowds brandishing batons and shields. They stormed the barbeques, destroyed the food, and clubbed the participants indiscriminately. Gene R. recalled: "People didn't like getting hit, so they fought back. All I saw was shields and helmets and billy clubs" (Gene R 1998).

In 1992 I interviewed Tookie, the DJ for this event, for a court case. He had been unable to testify as a witness because of an outstanding arrest warrant for non-payment of a traffic ticket. Tookie described the scene of the exit from the party: There was a cordon lined on both sides with police officers holding batons and relentlessly beating the party-goers. Going through the cordon, with batons smashing over his head, he felt he was transported back to the Confederate South. It made him see what it must have felt to live in the days of slavery. Another participant who wished to remain anonymous recalled how the police broke up the truce parties:

> Around eleven a line of cop cars started pulling in. They surrounded the playground where we were all partying. Two helicopters were flying overhead.

> They got on the loudspeaker and told us to leave, that we were disturbing the peace. I mean we were making peace. I put on "Fuck the Police" and turned up the volume. People started throwing bottles and shit at the cops. Around midnight we started to leave. A line of cops were standing at the gate with their batons. There was no way out, this was the only exit. And they were beating everyone with their batons. You had to go through that line and there was no way to avoid it. My cousin was ahead of me and I saw the cops beat the hell out of him. I told one of the cops I had my equipment there and needed to pack it up and take it with me. He just hit me in the face with his stick. I raised my arms to cover my face and he hit me again. So I hit him back. [Demonstrates how.] I had about four or five of them turning on me. They kept hitting and pushing me to the ground. I ran and fell in the sand. One cop got on top of me and kept pushing my face into the sand until I passed out.

Despite the police crackdowns, residents of the projects backed the truce participants. Ed Turley, a youth gang services counselor told the Los Angeles Times reporter, Jesse Katz, that the gang truce process was "phenomenal and should not be challenged by police muscle." Martha Clark, a member of the Jordan Downs Resident Management Corporation also told the Los Angeles Times that she saw the parties as a way of "uniting and trying to get along with our neighbors. Even if it is loud, I'd much rather have them doing this than going out and killing each other" (qtd. in Ford and Rivera A1).

By the end of June 1992, the LAPD had carried out several large-scale assaults on gang truce parties. Complaints against the LAPD's heavy-handed actions were dismissed citing the parties as a nuisance (loud music, revelers throwing beer bottles at the police). After that, gang

truce parties were effectively ended. Truce activists continued in many other forms, including rallies, demonstrations, commemorations, church meetings, and new cooperative participatory events. The end of the gang truce festivities marked the beginning of a new era for the truce movement. It opened the doors to outreach activities from sectors of society that had heretofore avoided working with gang youth. But it also helped solidify anti-gang initiatives and legislation, such as the Three Strikes laws, that enacted even more draconian repressive measures. (See also discussion of Proposition 21 in the section on Bloodhound at the end of this chapter).

The liminal experience of the truce parties had offered a rare opportunity for self-reflexivity and self-creation and led to personal changes in the lives of some individuals who moved away from gang-banging. Some of the original truce organizers became community activists and worked closely with the youth. Many of the women activists turned to organizing other black women in South Central. They monitored police abuse and oversaw court proceedings. This will be the focus of the following chapter. A number of non-profit cooperative organizations were formed to build self-esteem among gang members and to promote job training. As one participant pointed out:

> When the truce was initiated, it wasn't really a top-down situation here in this area; it was like a bottom-up. It was the youngsters who were saying, "Wait a minute, we're out here doing all of this killing, y'all used to be out there doing it, but we're going to stop it." In Watts it was basically a top-down and bottom-up situation, where both levels have played a major role. (Angelo, in Jah 78)

Truce efforts received some backing from such liberal politicians as Congresswoman Maxine Waters and State Senator Tom Hayden, who joined the dialogues. Many middle-class

community activists, who had previously shunned gang members and ignored the epidemic of police brutality and economic devastation of South Central neighborhoods, also joined the debates. Both Waters and Hayden set up liaison offices and held daily conferences with OGs and the younger neighborhood leaders. Compton's mayor at the time also worked closely with gang members to develop an economic revitalization program. These meetings resulted in the publication of an alternative "Rebuild Los Angeles" document, a development plan that called for the creation of jobs, the revitalization of city areas, and support for gang members who hoped to start new businesses [30]

Tom Hayden, who represented a district that contained liberal Santa Monica, became a consistent gang truce activist throughout the 1990s. He worked at the grassroots, legislative and policy levels, as well as the electoral and strategic levels.[31] He campaigned for the modification of the Three Strikes legislation so that the third strike was defined as "a violent act, not for a simple criminal act like check forging or stealing a sweater, or stealing a pizza." He argued that California was home to the biggest prison buildings in the world and that the state was institutionalizing a system of preventative detention that relied heavily on incarcerating black youth. Hayden spoke at a 1999 city-wide gang truce meeting, which I attended, and provided the following facts:

- A quarter of a million people were imprisoned in the state of California.
- Three-quarters of them were identified by the authorities as gang members.

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[30] Reprinted in Why L.A. Happened: Implications of the '92 Los Angeles Rebellion, edited by Haki R Madhubuti

[31] Quotes from Hayden are from his public lectures and from personal interviews. I interviewed Hayden for KPFK news throughout the 1990s and later attended his presentations and spoke with him while researching this dissertation.

- Three-quarters of them were blacks and Latinos.
- With the Three Strikes law, the average age was early 20s and getting older.
- Of those serving life sentences in California twenty-five percent were already third strikers.
- Two-thirds of those given life sentences were convicted of a drug or property offense, not a violent crime.[32]

Hayden rejected the designation of inner-city youth as hopeless. The middle classes and the media had been manipulated and lulled into believing that inner city youth were beyond redemption, that they were hopeless misfits. Hayden hired several former gang members on his staff and worked closely with a network of community violence prevention activists throughout Los Angeles. While serving as a California state representative of a district, which included Santa Monica and Venice, he also invited several architects of the truce movement to testify before state legislature in Sacramento.

Hayden constantly helped to rejuvenate a multidimensional gang truce movement in a city segregated by race, class, and ethnicity. For this work he often relied on inner city neighborhood organizers. But he also tried to build more than just a peace movement, insisting that: "Unless we start justice, we'll never stop violence. If we can try to do it in foreign policy, there is no reason why we can't do it in the inner city" (Hayden, personal interview).

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[32] See Chicago Tribune's editorial on December 13, 2001 on examples of cruel and unusual punishment resulting from Three Strikes laws: A thirty seven-year-old Leonardo Andrade was sentenced to a minimum fifty-year prison term with no possibility of parole for stealing videotapes from K-Mart. A twenty-five-year old man was sentenced to life in prison for stealing a slice of pizza. Another man was convicted of three separate crimes for stealing a $200 truck with two bicycles in the back. Fifty-seven percent of those in prison on Three Strikes laws were not convicted of a violent crime.

Figure 4.1: Signs of Peace (adapted from photos in Jah and Shah'Keyah)

The Diversity of the Gang Truce Movement

Although in 1992 a vast majority of gang truce events were organized by gang members, in the decade that followed the character of the movement changed considerably.[33] Soon, gang truce activists came from all walks of life and a number of religious and secular ideologies influenced them. As I will demonstrate below, there were a wide range of differences within the movement with regard to ethnic and educational background, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and artistic ambitions. The gang truce movement was composed of both those who had direct experience as gang members and those who joined the movement in an expression of solidarity, and was a diverse movement:

(1) Ethnic Background. Although most activists in the 1992 events were blacks and Latinos, there were others who helped to orchestrate the truce, including Korean labor activists, other Asian Americans, South and Central Americans, and Middle Easterners. However, some of the individuals that I worked with did not easily fit into any of the above single categories. One of my key sources, Bloodhound, was born in Switzerland, to a working class interracial family. His mother was Jamaican and he was later raised by a Belizean othermother in South Los Angeles (See discussion of the term "othermother" in next chapter).

(2) Age Differentiation. Many of the activists were only fourteen or fifteen years old, both girls and boys. Some of them were top students in their classes. Others were adults, both women and men, mostly family members of gang youth or individuals who had been gang members in their youth.

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[33] See Juan Esteva's "Urban Street Activists: Gang and Community Efforts to Bring Peace and Justice to Los Angeles Neighborhoods."

(3) Educational Background. Most gang activists who joined the truce movements had a limited formal education. Others had been gang members in their youth and later became social workers. Still others were political activists or academic scholars who participated in shaping the truce.[34] Many of the gang members in the truce movement were interested in international issues. They paid close attention to national liberation struggles in Third World countries and familiarized themselves with the processes of negotiation and political inclusion that other outlawed organizations followed. They examined and discussed the 1950s Mau Mau movement in Kenya, the Zapatista Movement of the indigenous people of Chiapas, Mexico, the anti-globalization protests, and the 1990s' environmental movement. In the late 1990s the space created by a massive anti-globalization movement became a meeting place for a new generation of gang youth and supporters of the truce movement. Some truce activists were also involved in the movement called "environmental racism," often closely related to a specific grassroots initiative at a particular site in an immigrant community.

(4) Religious and Ideological Affiliations. The gang truce movement was multi-ideological, multi-religious, and ecumenical. Gang members of the truce movement held varied affiliations and worked with Catholic priests, Methodist ministers, Presbyterian ministers, Muslim clerics, Jewish rabbis, and Santeria practitioners--the latter worked with the predominantly Dominican Latin Kings in New York. The largest gang intervention program in the United States is headed by a catholic priest in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of East Los

[34] See dissertations on girl gangs in southern California by Marie Miranda and Lisa Dietrich. Also see www.streetgangs.com, an extensive ongoing internet site and blogger community developed by Alex Alonso while working on his graduate degree at USC.

Angeles, Father Greg Boyle, also known as G-dog. His remarkable work in creating a support center for gang youth has been documented by Celeste Fremont in G-dog and The Homeboys

Gang activists also befriended others with internationalist and socialist tendencies. Kwame Toure's (Stokeley Carmichael) and Ron Karenga's organizations, as well as dozens of others usually known as "nationalist" organizations, were active in this movement and gained adherents. A wide range of Marxist organizations also participated in the gang truce movement and found great interest in revolutionary thought.

(5) Activism or Intellectualism: The gang truce movement gave birth to a generation of "organic intellectuals," inmates from the dark hellholes of prisons across the country who became thinkers.[35] Both male and female inmates used their time in prison to read and learn about theory and current political developments, as well as to engage in critical discourses on criminology. Some of the prisoners with whom I corresponded, such as X-felon, are currently serving long sentences in detention. They write to other prisoners, share their lyrics, and help raise other prisoners' consciousnesses about the unbearable conditions of life for gang members both inside and outside of the prison system.

X-Felon, who remains in a federal penitentiary in California, wrote the lyrics to a song called "Generation Lockdown." This is a term that is used in hip-hop and rap lyrics to speak of the madness that has characterized our era, the incarceration of a whole generation of black and Latina/o youth in United States prisons. He wrote:

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[35] I was privileged to witness the maturation of several such organic intellectuals --a term coined by Antonio Gramsci (Modern Prince). While working with a Chicago-based national prisoner correspondence campaign in 1999 and 2000, I helped produce a selection of letters written by prisoners to News and Letters Committees. For a seminar in ethnography at Northwestern University I produced a "glossary of terms" to reflect the richness of the oppositional lexicon prisoners developed in order to subvert the meanings of terms that violated them.

> How do you measure the caging of an entire generation? Certainly not with mere numbers. Statistics don't begin to tell the full story of the tragic intersection of the Hip Hop generation, and the American prison system. Cold figures—crime rates, homicide numbers, arrest statistics—cannot reflect the pain of a generation eroded by imprisonment, the minds bent, the spirits shattered. (Letter, summer 1999)

(6) Issues of Sexuality. Both the reproductive rights and the gay and lesbian rights movements have influenced gang youth who became politically active in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The 1992 rebellion occurred at a time when the Clinic Defense movement was gaining strength. This was also the height of the ACT UP movement in Los Angeles, when gay and lesbian activists started to bring public awareness to the AIDS epidemic. Gay activists regularly participated in open-street direct action throughout the early 1990s.

On April 29, 1992 Gay Men and Lesbians of West Hollywood were among the first to go to the streets to protest the verdict. A chronology of events of April 29 to May 2 1992 in the LA Weekly, reported on a street protest march by 200 gay and lesbians led by the mayor of West Hollywood. After crossing the boundary of West Hollywood and Los Angeles, this group was prevented from marching by LAPD riot police (Inside the L.A. Riots 35).[36] One example of the collaborative efforts between gay and lesbian activists and gang truce activists can be seen in an event organized on May 16, 1993 (Peace LA: The Poetics of Gang Truce). Thus, the movement traversed many dimensions of society, gang members and non-members, young and old, workers and intellectuals, straight and gay, religious and secular, radical and conservative, mothers and

[36] Carol Boyce Davis has argued that the rebellion was an international phenomenon in that it became the impetus for new outpouring of "uprising textualities." This is developed in the next chapter.

aunts, artists, university professors, parole officers, social counselors, and former police officers, and even included a current assistant District Attorney in New York City.[37]

As new legislation and the police increasingly closed off public spaces for gang youth, alternative counter-public spheres were developed. Activism took place in a variety of forms: organizing the neighborhood, city-wide regular meetings for negotiations, community centers where gang members developed skills, national and international conferences, not to mention the Internet websites that caused much consternation in the courts. This movement, with its meager resources, relied on its intelligence to both maintain and conceal itself. While it conducted internal, tactical negotiations with various gang members, it also faced a relentless campaign of repression by the criminal justice system that categorized gang youth as simply criminals. The same authorities also ridiculed scholars and activists for approaching gang youth with empathy and concern. Efforts to present a more balanced account of gang youth often met with politicians' furious resistance. An international conference at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York in May 2001 so angered Mayor Rudolph Giuliani that his spokesperson attacked the organizers and the sympathetic faculty members. In an interview I conducted with Hector Torres of the Latin Kings, he responded:

> Seems like Mayor Giuliani, doesn't want me at this conference. Looking at the newspaper this morning, I see him saying "what is Hector Torres doing at John Jay?" You know Mayor Giuliani; it is because this is a school. But you are too stupid to understand that. (Torres, 2001)

[37] During one panel at the Globalizing the Streets Conference in New York in 2001, an Assistant District Attorney was awarded a certificate of appreciation by gang truce activists for her support of their initiatives.

At "Globalizing the Streets," researchers, journalists, activists, social workers, and gang youth alike presented papers and talks and engaged in genuine discussions and deliberations for several days.[38] What angered Torres was the total lack of understanding by officials that the conference was a historic event.

Portraits of Actors and Players in the Gang Truce Movement

During the 1990s as I covered the gang truce movement as a reporter and later while working on this dissertation, I routinely met with individuals who had played an important role in the gang truce movement, including Michael Zinzun, T. Rodgers, Dewayne Holmes, Manuel Lares, and Bloodhound (Toni S). I also participated in events and activities of several organizations such as Unity One, Communities in Support of Gang Truce, and the Gang Violence Bridging Project, institutions that played a critical role at this juncture. These conversations took place at homes, restaurants, protest rallies, on air at the radio station, and in public meetings and conferences.

Michael Zinzun and the Coalition against Police Abuse[39]

> We can't look at the Gang Truce mechanically; we have to see it in relationship to confronting capitalism.

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[38] See Brotherton et al Gangs and Society: Alternative Perspectives for some of the papers presented at the conference. See especially the essay by Esteva-Martinez on the Los Angeles gang truce activists.

[39] I interviewed Zinzun several times for this dissertation between Summer of 2000 and Summer of 2006 when he passed away. We met at the offices of Coalition Against Police Abuse, at his house in South Pasadena, and at a café near his house in Pasadena. I also videotaped Zinzun's presentation at the conference entitled "Globalizing the Streets" in New York in 2001.

One of the key participants in the gang truce movement was Michael Zinzun, who founded the Coalition Against Police Abuse (CAPA). With damage award monies he received from a lawsuit against police officers who blinded him in one eye, Zinzun established an office to process claims of police abuse on Western Avenue near Adams Boulevard. Anna Deavere Smith included a sketch character of Zinzun in her Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992. In the 1994 book version of her play, Smith performs Zinzun telling the horrifying story of his beating by several police officers in 1988. She captured this chilling account with Zinzun's signature tone of anger, mockery, and humor, one that also conveyed his warmth of character. Smith also provided a vivid account of Zinzun's offices which were a gathering place for the truce activists. (16)

On April 29, 1992, Zinzun was protesting in front of the Parker Center, LAPD's headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. After the Rodney King verdict was announced, hundreds of protesters went to Parker Center to show their outrage. Zinzun held a bullhorn and encouraged the demonstrators to "keep the line moving" to prevent provocative attacks by LAPD officers (Hazen, Inside the LA Riots 35). In the following weeks, Zinzun was active in many gang truce negotiations, as they began crisscrossing several major cities, from Los Angeles and New York, to Philadelphia and Chicago.

The CAPA building on Western Avenue is a one-story storefront. The anti-Apartheid movement was headquartered at this location for several years. More recently, the Black Radical Congress and the anti-police abuse coalitions have held their meetings there. When I went to visit Zinzun in 2000 he was typing his statement for a press conference scheduled at the upcoming rallies that coincided with the Democratic National Convention. Across the hall a

video documentary production workshop was in session. He showed me CAPA's video archives that contained documentations of the gang truce events.

Zinzun saw his work as both a break from, and a continuation of, the civil rights struggles and the Black Power movement of the 1960s. His formative experiences developed during the 1960s when he was a member of the Black Panthers Party. This might explain why CAPA was geared partly towards radical political activism. With the rise of the Crips and the Bloods in Los Angeles, Zinzun began utilizing his organizational and political skills to bring people together to explore a number of community issues and conflicts. They discussed police abuse, welfare policies, activism on campuses, and unemployment due to economic restructuring (fig. 3.2). In the summer of 1992 Zinzun worked closely with Watts and Compton gang activists who suddenly found themselves players in the national and international arenas.

CAPA helped create the non-profit organization Community in Support of Gang Truce, which brought together gang members who negotiated an activist agenda. It was very difficult to get people to speak with one voice, but Zinzun had earlier experiences with radical youth, including Iranian students, that he could draw upon. He recalled with great amusement the squabbling Iranian student movement against the Pahlavi monarchy in the 1970s. There were so many tendencies, and so much internal strife, that participants could not agree on a single speaker for any event. Zinzun recalled how he would send them into a room to fight it out. While discussing some of the younger gang truce activists with whom we had both worked, Zinzun again spoke with loving concern about them and the tremendous challenge that young gang members faced when they chose to become political activists. It was not only "to pull others," but also to make sure that "you did not get yourself killed," he told me. Often as gang members moved toward political activism, they became isolated from their former friends:

"Your aspirations are now different, but you still have to deal with the home boys, who say we 'do or die.' All of a sudden, you begin going in a different direction. Some go to church; others go to jail. Some turn to kids and family."

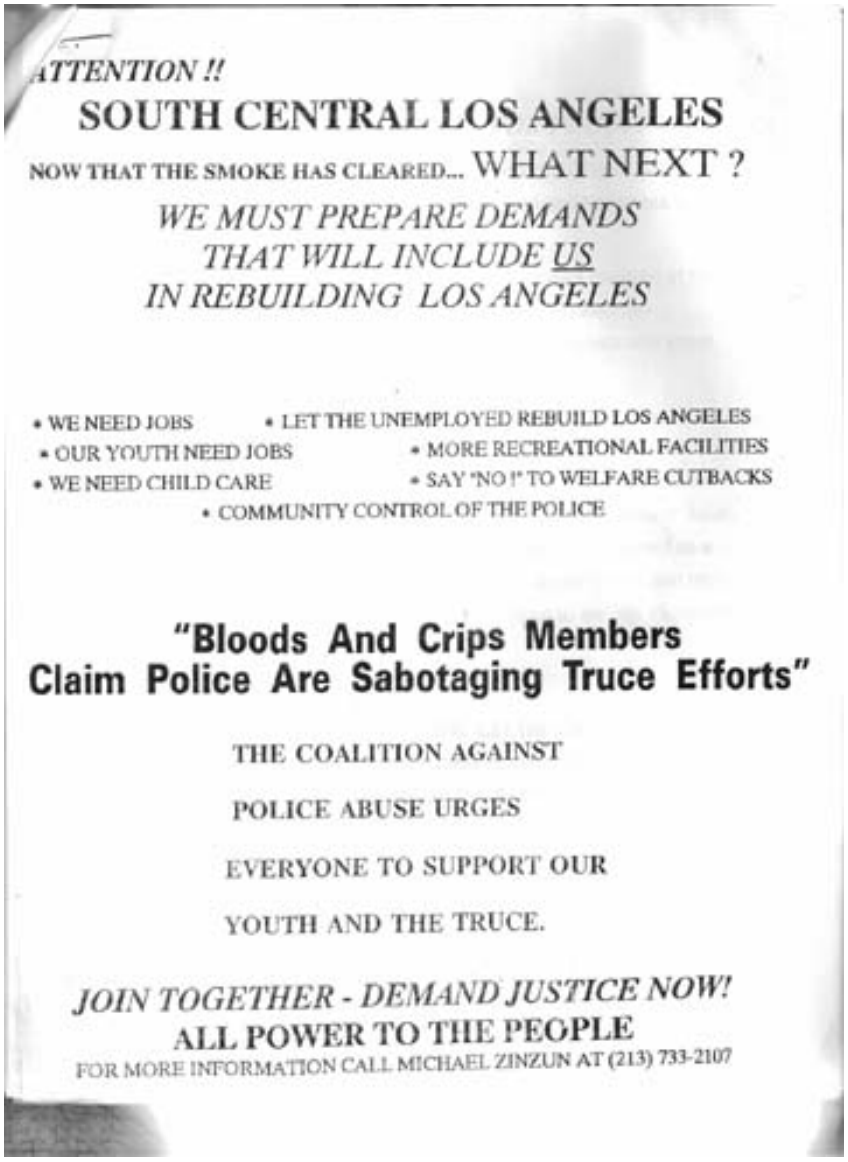

Figure 4.2: Flyer for one of the meetings sponsored by Michael Zinzun

It is often assumed that gang truce activists are highly localized and that gang members are confined to a narrow turf and territory. Zinzun pointed out that the dialogue in CAPA

covered several Western European and Latin American countries, as well as the Caribbean Islands. These international links were created through connections with activist researchers and immigrant gang members who had helped create these networks of support and bonds of solidarity. Zinzun worked with gang truce activists in Sao Paolo and the favellas [hillside slums] in Rio de Janeiro: "Exciting connections are being made, which are in part due to society's estrangement from young people."[40] These connections are essential in response to gang truce activists in Europe. In France, gangs included immigrants from Africa and were influenced by rap music from the United States. In England, chapters of both the Crips and the Bloods were active. The truce movement drew these diverse groups together. (Zinzun, personal interview)

Zinzun showed that the local, national, and international dimensions of the truce movement were intertwined. Gang youth who represented their neighborhoods found an affinity with national and international aspects of the struggle for freedom when they moved towards activism. "If you don't understand this relationship, you're not going to see the various . . . stages of cognition and recognition through which gang members change and become new persons." Zinzun described the gang truce movement as a loose-knit, multi-structured, and multi-faceted entity:

> There are tugs and pulls--people bringing different agendas. First, the ones who are there to get funded, who therefore feel that they have to tow the line. In part, it is mandatory. It is how social service jobs are funded. Some of those programs help teach urban life management skills. Second, there is a huge religious

[40] See JHC Vargas' essay "The Inner City and The Favella: Transnational Black Politics" for the exciting cooperation among gang truce activists in Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro. See also Catching Hell in the City of Angels: Life and Meaning of Blackness in South Central Los Angeles (2006), where Vargas analyzes some of this political activist work as an uneasy alliance of divergent tendencies of "self-help" and "social critique" in Community in Support of Gang Truce.

> movement that tries to swing people into non-confrontational modes. The Muslims have a strong presence, with everyone as either gods or devils. Third, the politicians who get involved only when they need you to register to vote, who want everyone to become a Democratic Party member. Fourth, the "damn motherfuckers" who see a truce and are probably thinking they can use it for drug dealing, or who don't want to be left out. Fifth, political activists, who are very diverse and often unconnected. Finally, there is a new exciting dynamic that has swept a lot of people, and that is rap music, which expresses a rejection of so much in the existing society; "fuck all this shit."

When I asked Zinzun about where the truce movement might be headed, he said we need to look beyond the present motivations of some participants, be they "money, religion, or fame and glory." He also warned about allegations that the LAPD encouraged gang wars and attempted to undermine the truce movement: "It's the nature of capitalism, just like it tries to undermine unions," he said. "It wasn't very hard to do when dealing with rinky dinky LA gangs".

Zinzun hoped the movement would address the unresolved questions that haunted whites and blacks in the United States:

> The worst thing they were afraid of was everyone talking about resolving the unresolved black question. Where do 23 million black descendants of slavery fit into the U.S. in this day and age? The Civil War didn't resolve it. Civil rights legislation hasn't resolved it either.

Zinzun regarded his experiences of the 1960s as profoundly liberating. Self-hatred was transformed into self-love. Blacks became more conscious of their African heritage and the black churches helped develop a new and more engaging theory of liberation:

> During the 1960s, we harbored tremendous self-hatred. With the emergence of the concept of "Black is Beautiful" in the 1960s, there was a period of transition. Young people were looking for a way out, begging for a way out, with pride, with their manners still with them. That was not a smooth transition, but we went from hating each other to loving each other, apologizing to each other. There was also a dynamic relationship to Africa. There was a two-way road that affected us. The sermons in churches in the U.S. about what it means to be black helped change conditions there.

Zinzun's organization, CAPA, reached out to gang members, helped them know their rights, and involved them in defending those rights and demanding more rights. Both Crips and Bloods participated in these events. They worked with each other on how to confront the police and exchanged stories of police abuse. A natural relationship developed from there.

Gang members now prodded CAPA activists to do more about the racist laws and the broad criminalization of youth taking place in California.[41] Many gang youth were forced into the underground economy because they had police records that prevented them from getting jobs. A person who was convicted for committing a crime could arrange to have his or her records expunged. But a person who was arrested, booked, and fingerprinted on suspicion that he or she carried or sold drugs, or had been involved in a robbery, could not clear his/her record, even if that person was released without any convictions. The information stayed on the police record even if the person had never committed another crime. CAPA tried to change this situation. CAPA also demanded an end to racial profiling in all its appearances, and not just by

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[41] See Dwight Conquergood's "The Power of Symbols"; and "Street Literacy" where he addressed the repression of gang youth creativity through gang loitering laws passed in Chicago in the aftermath of the Los Angeles rebellion.

the police. In the 1990s there had been an alarming rise in the number of complaints that CAPA received. Many individuals were stalked by the police. Others filed complaints because their children were subjected to racist attacks. Still others were gunned down by the police. CAPA helped formulate and push forward these demands and was therefore an important contributor to the gang truce movement.

T. Rodgers and Sidewalk University

"I'm truly your worst nightmare. . . ."

T. Rodgers, personal interview, New York

At the conference at John Jay College, T. Rodgers was the last person to speak on the panel entitled, "Street Soldiers and/or Street Activists." He blasted the conference organizers for formally inviting him, but not paying for his air travel and hotel costs. Rodgers had brought a group of young gang members from New York City with him. These young bloods[42] stood at the doorway with bandanas that covered their faces. There were about one hundred people in the room: students, scholars, activists, and even an assistant District Attorney. Rodgers walked back and forth, spewing out his anger, cursing the audience for disrespecting him, for "crucifying the youth," for not understanding. He continued to praise the gang youth who stood at the door as "the only uncut, untouched, unpolluted, un-paid off, un-bribed . . . un-American . . . natural resources that America has." He mocked the conference's keynote speaker by saying, "You can't love and teach something you don't understand." Rodgers was both confrontational and disrespectful. He told the audience that they were clueless about the really important things that were happening in the hallways.

[42] Calling one a "blood" is a term of endearment, as if saying that the person is close kin, family.

Rodgers is not always this rude to his audiences. This was a performance: “I practice a dramatic approach to education. Rap, rhyme and straight talk have all become powerful tools for me to inspire others—not only with words, but also with action," he told me later. He is often known as “Pops” to the younger kids who look up to him as a respected old gangster. He revels in presenting himself as a “godfather” figure. Rodgers is an actor who takes the role of mentoring the young gang members very seriously. He lectures everywhere: in the classrooms, on the streets, and at penitentiaries. He comes across—and sometimes is—arrogant, until you get to know him better. He is a hustler who is also an intellectual of the streets. He works very hard to create a more humane, counter-public sphere.

Before the Los Angeles rebellion, Rodgers worked with the AMER-I-CAN program, teaching urban life skills and talking to prison and school officials about ways of dealing with gang youth. After the rebellion, he worked for the rap singer Ice-T., the community service organization Hands Across Watts, and South Central Love. He has published a number of essays and has also been a performer/actor in several movies. He is featured in Jah and Shah’Keyah’s Uprising, a book of interviews with Los Angeles gang truce activists.

T. Rodgers moved from Chicago to Los Angeles in the late 1960s. He formed a branch of the Blackstone Rangers, a community-based organization that covered five different parks. In 1970 he was involved in a major confrontation with the police. Soon he found himself on a list of “Most Wanted Gang Leaders.” He has been shot and stabbed numerous times and loves to say that he has had more fights than Mike Tyson, though he has not been paid for any of them. I first met Rodgers at a protest against the criminalization of youth and the 1995 Federal Crime Bill. The event was held at Leimert Park, on a sunny afternoon in the heart of the predominantly African-American Crenshaw District. The neighborhood was better off economically than South

Central. There were many new stores, art galleries, clothing stores, a jazz café, and a hip-hop club. We spoke briefly about the continuing challenges faced by the original participants in the gang truce agreements of 1992. I asked him if he could arrange a meeting with gang youth to discuss their experiences with police harassment. He gave me his card and asked me to call him at home. His business card introduced him as: "T. Rodgers, CEO, Sidewalk University." In a classic example of signifying, T. Rodgers half-jokingly and half-seriously calls himself a "Gangologist," a person who has studied "Streetology" and has received his "Ph.G." in this field and is president and CEO of Sidewalk University (Fifty Questions 133).

Rodgers called a few days later and invited me to a meeting at his apartment. He lived at the foot of Baldwin Hills near La Cienega Avenue, close to a pan-African bookstore I sometimes visited. I took my tape recorder and microphone and went to his apartment. That afternoon in his apartment I recorded a conversation with four youth about the daily harassment they received from the LAPD. In all of the described incidents, they had been humiliated or physically attacked without apparent cause. Then their names were added to the computerized database of gang members that the LAPD (and the federal government) compiled. For these young men, membership in a youth group was natural. One of the youth, who accompanied me back to my car, made a parting remark. Gangs, he told me, were a basic form of human interaction in all societies.

After that day, I spoke with Rodgers on the phone on several occasions, but we did not see each other again until May 2, 2001 in New York. I ran into him in the hallway after that vigorous performance at John Jay College, where he had alienated some of the audience members. He asked me if I would help edit some of his writings that he hoped to publish as a small booklet. I agreed and I received a package that contained the transcript of "Everything

You Always Wanted to Know about Gangs But Were Afraid to Ask."[43] This was one of his contributions to the gang truce movement, in an attempt to shed light on the inner forces shaping a gang member's identity. T Rodgers is author of a new 180-page book in which he has painstakingly explained why young people join gangs and how their parents and educators can pull them out of gang activity. The book's cover identifies the author as T Rodgers, PhG, President of Sidewalk University. The book's title, Fifty Most Asked Questions About Gangs, and T Rodgers' self-created institutional affiliation indicate that he does in fact want recognition as an intellectual, a possibility that was initially closed off to him due to his lack of a formal education, but that has now become possible after publication of his original and highly readable book. T Rodgers' manner of oratory at the John Jay College conference, his confrontational and almost rude behavior towards the audience, which he was accused of great ignorance, can be classified as a form of "refusal" and resistance. T Rodgers refused to participate in the conventional discursive practices of the academic/intellectual world, yet his many lectures and new publication show he was not entirely against intellectual respectability.

Dewayne Holmes and FACES (Focusing on And Creating Ethnic Solidarity)

> It has to come from actual experience. You have to experience it tangibly. It has to be issues that are relevant to your everyday reality so you can see true change. (Presentation at Rhino Records, 1999)

Dewayne Holmes was one of the best-known gang truce activists in Los Angeles. His mother, Theresa Allison, was the founder of Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (MROC).

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[43] See "50 Questions You Always Wanted to Ask About Gangs," published in 2005by Sidewalk University. (The manuscript was edited by Kamran Afary and Nina Billone.)

Allison fought relentlessly to free Holmes from prison, and on the way to freeing him she also helped to organize a movement of thousands of other women.

Dewayne Holmes helped organize the 1992 peace treaty between the Bloods and Crips in Watts. He then worked with the organization Focusing on And Creating Ethnic Solidarity (FACES). This group planned athletic, educational, and job development fairs for youth in an attempt to maintain peace between rival gangs in Los Angeles. FACES received funding from the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation to train youth mentors, organizers, and activists.[44]

In April 1999, at a citywide gathering of gang truce activists at the offices of Rhino Records in Westwood, Los Angeles, Dewayne Holmes explained why he became an activist. Beginning at the young age of nine, Holmes spent many years of his life in various institutions, mostly for petty theft. Meeting Mike Davis in the early 1990s propelled him toward becoming an activist. According to Holmes

> Davis valued what I had to say. . . . He had a tremendous impact on my life at a point when I was trying to transition out of the gang lifestyle. Many people, especially those in the LAPD, think that guys like me never change. . . . Mike came in and began to show us how to organize around issues that presented me with an opportunity to really experience power in organizing.

Together they worked with families on the issue of police abuse and helped bring national attention to it. Their organizing work forced law enforcement officials to sit down and negotiate with them. Davis and Holmes demanded changes in how police officers dealt with individuals in the communities. "Experiencing that type of power forever changed my life," said Holmes.

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[44] For more see <www.rfkmemorial.org>.

By putting himself on the front lines, Holmes suddenly became known publicly as a "gang leader." Soon after May 1992, he landed in prison on a charge of shoplifting a $7 item and received a four-year sentence. Since Holmes had helped in organizing the peace treaty in 1992, the campaign to free him included Tom Hayden and Maxine Waters, who visited him in prison. According to Holmes, the majority of those who played key roles in organizing the peace treaty were later sent to prisons. Many had to go underground for fear of their lives. Holmes spent four years in a prison because of his notoriety as a "gang leader." With support from former governor Jerry Brown (who later became the mayor of Oakland) and Waters, who testified on Holmes's behalf during his trial, he was finally released in 1996. Since then, Holmes has continued his truce organizing and has had tremendous success in maintaining a measure of peace and tranquility in Watts.

During a workshop I attended, and an interview which I subsequently conducted with him, Holmes spoke about some of the strategies he has employed to bring rival gangs together. One was to organize football games between African-American and Latino gang youth in Alhambra. It took several weeks to convince the neighborhoods to put aside their fears and encourage the event. The games were a great success and helped establish many new friendships. Holmes pointed out that even the youth's parents regarded their children as criminals. The job of gang counselors was to change that perception. It was to say: "We are not animals, we are not low lifes, we are human beings, and thus subject to imperfections. We hurt and cry, and we make mistakes."

FACES was organized in part to respond to the demographic changes that were taking place in Imperial Courts housing project. In the 1990s, the population changed from ninety-nine percent African-American to about forty to sixty percent Latino. Dewayne spoke of providing

opportunities for the young people, such as taking them to the United Farm Workers Union headquarters to learn about the farm-workers' struggles. Such simple trips, said Holmes, would change the attitude of many African-Americans toward the Latino community. It would enable them to better understand the history of Latino struggles in California. Through a number of similar programs, Holmes and his colleagues established a truce in the three major housing projects of the Watts community. This remarkable act was accomplished by organizing football games between the Bloods and the Crips who resided in Jordan Downs, Nickerson Gardens, and Imperial Courts buildings, events that were attended by two to three thousand supporting fans. Holmes also pointed out that to keep the streets and passages safe and to enable students to attend their schools, it was essential that regular lines of communication among gang members be maintained. The Jordan High School was attached to the Jordan Downs Housing complex. If youth from Jordan Downs went to war with those of Nickerson Gardens or Imperial Courts, the latter two groups would not be able to attend school safely. Maintaining the peace agreement through regular communication was essential.

Manuel Lares: Santa Monica Barrios Unidos

Manuel Lares is a former gang member and peace treaty organizer. He co-founded Santa Monica Barrios Unidos (SMBU), a violence prevention organization that provided tutoring and other support to youth. Lares negotiated a peace treaty among four West Los Angeles gangs during one of the most deadly outbreaks of fights among them. Several people who knew him at the time told me they never thought he would be able to pull the different gangs together and come out alive himself. During our last conversation in the summer of 2000, Lares was working closely with Tom Hayden. Lares' work at SMBU also focused on opening channels of

communication between parents and their children. Lares said that SMBU was involved in what might be called "routine maintenance." The organization's purpose was to immediately intervene when two gangs started fighting each other, to end local hostilities, as well as personal vendettas. The organization educated people about the underlying issues and causes of violence, and cultivated cultural and spiritual activities such as discussions of Native American traditions. It also instilled respect for the community and for the environment, and tried to show that "money is not the bottom line." There were about a hundred young people involved in the program, who worked regularly with tutors. Lares spoke at length about his experience of starting a gang youth/former gang youth organization:

> When we started we were so naïve. We didn't understand the gravity of the perception that people had of us. We thought, once we organized gang members coming together to talk peace, people will come to our aid. And being on the West Side there is money all around us. Man, were we wrong! Instead, what happened is that they started to close down the schools to us. We had peace at Venice High School. So then they started isolating us as "known gang members." Law enforcement intensified their statistics against us. They brought on this whole mechanism of identifying us as the leadership. It was the complete opposite of what we expected. When we talked to mainstreaming services, like City Parks or the Chamber of Commerce, we got the doors slammed in our face. We were like, "Fine we gonna do it ourselves. We start our own innovations. Do what we need for ourselves." (Lares)

SMBU provided job opportunities for the "unemployable" and worked with prisoners and parolees. Lares also said that SMBU spent much time doing family mediation. He blamed most

of the problems on a society where working class parents came home tired and frustrated after fourteen-hour workdays and had zero tolerance for their children. As for possible solutions, Manuel Lares demanded that:

> We need power over resource allocation. We are ill-equipped, coming from a dysfunctional society. Until we are able to empower our community we will never be able to deal with the issue of gang violence on a real basis. It is an issue of empowering the youth as they grow up. (Lares)

Bloodhound:

When I first met Bloodhound (Toni S.) in the summer of 2000 he claimed he had been involved with the Bloods for thirty years. At the time he was only 35 years old. One year later we also met at the International Conference on Globalizing the Streets in New York, where he discussed his experiences as a truce activist and campaigned for the repeal of Proposition 21, a draconian gang suppression law passed by the State of California in 2000. During our extensive interviews, Bloodhound explained that young people joined gangs first and foremost because they wanted respect and recognition. He compared this to similar rites of passage in ancient societies and cultures, from Native Americans to Indians in the Asian continent, and to the emergence of the anti-colonial movements in Africa during the 1950s. In these societies, young men often had to go through a series of rituals of initiation before they were recognized as adults. This rite of passage often involved the slaying of a wild animal with one's bare hands or with a simple tool. If the initiate was victorious he proved his "warrior skills," was admired for his courage by the men, and became highly attractive to young women. In modern American society an aspiring gang member goes through a similar experience. A young man's cohort

admires him for his bravery when he walks through the neighborhood of a rival gang and thus becomes a member of the warrior caste of his community. Children from impoverished urban areas often have no other recourse but gangbanging to prove their courage and skill. The more they are shot at and survived, the greater their reputation and aura:

> If you haven't experienced it, then it's really hard to explain. I mean the adrenaline rush itself, is something meta. . . . It's euphoric. It's like being the greatest natural high. We cannot climb mountains. Most of the gang members that's from ghetto and slum, they don't go out whitewater rafting for an adrenaline rush. They don't climb mountains and go skydiving. Their adrenaline rush is when they get in gun fights, when they are on high-speed chases, when they're involved in hand-to-hand combat, when their life is on the line. . . . The reputation that you are doing for yourself when you're gangbanging, that's another thing that follows you for the rest of your life. . . . I've been shot nine times . . . and a lot of these young homeboys that hear those stories, even if they're not gangbanging, they wanna be the person in that story that people are saying wow. (Bloodhound, personal interview)

Bloodhound also argued that in a society where there was little opportunity to invest in small leadership roles, from academic success in school, to achievements in sports, music, arts, and literary clubs, the local gang served as an alternative club where youth invested in it with all their time, dedication, and limited funding

> When you create a gang, or you belong to a gang, when it first starts, you're one of the first members, one of the founding fathers, that's something to be proud of,' cause as long as the gang exists, that's something you built. I guess you

> could compare that to somebody who starts a corporation, like IBM-that's their legacy. They built that. . . . in gangbanging, that's your heritage right there. That's your culture. That's what you have to cling to. (Bloodhound 2000)

Bloodhound, who has participated in several rounds of truce negotiations since the Los Angeles rebellion, was convinced that members longed for a genuine truce because "nobody wants to get shot." However, up until our interviews, neither ceasefires nor peace treaties had lasted long. According to Bloodhound, one reason for the ephemeral nature of such agreements was that they were made orally and never on paper:

> [The agreement is] usually verbal which is also not a good thing, because people who are not at the meeting, they're relying on your memory, your account of what happened at the meeting. So you verbally enter into an agreement with a rival gang. Now you're coming back to your neighborhood as a representative at that meeting and you're trying to relay all of the articles that you went over, as best as you can remember them. And nobody's memory is perfect. And if it's not a clear and decisive verbal account of what happened or what transpired during the negotiations, well then some people aren't going to be quite clear. . . . A lot of people were, I guess you'd say, apprehensive. They didn't want to put anything on paper for fear of incriminating themselves. (Bloodhound, personal interview)

As Bloodhound has argued, agreements were oral because nobody wanted to put anything on paper for fear that they might incriminate themselves. Those who signed a peace treaty were labeled "crime lords" or "masterminds" by the police and quickly rounded up when the next major crime happened in their neighborhood. In Bloodhound's view, mainstream gang researchers increased such suspicions when they presumed that those who signed the document

did so because they had the power to make war. "If you have the power to stop a war, then obviously you have the power to start a war as far as the criminal justice system is concerned" (Bloodhound, personal interview).

Without trying to address any of these underlying issues, the California Judicial system has instead become stricter with regard to youth who are suspected of gang membership. Under Proposition 21 juveniles can be arrested for fraternizing with known gang members even if they have not committed any illegal acts. They could be denied probation and kept in adult prisons even if they are as young as fourteen. Those convicted of consensual crimes (prostitution, drug sales, purchase of stolen property, unlawful but consensual sex with a minor) can get twenty-five years to life.

A part of Bloodhound's work with the community has been to educate the youth and teach them ways of recognizing their rights (see fig. 3.3). But Bloodhound has also argued for a rethinking of the gang culture. He has taken issue with the notion that the only alternative for an individual who wished to pursue a new life was to leave the gang and relocate to another place. He suggested, instead, a process of building on the positive aspects of gang membership and transforming the negative dimensions through the creation of jobs, social services, and artistic communities. In his view, until such time when society understands and appreciates the complex dynamics of gangs and begins to extend resources to urban youth, gang leadership will remain in the hands of the most unscrupulous members who exploit the vulnerabilities of others. During the interviews Bloodhound shared many of his documents produced within the gang truce movement. One striking document was a widely distributed statement opposing Proposition 21 in California reprinted on the next page.

. Conclusion

The grassroots initiatives of the gang truce movement were a form of subaltern counterpublic sphere. They did not draw the kind of media attention that the 1992 outbursts did, but slowly and painstakingly helped members articulate new demands, negotiate new rules to maintain dialogue between rank-and-file gang youth and political activists. Most of these meetings were conducted in modest church basement rooms, union halls, small community organization meeting rooms, homes, and through improvisatory rituals that helped concretize the participants' ways of knowing.

"NUGANGS: (Neighborhoods United Gang Alliance: For A New Gang SubCulture)
Code Red Alert to all California Blood gangs.

Proposition 21 is a loaded gun. Politicians are using it to target America's youth. That's the cold-blooded truth. **If passed in the March 7th 2000 elections, Proposition 21 will:**

*Increase punishment for gang-related felonies and enact the death penalty for gang-related murders
*Impose a mandatory life sentence for home-invasion robberies, drive-by shootings, and gang-related shootings, even in cases where no one was actually injured
*Require by law that all known and suspected gang members register with police if found guilty in the past or present of a crime believed to be gang related, regardless of how long ago the crime was committed, and make it a felony offense to recruit new members into a gang, and authorize wire use or wiretaps against known or suspected gang members, their friends, and families in some cases
*Make violent gang related felonies, a strike under the 3-strikes law;
*Make assault with a firearm against police, school employees, or firefighters a serious felony
*And turn low-level Vandalism into a felony offense, and many misdemeanors and non-violent offenses to the list of strikable crimes.

"Pete The Weasel" Wilson is targeting all of our Blood ties for incarceration, and we're going to need the help of every Blood relation to stop this new form of gang legislation.
Those of you who can't vote for legal reasons can still help **stop Prop 21** being passed in the March 7th, 2000 elections by getting all of your family members, relatives, and Blood ties to register and vote No on Prop 21, and by getting all young Bloods to convince all of their friends and classmates to organize and participate in a mass walkout and rally at the schools they attend on either one or all of the following days, March 3rd, 6th, 7th.

The how, when, and where will be determined by you, the youth.
*Writing letters of protest to different newspapers, magazines, and the City and/or state officials;
*Calling into different radio stations to protest Prop 21;
*Drawing up and circulating petitions against Prop 21
*Convincing your moms, dads, uncles, and grandparents, etc., to get the reverends and ministers of local churches involved in the fight against Prop 21;
*Encouraging every Blood gang to work with other gangs in a wholehearted effort to stop Prop 21

Everyone dress in red clothes on March 7th as a sign of solidarity and a visual reminder that Blood is thicker than water

Figure 4.3 Bloodhound's Flyer on Proposition 21

These small local initiatives altered the participants' self image and helped transform the lives of a generation of youth activists. With the help of grassroots organizations such as CAPA, Amer-I-Can, Hands Across Watts, and South Central Love, many former gang members were able to make the transition to a new life. They became active citizens, mentors to gang youth, participated in civic and political organizations, or contributed to a new type of literature where gang youth were no longer just defined by others, but redefined by gang activists themselves. Their work has made an impact on academic scholarship and has penetrated some representations of gang life.

The early 1990s performance ethnography of Dwight Conquergood on Chicago's Latin Kings drew attention to "street literacy," or the creative forms of performance devised by gang youth to reclaim public spaces from which they had been expelled. The 1992 uprising helped transform many street-literate gang youth into gang truce activists engaged in public political dialogues. Their sustained activism and performances could not have gained such traction without the explicit recognition they received from scholars and activists. In Los Angeles Hayden, Costa Vargas, and Juan Martinez have produced a new literature on gangs through collaboration with gang activists. In New York, David Brotherton and Luis Barrios were instrumental in the transformation of gangs into grass roots empowerment organizations. Their scholarship was also a form of intervention to create a viable alternative to suppression of gang youth identities. In the next chapter we will turn to the grassroots activism and organizing efforts of women as they developed new identities through performance in activism.

Chapter Five

Performing Motherhood: Reclaiming Their Children, Creating Uprising Textualities

> My mother babysat a lot of these people. My mother nursed a lot of these kids. A lot of our mothers then nursed these kids. They never raised their kids but they now think they can tell us how to raise ours. [Audience: That's right.] Now, they replaced us with machinery. They moved us out of the South. Our cotton made them sit tall and be able to wear shirts and ties--us picking cotton and rice and potatoes and whatever we were growing in the South. We were enslaved. There's no difference today. There's no difference. Just the word changed: INCARCERATION. We've got to ask questions.
>
> Teresa Allison, "Incarceration."

These words were uttered in the anteroom of Faith United Methodist Church to an audience of about fifty people who had gathered to commemorate the second anniversary of the Los Angeles rebellion. The meeting was co-sponsored by the LA4+ Committee and Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (or Mothers ROC). Teresa Allison's son, Dewayne Holmes, was serving a seven-year sentence at the Wasco State prison in Kern County on a dubious charge of stealing ten dollars at a gang truce party. In fact, Dewayne was arrested in the summer of 1992

because of his role as a leader of the gang truce movement.[45] The LA4+ Committee was formed after the arrest of the four men charged with attacking truck driver Reginald Denny at the corner of Florence and Normandie. In 1993, Teresa Allison and her activist friend Geri Silva helped found Mothers ROC. They dedicated the organization to the support of African-American and Latino men who were arrested and incarcerated by the LAPD on flimsy and often trumped-up charges. LA4+ and Mothers ROC were composed mostly of mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, and their supporters, who attended court sessions. The women educated themselves about the legal process, monitored the actions of the judicial system, and mentored friends and relatives of the men on trial. They believed that they could build a movement that would offer their sons a chance for exoneration or a more equitable sentence. A flyer published in 1993 by Mothers ROC stated:

> It was the longing, the anger, and the need to Reclaim Our Children that gave rise to Mothers ROC. We formed it to ensure that our children are no longer alone in court at the mercy of judges and lawyers, who have no interest in justice. We formed it to be the voice of tens of thousands who are locked away and forgotten. Finally, we formed it to take our battle into the streets, to make ourselves seen and heard, to inform the powers that control and oppress us that we will build, we will grow, We Will Win!!" (Gubbay, "Collection of documents and clippings")

[45] See chapter four for a discussion of Dewayne Holmes' role in the Watts gang truce movement.

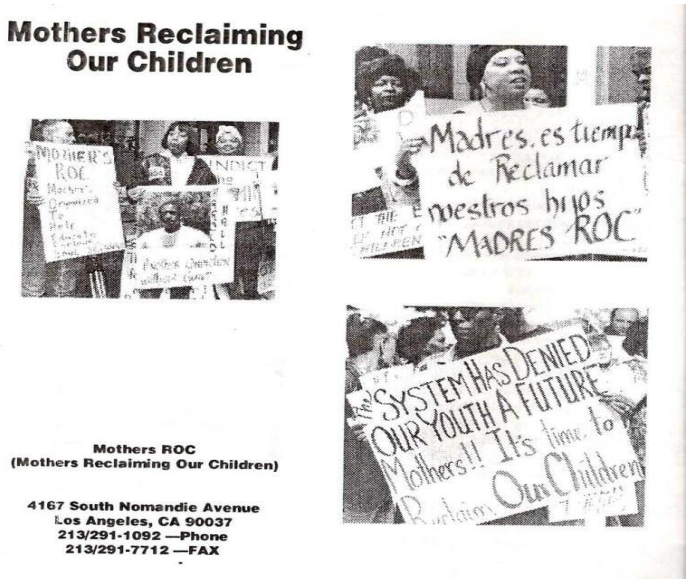

Figure 5.1 Cover of a Mothers ROC Flyer

At the commemoration of the LA rebellion on 29 April 1994, Theresa Allison shared the platform with another member of Mothers ROC and the LA4+ Committee, Georgiana Williams. Her son Damien Williams was one of the men on trial for attacking Reginald Denny. Georgiana Williams attended the trial and participated in numerous press conferences. At the conclusion of the trial, Damien Williams was sentenced to five years in prison. Despite this blow, Georgiana Williams and her associates continued to attend the court proceedings for the other youths. The women brought together many mothers whose sons had been arrested by the police, held regular weekly meetings, and taught them how to be "court watchers." This term was coined to refer to mothers and other supporters who regularly attended the trials of the young African-American and Latino men at the Los Angeles Criminal Court Building. There they took notes of the proceedings, collaborated and consulted with the lawyers of the accused, gathered evidence, and gave interviews to journalists. In these and myriad other ways they signaled to the defense, prosecution, and judges that the legal system would be scrutinized and held accountable. These

women court watchers developed one of the most successful grassroots responses to the injustices of the court system. They set a standard for positive action and became role models for dozens of other likeminded networks across the country.

As Nancy Fraser and Mary Ryan have shown, initially gender and women's concerns were excluded from the public sphere. Women's issues were deemed private affairs, inappropriate for public scrutiny. The disclosure of domestic violence and rape was viewed as an embarrassment to the victims of such abuses and therefore unfit for public discussion. The pain and agony of a mother of a son arrested on criminal charges was yet another example of an issue that modern American society long deemed private. The public had very little sympathy for these women whose sons were accused of violating the law or committing brutal acts. The women learned to be quiet about their grief in public arenas, such as their place of employment. The LA4+ Committee and Mothers ROC became new outlets where previously private concerns now became public ones. This confirmed, as Fraser has pointed out in "Rethinking the Public Sphere," that the boundary between public and private issues cannot and should not be drawn in advance.

Figure 5.2 Monica, Georgiana, Gina Rae, and Pastor Gaither on Court Steps, 22 July 1993.

This chapter provides an account of these women's contributions, or "uprising textualities," a phrase used by Carol Boyce Davies to argue that texts written by black women in the aftermath of the rebellion radically destabilized "established knowledges/authoritarian bases" and discourses and opened the possibility of new ones (108). According to Davies, what the press called riots, were "called by grassroots activists internationally, an 'uprising' in the sense of the people rising up from oppression" (108). The concept of "uprising textualities" "link[s] reasoning to action" and to explicit critiques of postcolonial theories. In her view, postcolonialism, which often conveys the sense of "being stuck" in "hybrid space," insufficiently credits the creative energies of black women's imaginative theorizing (90).

Black women's responses to the LA riots are "uprising textualities," because they disrupt the dominant racist discourses and provide counter-public spaces. Part one of this chapter provides a sketch of organizational meetings and how participants created a new ceremonial space for their activities. It examines the role of clothing, food, and religion in their discourse, as well as the tenuous bridges these women built with leftist activists who often pursued their own agendas. Part two considers literary and artistic performances through which the activists rearticulated their personal tragedies. Together, these varied approaches were crucial to developing a new ethics of care and reconstructing the perception of black motherhood in American society and also generated new levels of support for the movement as a whole and cracked the hard quartz surface of the criminal justice system.[46]

[46] In this chapter I use data gathered during two separate periods. In the first period, between 1992 and 1998, I was working as a journalist and activist. In the second period, from 2000 to the present, I was collecting information and conducting interviews for the dissertation. The data includes videotaped interviews, audio interviews, copies of radio programs, transcripts of interviews, newsletters, flyers, and short articles from grassroots newspapers. In researching the LA4+ Committee I received support from Judy Tanzawa and Dorothy Freeman. Freeman shared her organized binders with me, including documents and clippings on the LA4+ Committee. In researching the Mothers ROC organization Michelle Gubbay also provided me with several organized folders. Both

Othermothers involved in Uprising Textualities

The 29 April 1994 commemoration embodied what Baz Kershaw's The Radical in Performance describes as "democratized performances" (219). The meeting was publicized, though it was not held in the church's large auditorium. The event was recorded for later broadcast by a local radio station. The presentations and dialogues aimed at the creation of new cultural and political spaces, ones that enhanced the participants' agency, strengthened their sense of self-determination and kept them committed and responsible to one another. These private meetings helped prepare the women for their public court appearances.

The Christopher Commission, charged with investigating the LAPD after the beating of Rodney King, had released its report in 1991 before the Los Angeles rebellion. The report had revealed that LA court officials routinely used the acronym NHI (no humans involved) in reference to certain cases involving African-Americans, Latinos, and gays. Theater scholar Sylvia Wynter has argued that the widespread use of this acronym signified "a breach of the rights of young, jobless, black males living in the inner city ghetto" (13). Wynter pointed out that the outbreak of the LA riots should have compelled educators to ask themselves how this highly pejorative acronym could be used by "graduates of the university system of the United States, whom we ourselves educated" (15).

The activities of the LA4+ Committee and Mothers ROC can be seen as one type of response to the Christopher Commission. In the process of defending their children, the women created new identities for themselves and helped overcome some of the pervasive negative

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sets of documents will be donated to a library so that other researchers may use them in the future. Others interviewed are cited in the reference section.

perceptions about African-American families in white society. Often the mothers were blamed as "bad mothers," women who had spoiled their sons, indulged their every whim, and pushed their sons into a criminal lifestyle.[47] Initially, the women's protests increased their negative portrayal. The louder they protested, the more they were seen as ominous threats to society. Even so, their vigilance and persistence in monitoring the lawyers, judges, and prosecutors ultimately yielded them many successes.

The members of the LA4+ Committee and Mothers ROC also spoke out against adverse living conditions in their communities, including rampant police brutality. These activities earned the women much community recognition as "othermothers." Patricia Hill Collins uses the term "othermothers" to illustrate one way that black women have historically engaged in community activism. Their engagement takes the form of complex cooperative networks throughout urban and rural black communities that provide unique experiences for the development of community othermothers.[48] According to Collins, the energetic devotion of working-class black women to grassroots empowerment projects goes widely unrecognized because of their lingering characterization as perpetrators of underclass pathologies (70-78).[49] Although many feminists have begun to redress this invisibility, Elsa Barkley Brown asserts that the historical devaluation of black women has meant "that the concepts, perspectives, methods,

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[47] Also see Annette Appell's "On Fixing Bad Mothers and Saving Their Children."

[48] See Joanne Grant's Freedom Bound on the central role of Ella Baker in the development of autonomous youth organizations during the Civil Rights Movement era (121).

[49] See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," for a critical study of racial constructions of gender, class, and sexuality. Also see Dorothy Roberts' Killing the Black Body for a critical analysis of the punitive laws and policies that undermine these women's sense of self worth (8).

and pedagogies of women's history and women's studies have been developed without consideration of the experiences of black women" themselves (174).

Black women's performances in the period after the rebellion made use of tactics that brought them to the attention of television camera crews in highly publicized court sessions. Noting the involvement of elaborate "costuming," special preparations, and rehearsals, John Fiske has called these types of active interventions "media events." Fiske has pointed out that it was increasingly difficult to separate the LA rebellion as a "media event" from its character as a non-media spectacle, saying:

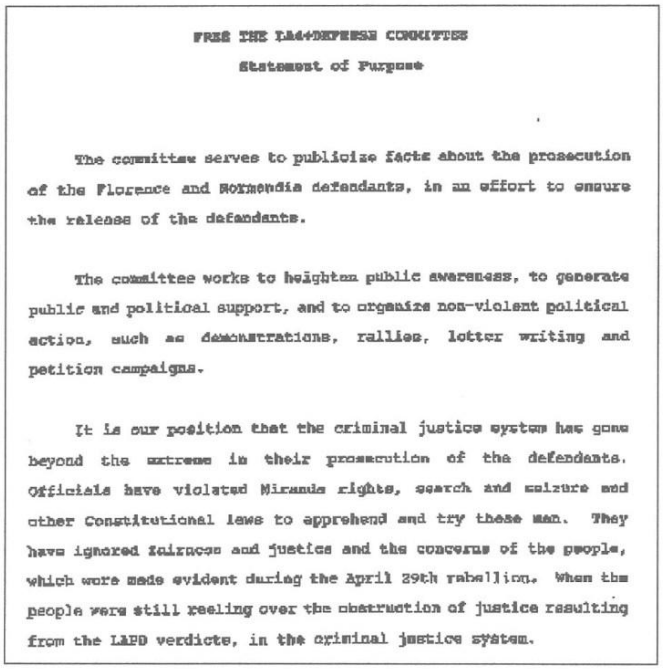
> We can no longer work with the idea that the "real" is more important, significant, or even "true" than the representation. A media event is not a mere representation of what happened. It has its own reality, which gathers up into itself the reality of the event that may or may not have preceded it (2).

LA4+ and Mothers ROC, two grassroots movements that coalesced in response to the LA rebellion, and to the media's shocking, negative images of it, were at the core of this media event. Created and directed by black women, these organizations played a formative role in a discourse of empowerment and agency. This discourse soon developed its own "reality," one that implicated, admonished, and held accountable the media and the judicial system in South Central Los Angeles. Black women illustrated to the local and international communities that they not only could influence contemporary perceptions of the events that transpired in 1992, but also change their expected repercussions.

The LA4+ Committee and Mothers ROC

Creating a Small Ceremonial Space

The LA4+ Defense Committee was formed in the summer of 1992. The initial meetings were held in response to the May 12 arrests of the four men who were charged with the beating of Reginald Denny. On the day of the arrests LAPD Chief Daryl Gates brought the full press corps to the home of Georgiana Williams, near the corner of Florence and Normandie, and provided stage lights for their cameras at an early morning press conference. Five months later, and after extensive work, the LA4+ Committee called a press conference where B. Kwaku Duren, an activist Los Angeles attorney, read a statement announcing the official formation of the LA4+ Committee and the purpose of the organization (see Figure 5.3).



FREE THE LA4+DEFENSE COMMITTEE

Statement of Purpose

The committee serves to publicize facts about the prosecution of the Florence and Normandia defendants, in an effort to ensure the release of the defendants.

The committee works to heighten public awareness, to generate public and political support, and to organize non-violent political action, such as demonstrations, rallies, letter writing and petition campaigns.

It is our position that the criminal justice system has gone beyond the extreme in their prosecution of the defendants. Officials have violated Miranda rights, search and seizure and other Constitutional laws to apprehend and try these men. They have ignored fairness and justice and the concerns of the people, which were made evident during the April 29th rebellion. When the people were still reeling over the obstruction of justice resulting from the LAPD verdicts, in the criminal justice system.

Figure 5.3 A page from the LA4 Committee founding statement

The LA4+ Committee originally met in the sanctuary of Bethel AME church near downtown Los Angeles, but telephone threats, including bomb scares, forced them out of that location. The group had to use its own members as security guards, since they could not trust the police to protect them. Regular meetings of the LA4+ Committee then moved to the Faith United Methodist Church near 108th street and Western Avenue in south Los Angeles. This church provided space and resources for social, educational, and political activities, as well as legal advice. The church was led by Reverend Gaither, a progressive minister with a history of civil rights activism.

The weekly meetings took place on Thursday evenings at the back of the church. Participants entered through a small side door, walked down a narrow corridor where the minister and his secretary's offices were located, and entered the meeting room next to a kitchen. Although there was a small raised stage at the back of the room, the chairs were set up in a circle away from the stage so that the participants faced one another during the discussions. Between seventy five and one hundred people attended the weekly meetings. Most were black women. There were also a few black men, including gang truce activists, at least one former LAPD officer, as well as a few white, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Middle Easterners affiliated with small leftist, Pan-African, or Muslim organizations.

Food was an important part of the gathering. When cooking is not a chore, cooking for others and eating together with friends becomes a pleasure and helps establish strong bonds and new rituals of friendship (Taylor 301). Williams was a gifted cook, and one of the ways she expressed her gratitude to the individuals who attended the meetings was to cook for them. She not only brought food to the meetings, but also occasionally took it to the homes of the participants. Judy Tanzawa, a Jewish leftist and her husband Paul, a Japanese-American art

teacher, soon became close friends of Williams. Judy recalled, "If Georgiana found out that Paul liked something to eat, she would make it for him and come and bring it to him, peach cobbler, greens, chicken. She used to also cook for me and say 'well you can eat' even though Paul is a diabetic, 'so come down and get it'" (Tanzawa 2006).

At first white activists like Judy were treated with suspicion, as they were assumed to be undercover police or reporters. Even though she had been invited by Williams to attend the LA4+ meeting, the first sessions did not go smoothly. "I remember when I first went they looked at me with some suspicion. The fact that Paul came with me gave me a little more credibility. At least I was with someone who was Yellow" (Tanzawa). But Dorothy Freeman and Paul Parker, who co-chaired the meetings, quickly realized that Judy could be of great help to the organization. Judy had worked as a union steward and was well-read in Marxist and early feminist literature. She was also drawn to the meetings because of her shared experience with the African-American women. Judy had lost two sons, one in the 1970s to suicide and another shortly before the LA rebellion to AIDS. Her son, Marcus, had contracted the virus through an infected needle used for intravenous drug use. In later years, Judy recalled that the meetings had proven to be therapeutic, not just for the African-American women who grieved for their imprisoned sons, but also for herself. At her union job or in the leftist political organization to which she belonged, Judy was expected to put her loss behind her and move on with her responsibilities. But at the meetings of the LA4+ Judy could expose her emotional wounds. Here was a place where she could cry, talk about her boy, and feel a kinship in their mutual grief. I knew Judy for over two decades through our common activist involvements, and I knew that she was a very reserved person who seldom spoke of her personal life. But at the LA4+ meetings she became a different person. There seems to have been a conscious decision on Judy's part to

foreground her experience as a grieving mother in this particular organization, whereas in other political contexts, she hardly ever spoke of her experience as a mother of four children, or her tragic losses.

Meetings of the LA4+ were lively and interesting, and the women brought children of all ages. Small children sat in different corners of the room with sheets of paper, colorful crayons, and plastic toys. Teenagers sat through the meetings with rapt attention as they listened to the women sharing the stories of their personal tragedies. There were also many celebrations and festive occasions, including one that was held after the release of Geronimo Ji Jaga (Pratt), a former Black Panther who was kept in prison for twenty-seven years, framed under the COINTELPRO program. Upon his release in 1997, Pratt came directly to a meeting of the LA 4+ Committee at the United Methodist Church. With the participation of many other activists, the event was transformed into a celebration in honor of Pratt and his activist supporters.

Several controversies broke out in the first months of the LA4+ Committee meetings, but the group survived them all. One of them involved the need to maintain a united front before the judicial system. The mother of Keith Watson, one of the LA4+ defendants, advised her son to accept a lesser charge in return for a reduced sentence. She hired an attorney for him who talked Keith into accepting a plea bargain with the prosecutor. When news of these negotiations emerged, heated arguments broke out in the meetings. Some of the women tried to dissuade Keith's mother from accepting the plea-bargain. Williams felt she had betrayed them all. In the end, Keith's mother was not persuaded and left the meeting angry. Keith spent a shorter time in prison. However, after his release, Keith and other members of the LA4+ were repeatedly arrested for violation of parole and consequently spent many more years in prison. For example, in Damien Williams' case it took only forty eight hours before the LAPD found an excuse to re-

arrest him. Before Damien's initial release, Georgiana Williams had moved out of her own house in Los Angeles to the neighboring Compton community where the LAPD did not operate. When Damien went back to his old house two days later to pick up his belongings, he was arrested and charged with fraternizing with known gang members. His crime was that he had greeted a neighbor in front of the house.[50]

Another controversy in the Committee involved the presence of political activists from communist organizations. Some in the organization objected to Judy and others' intervention. One person told Judy, "You're just an old lefty radical; why don't you be quiet" (Tanzawa). But Freeman defended Judy and snapped back at the man: "You be quiet. She is here every week and works very hard. Don't tell her to be quiet" (Tanzawa). Judy stayed and proved valuable in the weekly meetings and in the court where she became a regular court watcher for the LA4+ trial. She recorded the comments made by the judge, the prosecutor, the attorneys, and the witnesses, typed up the notes for future use, and occasionally published articles on the LA4+ in leftist newspapers. Freeman, Parker, and other organizers of the LA4+ focused on building a multiethnic organization with individuals of various talents and capabilities in order to strengthen the movement. In so doing, they sidelined the objections of some participants who wanted to exclude non-mainstream political views or to limit the membership to African-Americans.

Negotiating the tension between the aspirations of LA4+ Committee and those of the communist revolutionaries was a continuous feature of the rehearsals and meetings. Organizers of the LA4+ routinely bridged these differences and attempted to keep the diverse coalition

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[50] Chapters Three and Four cited the injunctions that makes it a crime to even wave at someone whose name appears on LAPD's gang registry.

focused on the trial. The following extended narrative by Mollie Bell best captures the process of ongoing negotiation:

> There was a mixed group of Latinos, whites, and Asians, called Refuse and Resist [which included many members of the Revolutionary Communist Party. KA]. They were a communist revolutionary party. We talked about that. We had discussions at the church about this on how in the South they used to call people who came from the north, "out-of-town trouble-makers." As a group of people we weren't talking about revolution. I know what we did was re-vo-lu-tion-ary. But we weren't talking about Revolution. Historically, being from United States of America, we don't have that Latino or Asian background where they have overthrown and had coups and have that on a regular basis. . . . As a black people we weren't talking about overthrowing the government; we were talking about righting a wrong. We were talking about making America be what it says it is. And so, we couldn't align ourselves with that group too much. Whenever we wanted to tell people that the LA Four were overcharged and that their bail was excessive, the RCP started asking us about communism and revolution and took us off the subject. So we learned through our meetings that you have to stay focused, because the system, the system of white supremacy, will take you out of what you are talking about and have you talking about the Revolutionary Communist Party, and trying to defend them as opposed to talking about why is Damien's bail five million dollars. (Mollie Bell, personal interview)

This approach is what Zora Neale Hurston called "going a piece of the way with them" and what Carole Boyce Davies has termed "negotiating theories" (46-48). The women in LA4+ kept their

critical distance from theoretical positions that did not reflect their goals and concerns. At the same time, they maintained their ties with members of various political organizations who attended their meetings and who were supporting them in their struggle to negotiate a reduced sentence for the men and to bring greater accountability to the justice system. Negotiating the conflicted and contradictory relationships between the Committee and the radical leftist groups was a constant feature of the meetings. It had to be handled with a lot of care so that neither the more mainstream African-American participants, nor the leftist activists, felt isolated and left the coalition.

Staging Spirituality

Religion was an integral part of life for most LA4+ members, and the meetings at Faith United Methodist were infused with a variety of religious rituals. Participants sang hymns and made routine references to God and the Gospels. The church also served as a model of activism for the women, who regularly drew on spiritual doctrines as they created a new organization with new rites. When Bell and Williams recounted their life stories in public, they often modeled their experiences on religious narratives and suggested that 1992 had "saved" them from a mundane and purposeless life. Bell had spent her life "dancing and partying." Georgiana was glued to the television watching "Wheel of Fortune," "Jeopardy," and religious programs such as "Praise the Lord" (PTL). Both women described their political activism in 1992 as a "rebirth," a revival of their faith. Suddenly it seemed that by God's command they had found the righteous path, as they moved into an activism infused with spirituality (Mollie Bell, personal interview). In the months that followed, some of the women changed their church affiliations and joined Faith Methodist, which had encouraged their activities:

> Before I came to Faith I had belonged to a Holiness Church, Church of God in Christ. At that church I got my religious foundation, I got my training. Before I believed in [Mollie starts singing] "We shall overcome" or "it's gonna be sweeter than the bye and bye" and that "God loves us." But after what happened in 92, then I was able to see that "Yeah but there's a whole bunch of other folks that don't love us. We are really not created equal and everything is not right" (Mollie Bell, personal interview).

As Faith Methodist gained new members, it came under police scrutiny. Members were harassed by LAPD officers who came to the parking lot at night and wrote down the cars' license plates. They told the pastor that as a result of engaging in political activity the non-profit status of his church might be revoked. These actions, and Reverend Gaither's support of the women, increased Bell's newfound religious devotion, and ultimately led her to another moment of revelation. She realized that there was safety in large numbers, and this feeling encouraged her to expand the scope of her participation: "They tried to intimidate us. But then we thought, you know, they can't put all of us in jail. They can't arrest all of us. And then the fear factor left. After the fear factor left, then it was easier to operate" (Mollie Bell, personal interview). Bell went around lecturing on how God had given people "the spirit of fear, but also the power of love." Soon the discussions moved to possible collective tactics that gained the defendants a lower sentence. Bell's spirituality shaped her activism, leading her to a point where the two were inextricably linked.

As with gang truce festivities, the meetings at Faith Methodist became a redressive stage in the women's lives. This was a time for self-reflection. It was also a sacred moment in two senses of the word. First, the fact that meetings were held at the Church reflected the fact that

most of the women had religious affiliations and felt a renewed sense of spirituality that was not separate from their activism. Second, the meetings were precious, because they became a time for healing and recreating. Judy, a red-diaper baby, who is a life-long atheist and Marxist, once commented ironically that if she ever were to join a religious community the church of Reverend Gaither would be that place.

Street Clothes, African Garbs, and White T-shirts

One way in which the LA4+ Committee and the Mothers ROC members altered the perceptions of the court and the media about themselves and their sons was through their use of clothing. It was important that the defendants not appear shackled, and with prison jumpsuits, during their trials. But the struggle to remove the chains during court hearings and dress the men in proper attire was no easy feat to accomplish. One District Attorney insisted that the men were dangerous and had to be kept in restraints through the whole trial (Tanzawa). This would have prejudiced the jury, who saw the men in chains and prison jumpsuits while an armed guard shadowed each one, conveying the message that, as far as the judge and prosecutors were concerned, these men were very dangerous criminals. To dress the men in proper street attire, Williams and the other mothers had to come to the court very early and bring the clothes with them. Because the mothers held regular jobs, leaving their work earlier than usual was a great burden on them. In addition, the prison deputies often proved to be uncooperative, sometimes delaying the process of transporting the defendants to court. By doing so, the officers could claim that there was no time for a change of clothes. Each time, the defense attorney intervened and the trial was postponed (Tanzawa).

The mothers were also highly cognizant of their own clothes in public. Clothing had become a way of reaffirming the "humanity" of their family and the defendants. It was a way of

signaling to the judge, the media, and the broader public that the men came from caring and respectable families. Judy recalled:

> I remember Georgiana, Mollie, and Dorothy got really well-dressed to go to court. Their clothes tended to be African in style, especially Mollie's. They wore their best clothes; they wanted to look very good when they went in court. I remember I went in there pretty casually dressed and I thought, "Well I won't do this again!" So the next time I came, I dressed up for it. It just felt like that is what they wanted to put across and I was going to respect that and try to make sure that I also looked good (Tanzawa).

For Bell this was much more than an act for the judges and the cameras. The events of 1992 led to a reclaiming of her African identity and eventually took her back to Ghana in search of her roots:

> I used to wear regular clothes, but as I really got into my blackness, now all I wear is African clothes. Before 1992 I didn't dress like that all the time. Just on Martin Luther King's birthday or something like that. I wore pretty stuff. I would wear nice suits to church. But now I wear African garb, the African clothes, the scarf, the head-wrap that is how I dress. I am telling you, it was the rebirth of a people, 1992. In the sixties we went into wearing naturals, natural hair, and start talking about changing our names. Now we went into understanding that my history did not begin with the Civil Rights Movement or with slavery, that I am from a country and a whole continent. Then I begin to see myself as the beautiful descendent of black Africans. I believe I am from Ghana. In 1998 I went to Ghana [with awe in her voice]: I saw the sunrise of my

> motherland; drinking coconut from a real coconut. I went to the slave dungeons. My father wanted to go but he was sick. I told him I'll take your glasses. And I buried them. (Mollie Bell, personal interview)

Other LA4+ Committee members drew attention to their presence in the courts by their uniform clothing and coiffures. The women braided their hair, or rolled it up in a bun, or adopted other stylish hairdos. Some others wore fashionable African and Middle Eastern head-wraps or the hats they usually wore to church on Sundays. Court authorities disallowed the wearing of buttons or t-shirts bearing logos, so members of the group decided to wear uniform t-shirts:

> We needed to let them know that somebody is watching them. So we would come to the court and maybe one day we had everybody wear white T-shirts, because they wouldn't let you wear no kinds of buttons, you couldn't come in there with a T-shirt that said "Florence and Normandie coming to a neighborhood near you," or "Free the LA4." You couldn't come with any of that. But they couldn't tell me that I couldn't wear white T-Shirt, because you wore white T-shirt. (Mollie, personal interview)

How did the LA4+ Committee, and its sister organization, Mothers ROC, eventually succeed in challenging the dominant master narrative and gain extensive public support in the black, Latino, Asian-American, and white communities? A careful study of surviving organizational documents, flyers, press releases, newsletters, articles, court transcripts, the minutes of the meetings of the LA4+ Committee and Mothers ROC, as well as interviews that I have conducted, suggests that the two organizations employed a variety of tactics in their attempt to create a broad mass movement with state and even national support. These included:

- establishing a graphic and textual continuity between their demands and those of earlier historical movements, such as the American Revolution, the Abolitionist Movement, and the Civil Rights Movement

- crafting a balanced organizational structure that represented different members and issues of an African-American community and the predominantly multi-ethnic and progressive coalition composed of workers, students, academics, and sympathetic attorneys and prosecutors

- creating a new alternative media

- a focus on Motherhood

- rhetorical and visual devices

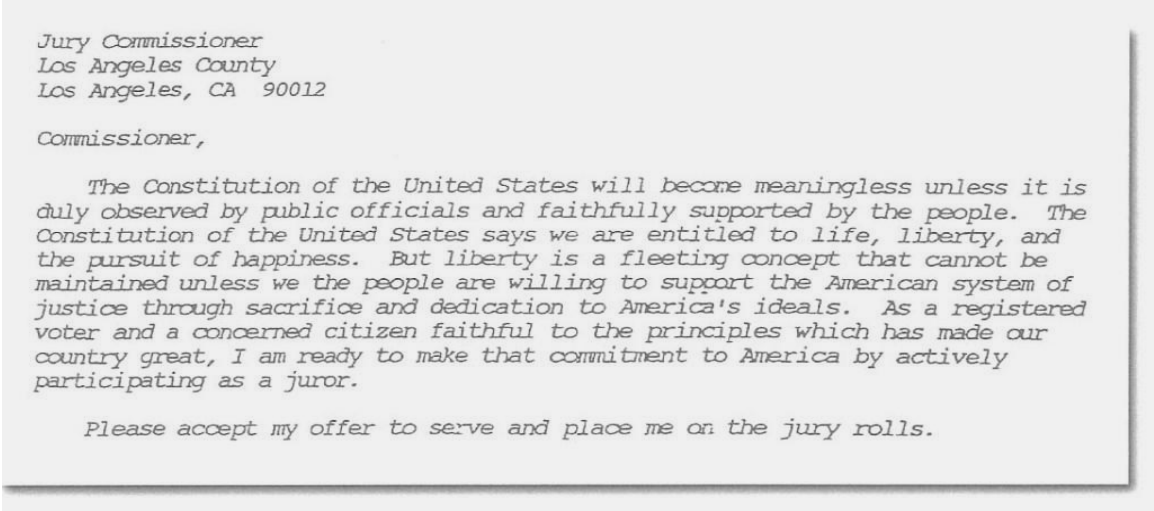
- building on traditions and rituals, and, in the process, establishing a politics of care and ethics

- reappropriating literary and artistic forms for new political themes, including poetry

- returning the gaze on the police

Reclaiming Patriotism, Constitutionalism, and the Civil Rights Movement

The LA4+ Committee skillfully appropriated patriotic American symbols and established continuities between the demands of the Los Angeles black community for justice, and those of earlier social movements in the United States. In numerous articles and columns, members emphasized the "Americanness" of the defendants and the African-American community's allegiance to the United States Constitution, specifically the Bill of Rights. They also challenged the process of jury selection and demanded to be included to serve at the trials of the LA4 defendants. They encouraged supporters to join the demonstrations by invoking the memory of Fredrick Douglass and his slogan "Freedom is a constant struggle."



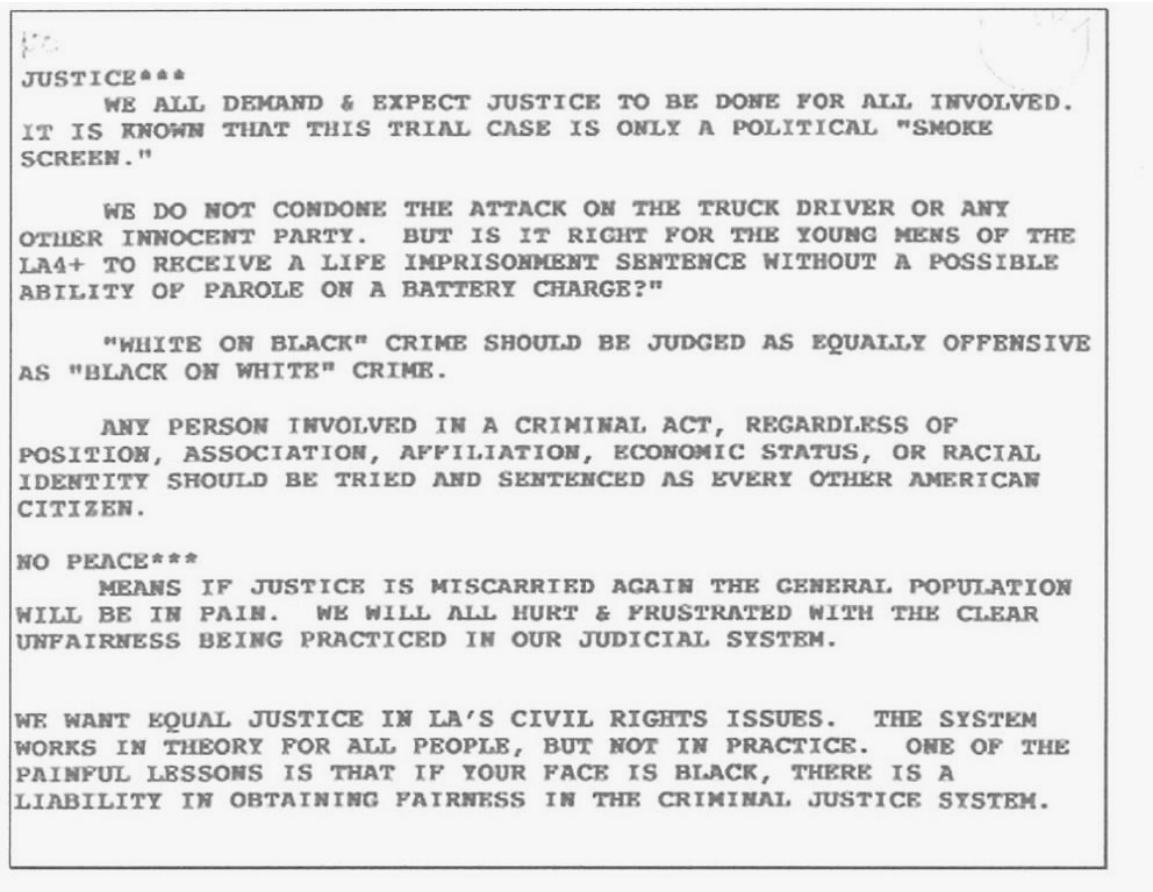
Jury Commissioner
Los Angeles County
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Commissioner,

The Constitution of the United States will become meaningless unless it is duly observed by public officials and faithfully supported by the people. The Constitution of the United States says we are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But liberty is a fleeting concept that cannot be maintained unless we the people are willing to support the American system of justice through sacrifice and dedication to America's ideals. As a registered voter and a concerned citizen faithful to the principles which has made our country great, I am ready to make that commitment to America by actively participating as a juror.

Please accept my offer to serve and place me on the jury rolls.

Figure 5.4 Appeal to the constitutional process.



JUSTICE***
WE ALL DEMAND & EXPECT JUSTICE TO BE DONE FOR ALL INVOLVED. IT IS KNOWN THAT THIS TRIAL CASE IS ONLY A POLITICAL "SMOKE SCREEN."

WE DO NOT CONDONE THE ATTACK ON THE TRUCK DRIVER OR ANY OTHER INNOCENT PARTY. BUT IS IT RIGHT FOR THE YOUNG MENS OF THE LA4+ TO RECEIVE A LIFE IMPRISONMENT SENTENCE WITHOUT A POSSIBLE ABILITY OF PAROLE ON A BATTERY CHARGE?"

"WHITE ON BLACK" CRIME SHOULD BE JUDGED AS EQUALLY OFFENSIVE AS "BLACK ON WHITE" CRIME.

ANY PERSON INVOLVED IN A CRIMINAL ACT, REGARDLESS OF POSITION, ASSOCIATION, AFFILIATION, ECONOMIC STATUS, OR RACIAL IDENTITY SHOULD BE TRIED AND SENTENCED AS EVERY OTHER AMERICAN CITIZEN.

NO PEACE***
MEANS IF JUSTICE IS MISCARRIED AGAIN THE GENERAL POPULATION WILL BE IN PAIN. WE WILL ALL HURT & FRUSTRATED WITH THE CLEAR UNFAIRNESS BEING PRACTICED IN OUR JUDICIAL SYSTEM.

WE WANT EQUAL JUSTICE IN LA'S CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUES. THE SYSTEM WORKS IN THEORY FOR ALL PEOPLE, BUT NOT IN PRACTICE. ONE OF THE PAINFUL LESSONS IS THAT IF YOUR FACE IS BLACK, THERE IS A LIABILITY IN OBTAINING FAIRNESS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.

Figure 5.5 “No Justice, No Peace” defined.

Not everyone active in the LA4+ Committee and in Mothers ROC held the same view about the gravity of the actions of the youth on the corner of Florence and Normandie. People with differing viewpoints in both groups characterized the beating of Reginald Denny in radically different ways. Some called it "revolutionary." Others felt it was merely "inappropriate" but ultimately understandable. Most of the members that I worked with felt it was totally unacceptable. Yet they placed the blame for these events on police brutality inflicted on an oppressed people. This counter-narrative was always embedded in a larger historical context. Through a steady stream of flyers, interviews, and other media outlets, the LA4+ Committee and Mothers ROC presented the following argument to the public: the 1992 Los Angeles rebellion was a justified reaction of an oppressed people subjected to the LAPD's incessantly cruel and inhuman brutality.

One undated LA4+ flyer contains the following narrative: The United States government tried to present the Los Angeles rebellion as a riot by people of color against law-abiding whites and Koreans. The riot had been followed by "the largest mass arrest in U.S. history, together with the summary deportation of over one thousand [undocumented immigrants] people of color" (Freeman Collection). In response to these arrests, and especially after the criminal justice system had exonerated the police officers who had participated in the Rodney King beating from any crime, a group of young black men overreacted and assaulted Reginald Denny at the corner of Florence and Normandie. The actions of these young black men were wrong. However, "the retaliatory actions of an oppressed people are [not] the same or even worse than calculated brutality by trained and professional enforcers of the status quo" (Freeman, Collection). The police officers who had beaten Rodney King were released without serving any time, while the prosecutor threatened the young men who had attacked Reginald Denny with life

imprisonment. How could a state have such a disproportionate response to the crimes committed by the four young men? Why were they not simply charged with battery? These series of arguments and questions were followed by a list of calm and measured demands for legal action, emphasizing "equal access, equal protection, and equal justice" for all (Freeman, Collection).

Los Angeles Times staff writers Newton and Mitchell reported on the difficulty that many had in comprehending the immense community support that had been generated for the four black men. They wrote:

> [T]he case has moved well beyond the relevant criminal statutes and into the realm of symbolism, where issues of guilt and innocence have become intertwined with broader questions of how the justice system has treated African-Americans. In the view of an increasingly vocal group of friends and activists, the suspects charged in the Denny attack are themselves victims—of racism, unreasonable bail and excessive criminal charges (1).[51]

The Committee portrayed the defendants as victims of the criminal justice system. Their cases were contrasted with those of the LAPD officers in the Rodney King beating and that of Soon Ja Doo, a Korean grocer, who had shot and killed Latasha Harlins.[52] In these other cases, the LAPD officers and Soon Ja Doo had been treated less harshly. Either they were found not guilty, or they were given light sentences. By contrast, the LA4+ were facing numerous charges and multiple life sentences.

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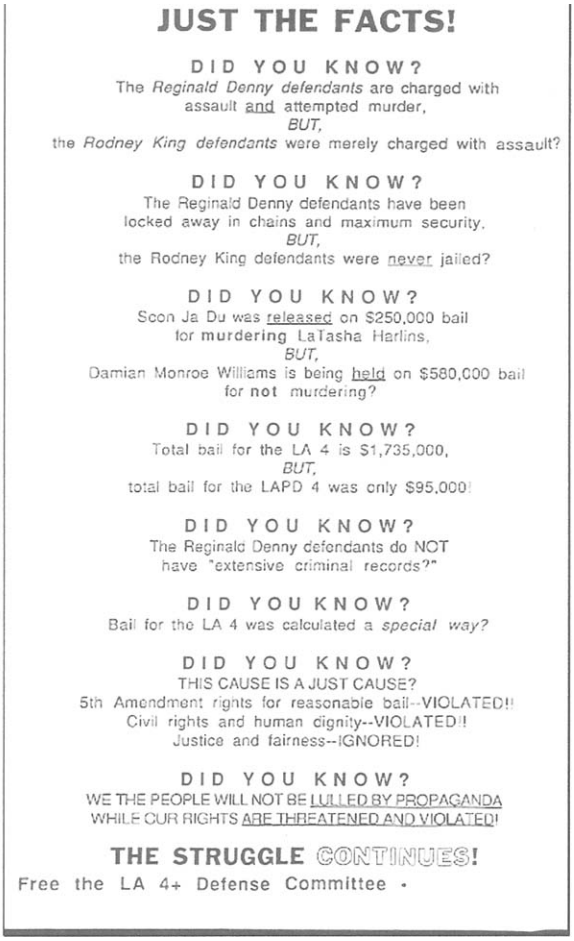
[51] See also John Caldwell's discussion of the news media's obsession with the images of Florence and Normandie as a "televisual autopilot" for crisis management (308-11).

[52] See Miles Corwin on Denise Harlins, Latasha Harlins' aunt's vigils in front of Soon Ja Doo's house. See also Anna Deavere Smith's interview with Fuller and Armstrong on the phenomenon of aunts becoming active spokeswomen for their wronged nieces and nephews. (69)



JUST THE FACTS!

DID YOU KNOW?
The *Reginald Denny defendants* are charged with assault and attempted murder,
BUT,
the *Rodney King defendants* were merely charged with assault?

DID YOU KNOW?
The Reginald Denny defendants have been locked away in chains and maximum security.
BUT,
the Rodney King defendants were never jailed?

DID YOU KNOW?
Soon Ja Du was released on $250,000 bail for **murdering** LaTasha Harlins,
BUT,
Damian Monroe Williams is being held on $580,000 bail for **not** murdering?

DID YOU KNOW?
Total bail for the LA 4 is $1,735,000,
BUT,
total bail for the LAPD 4 was only $95,000!

DID YOU KNOW?
The Reginald Denny defendants do NOT have "extensive criminal records?"

DID YOU KNOW?
Bail for the LA 4 was calculated a *special way?*

DID YOU KNOW?
THIS CAUSE IS A JUST CAUSE?
5th Amendment rights for reasonable bail--VIOLATED!!
Civil rights and human dignity--VIOLATED!!
Justice and fairness--IGNORED!

DID YOU KNOW?
WE THE PEOPLE WILL NOT BE LULLED BY PROPAGANDA
WHILE OUR RIGHTS ARE THREATENED AND VIOLATED!

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES!
Free the LA 4+ Defense Committee •

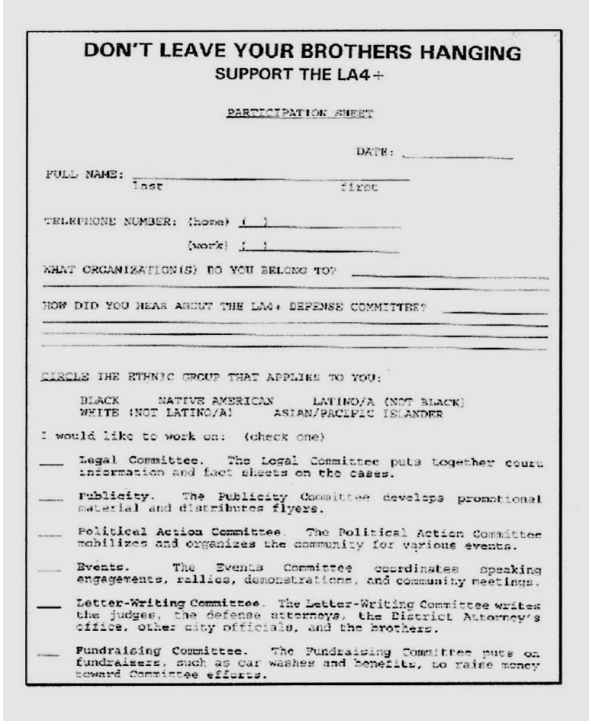
Figure 5.6 "Just the Facts"

Organizational Structure

Both organizations adopted a public, rather than a concealed approach, to avoid charges of being subversive institutions employing illegal tactics. Their founding documents adopted a posture that everything was in the open. Leaders' names, addresses, and phone numbers were all publicized, together with the names of family members whom the two organizations supported. The organizations' flyers, intended to recruit more volunteers, resembled legal questionnaires published by the federal and state governments. Volunteers were asked to identify themselves, provide information on previous organizational affiliations, and indicate their ethnicity according

to one of the following groups: black, white, Native American, Latina, Latino, or Asian-Pacific Islander.

The LA4+ Committee and Mothers ROC were able to mobilize several hundred people, who raised funds, organized public events, gathered and disseminated legal information, and maintained regular contacts with the defendants' families. These widespread actions depended on a careful organizational structure. Appeals to an ever-greater number of activists from within and outside the black community were combined with meticulous adherence to a democratic organizational structure and precise security measures. Women were represented in the organizations' steering committees and constituted a majority of their rank-and-file activists.



DON'T LEAVE YOUR BROTHERS HANGING
SUPPORT THE LA4+

PARTICIPATION SHEET

DATE: _____

FULL NAME: _____
last first

TELEPHONE NUMBER: (home) ( ) _____
(work) ( ) _____

WHAT ORGANIZATION(S) DO YOU BELONG TO? _____

HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE LA4+ DEFENSE COMMITTEE? _____

CIRCLE THE ETHNIC GROUP THAT APPLIES TO YOU:

BLACK NATIVE AMERICAN LATINO/A (NOT BLACK)
WHITE (NOT LATINO/A) ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER

I would like to work on: (check one)

___ **Legal Committee.** The Legal Committee puts together court information and fact sheets on the cases.

___ **Publicity.** The Publicity Committee develops promotional material and distributes flyers.

___ **Political Action Committee.** The Political Action Committee mobilizes and organizes the community for various events.

___ **Events.** The Events Committee coordinates speaking engagements, rallies, demonstrations, and community meetings.

___ **Letter-Writing Committee.** The Letter-Writing Committee writes the judges, the defense attorneys, the District Attorney's office, other city officials, and the Brothers.

___ **Fundraising Committee.** The Fundraising Committee puts on fundraisers, such as car washes and benefits, to raise money toward Committee efforts.

Figure 5.7 LA4+ Committee Participation Sheet.

Volunteers were given a choice of a number of sub-committees that they could join, including: (1) a Legal Committee that produced court information and fact sheets on cases, (2) a

Publicity Committee that developed promotional materials and distributed flyers, (3) a Political Action Committee that mobilized the community for various events and wrote letters to various officials “and the brothers," (4) an Events Committee that coordinated speaking engagements, and (5) a Family Support Committee that maintained contact with the family and compiled personal profiles on the defendants.

Volunteers were given clear and detailed instructions and contact information to reach out to various groups, including churches, mosques, synagogues, heavily black police stations, and the Black Bar Association. In an attempt to make the LA4+ Committee less hierarchical and more diversified, the steering committee members were asked to limit their involvement to only two other sub-committees. Finally, to guard against provocation from police, who saw the rise of these organizations as a threat, the LA4+ Committee recruited volunteers to maintain order at public events. A sergeant-at-arms was designated to keep the meetings in order. He or she had “the right to escort the person out of the room if [that person] became unruly” (see Figure 5.8).

FREE THE LA 4+ DEFENSE COMMITTEE
Subcommittees

All subcommittees must submit plans to committee for review and approval. Each subcommittee will have one subcommittee coordinator and at least two members. Coordinators will report to committee and shall be responsible for ensuring that their subcommittee activities are implemented as approved. It is crucial that we present a united front and act according to parliamentary procedures. The LA4+ includes Antoine Miller, Damian Williams, Henry Watson, Gary Williams, Anthony Brown, Lance Parker, Cornell Cunningham and Mark Jackson.

LEGAL
- Maintain contacts with all attorneys
- Notify attorneys of committee activities
- Compile and maintain LA4+ court data
  - court dates
  - court decisions
  - court transcripts
- Prepare fact sheet on these cases (bail figures, court dates and decisions, official statements, public and media reactions, etc.)
- Compile data on police brutality records for four LAPD officers

FAMILY SUPPORT
- Maintain contacts with families
- Notify families of committee activities
- Identify needs of families
- Compile personal profiles, acquire photos of defendants and family spokespersons

PUBLICITY
- Develop promotional materials (flyers, buttons, bumper stickers, t-shirts, banners, signs, press releases)
- Coordinate speaking engagements for spokespersons
- Prepare media and flyer distribution list
- Promote activities (distribute flyers, press releases, etc.)
- Prepare media kits

POLITICAL ACTION
- Acquire endorsements/statements from officials/organizations
- Prepare distribution list for letter writing campaign
- Solicit letter writers
- Prepare and coordinate outreach for petition drive
- Prepare phone tree distribution list for on-the-spot supporters

EVENTS
- Coordinate events (demonstrations, rallies, town hall meetings, etc.)
- Work in conjunction with other subcommittees for event coordinate

Figure 5.8 LA4+ “Subcommittees” (Dorothy Freeman Papers)

Creating a New Alternative Media

Members of both the LA4+ and Mothers ROC recognized that the battle for the defense of the incarcerated youth had to be fought in both the legal/judicial and the symbolic discursive arenas. In the pages of their newsletters, new legal developments, especially new California crime bills, were routinely discussed. These newsletters also regularly published articles written by both regular columnists and prisoners.

The 1995 Federal Crime Bill called for the construction of more prisons, the employment of 100,000 more police, and the institution of the infamous "Three Strikes and You're Out" legislation. Under these new laws, anyone convicted of a third felony ended up in prison for life. In the June 1995 issue of The ROC, Teresa Allison's column, "A Word from the President," attacked the pending California crime legislation as "an ongoing war against the people of color." Allison argued that the disproportionate number of blacks in prison was not directly linked to a higher crime rate among them:

> The fact that People of Color fill this nation's hell holes (prisons) does not mean they commit all the crimes. It only means they are targeted for arrest and conviction at a high rate. Where is it written that a black or Latino man can't be out in any street or any neighborhood anytime of day or night? But to a cruising racist cop, if you're a black man on the street you must be up to NO good. And please don't let there be a report of a robbery or a shooting in the area, and have the police spot a black man. He'll be tried and convicted on the spot. . . . Most of our leaders are only interested in passing a crime bill that will ensure that hundreds of thousands of our youth are locked up. Who do you think those one

> hundred thousand cops are for? Who do you think will be sitting in prison for life under the Three Strikes Laws? No one but you!! You must wake up. (2)

The ROC also printed a letter from Juan Greer, a thirty-seven-year-old prisoner who had been in jail from the age of seventeen on murder charges, under the heading of "A Message from Hell":

> [T]he fastest growing industry in California is the warehousing of human beings. Eighty percent of the prisoners in the California State Prison are people of color. When I came to prison in 1976 there were two prisons in the whole state. Nineteen years later, there are forty plus, and society has approved the building of at least twenty more prisons (The Roc Nov. 1994 p 1).

Greer argued that this was not a war on crime, but a war on the country's African-American population. New terms were coined to reflect the community's anger and resentment. The court system was not "a criminal justice system" but an "injustice system." Numerous flyers asked that "white on black" crime be judged the same way as "black on white" crime.

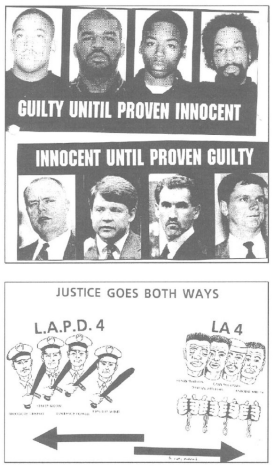


Figure 5.9 Double Standard

Volunteers were reminded that their central constituency was the black community and that they needed "to get information to the black community . . . the core of this movement." A particularly moving flyer for a 12 January 1993 mass community rally in support of the LA4+ Defendants warned: "Don't leave your brothers hanging." The message was accompanied by the graphic images of four castrated and lynched black men chained to a post. It was a stark warning that "black people are being legally lynched once more." In the same document, the LA4+ Committee demanded support so the defendants would receive a fair trial. No longer were they to become the "official scapegoats" of the Los Angeles rebellion (see Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10 "Don't Leave Your Brother Hanging"

Members of the LA4+ and Mothers ROC set up a neighborhood watch that monitored police action. In August and September 1995, Mothers ROC produced detailed instructions on how to return the gaze and deal with a police officer who was suspected of mistreating a citizen along the lines suggested by Freeman (see Figure 5.11). Freeman, who was in her early seventies, had worked with Martin Luther King in the Civil Rights Movement. She believed that

police harassment could be checked if officers realized that they were being constantly monitored by the public. In a sense the police and the community had to change places, so that the police feared the public's gaze rather than the other way around. She knew how to make use of the talents of the most ordinary members of the group and had developed a number of specific instructions on ways of behaving in the streets, in the courthouse, and before the media, in order to bring attention to the subject of police abuse. As Judy recalled:

> If Dorothy saw that the police in the neighborhood had stopped someone and were harassing some blacks or Latinos, she would stop, park her car, stand there, and watch. And the police would say, "Did you want something Ma'am?" And she would say "No I'm just observing; just observing." And they did not like that. Sometimes she would bring a camera. She did that kind of thing on a regular basis (Tanzawa).

This type of police monitoring was taught by Freeman to other members of the LA4+ and proved to be highly effective.

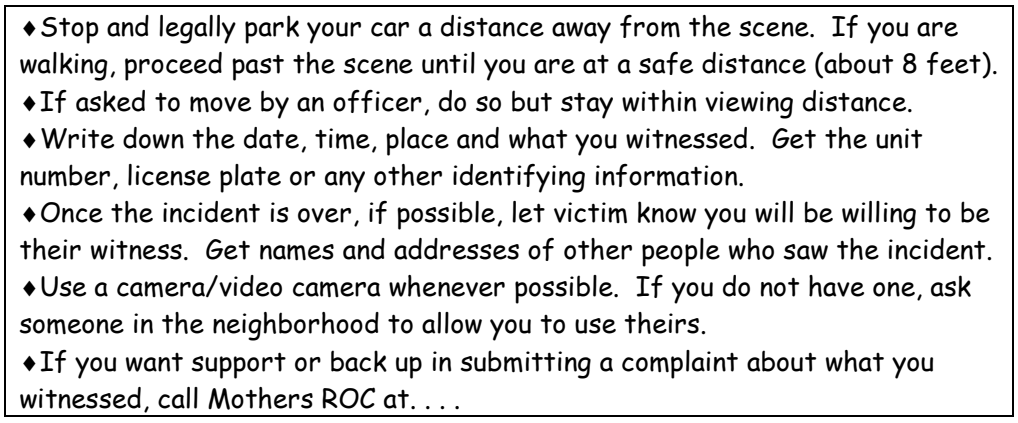

♦Stop and legally park your car a distance away from the scene. If you are walking, proceed past the scene until you are at a safe distance (about 8 feet).
♦If asked to move by an officer, do so but stay within viewing distance.
♦Write down the date, time, place and what you witnessed. Get the unit number, license plate or any other identifying information.
♦Once the incident is over, if possible, let victim know you will be willing to be their witness. Get names and addresses of other people who saw the incident.
♦Use a camera/video camera whenever possible. If you do not have one, ask someone in the neighborhood to allow you to use theirs.
♦If you want support or back up in submitting a complaint about what you witnessed, call Mothers ROC at. . . .

Figure 5.11 From The ROC

The organizations produced counter-media images for rebuttal. They gave free replacement tapes to members who owned videocassette recorders and asked them to tape certain news programs on a daily basis and bring the tapes to the meetings. Special attention was paid to the black-owned media, including newspapers, such as The Sentinel,[53] and radio stations, such as KJLH. The radio was especially important to the organizers because it was "the media most frequently and widely used by the black community" (Phylis Ann Johnson). The LA4+ Committee also targeted local television stations' for unfair coverage (see Figure 5.12).

PROTEST UNFAIR & INACCURATE MEDIA IMAGES

We the Afrikan and New Afrikan (Black) communities have constantly been the victims of stereotyping based on the negative images given of us in The Media.

These Images have been used historical to justify denying us our basic human rights, so (unfortunately) it is no surprise to find out that The Media is using these same tricks against our Brothers accused in the Reginald Denny Case. The News Media has been trying to **LYNCH** our Brothers in the minds of the people since before the trial started, and now they are reporting only half-truths or outright lies when covering this case. One station in particular **KCAL Channel 9** and their reporter **David Goldstien** are blatant examples of this type of so-called reporting and I think we the people should let them know what we think about this!

WE DEMAND...

1. A Formal Apology to the Families of the Accused privately and ON-AIR by Channel 9.
2. The Immediate Resignation of David Goldstien.

PLAN OF ACTION:

1. **PROTEST** Where: KCAL Channel 9
5515 Melrose
Hollywood, CA 90038
When: Friday September 3, 1993 at 8:00am

2. **BOYCOTT WATCHING CHANNEL 9** and **BOYCOTT THEIR MAJOR SPONSORS** (list will be provided by the LA4+ rep. at the protest)

3. **CALL** KCAL channel 9 between 8:30am-6:00pm at 1-213-467-9999 stating in your own words these ideas:

I am offended by your Station's and David Goldstien's misrepresentation of the facts in the Denny case, and in your belief that we the public are so stupid that we could not find out that what you said was a lie. So until you address my concerns I will not watch you station or buy any products made by your sponsors.

4. **LETTERS** addressed to the Attn.: Station Manager at KCAL Channel 9

Any Questions please call The LA4+ Defense Committee 1-213-566-3027

Figure 5.12 Flyer

[53] See Ronald Jacobs's Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society: From Watts to Rodney King on the importance of the contributions of African-American newspapers, such as The Sentinel, The Defender, and Amsterdam News, in constructing an alternative black public sphere.

The group also developed a coherent policy on ways of speaking to conservative reporters and created a counter-response to the dominant images and rhetorical trajectories of the mainstream media. Bell pointed out:

> The media has a habit of finding a person that looks like the dumbest person there and then asking "So what do you say happened?' And that person will be the least educated and least involved "I don't know. But I think the police was right." We needed someone to say that, one, they overcharged them, and two they didn't read them their Miranda rights, and another nine or ten points. (Mollie Bell, personal interview)

These efforts were inspired by the earlier experiences of several activists from the Black Panther Movement and the SNCC era. In the late 1960s, the Black Panthers Movement in Oakland had created a model for self-organizing within communities. These principles continued to resonate with many of the same activists who were now older. These older activists no longer encouraged young men to put on uniforms, but they did help organize street-level observations and documentation against both possible criminal actions and police violence, as we have seen (Figure 5.11). Michael Zinzun, discussed in the previous chapter, made it amply clear that the networks of earlier Black Panthers activists had an important following. Mothers ROC organized educational workshops, and panels routinely included college professors, attorneys, sympathetic public defenders, and former and present gang members, in an attempt to teach the public about the court system's injustices.

Latina Organizations

Even before the 1992 uprising, several grassroots and community-based Latina groups were becoming active in Los Angeles. Among them were Madres de ELA (Mothers of East Los Angeles) and Vendedores Ambulantes (Association of Street Vendors).[54] Madres de ELA was formed in the late 1980s. The group opposed the construction of a prison in East Los Angeles and rejected the installation of a trash incineration plant because of its anticipated health hazards. Vendedores Ambulantes was concerned with working women's issues, particularly assaults by local merchants and the police on Salvadoran and Mexican immigrant women who worked as street vendors.

After the Los Angeles rebellion, life became more difficult for the Latino/a immigrant population of Los Angeles. The United States Border Patrol and Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) authorities initiated a large-scale sweep and deported thousands of men and women. In response, California became the scene of scores of new activist initiatives. Latino/a organizations documented the illegal arrests of immigrants and filed lawsuits to stop them. Caribbean & Central American Support (CARECEN), and El Rescate, a shelter for women, demanded to interview the INS detainees and often were able to do so. Together they proved that one-third of the arrested people were improperly incarcerated (Brace). These activities were supported by UCLA students, who joined tens of thousands of marchers from East Los Angeles. A commemoration of the death of Cesar Chavez was turned into a hunger strike and sit-in on the campus, which successfully prevented the closure of its Chicano Library and eventually won recognition and funding for an independent Chicano Studies department.

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[54] See Mary S. Pardo's Mexican American Women Activists: Identity and Resistance in Two Los Angeles Communities and Luis J. Rodriquez's The Republic of East LA: Stories.

A California ballot initiative designed to cut off social services, health care, and public education to undocumented immigrants and their children was passed by a majority of voters in 1994. The measure had gained momentum in part due to a backlash against the large participation of Central American immigrants in the 1992 events. The introduction of Proposition 187 led to one of the largest Latino protests in the history of Los Angeles. On 15 October 1994 nearly half a million people participated in an anti-187 demonstration in East Los Angeles. Thousands of teachers and other state employees signed petitions declaring their refusal to carry out 187's requirements to report undocumented immigrants. The organizing efforts against 187 were supported by both the LA4+ and the Mothers ROC members and created many opportunities for them to attend public events to declare solidarity with undocumented Latino immigrants. Before 187 could go into effect, a federal court declared it to be unconstitutional and state officials decided to drop the appeals process in 1998.

But the riots of 1992 had also devastated the Latino/a working-class neighborhoods of Pico-Belmont, one of the most impoverished communities of Los Angeles. In response, several existing Latina organizations adopted a more activist orientation. New Economics for Women (NEW), the first economic development organization in the United States organized by and for Latinas, especially single mothers, played a crucial role during this period. NEW was responsible for the construction of Casa Loma, a housing project that provided affordable homes for low-income single parents, as well as a variety of social services. After the riots, Casa Loma focused on job creation and economic development, as well as support for undocumented workers. Residents patrolled the streets in an attempt to prevent both police abuse and vandalism. Young Latino/as volunteered once a month to paint over wall graffiti by local gang groups. Through these around-the-clock activities, NEW publicity materials claimed to have

reduced crime levels in the Pico-Belmont neighborhoods by thirty percent in ten years, even though the organization had a regular staff of only eleven members. NEW was also instrumental in providing better health and nutrition programs for the community, establishing bilingual day care centers and sponsoring ESL and computer classes, thus making a substantial contribution to the community's revitalization.[55]

The Focus on Motherhood

Another tactic was to foreground the involvement of the mothers with the committee so as to counteract the dominant discourse of the inner city as a place where everyone was a thief, a drug addict, or lived in a crack-house. The defendants had to be presented as young men from loving families with attentive mothers:

> All the world knew, was that this enraged, crazed black boy from South Central took a brick and tried to smash-in Reginald Denny's head. So now we got to make him human. How do we make him human? It was left up to each of us individually to make it so in our own way. (Bell, personal interview)

The focus on mothers of the men in both the LA4+ and the Mothers ROC Committees was not accidental; nor was it because these women saw motherhood as their primary vocation. As Diane Taylor has argued in the case of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, a distinction must be made between the "performance" of motherhood and "essentialist notions of motherhood" that are attributed to activist women who take on that identity. The mothers in these organizations consciously accentuated the latter essentialist notions. In this way, they also created confusion in the minds of commentators who focused too narrowly on the women's role

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[55] See also New Economics for Women at http://www.enterprisefoundation.org.

as mothers while missing the mothers' self-conscious decision to agitate as mothers, to utilize their "gender as performance" (Taylor 293).

Rhetorical and Visual Devices

Some women had their own flamboyant style in dealing with the media. Bell's religious convictions were not always expressed in theological language. Instead she sometimes expressed them through the medium of popular culture. In some of her talks about the experience of 1992, and her political awakening, she compared herself and others to the comic book character Popeye the Sailor Man, who gained strength to fight his enemies once he consumed a can of spinach: "I always say I went into a Popeye mode, you know the cartoon character, the sailor--I couldn't stand it no more, I popped. . . . People just threw a tantrum (Bell, personal interview). Through this reference to a cartoon figure, Bell was able to reframe an incident that had frightened mainstream society and led to a demonization of African-American and immigrant Latino communities. She was also presenting this violent episode in L.A. in a more jovial mood and hence rendered it perhaps more acceptable.

Williams had an eye for the video and still cameras and at times used her umbrella to make a point. As Molly recalled:

> I was watching television. I saw Georgiana Williams on the television, I didn't know her. And they were talking about Damien and she was getting on the elevator and she shook her umbrella at the police officers and they said on the television that they were going to meet and talk about this at someplace. I said I have to be there! (Bell, personal interview)

Journalists found Williams an intriguing presence and often followed her around. At this point she found a new way of pushing them away while simultaneously drawing further attention to

herself. She brought a spray bottle to the courtroom and whenever the journalists got too close to her, squirted them with the bottle and said: "Quit following me" (Tanzawa). Naturally this was also covered on television. Once the daily court-watching ended, Williams rushed home to see if the local television channels reported on the days protests, and if so for how long. She boycotted the channels which presented her in a negative light, often showing a five second clip of her interview out of context. To the local affiliates of CBS, NBC, and KCAL she refused to give any more interviews. But she allowed ample time for interviews with the reporters from ABC, and some of the LA Times reporters such as Ed Brodsky, John Mitchell, and Ashley Dun.

As Dwight Conquergood has pointed out, resistance against hegemonic powers can sometimes be expressed through "silent gestures" and "tactical refusal." When subordinated people such as Georgiana Williams become the focus of media attention, they may not always be able to establish "free and open debate on level playing field" with those in positions of power. Nor will people like Williams always have the "privilege of explicitness" (Interdisciplinary 4). This is not because they necessarily lack a deep understanding of a specific discursive field of knowledge, but because women like Williams have no control over the mainstream media and the manner in which their statements might be edited or framed. Hence Williams's gesture of silence towards those she deemed hostile, at a time when her son was on trial and the media was clamoring for an interview with her, may have been the best tactic of resistance at the time.

The LA4+ Committee also focused on some of the non-violent aspects of the uprising, and the irresponsible conduct of the police. Although protesters had tried to break into the downtown headquarters of the LAPD on April 29, 1992, participants had refrained from harming the police. LA4+ Committee members repeatedly emphasized this point in various interviews. As Bell indicated: "we never overthrew the police, nobody was attacking one police officer, and

they weren't jumped on or beat up" (Bell, personal interview). Instead LA4+ Committee members reversed the blame and argued that the police had abdicated their responsibilities during the riots and allowed "unruly consumption"[56] —the taking of merchandise from stores and setting them on fire—to continue, so the police could later appeal to the anxieties of the people and reassert their role as the protectors of civil society against the mob.

For years, the police had been criticized for brutal treatment of inner city youth. By completely withdrawing from the city, and allowing the looting to continue and spread, the police seemed to have sent the message: "See what happens when we don't forcefully enforce the law." As Sergeant Charles Duke told Anna Deavere Smith:

> I can't prove this,
> But I believe Daryl Gates,
> And the Command staff were gonna do an "in your face" to the
> City Council
> And police commission, saying:
> "You took upper body control hold away from us –
> Now we're really gonna show you what you're gonna get.
>
> (Smith 2003 55)

Building on Traditions: Ethics of Caring

Victor Turner wrote of the "reflexive" moment in social dramas when redressive performances flourish and traditional symbols are reappropriated to generate space for new cultural repertoires (92). The creation of a counter-public space in Los Angeles involved careful

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[56] See "The Last Word: Unruly Consumption," in jumpcut 46

use of available, but scarce resources, as well as a reliance on a repertoire of traditional community rituals and ethics. Rituals and interactions, which had previously defined extended family relations, kin, and religious institutes, were now reappropriated in the political movement.

In Mothers ROC and the LA 4+ Committee, unemployed members of the community who possessed some legal knowledge were asked to work at information centers. These individuals called upon more informed members of the legal community for advice and gave family members detailed information on courtroom proceedings. A schedule of time-slots for participating in the trials was provided. Volunteers were advised of times to attend the proceedings, as well as the schedules for lunch breaks and recesses.

MOTHERS ROC
Agenda
6-01-94

Mothers ROC was formed to defend/support victims of the police and the criminal injustice system. Our strength comes the fact that we work and fight for each other. Our success depends on each member leading the fight around his/her case. *It is our belief that the system is guilty, not us and not our children!!* We work with all who come to us.

Prayer/Introductions -
a. select someone to take minutes
b. select someone to aid the chair

1. Read (only) decisions from last week's meeting

2. Liberty Hill & funders will visit MROC Sat - June 18th 10:00 AM

3. Case calendar BRIEF UPDATE
a. William Jackson - June 6th - Torrance Crt, Div F
b. Ardelphia - June 8th CCB - 13th Fl Dept 124
c. Marian
d. Betina - June 20th - 312 No Spring St 3:00
e. Glen Ford - June 3rd Torrance - Div C
f. Reginald York - ongoing CCB
g. Damen Goff - June 9th - CCB
h. Edwin W - June 13th CCB
i. Ebony -June 15th - Pasadena Crt - 100 Nor Garfield
j. Thomas Howard - June 28th -Pomona Crt
l. Lance Parker - ?
please call office with court dates ahead of time

June 29 Compton Juv. Court - Vicki's son Dept - 261 12th floor

4. New cases - Intake procedure- brief 5 min intro (include what charges are, when court date) Jesse [redacted] 23, Robert Keiston CCB Dept 125 / 15th floor Victim - attempted murder

5. Legal workshop - June 12 - 5 PM ? Tuesday

6. Who is a voting member of MROC - confirm decision

7. MROC - Board nominees Ardelphia - outreach Bettina Pauline

8. Open discussion - 30 minutes

Figure 5.13 Meeting notes.

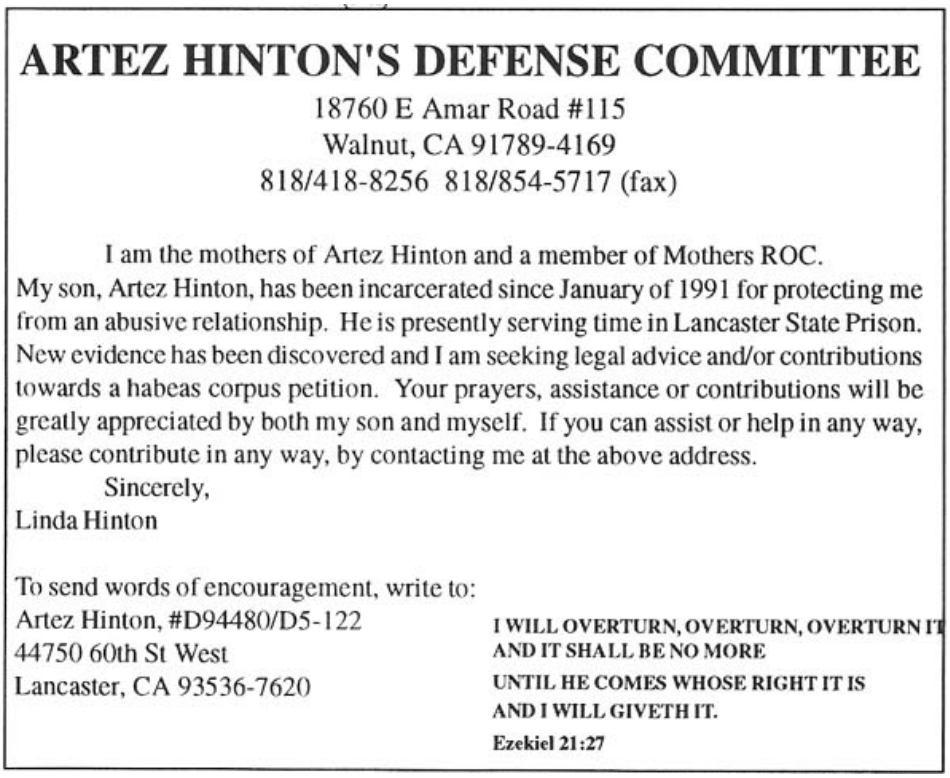
This sense of care was extended to the prisoners as well. Donna Warren, one of the founding members of Mothers ROC, met with over fifty young men during her visit to the

Terminal Island Federal Prison in March 1994 and gave them a message of hope and love. She asked them to maintain contact with their mothers, fathers, and others who had joined the struggle to defend them and suggested that while in prison, young men should remember that they are all brothers. As she wrote in the May 1994 issue of The ROC: "If one of them has a skill he should share it with his brother. If one can read, and another can't, the one who can read should teach his brother (2)."

In their appeals to the community to observe the LA4+ trials, the LA4+ Committee stressed how its supporters' presence in the courtroom provided moral support to the defendants and made it known to the court that others were concerned with the case's outcome and the way justice was practiced. Keeping the black community as the principal object of attention meant that flyers were distributed not just at rallies and benefit concerts, but also at "barber shops, beauty shops, liquor stores, record stores, hardware stores, auto repair shops, clothing stores, grocery stores, churches [mosques], and restaurants" (Freeman Collection).

Mothers ROC celebrated the birthday of Marcus Garvey, the Black Nationalist leader and founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association on August 17th. It also observed Black August to honor the memories of several radical prisoners who were killed by prison guards in the 1970s. Mothers ROC's newsletter also remembered Jeffrey Gaulden, a leader of politically active prisoners who later died as a result of medical neglect in San Quentin Prison. Throughout American prisons, Black August and the birthday of Marcus Garvey were devoted to fasting, along with discussions and readings on black history. Jitu Sidiki wrote in the August-September 1995 edition of The ROC that the same ritual was reenacted in some African-American communities as well, as an expression of solidarity with those who were incarcerated (1).

The family support committee of the LA4+ acquired information about the defendants, maintained regular contact with the incarcerated young men's relatives, and notified them of activities that were being conducted on young men's behalf. Both organizations tried to identify the community's needs, and whenever possible, tried to help them through donations of food and other necessities, and volunteers, who aided the families' essential needs. Mothers' ROC's newsletter regularly featured pleas for support from its members (See figure 5.14)



ARTEZ HINTON'S DEFENSE COMMITTEE

18760 E Amar Road #115
Walnut, CA 91789-4169
818/418-8256 818/854-5717 (fax)

I am the mothers of Artez Hinton and a member of Mothers ROC. My son, Artez Hinton, has been incarcerated since January of 1991 for protecting me from an abusive relationship. He is presently serving time in Lancaster State Prison. New evidence has been discovered and I am seeking legal advice and/or contributions towards a habeas corpus petition. Your prayers, assistance or contributions will be greatly appreciated by both my son and myself. If you can assist or help in any way, please contribute in any way, by contacting me at the above address.

Sincerely,
Linda Hinton

To send words of encouragement, write to:
Artez Hinton, #D94480/D5-122
44750 60th St West
Lancaster, CA 93536-7620

I WILL OVERTURN, OVERTURN, OVERTURN IT AND IT SHALL BE NO MORE UNTIL HE COMES WHOSE RIGHT IT IS AND I WILL GIVETH IT.
Ezekiel 21:27

Figure 5.14

The LA 4 + Committee meetings gradually began to address other issues and at times challenged dominant discourses within the black activist community. Thus, for example, in 1994-1995, and during the course of the O.J. Simpson trial and the Million Man March, some group members took issue with the expressions of homophobia that others expressed in

meetings, especially because a pastor at one of the churches where the activists met regularly was said to be gay. Williams, however, took the lead in speaking out against such expressions of homophobia. As she said in her 1998 talk at San Jose State University:

> We can't be against the gays and lesbians because they choose to have sex in a different manner. I think what you do in bed is your business. We need to build a community and become one to get rid of racism, to get rid of injustice, and to get rid of homophobia.

At times, the feminist dimension of this ethics of care was also put to a test and found wanting. During the early phases of Simpson's trial, Mothers ROC and LA4+ demanded justice for "NO Js" [i.e., not O.J. Simpsons], who had no means to adequately defend themselves. Their literature was headlined: "What about the NO.J.s?" (discussed later in this chapter). Many were forced into a straight jacket of choosing either "domestic violence" or LAPD racism, but not both at the same time. This split and the need to take sides can be seen in the flyers and newsletters of the time. An Editorial by Dewayne Holmes in The ROC, for example, had no words of compassion and regret for the sad fate of Nicole Simpson, also a battered wife and the mother of Simpson's two children. For some, including non-African-Americans, "the race question," which centered on the racist police detective Mark Furman's involvement, trumped all other issues, including gender solidarity across racial lines. In fact, the Los Angeles chapter of the National Organization for Women split over this issue, as did many other progressive organizations throughout the city. Mothers ROC participant Michelle Gubbay spoke about this issue:

> When Dewayne Holmes' column appeared there was a split. There were people in MROC who didn't want to have to make that kind of choice. Some people struggled with how to have simultaneously a focus of awareness both on issues of domestic violence and at the same time not ignore these issues of racism and police misconduct. I think there was a split in MROC between supporters of Dewayne Holmes' editorial and those who didn't want to take a stand and felt they should support the nO.J.s. (Gubbay, personal interview).

Redefining the Self: One's Life as a Work of Art

Ethnographer Ruth Behar, who has written on the lives of Mexican-Indian women, pointed out that the women she interviewed were often very conscious of the fact that in telling their stories they were also constructing a particular image of themselves and of their communities and, hence, presenting their lives as texts. In narrating their stories, Behar's subjects often based themselves on a variety of models, among them Christian narratives and cultural myths that attributed great powers to women (11-12). Historian Ruth Feldstein presented a similar view when she examined the life story of Mamie Till Bradley, whose son Emmett Till was brutally murdered by two white southerners in Mississippi in 1955. Feldstein argued that not only constructions of gender, but constructions of motherhood, were a "battleground on which the meaning of Till's death was fought" (265). White society had created certain definitions of who was a "good" and "proper" mother. Feldstein's study documented how the struggle of Mamie Bradley, a black, working-class mother of thirty-three, began by establishing her own "credentials" as a caring and qualified mother. Feldstein argued that, at the funeral, the trial, and the ensuing political debates, "she claimed the public role of

grieving mother and thus reformulated conceptions of both white and African-American motherhood" (266). Her actions challenged the exclusion of black, single-mothers from the definition of appropriate (white) motherhood and from the "gendered discourse of politics" (266).

Williams's campaign on behalf of her son Damien followed a similarly complex form. First, Williams labored strenuously to reframe the events at Florence and Normandie and to refute the many implied and expressed charges against her "mothering." She carefully constructed a narrative that emphasized the credentials of several generations of women in her family as honest, capable, and qualified mothers. Second, she strengthened her narrative by drawing upon the rhetorical forms of earlier speeches and pronouncements by key civil rights figures in American history, from Sojourner Truth to Martin Luther King.

Williams's version of what happened at Florence and Normandie on April 29 differed markedly from the standard version in that she emphasized what happened before the beating of Reginald Denny:

> At about 3:30 p.m. on the 29th of April 1992 the police began harassing all the young men at the corner. They began to beat up one young man and his mother, and many neighbors ran over to stop the beating. The police then arrested three of the men including my older son Mark. After this horrible experience everyone in the neighborhood was running around crying and saying: "They beat Rodney King and got off and now they're over here doing the same thing." This is what sparked Florence and Normandie, the injustice of it all. (Williams 1997)

After Damien Williams' trial a black pastor told a Los Angeles Times reporter, "Look, the boy committed the crime. She [Williams] needs to get off this babying and pampering. He's a criminal" (Dunn, "Williams' Mother Becomes A Crusader in his Defense"). While the text was directed against the son as "criminal," the subtext seemed to suggest that it was Williams's mothering—"babying and pampering"—that had helped bring on his criminality. In a USA Today article, singer CaSheaers suggested that "Georgiana Williams holds the key as to whether or not this city erupts again. She's the most powerful woman in the city" (El Nasser, "New Unrest"). During the trial of Damien Williams, Peter Boyer wrote an essay in The New Yorker that described Williams as "the mother of the L.A. riot." But Williams, and a host of other women, stood up to these sexist and racist stereotypes. Williams' first response to Boyer's essay was: "I am no mother of no riot" (Williams, personal interview). But there were also sympathetic coverage of her activities. In a front-page feature article in the Los Angeles Times, reporter Ashley Dunn quoted Williams' neighbor Naomi Bradley as saying: "I would just hope my mother would fight for me like that" (Dunn, "Williams' Mother Becomes A Crusader in his Defense").

While Damien was serving his sentence, Georgiana Williams worked ceaselessly to ensure his safety within the prison. In an interview she pointed out: "We monitor the justice system, keep a video camera and a 35mm camera with us, and as soon as we see the police, we start filming. Let me tell you, cameras make a difference. We pack the courtrooms. We meet with lawyers. We protest. We write letters. We jam phone lines and FAX lines. We make ourselves known" (Williams, "From the South to South Central"). At one point, when a warden threatened to transfer her son to a prison nearby, Williams campaigned to keep him as far away as possible from Los Angeles prisons in order to protect and shelter him from local prison gang

warfare. However, soon after members of the LA4, including Damien, were released from prison, the LAPD began a campaign of intimidation. Each youth was eventually charged with a minor violation and returned to jail.

At a 1997 Frontline Feminisms conference, Williams' narrative began with a description of her grandmother, Big Mama, as a highly responsible woman who helped her family survive dire poverty and starvation in a Mississippi plantation. Williams focused on the lessons she had learned from her grandmother about fighting for her rights:

> I still don't know how we would have survived had it not been for my grandmother, who would speak out. She was the granddaughter of the master of the plantation. She would say to Mr. Hawkins, "I want some food for my family." He would tell her, "Dora, we ain't gonna make no money this year." And she would answer back, "We didn't make any money last year either." (Williams, "From Mississippi to South Central L.A.")

Big Mama was also concerned with her grandchildren's education. Mr. Hawkins padlocked the local school and forbade his tenants from sending their children there. Big Mama resisted the order, went to Mr. Hawkins's house, and demanded to see him:

> Mr. Hawkins came to the back door and asked, "What you want, Dora?" And Big Mama told him, "I finished my crop and I want my children to go to school. And they are not going to work in anybody else's field." He paused and said, "Okay." The locks were removed from the school as long as the plantation existed, until the 1970s. (Williams, "From Mississippi to South Central L.A.")

Big Mama was just as strict in her own house and would not allow any visible sexual transgressions by the men on the plantation. After studying at the school plantation, Williams moved away to train as a nurse in Mississippi and later moved to Los Angeles. She credited her grandmother's determination for giving her the courage to move away and not to become another source of cheap labor or sexual exploitation for the plantation owner or for other men on the plantation. Williams insisted that not every woman on the plantation had her grandmother's forceful presence:

> I am very thankful to be the granddaughter of a lady who had the courage to speak. She did not allow the things that went on in other families to happen to us. My great great aunt had no say over her own body. Her sister's husband had four children by her. This made the plantation owner very proud. The plantation owners were pleased when big men would breed women on their plantations. The big man could breed any woman he wanted, and there was nothing any woman could say. So you can see why I said I'd be damned if it would happen to me. I barely made it out of high school. I did well in nursing school. Then I got the hell out, at the age of twenty-one. (Williams, "From Mississippi to South Central L.A.")

Williams's account took her audiences to places where the legacies of slavery and of the sexual molestation of black women by white men were still alive. At the same time, Williams showed that the plantation system fostered an environment where black women faced abuse by black, as well as white men. Her dynamic account of her powerful grandmother immediately subverted the image of the passive, subordinate black woman of the plantation.

In our conversations Georgiana included a careful sketch of her own mother as a person of impeccable ethical mores and convictions, "Mama always said that you lie about one thing, you'll lie about another one. And we was always taught never to tell a lie" (Williams, personal interview). The contrast between her mother's value system and that of the LAPD and the judicial system could not be sharper. As she explained earlier to her college student audience:

> I'm telling you that the police will lie, the District Attorney will agree with the lie, and the judge will send somebody "up the river" on the lies of the police and the DA. You need to get involved; you need to monitor your community. When you see the police stop, don't be a coward. If you have to go to the store and pretend you're looking at a paper or reading a sign, you want to see what the police are doing to the people in your community. (Williams, "From the South to South Central")

Williams then extended her grandmother's and mother's concept of ethics to the way she lived her life and insisted that until the May 1992 incident with Damien, she had always respected the police and the firefighters. Indeed one of her biggest complaints in the community until 1992 was that people in California, unlike in the South, were not sufficiently respectful toward firefighters and the police (Williams, personal interview). She also emphasized her nurturing attitude toward other young members of the community, whom she regularly fed, bathed, and even disciplined:

> I've always cooked; so there's always been a lot of kids coming into my house…. You'd get up and you'd cook biscuits and grits and chicken wings and bacon and sausage every morning for your kids to eat before they'd go to school. And then

> in the evening you'd cook a big dinner. So, all the kids in the neighborhood was always coming to my house and eating … I would take their clothes off them and put them in the bathtub and give them a bath, wash and dry their clothes, comb their hair, whoop their butt too. They'd said, "I'm gonna tell my mama." "You bring your mama over here, I'll whoop her butt," I said. . . . But everybody wanted their kids to eat so we had to do what Georgiana said. (Williams, personal interview)

When she bought a house on 71st Street near Normandie, she likewise demanded that the neighbors keep the streets clean, "I used to get the broom and tell 'em move those cars and clean this street" (Williams, "From Mississippi to South Central L.A."). In this way, Williams presented herself in her lectures and interviews as a traditional, law-abiding, and respectable mother. Her point was that Damien had been raised in a stable and nurturing family, even if the head of this household was a working-class single-mother. Accordingly, he should be treated with the same dignity and by the same standards that society values the hallowed role of motherhood for others.

Under the guise of traditional motherhood, this discourse was infused with a subtle, radical content as well. Williams using words and concepts that often invoked, or even echoed classic speeches and writings by leading civil rights activists. In her classic "Ain't I a Woman" speech, Sojourner Truth said:

> Look at me! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns and no man could head me. And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well. And ain't I a woman? I

> have borne thirteen children and seen most all sold off, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me (qtd. in Patricia Hill Collins Black Feminist Thought 14).

Williams followed a similar pattern at one of her lectures in 1997:

> My name is Georgiana Williams. I am the daughter of a sharecropper, the sixth of thirteen children, born in the hills of Mississippi where the white man was the law. I picked cotton, I know how to make soap, I know how to milk the cow, and I know how to plow the field. You did what you were told. We were told that we were free. I am here to tell you that we were not free. (Williams "From Mississippi to South Central L.A.").

Today Los Angeles is promoted as a model of urban multiculturalism, but most of the city has distanced itself from the struggles of the poor, who live in ghettos. Williams rooted her activism more deeply in the struggles of the poor by writing, speaking, and organizing local networks of neighborhood young and old women and men in their neighborhoods. At feminist conferences, church meetings, rallies, and marches, Williams challenged mainstream and left-wing politicians, as well as ordinary folks to be vigilant. With historical ancestors such as Sojourner Truth and lineal ancestors like Big Mama, we begin to see Williams, not as the stereotypical welfare mother of urban America, but as the heir to a powerful legacy stretching over 150 years. In the San Jose State talk, Williams placed her experiences in the context of the Civil Rights Movements of the 1950s and 1960s and drew on some of the imagery that Martin Luther King had invoked in his famous Memphis speech of 3 April 1968, the day before his assassination. King had ended his rousing speech by turning to the audience and asking for a deeper

commitment to the long, hard road of building community institutions and attaining social justice. Williams demanded the following from the students:

> My message to you all is for you to stay in school and to get a degree. But when you get your degree don't forget where you came from. Don't get greedy and go on up the hills and forget your brothers and sisters, or forget ol' grandma like me who barely made it through high school. So when you get yours, you go back to your community and you look for them brothers and sisters because they need it. Tell your mamas and your daddies they better get involved cause they're gonna fill the prisons up with our brothers and sisters. They cannot be afraid. Martin Luther King gave his life, and I'll give mine, and I hope that more mamas and daddies out there will work to make a change. This is not just a black thing; this is a change for all people. We've got poor people that are all colors and this system is against them. (Williams "From the South to South Central")

Again, her words contained a double meaning. She called on the upwardly mobile student population to remember their inner-city roots after graduation and remain committed to their community of origin.

Planet of Hope: Vicky Lindsey and Poetry from the "Hood"

Several members of both the LA 4+ Committee and Mothers ROC were artists and poets. Their work was infused with a new political content in this period, a form of art that spoke eloquently of young lives lost, of mothers' grief, and of optimism for a better world tomorrow. Here the contribution of Vicky Lindsey, a member of Mothers ROC, stands out.

Born in 1958, and a graduate of Compton High School, Lindsey lost her husband to a shoot-out and became the single mother of two young boys. She edited The ROC, Mothers ROC's newsletter and wrote a regular poetry column called "Poetry from the 'hood'." Her poems attracted enough attention to merit a long article on her by Bob Pool in the Los Angeles Times on 16 July 1995.

In the mid-1990s Lindsey drove bus number forty for the Los Angeles Metropolitan Authority. Her route started at the Los Angeles County Jail in downtown Los Angeles, passed through South Central, and ended at the shopping malls of Redondo Beach. By her account, she traveled "from the scruffies to the yuppies" (Pool). On her regular twenty-minute bus layover, she would jot notes on the back of passenger transfer tickets. Using this impromptu method, Vicky authored over six hundred poems.

Through the windshield of her bus, Lindsey watched the world around her and wrote on a variety of subjects. She wrote poems about cute babies, young mothers fighting for child custody, young cocaine addicts wasting away, and a young boy who stepped off her bus, became involved in an altercation with the police, shot before her eyes. She also wrote on Rodney King and O.J. Simpson in her regular "Poetry from the Hood" feature:

> "What about the nO.J.s?"
>
> We never even mention. . . . Less known pay attention . . . until the situation hits home . . . then we want to say the system is WRONG.. . . . Why wait that long? . . . One finds it hard to see . . . that everything may not affect us directly . . . but it affects us all indirectly.

What about the nO.J.s? . . . The ones who sit in jail for days. . . . The ones who've been in there for years. . . . In spite our efforts and tears. .

(The ROC Nov. 1994 3)

One genre of poems Lindsey was often compelled to write was the funeral eulogy. By 1995 she had written fifty of them. Twenty were about people involved in gang shootings. Lindsey prayed she would never have to write a poem eulogizing one of her own children. However, in November 1995, four months after the article about her as bus driver and poet appeared in the Times, Lindsey's son, nineteen-year-old Lionel Whiteside, was killed while attending a football game in Compton. Lindsey would now write that dreaded poem (Benning 13).

"To Lionel . . . Love Vicky"

Lionel, you know how mad I'd be at you

Because of the silly things you would do

You felt that I was being too overprotective

Trust me; I did understand . . . that you were becoming a man

And there were some things on your own you had to do.

But being your mother, I had to still be here to guide you. . . .

Not one time, tho', do I blame myself. . . .

Your senseless killing was definitely at the hands of someone else. . . .

But to the Heavens will come my help. . . .

(The ROC (Jan/Feb 1996): 1)

Lindsey did everything in her power to avoid such a tragedy. Despite great emotional and financial hardships, she had raised two sons in a tough neighborhood. Lionel's girlfriend was expecting a baby. Lindsey recalled that Lionel was very excited about the baby and "he made every doctor's appointment." The baby was born two weeks after Lionel was shot (The ROC, January-February 1996 1).

The poems authored by Lindsey and various others in the pages of The ROC expressed a range of powerful emotions through blending of short, first-person narratives and sketches, a common feature in poetry of mourning (Ramazani 35). Sometimes poems in The ROC, such as Ardelphia Hickey's "A Two-way Street," revealed profound existential truths. Here freedom becomes "a two way street," a liberation from class divisions into which both master and slave are born:

"A Two-way Street"

This freedom is a two way street,

I will never be free from you,

Until you are free from me.

Me the serf, you the master is the reality,

Which kept both of us enslaved throughout history …

Right now, let's rise up with courageous determination,

And totally eradicate this scourge from our great nation.

Completely free from you is my human right to be,

Only then will you be truly free from me.

Lest your superiority complex versus my captivity,

May keep us both in bondage for eternity.

What our posterity needs, ancestors denied you and me,

The freedom to travel on this two way street.

Ultimately free, from each other, in peace and harmony.

(The Roc 1.2, July 1994: 1)

The uprising that Ardelphia Hickey envisioned clearly involves liberations on both sides of the conflict, mutual yet separate freedoms. On the arduous road of the struggle, at times despair overtook the participants, causing them to give up on the vision of creating a community of care. At other times, in the case of Vicky Lindsey, a ray of light nourished by her faith turned into a planet of hope.

"Hope"

There are times when I think I can't cope. . . . But because of my faith, I know there's hope.

When I look around and see my own brother kicking me down. . . . I sometimes wonder if hope can really be found. . . . Must I stay on the ground, just lying there not making a sound.

Or shall I speak . . . just to prove I ain't weak . . . or shall I just save my words . . . knowing they really won't be heard.

> Hopelessness is all in the 'hood.' . . . There are times when we all feel we can't cope. . . . But with an ounce of faith, there's a planet of hope!
>
> (The ROC Aug/Sep 1995 3)

Performing an Ethics of Care

Can we define the activities of these women not just as a form of grassroots activism, but also as the performance of an "ethics of care"? Allison Jagger has argued that traditional ethics—religious or academic, in "ancient" or "modern" realms, from Antigone onward—ignore women's experiences in creating just such an "ethics of care" in five related ways. First, they show little concern for women's rights and interests. Second, they casually dismiss issues that take place in the so-called private realm, encompassing the family, both young and old. Third, traditional ethics often subscribe to the position that women do not possess the same moral convictions as men. Fourth, they grant disproportionate value to traditionally male values that privilege independence and autonomy or those that glorify war and death. Finally, they tend to prefer moral reasonings that "emphasize rules, universality, and impartiality, often considered to be a position of male privilege, over culturally feminine ways of moral reasoning that emphasize relationships, particularity, and partiality" (Jagger; Tang).

The black and Latina organizations discussed in this chapter challenged these dominant traditional ethics in all five ways. They have questioned the culturally masculine and privileged, moral paradigm of white bourgeois American society, a paradigm that emphasizes rules, law, and disciplines and regards itself as impartial even when this is clearly not the case. Women's organizations have challenged the very rationality of the criminal justice system through their actions. While police and politicians have presented the incarcerated black and Latino men as

"irrational predators," activists have shown the logic that exists behind the protests, uprisings, and anger. They have demonstrated that there is a history of abuse, mistreatment, and unjust incarceration, and hence have provided a context for their individual actions. If, in fact, white, middle-class society places greater value on cultural traits such as "independence" and "autonomy," the women' s organizations discussed in this chapter employ community and interdependence, expressions associated with culturally feminist women-centered traits[57]. Dominant post welfare-state ethics generally support the false idea that both women and people of color are less developed morally. By establishing their credentials as moral, ethical, and loving mothers and as prominent members of their communities, these women challenge the moral bases of the United States legal system. Traditional ethics dismissed issues and relations that take place within the private domain as "uninteresting" facets of a world in which women care for the young, the old, and the sick. These women's organizations have removed those misconceptions as well. Fewer dichotomies between the private and public realms now exist. These women placed neglected issues of the family at the center of their activities, transforming these issues into a set of desirable and attainable ethical goals that both men and women in the organizations could pursue.

Activist women in Los Angeles during and after the 1992 LA riots combined multiple feminist approaches to ethics without concern for the traditional academic divisions on the issue. They employed a "maternal approach to ethics," one that emphasized the daily practices of being a woman, especially the mother's role in preserving and nurturing a child's life. Their "feminist approach to ethics" is one that investigated the sites of power and questioned its dominant and

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[57] See Ruth Wilson Gilmore.

subordinate positions. The "uprising textualities" born from these investigations found their way into at least one major performance work, Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 by Anna Deavere Smith which will be taken up in the next chapter.

Chapter Six:

Performing Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992:

Walking in the Words of a Sad and Beautiful Poem

> I am thirsty for a theatre that reclaims performance. We have lent our costumes. We have in fact left our garments unprotected, and they are being worn in courtrooms, they are being worn in the political arena. They are being worn in the business world. . . . And we find ourselves, in an hour such as this, with very little. Have we lent out our empathetic gifts? Oh, I hope not.
>
> Anna Deavere Smith, "Metaphor's Funeral"

An air of optimism greeted Anna Deavere Smith as she arrived on the scene in Los Angeles during the summer of 1992. Although a major social tragedy had just occurred, leaving dead bodies and torched buildings everywhere on the stage, there were also the bugle calls of new arrivals, what Smith called "consciousness on the brink of being raised" ("Insights"). The preceding two chapters explored two movements in the aftermath of the L.A. rebellion focusing on the performance-sensitive activism of gang youth and grassroots women's groups. We examined the public and counter-public spaces that these movements created by exploring their organizing activities, rehearsals, and performances. The dissertation also identified key actors and documented their rhetorical arsenals, the language and imagery they used in their mobilizing efforts. Each chapter viewed the publicity and performances of these grassroots mobilizations as forms of redressive rituals played out on a highly improvisatory and creative stage of the sort that often appears in the aftermath of a breakdown in social norms (Turner). However, during this

period of fermentation, the Mark Taper Forum Theater invited Anna Deavere Smith to produce a performance on the Los Angeles rebellion. Smith interviewed several activist leaders from these movements, including Twilight Bey, a gang truce leader whose name became the title of Smith's performance.

There are many diverse ways to read Smith's texts and performances. Her meteoric rise in both the popular and theatrical arenas can be seen in a rich variety of critical reviews of her work.[58] This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part takes up the printed text, as well as writings on the early stage performances of Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992. The second part focuses on the video production, which was aired on PBS in 2001 with the slightly different title of Twilight Los Angeles. In both parts of the chapter I will be linking a textual analysis of the production to what is, in effect, a "textual analysis" of the rebellion itself. That is, I will be reading Smith's script against other media accounts and narratives. In this way, I hope this intertextual reading will make a new contribution to the literature on the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion.

Part One begins with a discussion of Smith's career, highlighting her experience in creating social dramas (see Chapter One) and pointing to Twilight's circulation in the past decade in the popular and theatrical imaginary. Next, I explore three crucial themes in Smith's social drama. First, I examine Smith's representational strategy in exposing class and race hierarchies in American society. Here I highlight the places in Smith's text where her

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[58] Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 was first published as a play by Dramatists Play Service in 2003. This chapter cites two versions of Twilight. First, I use the 1994 book version entitled Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992. This printed text included fifty characters out of a total of 288 persons interviewed by Smith. Second, I use the video version that was first aired on PBS in 2001. In the first production in 1993, Smith performed twenty-two characters. In 1996 Smith began a new national tour of Twilight. In 2002 she wrote of having performed a total of 46 characters on stage for Twilight.

interlocutors challenge a politics of exclusion and apathy. I focus on the brief openings and imaginative possibilities that appeared after the 1992 breakdown and the efforts to put an end to oppressive policing strategies. Second, I consider how some characters in Twilight drew upon history and memory to make sense of, and also shape, the meaning of then-current events. Here I examine how history and memory served as lenses through which those interviewed by Smith created their own social dramas. I argue that narrated memories of earlier struggles not only do not fade away, but in fact act as a catalyst for agency and for transformation each time a new breakdown in the established order or a new protest movement arises. Third, in Part One, I analyze Smith's representations of a major failure of the Los Angeles Rebellion in its treatment of Korean Americans. By including voices of Korean-American store-owners as both bitter victims and imaginative sympathizers of the events, Smith challenged the simple dichotomies that are often attributed to Koreans and African-Americans.

In Part Two, the focus shifts from a concern with the participants' utterances and meanings to a closer analysis of the presentational and acting techniques that Smith used in her collaboration with film director Marc Levin in producing a video version of Twilight Los Angeles. I begin with a brief discussion of some commonalities that brought the two artists together and made their collaboration so vibrant. The remainder of the chapter is divided into the three sections. The first focuses on Smith's techniques of crossing boundaries of power and lines of gender and race, as she embodied characters that were engaged in a social conflict. The next section on the power of video production examines techniques in camera work and lighting, as well as the documentary footage in the video that added to Smith's power of representation across gender and race lines. The final section of this chapter returns to Smith's uses of

ambiguity and compares that with the uncertainties inherent in the social and political matrices that ground her work.

Part 1: A Theatre that Reclaims Performance

> I have cast myself as an outsider in my artistic life. . . . [I]t is my goal to try to tell stories from multiple points of view, which involves going out of my "place" to get a point of view other than my own. It is a passion that I have, born out of my own position as a girl growing up in segregation. . . . For me, the disaster of "placement" is an intellectual and spiritual disaster. Clearly there are other disasters--being put in your place can trap you in a social class, wind you up incarcerated by the blinders of poverty, or wealth for that matter.
>
> Smith, "Insights from a Perpetual Outsider"

On the Road and Out of Place: Notes on Smith's Career

Anna Deavere Smith's Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities originally was scheduled to open in May 1992 in New York's Joseph Papp Public Theater. As social drama, Fires in the Mirror documented the interplay of many voices that created or contained the outbreak of open street violence between Hasidic Jews and African-Americans in New York. But the performance was abruptly canceled because of fears that it might spark the spread of the fires that were then being set in Los Angeles. When Fires in the Mirror finally debuted on 14 May 1992, Gordon Davidson, the director of Los Angeles's Mark Taper Forum Theater, was in the audience. The next morning Davidson called Smith to invite

her to Los Angeles, where she would be commissioned to create a new performance that centered on the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion (Hart and Phelan 27).

By this time Smith had produced a long list of productions. A 1993 Drama Review interview with Carol Martin listed at least nineteen productions as part of the "On the Road" series going back a decade. During this time Smith also taught drama at several universities. She had been a drama professor at Stanford, an actress, a performance artist, and a playwright who was well known for her explorations of gender and racial fault-lines. Her production and performance of Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 established her as a significant chronicler of urban and racial discord and solidified her standing as an outstanding performance artist and writer-director. Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan argued that Smith's rise to prominence helped draw supportive audiences for performance artists across the country. Her influence was significant because, at the time, other performance artists and even the National Endowment for the Arts were being chastised by conservatives in the United States Senate and federal government funding agencies (28; see also Lloyd).

Smith was born on September 18, 1950 in Baltimore, Maryland into a middle-class family (Weaver). Her father was a coffee merchant and her mother a schoolteacher. She attended Beaver College near Philadelphia, received a BA in English Literature, and went to the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, where she received an MFA in 1976. As a talented actress, Smith has appeared in numerous New York productions and films, such as Philadelphia, Dave, and The American President. She had a recurring role on several television programs such as The Practice and West Wing. She has taught at Carnegie-Mellon, the University of Southern California, Yale, Stanford University, and New York University, and taught Performance Studies.

Smith's productions have often been provocative and unsettling. In a 1993 essay, Sandra Richards pointed out that Smith is often commissioned to do a performance by communities "interested in self-reflexively exploring a given topic" (36). The host community would provide Smith with a list of names and telephone numbers of people to contact. Smith's interviews for each performance varied in length and would total between seventy and several hundred hours. From these interviews she would produce a sixty- to ninety-minute performance. The plays were performed in conference rooms and college campuses, beginning with the communities for which they were produced. Each of Smith's plays was a series of two- to three-minute character sketches, with minimal props. Sometimes the characters were juxtaposed, with each sketch standing in stark contrast to the others. At other times, however, the viewers remained puzzled about the connections between them (Richards "Caught in the Act of Social Definition" 36-37).

In 1996, Smith was awarded a McArthur Fellowship ("genius award") for having created a "new form of theatre—a blend of theatrical art, social commentary, journalism, and intimate reverie." Smith became the founder and director of the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue in 1997. Harvard University gave it a home, where people from multiple disciplines could come together to produce art for social change. Critics raved that Smith, along with Tony Kushner, Peter Sellars, and Spalding Gray, had resurrected the experimental theater, that she had become a "theatrical messiah" (Lloyd). Two Supreme Court justices, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen G. Breyer, encouraged her to produce a made-for-television version of Twilight, according to Bernard Weinraub, so that it could be shown "in every high school in America." Twilight Los Angeles, the movie, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2000. One year later, on the

ninth anniversary of the Los Angeles Rebellion on 29 April 2001, a slightly revised version of the video debuted on PBS as part of its new "Stage on Screen" drama series.[59]

For the Mark Taper Forum debut on 22 May 1993, Smith interviewed about three hundred people in California and elsewhere. Most were individuals who had been involved with the events in some capacity. Others had written on the uprising. She then selected twenty-five characters and created a play that was performed at the Mark Taper Forum and subsequently at the New York Shakespeare Festival and in theaters in many other major cities. Smith has performed Twilight across the country, to great acclaim.

In "Caught in the Act of Social Definition," Sandra Richards argued that Smith's series of one-woman performances entitled "On the Road: A Search for American Character" was a form of "postmodern theater for development." If the African Theater for Development targeted scientific and technological underdevelopment (advocating child immunization, for example), then Smith's postmodern theater has targeted "social underdevelopment in privileged Western settings" (46).

Indeed Smith's performances achieved a certain type of diversity by moving beyond the work of many previous white and black playwrights. The story of race in America has never been just a black and white one. Smith's one-woman shows differ from many earlier forms of white theater, in which people of color were used as "walk-on stereotypes" (xxi). Her plays also contrast with the Black Arts legacy of bringing relationships within the black community to the center stage. Instead, it is her ability to present those rare moments of commonalities and shared experiences of people of different racial backgrounds that makes her work so special. As

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[59] Resources made available by PBS to its Twilight audiences for research and consciousness raising can be found at: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/stageonscreen/twilight/resources.html>.

Richards argued, this representational strategy gave Smith's work a note of hopefulness amidst divisive social conditions (49). For her first performance of Twilight, Smith solicited the advice of several dramaturges of various races and ethnicities, as well as individuals who brought their own life experiences with race into the theater to achieve a certain métissage.[60] Smith had been concerned that her life experiences as a black actor and scholar might limit the scope of the play, that it might reduce the performance into a "history of race as a black and white struggle" (xxii). She, therefore, drew on the expertise of Dorine Kondo (a Japanese-American feminist anthropologist) and Hector Tobar (a Guatemalan-American Los Angeles Times writer) in her efforts to move beyond a simple, binary narrative of the Rebellion.

White-on-Black Racism: Ephemeral Openings and the Politics of Exclusion and Apathy

Like many others who heard the verdict on 29 April 1992, Smith was perplexed by the acquittal of the four LAPD officers and questioned the divergent perspectives in the white and black communities. She wondered why the white jurors saw the brutal beatings as acts of self-defense carried out completely within the guidelines of the LAPD policy. The white jurors saw the police as "polite, well groomed, and ready to 'protect and serve'" (xx),[61] while activists from the black community saw almost nothing but violence in the LAPD officers' actions. To explore these dramatically different reactions, Smith presented a complex portrait of white-on-black racism, its covert and subtle, as well as overt and explicit, manifestations. Racism often operates through exclusion and lack of empathy.[62] Smith portrayed this toxic combination of

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[60] I use the term métissage in the sense that Chicana writer Karen Mary Davalos developed, as "a force of movement, combination, and transformation" (28).

[61] Unless otherwise stated, page references in text are to Smith's Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992.

stigmatization, exclusion, and lack of empathy through her careful selection of dialogues and interviews with various participants in the Rebellion. Smith's particular skill was in the way she captured various manifestations of racism in different sectors of society, beginning with the top—the office of the President and the United States Congress—and continuing down through the streets of Los Angeles.

In the aftermath of the Rebellion, President George H. W. Bush called a meeting at the White House to discuss the government's response. However, Congresswoman Maxine Waters, whose district covered a large part of South Los Angeles, was not invited. She first heard about the gathering from the radio while riding in a taxicab. In an interview with Smith (163-169), Waters recounted that she had to "force herself on" the meeting. She walked straight past a menacing security guard—"I was gonna kick him, if he tried to stop me"—and entered the meeting. The President greeted her with a quizzical look. Halfway through the meeting, Waters realized that no one in the meeting cared much about the underlying causes of the disturbances. She gave an impromptu speech on poverty and excessive police violence in inner city areas, as well as other conditions that frustrated the youth. Only one person from the Labor Department—an assistant substituting for Secretary Lynn Martin—dared to support Waters's remarks by saying, "this country is falling apart." The discussion did not go well. Waters reported, "The President's back stiffened," and the meeting ended without any concrete result (169). Smith's interview with Waters thus captured the politics of exclusion at the highest level of the United

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[62] Howard Winant in Racial Conditions: Politics, Theory, Comparisons argued against the consideration of race as either purely ideological (false consciousness) or as objective fact. Both of these one-sided tendencies remained closed to considering the performative aspects of race, the processual and relational aspects of racial identity, the historical dimension of racial conceptions, and the ways that people negotiate racial identity in everyday life (18). Winant's essay "The Los Angeles 'Race Riot' and Contemporary U.S. Politics" was taken up in greater detail in a chapter two.

States government. But throughout Twilight, and in several other interviews, we can see the same, persistent lack of communication on race relations at all levels of society.

Lower in the official hierarchy, Smith highlighted the deep-seated hostility among the ranks of the LAPD toward any attempts at initiating a dialogue with gang youth. In her interview with Stanley Sheinbaum (11-15), the head of the Police Commission and a former ACLU chief, he recalled his visit in May 1992 to Nickerson Gardens, where gang truce meetings were taking place. Like many other concerned officials, Sheinbaum recognized that he was faced with an agonizing dilemma. He wanted to remain neutral in the exploding conflict and help bridge the gap, but he also wanted to maintain his influence and authority as a public official. But by taking a middle ground, Sheinbaum exposed himself to the danger of being "shot at" by both sides:

> I go into the, uh, into the group of gang members who were outside.
>
> Even Maxine [Waters] got scared by this. . . .
>
> Some of these guys were ready to kill me. . . .
>
> [Y]ou know, I hung around long enough that I could talk to them,
>
> get some insights.
>
> But the cops were mad, they were really mad. . . . (13)

A group of officers from the 77th Street station filed a formal complaint against Sheinbaum for improper conduct by "talking to the enemy." In response, Sheinbaum angrily marched into the station and faced those who had signed the letter. He told them:

> This is a shot I had at talking to those curious people
>
> and I wanna learn.
>
> Don't you want me to learn about 'em? . . .

The officers were not convinced and demanded to know: "[s]o, which side are you on?" (15).

In selecting the Sheinbaum interview and another interview with Chief of Police Daryl Gates, Smith was able to contrast Sheinbaum's passionate concern for the city with Gates's callous disregard. She also showed the diversity of views among several white city officials. On 29 April Sheinbaum arrived at police headquarters just as Gates was leaving. He asked Gates: "Where you goin'?" Gates responded, "I got something I gotta do" (79). Gates had been invited to a political-fundraising dinner in the wealthy Pacific Palisades; and although the city was about to explode, he did not want to miss the reception. Smith's interview wonderfully captured Gates' distress as he fretted over the fateful decision that would eventually help to unseat him. Should he tend to the street disturbances that were rapidly spreading across town, or should he attend a fundraiser that was vital to his political career? Gates's comments conveyed a sense of self-pity mixed with grandiosity, brooding mixed with a secret joy for being both a hero and a villain (187):

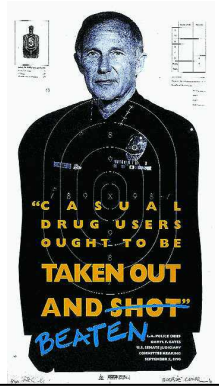

Fig. 6.1. Robbie Canal's dartboard poster in response to remarks made by Daryl Gates, that casual drug users "ought to be taken out and shot."

> Suddenly!
>
> I am the symbol. . . .
>
> On the day that the Rodney
>
> thing thing [sic],
>
> happened, the
>
> President of the United States
>
> was declaring me a national hero. . . .

Suddenly,

I am the symbol

of police oppression

Just because some officers

whacked Rodney King (187).[63]

So far I have discussed two interviews in Twilight, where we have seen how a few government leaders, black and white, took advantage of the momentary breach in the social order to address and confront racism. Congresswoman Maxine Waters forced her way into a presidential meeting to demand that racist policies be put on the agenda, and Police Commission head Stanley Sheinbaum took Daryl Gates and his officers to task for refusing to open a dialogue with the gang youth. Such abrupt and ephemeral openings were also evident in the culture industry. Smith represented such openings in her interview with film producer Paula Weinstein (204-13).

Weinstein, a former activist in the radical Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) during the 1960s, had organized a press conference at Warner Brothers Studios to protest the verdicts in the LAPD officers' trial. Her colleagues, "powerful people in Hollywood," refused to back her statement. Many agreed with Weinstein's critical perspectives, but chose not to go public (205). Hollywood entertainers were too caught up in the media's potential reaction to their press conference. They feared that if they called a press conference only a small number of people would show up, making the whole protest insignificant in the eyes of the media. They did not realize that the more important issue was that they, as elite members of the white

[63] A year before this alleged symbolic transformation, Mike Davis had devoted an entire chapter to unearthing Gates' increasingly harsh words and deeds in his City of Quartz. The chapter entitled "Hammer and the Rock" analyzed the historical, ideological, and economic forces that shaped authoritarian personalities like Gates who carried out policies with callousness. For a comprehensive journalistic, but equally damning analysis, see Lou Cannon's Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD.

community, needed to reach out to the distressed neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles. In the first few weeks after the rebellion, Weinstein and others, mostly younger actors and directors, helped the riot victims by organizing food drives and providing emergency relief. But Weinstein also was aware of the negative realities and the hardening of racist attitudes among the white and upper-middle-class communities:

> Watching rich white people guard
> their houses
> and send their children
> out of L.A.
> as if
> the devil was coming after them. . . .
> It was, I think, a media fest
> of making white people
> scared
> of the African-American community. . . .
> The white community—
> went into a sense of real terror,
> and, and
> an inward looking self-protectiveness. . . . (211-12)

In another character sketch, Smith captured how racist stereotypes can become hard and rigid. Judith Tur was an attractive, blonde, and impeccably dressed reporter from the Los Angeles News Service. Her narrative about the beating of Reginald Denny reflected the point of view of many others in the media:

black, white, green, or purple, I don't care
but what's happening in South Central now
I think they're really taking advantage. . . .
The white people are getting so angry now
that they're going back fifty years, instead of being pushed forward. (98)

Media coverage of the events reproduced negative stereotypes and thus reinforced dominant, ideological formations for public consumption.[64] Tur's sentiments also served as a synecdoche for the forces that compelled a large-scale exodus of whites from Los Angeles during the first half of 1990s, a period when the city experienced a severe economic crisis.[65]

Smith's interview with Elaine Young, a white real estate agent from Beverly Hills, showed that "white flight" acquired different meanings in Los Angeles. Sometimes it meant that the more wealthy community members fled to fortress spaces within Los Angeles, where "safety" was combined with isolation from the city (Davis 221). A few weeks after the Rebellion, a local television program interviewed Elaine Young and asked where she spent her

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[64] Elsewhere in the dissertation I discuss four works that study and theorize media practices impacted by the 1992 events. John Fiske's Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics included a chapter entitled "A Tale of Three Videos" (125-90), which examined how videotapes of Rodney King, Reginald Denny, and Latasha Harlins became media events, and how each illuminated aspects of "power working," "race at work," and "race consumed." John Caldwell's Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television explored representations of the Los Angeles Rebellion on television with its main function to "stylistically package the dangerous other." I also examine Darnell M. Hunt's Screening the Los Angeles "Riots": Race, Seeing, and Resistance and Ronald W. Jacobs' Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society: From Watts to Rodney King. Another theoretically informative essay is by Joost van Loon entitled "Chronotopes Of/in the Televisualization of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots."

[65] See Peter Reiner's review of Falling Down, Los Angeles Times, March 15, 1993. In this film, Michael Douglas depicts a slightly-crazed and short-tempered white aerospace engineer, who becomes a deranged, urban vigilante after being laid off from his job.

time during the riots. Her comments earned her widespread public condemnation, and, as a result, Young was eager to meet with Smith to clear her name.[66]

Young had taken refuge at the Polo Lounge in the Beverly Hills Hotel during the Rebellion. Indeed, it appeared that for some Beverly Hills residents, the days of the rebellion had become a welcome vacation at the Polo Lounge. Young had been a regular customer of the lounge for thirty-six years. On television, she had reminisced about the delightful time the patrons had experienced during the days and nights of the riots in April-May 1992. Although she was eager to set the record straight, to show that she was not "a blond bimbo . . . having fun during the riots," Young confirmed the audience's worst stereotypes of a Beverly Hills real estate broker. In Young's narrative, Smith not only captured the sharp divide between the privileged life of Beverly Hills and the poverty of South Central Los Angeles; she also exemplified the utter lack of concern within Los Angeles's well-to-do communities.[67]

Smith's interview with Harland W. Braun revealed a tactic that attorneys used to ensure the LAPD police officers' release. Here she also exposed the hostile postures and moral anxieties of another white character. Brown, a former District Attorney, was counsel to Ted Briseno, one of the four LAPD officers who were videotaped while they were beating Rodney King. Throughout the interview, Braun insisted on his absolute objectivity. He acknowledged

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[66] Young was a real estate agent whose claim to fame stemmed from two infamous episodes. She had sold the actress Sharon Tate the house where Tate and several others were murdered in gruesome fashion by the Manson gang. Young was also profiled in a People Magazine article on silicon implants. Her face had been disfigured by a bursting implant and from having undergone numerous corrective operations. Smith's playful highlighting of these details led some to criticize her for her caricaturing of Young, making Young a completely unsympathetic character. The portrayal of Young apparently drew enough criticism that Smith toned down the hilarity in the PBS video (see interview with Fuller and Armstrong. See also Janelle Reinelt.)

[67] Young's narrative about the celebratory atmosphere of the Polo Lounge brings to mind Harold Pinter's Tea Party. Renamed The Party, the author updated and adapted it for a BBC radio-drama broadcast in the summer of 1992. Young's narrative was also the subject of a talk on performances of "Whiteness," by Shannon Jackson at Northwestern University in 1999.

widespread police harassment of black motorists and recalled an incident in which an armed policeman had threatened his 17-year-old son and a black friend (240). But Braun insisted that Briseno and the other LAPD officers were innocent. In his view, the federal courts had found them guilty in a second trial in order to appease the "mob":

> If you ask it more blatantly:
> Is it better that two
> innocent men get convicted
> than that fifty innocent people die?
> What is the answer to that? (241)

Braun identified himself to Smith as a Catholic (with an orthodox Jewish father) who had turned to the Bible for an answer to this dilemma. He likened the Simi Valley trial to the trial of Jesus by the Roman magistrate Pontius Pilate:

> Pontius Pilate
> Talks about
> There being rioting in the city
> It's clear that Pontius Pilate
> Is trying to balance the fact that this man has done no evil
> Against the fact that there would be public disorder
> If this man wasn't condemned. (243)

Braun gloated further about his closing argument in court at the original Simi Valley trial, where he conveyed to the jury that anything but a vote of "not guilty" for the officers would be tantamount to bowing down to "the mob":

I've never used the Bible very much before

I used it in my closing statement . . . not directly.

Gotta remember

it was the Saturday

after Good Friday and before Easter. . . .

In my closing statement

I used the parts of the Bible

From the trial of Christ,

Because, really,

Pontius Pilate,

Wasn't such a bad sort .

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor who allowed the crucifixion of Jesus because of pressure from Jewish priests and their supporters calling for Jesus's blood, a group that had been characterized in the Bible as "the mob." Braun's narrative suggested that he placed the jury in the position of Pontius Pilate, with the proviso that they must not abandon innocent LAPD officers to the raging mobs. If Braun viewed the jury as Pontius Pilate, and if he saw the defendants as Christ-like figures, then he probably equated the modern black community with the Jews of the Roman Empire, the supposed true villains and the instigators of this injustice (at least according to centuries of Christian anti-Semitic narratives). With this interview, Smith illuminated the powerful symbolic imagery that triggered racial fears among white jurors and among those living in white communities.

Memory at Historic Intersections: Generational, International, and Personal Transformations.[68]

Although Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 focused on the events of April-May 1992, it encompassed a complex history of intersecting racial and ethnic conflicts in modern American history. One key focus in Smith's explorations has been the historical constructions of race and ethnicity in contemporary society. Richards has argued that by placing constructions of identity and fragmentation at the heart of struggles from different historical periods alongside each other, Smith has maintained differences, while also offering hope for an end to divisiveness and fragmentation (51).

The term "twilight" suggests a moment of historical transition, of in-between-ness. As we stood at a twilight moment in history, Smith provided us with a vision. As Twilight, the ex-gang member for whom the play was named, so eloquently argued:

> Twilight is that time of day between day and night
>
> Limbo, I call it limbo,
>
> and sometimes when I take my ideas to my homeboys
>
> They say, well Twilight, that's something you can't do right now. (254)

Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha was another character who was performed by Smith in Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992. This was no accident, since Bhabha's articulation of a twilight moment was central to how Smith shaped and ordered the voices in this performance. In

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[68] For the conceptual frame for this section I rely on seminars by two of my professors. One was Sandra Richards, in her fall 1999 course at Northwestern University on "Performance of Memory in the Black Atlantic." See Richards' "Horned Ancestral Masks, Shakespearean Actor Boys, and Scotch-Inspired Set Girls: Social Relations in Nineteenth Century Jamaican Jonkonnu." The other was Judith Hamera, in her ethnographic writings with survivors of the genocide under Pol Pot. See her "On Answerability of Memory: 'Saving' Khmer Classical Dance."

Bhabha's view, it was the moment of in-between-ness and ambiguity of twilight that had to be grasped, not the clarity that came with daylight:

> We have to interpret more in
>
> Twilight,
>
> We have to make ourselves part of the act. . . .
>
> But also the thing itself
>
> In Twilight
>
> Challenges us
>
> To be aware
>
> Of how we are projecting onto the event itself. (233)

In 1807, almost two centuries earlier, the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel also had begun his Phenomenology of Spirit with a reference to twilight, as "a birth time and period of transition" (6),[69] one that demanded ever deeper explorations of an event's theoretical ramifications. In the Phenomenology, twilight referred to two very contradictory moments of the day, dawn and dusk. It could be the moment when light first appeared and showed a way out of darkness, or it could be a plunge into even deeper darkness. A critical-historical awareness was thus essential to our developing the meanings of events in such moments of transition and ambiguity.

With regard to the Los Angeles Rebellion, such historical contexts can be found in the narratives of many of the individuals that Smith interviewed for Twilight.[70] They thus saw the

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[69] Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, especially his discussions of the struggle for recognition in a relationship of servitude and mastery, loomed large in the writings of several theorists on the Los Angeles rebellion. (See Gooding Williams) The Phenomenology's section on "Spirit in Self-Estrangement" also forms the basis of Adorno and Horkheimer's famous 1944 essay on Los Angeles and its culture industry discussed in chapter two.

Rebellion through the lens of past experiences, rather than as an isolated event. The Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, the Watts Riot of 1965, the Civil Rights Movement, and the movements to end United States wars in Vietnam and Latin America formed contexts through which the participants experienced the Los Angeles Rebellion and anticipated its future direction.

The beating of Rodney King awakened an old trauma in Rudy Salas, a middle-aged Chicano sculptor and painter, reminding him once again of his family's "run-ins with gringos" (1). Although half a century separated the two events, the Zoot Suit protests had some similarities to the trial of Rodney King and its aftermath. Salas's grandfather had been a compatriot of Pancho Villa, the folk hero of the Mexican Revolution. Salas himself was a Zoot Suiter. The Zoot Suit riots in Los Angeles took place in June 1943, in the midst of World War II, the same period when Japanese-Americans were rounded up and locked in internment camps. Many young Mexican Americans likewise were viewed as possible collaborators with the enemy.

Mauricio Mazon suggested that these riots were much more understandable if seen as a campaign of symbolic annihilation (Mazon 78-94). These riots involved thousands of Mexican-Chicano youth fighting United States sailors and marines, who were roaming in the streets in search of "Zoot-Suiters," youth who often referred to themselves as Cholos, or Pachucos. It also occurred after long campaigns of harassment by the LAPD, during which two warring Chicano gangs, the 38th Street Gang and the Downey Gang, were the focus of a major crackdown by the

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[70] A recent play by August Wilson, Gem of the Ocean (Goodman Theater, spring 2003) imaginatively depicted one such moment of transition in Pittsburgh's black community circa 1900. Having broken with a hard-driving loathsome black sheriff, two youthful black protagonists become new vessels for stories carried by a 300-year-old woman and recollections by a former Underground Railroad conductor to refugee slaves. To receive the memory they must go through an initiation ceremony that involves traveling to the "City of Bones," buried at the bottom of the ocean under the Middle Passage.

LAPD. The police arrested most members of the 38th Street Gang and charged them with a teenager's murder at Sleepy Lagoon. A hostile, all-white jury tried and convicted twenty-two Chicano men and sent them to the dreaded San Quentin Prison. This incident, and similar racist events, contributed to the increased hostility between the white police and the Chicano community. In 1943, gangs of United States sailors went out marauding in the barrios and mercilessly beat the Zoot Suiters, while the police stood by with the encouragement of their fellow officers and the media.[71]

In Twilight, Salas recounted his involvement as a young Zoot Suiter. The LAPD arrested him and beaten him so severely that he lost his hearing in one ear. As a result of this incident, he developed a permanent rage toward white society, especially the police. He was ashamed of these feelings, which disturbed his daily life and affected his relations with his wife. He repeatedly tried to control this "insanity," but was never able to fully overcome his rage:

> The insanity that I carried with me started when I took the
>
> . . . beating
>
> from the police.
>
> Okay, that's where the insanity came in.
>
> In forty-
>
> two,
>
> when I was in my teens
>
> Running around as a zoot suiter,

---

[71] For this discussion I have benefited from Luis Valdez, the performance in 2000 of Zoot Suit at Chicago's Goodman Theatre, and the materials accompanying the play. See Stagebill (July 2000). PBS also has produced a television version and an accompanying web site: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng_tguide/index.html>. In addition, Mauricio Mazon's The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation offered an especially incisive account.

One night the cop really tore me up bad.

I turned around, I threw a punch at one of 'em

I didn't hit him hard,

but that sealed my doom. . . .

As a result of the kicks in the head they fractured my

. . . eardrum,

And, uh,

I couldn't hear

on both ears.

I was deaf,

worse than I am now.

(He pulls out one of his hearing aids)

So

from that day on

I, I had a hate in me,

even now.

I don't like to hate, never do,

the way that my Uncle Abraham told me that to hate is to

waste

energy and you mess with man upstairs,

but I had an insane hatred

for white policemen. (2-3)

Thus Salas, a Chicano, could identify with black youth who had confronted the LAPD. He saw continuity between the 1992 Rebellion and the Chicanos' resistance against attempts to force them off public spaces during the Zoot Suit riots of 1943.[72]

Congresswoman Maxine Waters linked the Los Angeles Rebellion to another key historical event, the Watts Uprising of 1965. After that earlier riot and the widespread urban revolts of 1967, the federal government formed the Kerner Commission to investigate the incident, and the commission produced a list of possible remedies.[73] Smith included in Twilight the text of a fiery speech that Waters delivered to a large gathering at the First A.M.E. church during the rebellion:

> There was an insurrection in this city before
> And if I remember correctly
> it was sparked by police brutality,
> We had a Kerner Commission report.
> It talked about what was wrong with our society.
> It talked about institutionalized racism.
> It talked about a lack of services,
> Lack of government responsive to the people.
> Today, as we stand here in 1992,
> If we go back and read the report

---

[72] Later in this chapter, I discuss some of the techniques that Smith used to perform Salas, and point to larger historical dimensions of 1992.

[73] The McCone Commission studied the 1965 Watts Uprising mainly to determine whether Russian and Cuban provocateurs had instigated the events. It determined that the riots were homegrown and in response to police brutality.

It seems as though we are talking about what that report cited
some twenty years ago still exists today
Mr. President,
THEY'RE HUNGRY IN THE BRONX TONIGHT
THEY'RE HUNGRY IN ATLANTA TONIGHT
THEY'RE HUNGRY IN ST. LOUIS TONIGHT. (160)

The manner in which Waters responded to the Los Angeles Rebellion thus was shaped by that earlier experience in 1965. In 1992, journalists and other politicians were pressing Waters to issue a statement condemning the protesters, but she refused to do so. She distanced herself from these critics and from her black political leaders who were her predecessors:

They want me to march out into Watts,
as the black so-called leadership did in the sixties,
and say, "Cool it, baby, cool it."
I am sorry. I know how to talk to my people…
The fact of the matter is,
Whether we like it or not,
Riot
Is the voice of the unheard. (161-62)

Urban theorist Mike Davis also turned to the 1960s in an attempt to show what was different about the 1992 Rebellion. Davis focused on the caring he had witnessed in the civil rights movement. He described the desire of many young, white activists in the 1960s to extend some of the privileges they had enjoyed in their own lives to the black youth. Davis also suggested that by the 1990s a different economic reality had emerged in the United States. The battles

against segregation in the 1960s had taken place in the context of an economy that could provide plentiful jobs for many white youth, as well as free two-year college tuition.

By the 1990s, such privileges had disappeared from many white communities as well:

> And the whole ethos of the civil rights struggle and
>
> movement for
>
> equality in California's history
>
> was to make this available to everyone.
>
> The irony is that even white privileged kids
>
> are losing these things.[74] (30)

Davis lamented the fact that the city had not entered into a dialogue with gang youth. Such a dialogue would have opened the possibility for a different set of relations, not just between inner city black and Latino youth, but also between them and white youth, and all youth and society as a whole:

> In the last instance, if you peel away words like, you
>
> know, "gang-banger" and "looter" and stuff,
>
> this is a city at war with
>
> its own children,
>
> and it refuses to talk to those children,
>
> And the city doesn't want to face these kids,

---

[74] See Chapter One for a discussion of Mike Davis's City of Quartz, especially the chapter entitled, "Fortress Los Angeles." Davis discerned a systematic and pervasive eviction of youth from public spaces through a wide range of techniques, from policing and surveillance to inaccessible architectural designs that was reminiscent of Foucault's disciplinary society. In the interview with Smith, Davis also said: "I mean, there is no freedom of movement or right of / assembly for / youth / I mean, / the only permitted legal activity anymore / is, / is being in a mall shopping." (31)

or talk to its kids,

And I think,

I think It's the same thing probably with the white

middle class. (29-30)

Some former activists from the 1960s tried to recreate that past—those positive experiences—and bridge the gap between various ethnic communities.

A group of young Warner Brothers' employees, whites and blacks, camped at the home of the film producer Paula Weinstein. At her initiative, they organized a food caravan and collected donations from Beverly Hills and West Los Angeles businesses and residents. Weinstein and her friends turned the days of the Rebellion into a lesson in civic activism for the young employees who had never participated in a movement. "I was back in SDS," Weinstein remembered nostalgically (209). For the young actors, it was a unique, life-transforming experience when they realized that social activism was a form of performance: "It was fabulous for these kids, it was like street theatre." They went up to managers, collected food and money, and began "organizing people in Mrs. Gooch's in Beverly Hills" (209). This experience helped to connect two generations, those of the 1960s and the 1990s. Weinstein saw it as a "kind of Jungian Collective Unconscious Connection," helping the actors to understand their parents' generation, also giving them the opportunity to be part of a movement that proclaimed "we will stand together if only for four brief days" (212).

Another powerful example of a personal transformation performed by Smith appeared in the narrative of Reginald Denny, the white truck driver whose beating on the corner of Florence and Normandie became a symbol of the riots. Denny, the most visible white victim of the 1992 events, exhibited a working-class sensibility, refusing to dismiss those events or to even

condemn his assailants. First he even seemed to blame himself for his lack of political awareness:

> I didn't pay attention to that,
> because that was somebody else's problem.
> I guess I thought at the time
> it didn't have anything to do with me.
> I didn't usually pay too much attention to what was going on in California or in America or anything. (104-05)

After the incident, however, Denny changed. Initially, he was elated to have famous visitors in the hospital, African-American figures such as Jessie Jackson and Arsenio Hall. Later, he was moved to learn about the four African-American individuals who had rushed to the scene to protect him and take him to the hospital. What was so intriguing about Denny's account was that instead of dwelling on the negative—his pain and his anger and the men who targeted him—he celebrated the decency and humanity of those who came to his aid that day: Lee who cradled him in her arms, Bobby Green who drove the truck, Titus who looked through the smashed windshield and gave directions to Bobby, and Terry who sat in front of the truck, waved through the traffic, and helped open the way to the hospital.[75]

Denny had a personal sense of history. He recognized that his narrative of the Rebellion had to be preserved for future generations. If this was not done by professional exhibitors or academic historians, he would be sure to remember the incident as he wanted it to be

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[75] See Gregory Alan-Williams' A Gathering of Heroes: Reflections on Rage and Responsibility: A Memoir of the Los Angeles Riots. Alan-Williams was an actor and director of a theater company, and a playwright. Wanting to join the protests he found himself instead battling a very different kind of crowd he had imagined. He found a group of men attacking a Japanese-American man. Powerfully written, this work showed how earlier memories of his own "cruelty" to others came to haunt him and propelled him into action.

remembered. He wanted to build a memorial to this event and talked about his dream of building a small museum in his house:

> Someday when I, uh, get a house,
> I'm gonna have one of the rooms,
> and it's just gonna be of all the riot stuff.
> And it won't be a blood-and-guts memorial.
> It's not gonna be a sad, It's gonna be a happy room.
> It's gonna be . . . of all the crazy things that I've got,
> all the love and compassion, and the funny notes,
> and the letters from faraway places,
> just framed, placed, framed things,
> where a person will walk in
> and just have a good old time in there.
> It'll just be fun to be in there,
> just like a fun thing, and
> there won't be a color problem in this room. (111)

Denny also wanted to change others, white men like himself who remained "self-centered" and apolitical. He said he would aim his efforts at the "toughest white guy who thinks he's a bad-ass." Such a person, when in need, would "take the help from no matter what the color of the guy across" but who forgets as soon as his problem is solved and will "turn around and rag on'em" (111).

Some of the participants in the Rebellion tried to bring a more global, historical vision to the events. In her conversation with Smith, Lucia Gladis Sibrian, a resident of Los Angeles's

large Salvadoran community and an activist with the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, was reminded of her life in El Salvador, where she had joined the movement to topple the United States-backed military dictatorship, which had ruled that country for over sixty years:

> And one of the things we have
> was faith,
> convictions.
> That we have power within ourselves,
> That we can change things. (250)

In Sibrian's view, the Los Angeles Rebellion lacked cohesion. There should have been more political organization, leading to a larger, more empowered community:

> What happened here in LA, I
> call it a social explosion?
> And what we call an uprising,
> it's much more organized, planned.
> So what happened here was more
> spontaneous.
> On the one hand,
> I was, I was, I was excited,
> I was excited that people
> didn't just
> let it pass,
> let it pass by.
> That, that, what happened,

declaring innocent the police,
and this spark though Rodney King
became
that,
what we call the detonante.
There is a bomb and you pull the cord? . . .
But on the other hand, I was sad
because it was anarchical,
it was not in any way planned,
organized. (251-52)

But Elaine Brown, a former leader of the Black Panther Party, had a different view. In her opinion, the problem with the rebellion was not its lack of organization, but its lack of historical vision. Until the shortcomings of previous moments in black history were clearly understood and resolved, no new movement could move forward. Bright individuals who could become community political leaders wasted their lives by simply picking up a gun and shooting at the colossus of the United States government. She recalled how Jonathan Jackson, a brilliant seventeen-year-old youth with the Black Panthers, a science genius, took up a gun one day in 1970:

He was not a gang member, by the way,
but Jonathan Jackson went to a courtroom by himself
and took over for that one glorious minute
in the name of revolution and the freedom of his brother
and other people who were in prison

and died that day. . . .

Do you think it would be better

if Jonathan Jackson were alive today

or that he died that day in Marin County? . . .

I'd rather him be alive today,

to be among the leadership that we do not have,

than to be dead in his grave at seventeen years old. (227-28)

Brown was not a pacifist. She argued that guns had their place when one was "black and in America."

But it was "foolish" to think one could bring down the United States government, a military behemoth that had won numerous wars around the globe, by picking up a gun:

But if you are talking about a war against the United States government,

then you better talk to Saddam Hussein

and you better talk to the Vietnamese people

and the Nicaraguans

and El Salvadorans

and people in South Africa

and people in other countries in Southeast Asia

and ask those mother fuckers

what this country is capable of doing. (230)

Brown insisted that the battle must be fought in a different way, through a life-long commitment to change, a commitment based on love, not hate. Otherwise, this endless bravado and talk of a "so-called armed struggle" remained both useless and harmful (32). Without such reflection and

introspection, she argued, “we will be twenty more years trying to figure out what happened to Martin, Malcolm, and the Black Panther Party” (231).

Sa-i-Gu: A Turning Point for Korean Americans

> “Public relations” is exactly the craft of creating the illusion of intimacy.
>
> Smith, “Metaphor’s Funeral.”

Korean Americans store owners experienced the Los Angeles Rebellion as ethnic persecution. They saw the event as a form of racial hatred unleashed against them, one that had the acquiescence of the police, perhaps even a wink and a nod from the chief of police himself. Korean store-owners saw themselves victimized on a number of fronts. In various parts of Los Angeles, close to 90 percent of Korean-owned grocery and liquor stores were destroyed in the brief few days of April 29 to May 2. The loss of business property was staggering, and the sporadic physical attacks terrorized many on the streets.

Although actual loss of life was minimal, there were several unprovoked homicidal attacks aimed at Korean drivers and passers-by during those days. Resentments had been simmering for a long time between newly arrived store owners and their customers. The death of Latasha Harlins at the hands of an older Korean store-owner in 1991 was captured on a security camera. The incident showed how deadly the ethnic antagonisms had become. African-American residents expressed a sense of humiliation and outrage, which was reinforced on a daily basis through every transaction at a cash box. An urban combat terminology already preceded the outbreak of violence. Some were encouraging African-American residents to “take back our jobs [from new immigrants] and our stores block by block.” This was the mortar used to erect and reinforce ethnic and racial divisions. Many sympathetic observers and participants

refused to dignify the April-May 1992 events by calling them a rebellion and, instead, called them a riot because of the looting and burning of Korean stores. To Korean Americans, it became simply "Sa-i-gu"[76].

Smith was particularly concerned with the plight of Korean-American business owners and represented their voices prominently throughout Twilight. One section entitled, "Kinda Lonely" (142-49) was devoted to the Park family and showed the tragic losses of several Koreans. Walter Park was waiting at a stoplight when he was shot at close range. At the hospital, the doctors removed part of his frontal lobe. The bullet had traveled through his temple and destroyed his left eye. The damage to Park's brain left him incapable of rational thought. As Smith wrote in her introduction:

> Park speaks in the rhythm of a person who has full authority and ease . . . and all of the facts exactly straight. . . . From his body position and rhythm you would think this was the most reasonable, sound response possible. It is, of course, emotionally sound, but there is a gap between the question and the answer. . . . (143)

Mrs. June Park, the wife of Walter Park, cried as she spoke and remained dazed about the experience. Her well-ordered worldview had fallen apart, and she strained to find an answer as to why her husband had been shot:

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[76] Earlier in chapter one I discussed the question of naming the event which has been called rebellion, riot, insurrection, uprising or twilight. Sa-i-gu simply states the day of occurrence, April 29. (See Kyeyoung Park's The Korean American Experience. But historically, very few days, really catastrophic days, received such short and potent names. While in the beginning it contained only a negative connotation (i.e., signifying the most devastating days for Asian Americans since the Japanese internments of World War II), today it signifies a generational power shift and opening towards political empowerment. See Helen Zia, "Asian American Dreams," an essay on the website of the Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs, <http://www.capaa.wa.gov/koreanamericans.html>.

He was very high-educated

and also very nice person to the people. …

Donated a lot of money to the Compton area.

And he knows the City Council,

The policemen, they knows him.

Then why,

why he has to get shot.

You know,

I don't know why.

So really angry, you know. (146)

Smith captured an unflinching performance of pain in the lives of many Koreans. They remained puzzled and distraught by the fact that their middle-class lifestyles—imitative European furniture, impeccable religious piety, and pleasant homes and surroundings—had not shielded them from the tragedy of Los Angeles's ethnic divisions.

Throughout Twilight, Smith provided snapshots of Korean-American store-owners who chose to protect themselves and their family members rather than confront the looters or save their shops. Cheng Lee, a store-owner who lost everything in the riots, and who later became President of the Korean-American Victims Association, explained that he decided, "to give up any sense of attachment to our possessions" (84). Others, such as Richard Kim, a younger appliance store-owner in his 30s, decided to take on the attackers. Kim barricaded himself inside a van parked in front of his store. He shot back at the armed attackers and managed to save his store (89).

In addition to these snapshots of Koreans who lost everything, and those who defended their property by taking up guns and shooting at the looters, Smith delved more deeply into the nature of social interactions that divided African-Americans and Korean Americans in South Central Los Angeles. Her performance of Katie Miller, a bookkeeper and accountant, presented a different narrative of the conflict. Miller, a large black woman who spoke with a great deal of vigor and force, initially deflected part of the blame for the incidents in Korea Town onto Central-American immigrants:

> Now they talk about the looting
> in Korea Town. . . . Those wasn't blacks,
> Those wasn't blacks, those was Mexicans in Korea Town
> We wasn't over there lootin' over there, lootin' over there,
> But here, in this right here. (129)

But she almost immediately conceded that Korean stores were indeed targeted for one reason: Koreans did not "respect" their black customers. They never bothered to know the people who frequented their stores, and they maintained distance and aloofness, even with long-time and frequent customers:

> The stores that got looted for this one reason
> only is that . . . know who you goin' know.
> Just know people comin' to your store, that's all,
> Just respect people comin' there,
> Give'em their money,
> 'stead of just give me your money and get out of my face. (130)

In retrospect, one can argue that members of the Korean-American community certainly shared the class and racial prejudices that many new immigrants exhibited toward African-Americans.[77] These prejudices stemmed from a variety of factors, such as new immigrants' ignorance of the complicated history of race relations in America. There were also important class differences between Asian-American immigrant business owners and African-American residents of poor neighborhoods, though both worked in the same geographic locations.

Many Asian immigrants were refugees from war and political instability, who were able to obtain visas and travel to the United States because they belonged to more educated and upper-class segments of their respective societies of origin. As a result, they were also more skilled in climbing the social ladder. They maintained close-knit family ties and clung to traditional networks that helped them in business.[78] Finally, most white, Asian, and Latino immigrants had a rudimentary understanding of racism in the United States and realized that in order to blend in with the "white" society, and to live up to the expectations of a "model minority," they had to separate themselves from African-Americans.[79]

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[77] In Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black Korean-Conflict in New York City, Claire Jean Kim credited the narrow lens of racial scapegoating with which journalists often explained confrontations between Koreans and blacks for creating an urban mythology (2).

[78] See Micaela di Leonardo for a critique of how ethnic success is tied to alleged moral superiority or an ideological mystification of the notion of family. di Leonardo referred her readers to Linda Gordon, whose work on Boston's Irish, Italian, and Jewish poor provided an "unremitting narrative of drunkenness, wife battery, child abuse, desertion, incest, and prostitution" (44).

Part 2: A Performance that Reclaims Space to Converse

Smith, "We are not at Metaphor's Funeral," in "Metaphor's Funeral"

Anna Deavere Smith and Cherie Fords—who collaborated with Smith on the production of Fires in the Mirror—initially began to work on a film version of Twilight with the support of various foundation grants the mid-1990s. Smith worked on the film's script and structure at the Sundance Institute's Screenwriters' Lab in the summer of 1998. In 1999, director Marc Levin joined her. With the help of a production team that was drawn from the worlds of theater, film, journalism, and documentary, Smith's innovative play was transformed into a powerful documentary performance.

Smith's Collaboration with Marc Levin

Levin had been no stranger to controversial subjects or to combining the worlds of fiction and reality. He also had a long history of working on issues of racism and social justice. From the mid-1970s to the end of the 1980s, Levin had worked with Bill Moyers on PBS. Beginning in 1990, Levin began making award-winning documentaries dealing with race relations. He looked at life in prison, drug policies that filled up prisons, and gang culture. He explored the words and worlds of troubled youth in and out of prisons, from street gangs in Little Rock,

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[79] See Kyeyoung Park's The Korean-American Experience (143-45) for a discussion of the notional formation of racial hierarchies among Koreans. A Korean store owner in my neighborhood of Echo Park once told me that there was perhaps another factor that added to the hostility of the African-American customers. Many Asians are known for their scrupulous adherence to social niceties and excessive politeness. The Japanese and Iranian cultures of immigrants in Los Angeles certainly fit this model. But Koreans are often more straightforward, more "in your face," and in this sense, they more closely adhere to American customs and norms than the more "Oriental" models. African-Americans (and most Americans) were not aware of such subtle cultural differences among Asian Americans and expected a much greater degree of "respect" and deference from the Korean shopkeepers. They therefore could not understand why a customer who frequented a Korean store on a daily basis was not treated with a warmer reception and a greater degree of deference.

Arkansas to the juvenile justice system. Levin's HBO documentaries have included Thug Life in DC and The Execution Machine: Texas Death Row.

Levin entered the world of dramatic feature films with Slam (1998), a meditation on the subject of personal freedom, the story of a prisoner who turned to poetry to survive the prison confines. Levin brought together the worlds of poetry, rap, and hip hop. Levin's more recent hip-hop fable, Brooklyn Babylon, is a moving story of two young lovers, an Orthodox Jewish woman and an Afro-Caribbean hip-hop artist, who fall in love at the most unlikely moment. Their separate worlds within the same neighborhood collide in the days prior to the outbreak of the Crown Heights riots. As noted earlier, Smith's Fires in the Mirror was based on the same event. With regard to his experience in working with Smith, Levin observed:

> What's unique about Anna is that she comes out of the theater world but uses the techniques of a documentarian, creating dramatic storytelling out of real-life research. . . . So we really started at the same place. How we shape real people's words—I as a filmmaker, Anna as a dramatist—is where we meet, and what is so fascinating to me about Twilight, Los Angeles. (Offline Releasing)

The collaborative work of Levin and Smith succeeded at a time when there was a move toward even more fracturing along racial and ethnic lines in the United States. The next section will explore some of the techniques through which Levin and Smith reached a new audience and helped expand the space for the cultural clash of race, gender, and class in this country.

Jumpcuts and Continuities

Much of the delight in Smith's performances has been tied to her ability to mimic the speech traits and facial expressions of her characters. She embodies her subjects by reproducing

their postures, body movements, and gestures, and in this way brings her characters to life. As one critic argued, the strength of Smith's performance is in the way she transforms herself from one race or gender to another (Albert). Smith has never ceased to surprise her audiences through her use of oppositional sketches. She has done more than portray the mixed canvas of race and gender in American society. As Richards has pointed out, Smith anticipates her audiences' reactions. When audience members think that the focus is on the deep-rooted racism of American society, Smith next offers an image of working-class solidarity among people of different ethnicities (40).

In some of her earlier plays, Smith's intimate relationship with her characters, the fact that she knew them, interviewed them, and then performed them, became a source of deep anxiety for both her participants and her audiences. The individuals she interviewed worried about how they would be presented: Would she present them fairly and accurately? Would they look thoughtful to others? Would she mimic their "small idiosyncrasies" and make them look foolish? Would she even include their interviews in her performance? (Richards "Caught")

Some of the more disenfranchised individuals whom Smith interviewed engaged in "verbal histrionics" in an attempt to get across their points of view. Others, who were in more privileged positions and who evidently felt threatened by certain social and political changes, tried to present a more "tolerant image" of themselves to this black woman whom they seemed to distrust. Smith's brilliant performance highlighted both of these attempts and demarcated the difference. As Richards pointed out, "Everyone—organizers, speakers, other community members, and performer as well—have been caught in an act whose high stakes leave no one unscathed" (47).

In the end, both the powerful and the disenfranchised people whom Smith interviewed and then performed relinquished all control. The experience could be quite unnerving because one heard one's voice and saw one's bodily movements in another body. A "female body is seen at times executing 'male' movements. Gesture becomes paradigmatic of gendered social constructions" (Richards 42). In a Lacanian reading of Smith's performance, Richards argued,

> Within this uncanny doubling resides comic delight: for the person being represented, the experience may constitute a magical return to the mirror stage of development, where one first discovers his or her corporal distinctness and derives narcissistic pleasure from the gaze upon the self. For those viewers who know the individual, delight may arise from seeing the familiar emptied of a measure of self-importance. Laughter focuses not only on this alienating near-image but also targets both what has and has not been said. (42)

This laughter is paradoxical. It can be "therapeutic," uniting different people in a common understanding, but it can also be alienating. The individual or group that is mimicked might decide they have been stigmatized. Those that are not part of the group might feel excluded from inside jokes (43).

The Power of Video Production[80]

At first it would seem that the live performance of Twilight would be a much more powerful medium of communication than the video version. After all, the play was often tailored for a particular audience, while the video version remained the same. In her live performances, Smith has been able to make subtle but important changes in the play based on the

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[80] Thanks to Lena T. Afary for help on this section.

audience's ethnic, class, and gender makeup, as well as its early reaction to the play. However, the video provided several additional venues for a dialogue on race and class, and not only just because it could be seen by a much larger community.

First, the video spliced together real footage from the Los Angeles Rebellion with the play. We see the actual faces of many of the major figures in this event, including some of the personalities that Smith interviewed. Additionally, the video included some key documentary footage that helped shape the rebellion, such as the beatings of Rodney King and Reginald Denny. The video audience therefore gained an immediate sense of the proportion and magnitude of the Los Angeles Rebellion.

Second, Marc Levin's directing, the cinematography, and various editing strategies added subtle, new dimensions to the video. As is usual in documentary style, Levin used a tripod to shoot when he intended to demonstrate a sense of stability and strength, and he used a hand-held camera to create a sense of agitation. Levin maintained the 180-degree rule of editing to maintain a sense of continuity and an illusion of a seamless performance.[81] But Levin intentionally broke the 180-degree rule at several points to create a sense of confusion and heightened agitation in the audience. The segment with Rudy Salas, for example, was shot mostly as close-up and as Salas paced up and down the set. Several times the camera lost Salas, who walked outside the frame. In this way, the director created a feeling of anxiety in the audience, one that paralleled Salas's angry monologue.

In the next scene, Salas's account of his brutal beating by the LAPD in the 1940s was followed by the actual videotape of Rodney King's 1991 beating. This scene was also shot by an

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[81] In this editing technique, when the camera cuts from a person facing one direction, the next scene shows the character looking in the same direction.

amateur videographer who used a handheld camera. In this way, Smith's performance of Salas was blended with the reality of the Rodney King beating. Two distinct historical periods separated by a fifty-year interval thus were merged into one, suggesting a historical continuity in the LAPD's actions against the city's minorities. In the following scene, the camera cut to Smith, who was performing Rodney King's aunt. This scene was shot using a tripod and suggested both strength and stability in the character.

A second, standard rule in editing is that when the camera goes from close-up to medium shot, the angle must change by at least thirty degrees to create a more stable shift in the viewers' perspective. By maintaining the same angle as the camera moved to medium shot, Levin again created a sense of tension. He used this technique when the play dealt with the scenes of the Rebellion.

When Smith performed one of the white jurors in the Simi Valley trial of the four LAPD officers, she showed a sad and remorseful character, a man who had gradually come to the realization that his verdict led to horrific consequences. Levin's camera once again helped convey this sense of remorse. The juror did not look into the camera, suggesting an involuntary confession by a reluctant character. He slowly recounted the aftermath of the verdict when the New York Times and several other media outlets both mocked and vilified the jury. Zooming in slowly has been a traditional method of suggesting greater depth in the character. The camera zoomed in ever so slowly, giving viewers a feeling that they were finally reaching the crux of the story. When the juror revealed that members of the Klan had contacted the jury and asked them to join their organization, Smith (as the juror) slowly turned her face and looked at the camera. The juror had finally come clean.

In general, Smith's "On the Road" plays made minimal use of stage props. But here, in the video production, again the camera and the quick cuts from one scene to the other added their own meanings. Viewers learned a significant amount about each character from the curtain or the flag that hung on the wall behind the person. A Mexican flag formed the background to Rudy Salas, the old Zoot Suiter. A gaudy pink lace curtain behind Elaine Young indicated the frivolous concerns of a Hollywood real estate agent whose office was decorated "down to the paper clips" she used, and who spent the days of the Rebellion at the Beverly Hills Hotel. In contrast, a beautiful lime-green curtain with soft hues formed the background in the sympathetic representation of Angela King, Rodney King's aunt.

The camera played a key role in attributing power or lack thereof. Rudy Salas stood up before the camera and exuded a sense of power and confidence when he spoke of the anti-Mexican-American riots of mid-twentieth century. But he shriveled up in a corner and took very little space when he spoke of his children and the fact that the police were still harassing them. Likewise, the close-to-ground camera panned upward as a menacing Smith wielded a baton—one of the actual batons that were used in the beating of Rodney King—while performing Charles Duke, an LAPD expert on the proper use of force. Here Duke calmly demonstrated, in the manner of a baseball coach who is showing a batting technique, repeated baton blows while claiming they were not forceful enough to subdue Rodney King because they lacked proper technique.[82]

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[82] Duke wanted to see a return to the more "effective" method of using choke-holds. Choke-holds were banned in Los Angeles after the uproar caused by the deaths of dozens of black men, who died from asphyxiation after their larynxes were crushed. Daryl Gates was quoted as saying that he saw nothing wrong with the chokehold, that it was weakness in black men's anatomy that caused their deaths (qtd. in Bates).

Third, in Twilight, as in her other plays, Smith drew her audiences into a conversation by juxtaposing "oppositional" characters. In Charles Duke's steely demonstration of the proper technique for wielding a baton, there was no room to acknowledge the suffering experienced by the objects of his beatings or the unaccounted deaths of suspects in police custody. It is hard to imagine a sharper contrast to Duke than Angela King, who conveyed an intimate and loving portrayal of her nephew, Rodney King.

Angela King did not present official statements fluently, as Charles Duke did. But she was more convincing. The audience began to see Rodney King as part of a close-knit family, a family that took pride in its interracial and multiethnic relations and had maintained close friendships with Asian Americans. Through such simple means, Smith empowered King and his family. She provided an alternative context for King, centered on his relationships with loved ones. She released King from the "freeze-frame" narratives of the courts and the media.[83]

Using the same technique, Smith also managed to alter the audience's view of a white juror in the first trial of the four LAPD officers. During that trial, the video of King's beating was endlessly shown and dissected by the officers' defense attorneys. The camera, however, had not captured what preceded the relentless beatings, whereas Smith's performance did. First, Smith performed a witness, a Latina woman who watched the whole incident from her balcony nearby. This unnamed woman repeatedly attempted to testify in court, but was rebuffed by the prosecutors because her testimony contradicted that of the Highway Patrol officers. Then Smith abruptly switched to a jury member, who was astonished because the prosecutor had never called the witnesses who had seen what happened before the taping of the beatings had begun. By

[83] See earlier discussion of Kimberle Crenshaw's essay.

juxtaposing these two stories against one another, Smith gave a plausible answer concerning why the Simi Valley jury refused to vote against the officers. Smith thus provided a context for the tapes. She humanized King by showing his complex relations to the world, and she showed the genuine concern others had for him, especially the residents who saw the beating and the circumstances that led to it. She also showed that the jurors were fed a select view of the event, one that privileged and substantiated the officers' point of view.

The Uses of Ambiguity

Because Smith has performed all the characters in the play using minimal props and costumes, audiences have had to make assumptions about the characters' class, race, ethnic, and gender makeup. This created a sense of ambiguity. In addition, as Table 5.1 demonstrates, Smith adopted and then discarded a number of racial and gender identities before she arrived at some of the most sensitive materials, by which time her audience would become quite puzzled. As Richards argued:

> This blurring has potentially created a space in which the listener is afforded no easy way out; deprived of cues concerning the speaker's identity and location, she or he cannot focus solely on political ramifications. In such an instance a curious estrangement is at work in the theater: thought has become separated from its material, that is, racial embodiment. . . . This process thus "frees" some audiences from fixed parameters.(46) (see table on next page.)

	Order of Appearance	Ethnicity / gender / vocation
1	Twilight	African-American man, a gang truce leader
2	Elaine Young	White woman, Beverly Hills realtor
3	Rudy Salas	Chicano man, sculptor and painter
4	Angela King	African-American woman, Rodney King's aunt
5	Charles Duke	White man, LAPD SWAT, expert on use of force
6	Charles Lloyd	African-American man, Soon Ja Doo's attorney
7	Gina Rae	African-American woman, Latasha Harlins Justice Committee
8	Jay Woong Yahng	Korean man, store owner
9	Gina Rae	See above
10	Josie Morales	Latina woman, witness to Rodney King beating
11	Anonymous	White man, juror in the Simi Valley trial
12	Henry Keith Watson	African-American man, one of LA4
13	Shelby Coffey III	White male, L.A. Times editor
14	Mrs. June Park	Korean woman, wife of shooting victim.
15	Katie Miller	African-American woman, bookkeeper
16	Stanley K. Sheinbaum	Jewish man, civil rights attorney, Police Commissioner
17	Mrs. June Park	See above
18	Daryl Gates	White man, former Chief of Police
19	Federico Sandoval	Latino man (did not appear in the book)
20	Ruben Martinez	Latino man, critic-poet
21	Maxine Waters	African-American Congresswoman
22	Charlton Heston	White man, prominent advocate for gun ownership
23	Katie Miller	See 15
24	Mrs. June Park	See 14
25	Shelby Coffey III	Managing editor of the Los Angeles Times
26	Anonymous	"Good looking man," Hollywood agent
27	Elaine Young	White woman, Beverly Hills realtor
28	Henry Keith Watson	See above
29	Elvira Evers	Latina woman, pregnant, took stray bullet
30	Jessye Norman	African-American woman, singer
31	Henry Keith Watson	See above
32	Reginald Denny	White man, truck driver, attacked
33	Paul Parker	Black man, Justice for LA4 Committee
34	Reginald Denny	See above
35	Paul Parker	See above
36	Cornel West	African-American male, Intellectual, theorist
37	Maria	Latina woman, Juror #7 in the federal trial
38	Mrs. Young–soon Han	Korean woman, former liquor store owner
39	Twilight	African-American man, gang truce leader

Table 6.1.: Smith's Movements through Racial and Gender Identities

A similar process took place in Twilight Los Angeles. In the first thirty minutes of the performance, Smith moved in rapid succession, performing a young black man (Twilight Bey), a white woman (Elaine Young), a Chicano man (Rudy Salas), a black woman (Angela King), and a white man (Charles Duke).

Another juxtaposition of oppositional characters captured the beating of Reginald Denny on April 29. It was common knowledge that four black men (the LA4) had beaten Denny. But hardly anyone knew that Denny also had been rescued by four courageous black residents—three men and a woman—who put their lives on the line by rushing to the scene of Denny's beating after witnessing it on television. Introducing the characters back to back, Smith refuted LAPD officer Ted Briseno's malicious comments that portrayed black youth as "diabolical predators." The scenes of mayhem that Smith recreated with one of the LA4 members, Henry Keith Watson, were juxtaposed with the compassion and courage of the black residents who risked their lives to save a white man. After performing these two scenes, Smith introduced Paul Parker, who said things like:

> They're talking about "You burned down your own
> Neighborhoods."
> And I say: "First of all,
> we burned down these Koreans in this neighborhood."
> About ninety-eight percent of the stores that got burned
> down here
> Korean.
> The Koreans was like the Jews in the day
> And we put them in check. (175-76)

Then, instead of ending the video performance with an equally dismissive—or racist—statement by a Korean resident, Smith selected an articulate and bold Korean woman, Mrs. Young Soon-Han, whose liquor store was completely burned to the ground. This wound inflicted upon her life, however, did not destroy her capacity to understand the history of racism in the United

States. She expressed a genuine appreciation for the gains that were made in the United States when people fought against racism. She wondered why Koreans had to be left out from receiving compensation by the government and from a sense of solidarity with African-Americans. They could not sympathize with the African-American community, nor did the city protect (or compensate) them. In an essay on "The Los Angeles Race Riot," Howard Winant argued that instead of opening the doors to a vaunted social disintegration, the Los Angeles riots in fact brought out "the limits of the reactionary racial politics practiced during the Reagan-Bush years"(82). Winant concluded that the riots revealed a level of complexity and variety never seen before, a phenomenon that contributed to a dismantling of official narratives. Referring to Korean merchants, he wrote,

> When even they—surely the most unambiguous class of "riot victims" visible on the nightly news—revealed themselves as having some sympathy for the impoverished inner-city dwellers, how could the official story cope. (83)

Smith did not make women invisible in the video performance of Twilight Los Angeles. There were five black women, two Korean women, and four Latinas in a cast of twenty-nine characters.[84] Passionate and articulate women were certainly present throughout the performance. However there was little explicit discussion of gender relations between or within either black or white communities, though there were a few references to complex gender relations, including thoughtful statements offered by Maxine Waters and Cornell West.

Both argued that social conditions affect the relations between women and men in working class and poor areas with high unemployment. Black Congresswoman Waters, whose

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[84] With only Elaine Young serving as "a bit of comic relief" (Curran), Twilight's complex cast of characters left out a serious interrogation of gender across the racial divide.

Los Angeles office was burned down during the unrest, decried how young black men have fallen off the map of America and disappeared from its social agenda:

> They don't show up on anybody's statistics.
>
> They're not in school,
>
> They have never been employed,
>
> They don't really live anywhere.
>
> They move from Grandmamma
>
> to mama to girlfriend.
>
> They're on general relief and
>
> they're sleepin under bridges. (160)

Cornell West talked about movements reproducing the conditions they set out to remedy:

> . . . racial reasoning, I think, oftentimes has been construed
>
> as an
>
> attempt of black people
>
> all coming together
>
> in order to
>
> both protect
>
> each other
>
> but usually the men
>
> who will serve as the policing agents,
>
> therefore the interests of black women
>
> are subordinated
>
> and the black men

become the

machismo heroes,

because they're the ones who defy

and women can't do that.

Why,

because,

you know, these folks who you're defying

themselves are machismo

So you need a machismo person to respond to the machismo. (45)

The ambiguity Cornell West was describing here, both the closing off of public spaces and the risk of intensifying the very thing one are fighting against, also can be seen in the lack of solidarity among women of different racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds. While a sense of shared aspiration, one that cuts across social divides can be found in Twilight among men, the three white women—Elaine Young, Judith Tur, and the anonymous student who was upset because her father's collection of antique autos had received one scratch—were all portrayed as callous and highly unsympathetic characters. While Paula Weinstein helped enlist the support of people of Brentwood, a very exclusive Westside neighborhood, for the victims of 1992, but she did not appear in the video.

However, in a 1993 interview, Smith stated that white men were perhaps the only ones underrepresented in Twilight and that she intended to remedy that situation. In that same interview, Smith called attention to the phenomenon of African-American aunts becoming active spokeswomen for their wronged nieces and nephews. Smith said:

> One curious thing that I'm interested in, that doesn't get fully articulated even in two full hours of Twilight is aunts. Angela King is Rodney King's aunt, and she's a spokesperson for the family, then there's . . . the killing of [Latasha Harlins]. . . . Her aunt, Denise Harlins, represents her in that and has become really politicized. And then there's a woman called Theresa Allison, who I do in the full show, whose nephew was shot forty-three times by the cops—Henry Pico was his name. (Fuller and Armstrong)

By posing these shifts in identity as dilemmas in representation, Smith seems to suggest that we were not simply witnessing a continuation of the struggles of the civil rights era, but that we were standing at the dawn of a new era in race relationships in the United States when many new questions are posed. She has asked, what spaces have the new immigrants such as Koreans or Middle Easterners occupied in this new canvas of America? And how do new immigrants relate to the history of the civil rights movements? Smith did not attempt to answer all these questions, but she did pose them, and in doing so, she broke with many of our conventional and rigid assumptions about race relations. Her focus was not so much on solutions to social problems; instead, she was interested in the process of negotiation, in moments when different communities search for a shared, alternative answer. Repeatedly, she reminded her audience that before rushing to solutions, we must break the silence about race and encouraged people to participate in the dialogue, that there is no one "unifying voice" (xxv) that can speak for the entire city.[85]

At times, counter-public spaces, arenas that are created as alternative sites in the course of protests, encouraged such dialogue and created new possibilities among diverse participants.

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[85] Julian Murphet's Literature and Race in LA, views Smith's work as heralding a "return of realism itself."

Smith, however, seemed to suggest that we pay a price for the security and safety of such counter-public spaces, such "safe spaces." We miss the story of race in its "complexity and its scope" (xxv). Smith's video performance provided a new type of a counter-public and a new form of safe space, a theatre that was both complex and multiethnic.[86] The fluidity of this theatre presented the risks of slippage, skidding, or even a loss of cohesion. But it can also provide us with a more comprehensive language to probe racial, gender, and class conflicts.

[86] The notion of "safe space" has been key concept in the writings of black feminist writers, including sociologist Patricia Hill Collins. The traditional "safe spaces" of the community, such as black churches, allowed a respite from white intrusion and provided a location where one could develop a sense of identity.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: Remembrance and Reinterpretation

> The riot should not be forgotten. It should be reviewed. It has valuable information on how to live in the world, not just in a city. The riot should not be repeated, but in that brief moment when people were stunned, consciousness was on the brink of being raised. Yet we are still not awake.
>
> Anna Deavere Smith, "Insights from a Perpetual Outsider"

Drawing together the various threads of this dissertation does not lead to a narrative of progress, a set of reassuring conclusions, or a happy ending. The dynamics that brought on the rioting and called for activist interventions persist. Bringing together the various strands of activist performances and critical theories in this dissertation can provide a window into the process of cultural production and a legacy for the future.

As we saw in chapter two, the dramatic economic growth of Los Angeles had come to a screeching halt by the early 1990s. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War came cuts in defense industry subsidies, which had been the mainstay of the local industry. Meanwhile, California's move from industrial manufacturing to high technology and service industries resulted in the closure of large factories and their replacement with small non-union facilities. Soon double-digit unemployment rates became prevalent, affecting black and Latino communities disproportionately. With the drying up of high-wage unskilled jobs, many inner city youth were driven into a variety of illegal activities. The dominant classes responded by increasing the police force and creating a gigantic prison system. At a national level, California

led the way in increased incarcerations, and prisons became a major component of the regional economy of Los Angeles. There is no better example of what Baudrillard has called hyperreality than the daily media saturation with crime, criminals, and the police, which was even more pronounced in Los Angeles than in many other large cities. This discourse was in many ways a self-created world, since it seemed to have little relationships to actual crime rates or the real dangers that citizens faced.

In 1991, this dominant media discourse on crime was challenged momentarily after the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles. When the Simi Valley court exonerated all the officers who were charged with beating Rodney King in a state trial, a riot ensued. The urban rebellion began in some black and Latino communities, but spread widely in immigrant Central American neighborhoods. It was quelled after three days with the help of the National Guard and Federal troops. During this period, the hold of the dominant discourse on suppression of crime was broken for a short time. A series of grassroots movements and creative artistic responses emerged in the after math of the LA rebellion, as we have seen in earlier chapters of this dissertation.

In the momentary vacuum created by the rebellion, gang activists from Watts and Compton found a new space for performing truce. In chapters three and four, I discussed the gang truce movement, which attracted large numbers of South Central residents. After the initial negotiations and festivities, truce activists continued meeting and engaged in a number of initiatives to maintain the truce. In some areas of the city, drive-by shootings ceased completely. Negotiations continued on a daily basis throughout southern California in dozens of locations, with the residents themselves undertaking major initiatives. The year 1992 posed new challenges as much of the hitherto accepted political and cultural discourses were called into

question. These discourses centered on the role and nature of crime, reactions to it by the police, responses to it by the court systems, and the impact of the prison system. Ted Koppel's Nightline and Congresswoman Maxine Waters invited some gang truce leaders to sit at a table with government officials for deliberations on macro and micro-level economic reforms to shape California's employment, urban redevelopment, and immigration policies.

Attempts by gang truce activists to create subaltern, counter-public spheres did not draw the kind of media attention that the 1992 outbursts had attracted. The slow and painful negotiations did not take place in elite conferences and summits, or in the large ballrooms of downtown hotels. Rather, most were conducted in more modest church basement rooms, union halls, and homes, or through improvisatory rituals that helped concretize participants' ways of knowing to resist dominant discourses on race, crime, and gang culture. These small local initiatives altered the participants' negative self-image and helped transform the lives of a generation of youth activists. With the help of several grassroots organizations such as Coalition Against Police Abuse, Amer-I-Can, Hands Across Watts, and South Central Love, many former gang members were able to make the transition to a different life. They became active citizens and mentors to gang youth. They participated in civic and political organizations, or contributed to a new type of literature where gang youth were no longer just defined by others. The new vocabulary, poetics, and visual imagery of this era influenced a new series of academic studies and also made inroads into mainstream representations of gang life.

The mothers of the LA4+ enacted different types of performance and the community that grew around them. In 1992-1993, an intense process of radical self-redefinition and political expression emerged among a number of working-class Black and Latina women in Los Angeles. New organizations such as the LA4+ Committee and Mothers ROC focused initially on the trial

of the four young black men arrested on 29 April 1992, as well as others caught up in the post-riot prosecution. But the two organizations soon began to address various other issues, among them oppressive living conditions, police brutality, and the media's demonization of African-American and Latino youth. The LA4+ Committee and Mothers ROC also articulated a new image of black women, focusing on their identities as caring mothers, sisters, and activists, who confronted injustices and were engaged in a process of empowerment for themselves and their families.

To simply state that these women became politically active does not convey the complexity of their efforts. Members of the LA4+ Committee and Mothers ROC expressed their grievances through elaborate public performances. They remained conscious of their audiences and built upon a variety of cultural codes, traditions, and legacies. They prepared meticulously for the glare of cameras by writing and rehearsing their presentations of demands and grievances. They worked hard to dispute the pervasive stereotype of "mothers of gang-members," and learned through practice how to counter the negative image of "irresponsible parents." The women knew they were suspected of using their children as a source of income and raising deviant children. The media had helped create and reproduce the myth that every house in South Central Los Angeles was a crack-house, and every mother of a gang member was addicted to drugs and alcohol and therefore oblivious to the comings and goings of her children.

In writing a history of this period I moved away from a singular focus on the content of the women's grassroots activism in order to examine their actions as a form of performance. I showed how the women took on different characters, including their role as "mothers," how they physically engaged their bodies and dressed, how they used traditional women's vocations, such as cooking and religious rituals, to forge new political and organizational relations, and how they

used rhetorical and visual props to draw attention to their actions and to appear on the evening local news.

In August 2006, as I was concluding this dissertation, Dorothy Freeman died at the age of eighty-six. A few months before her death, Dorothy's grandson was charged with murder and put on trial. Since her death her friends have continued to monitor the case, which was turned over to the jury for deliberation in October 2006. Mollie Bell, Paul Parker, Judy Tanzawa, Georgiana Williams, and many former members of LA4+ Committee and Mothers ROC have remained court-watchers for the last 15 years, while also fighting on a number of other fronts, from supporting families of prisoners in Families to Amend California's Three Strikes (FACTS), to fighting against the closure of Martin Luther King Hospital in Watts.

Chapter six of this dissertation focused on a play by Anna Deavere Smith. While I explored a more classic type of performance here, there is a crucial connection between this chapter and earlier ones. The gang truce movement and the women's organizations were a form of "performance-conscious activism"; likewise those of Anna Deavere Smith and subsequent productions of Twilight in high schools and colleges have been "activist-conscious performances." Smith's postmodern theater for development, with its blend of documentary journalism, social commentary, and the arts, has created new possibilities for addressing social concerns. She moves us beyond the exposé of white-on-black racism and beyond an exclusive focus on relationships within black communities. She has made it possible for audiences to see the commonalities and shared experiences of people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Smith has also depicted the sharp divides within both the black and the white communities, showing that the conflict is not only between Beverly Hills-Brentwood and South Central Los Angeles, but also within Los Angeles' affluent and poor communities.

Smith is particularly aware of the role of memory and historical experience in constructing popular and theatrical imaginaries, matrices for how we perceive the present. The participants in the Los Angeles rebellion did not come to this event as a blank slate, in a mental void or ab novo. They viewed the rebellion through a host of past events that they either witnessed personally or heard about from their parents and grandparents. Memories passed down orally of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, the Japanese-American internment camps, the mass expulsion of Mexican agricultural laborers during WWII, the Watts Riots of 1965, the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the Vietnam War, and the feminist movements of the 1970s and the 1980s, resonated throughout the text of Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992.

Through character sketches, Smith showed that racism takes many forms. It operates through exclusion, when even key black politicians who represent the districts of their constituents are not involved in the decision-making process at the highest level of government. It is perpetrated by a lack of empathy on the part of both wealthy residents and public officials. But racism also operates through a mindset that blocks channels of communication, unleashing dangerous stereotypes that arise in times of social and economic crisis.

In their various manifestations, Smith's performances have operated to change prevailing attitudes on a number of levels. Her interviewing and selection of characters for the play created much anxiety in the communities she covered. Those she interviewed, and ultimately performed, relinquished all control over how they were to be represented in Smith's play. They watched Smith perform them, while audiences took delight in this act of mimicking. Well-known personalities, including the establishment figures such as Daryl Gates, were dis-empowered, while shadowy and frightening strangers, such as gang truce activist Twilight Bey, were held up

as sages. Likewise, unknown and previously unimportant figures, such as Angela King, were dignified and empowered. In this way, the camera was turned into an instrument for liberation from the disaggregating practices of dominant media. Twilight helped release Rodney King from the choke-hold of images of his repeated beating because Smith—and later Levin—disentangled the structures of interpretation and provided a context for the events that led to the beating and the jury's decision.

At the same time, audiences could experience the rare freedom of release from the grip of stereotypical views of gender, race, and ethnicity, in order to confront, instead, a sense of ambiguity with regard to some of the sketches. In these ways, the splicing together of documentary footage with the performance gave audiences both a macro and a micro view of the events. Editing techniques added new subtleties, increased the audience's tension, and exposed each character's rage or sorrow.

Twilight: Los Angeles 1992 has also found an independent life without Smith's corporeal presence. In the last decade, various local theater companies, colleges, and high schools across the United States have staged Twilight as ensemble pieces with a large cast. For example, students at Waukegan High School, an hour north of Chicago, used their performance of Twilight to create a space of contention and dialogue. Cast members led the audience through a long maze with graffiti and drawings of burning buildings and dizzying unrest. Through the play, they addressed their city's social deterioration, its "rusting" industrial economy, and the dehumanizing effects of living under constant racial conflict. Their 17 November 2001 performance directed by Avi Lessing was followed by a spirited panel discussion by the actors, a panel of speakers composed of Waukegan activists spanning the 1960s to 1990s generations, and

an audience of mostly black and Latino students and their parents[87]. At the more prosperous Wake Forest University in North Carolina, a production of Twilight, struggled to remain true to Smith's call for polyphony, especially in casting the performance (Cynthia Gendrich Directors' Notes)

As productions of Twilight Los Angeles 1992 thrive in high schools and colleges, and as the video is used in classrooms across the country, a new generation of students has started to grapple with the challenges of representation in activist performances. These local school productions encourage students to confront some of the issues that I have explored in this dissertation: How can we form complex and concrete images and representations of one another, given the subtle nature of the knowledge/power dynamic and the manner in which discursive formations are framed? How can we recognize the performative aspects of many grassroots activities as we research their geneologies? How can we develop a greater appreciation for the way participants reshape their own identity through performance? How can we document their actions not only as "spontaneous" and "instinctive," but as improvisatory, embodied, and constructed? Finally, why should we encourage more "activist-conscious performances" as a means of bridging the enormous class, race, and gender divides of our society, not only for Los Angeles, but for the world?

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[87] I attended this performance thanks to Sheila Robinson and spoke during the discussion. I also use it for courses on performing Los Angeles to show alternative forms of research by community arts organizations.

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