

pressed, reading this very wide, very deep study. . . . Every this collection describes, to some extent a version of the story. . . . The essays on homelessness, on black and Latino race and history are fascinating and informative. . . . The on architecture and the arts seem to retain the greatest y to the actual organism, while fashioning an identity insecure urban dwellers flail for."

Susan Salter Reynolds, *Los Angeles Times*

ume of challenging essays . . . usefully steps beyond the nstraints of urban discourse and analysis, with topics from the evolution of the freeway infrastructure and ties among the 36 percent Latino population in the city rigin of modern fast food at McDonald's San Bernadino of 1948."

Architecture Today

ntative of the self-proclaimed 'L.A. School' of regional that emerged in the 1980s, many of the authors are amous. The work has significance far beyond the of California."

Richard Walker, University of California, Berkeley

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Scott and Soja

THE CITY

Los Angeles and Urban

Theory at the End of

the Twentieth Century

Edited by Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja

ELEVEN

A City Called Heaven

Black Enchantment and
Despair in Los Angeles

Susan Anderson

The first generation of black political leadership in Los Angeles was inadvertently launched on 19 January 1856 as the result of a fairly routine court case. In the First Judicial District of the State of California in the City of Los Angeles, Judge Benjamin Hayes manumitted a group of illegally held slaves. Sisters Hannah and Bidy and their children and grandchildren were granted "full liberty and discharge" under the Sheriff Special Guardian.¹ The younger sister, Bidy, would become one of the most prominent citizens in Los Angeles history, a wealthy property owner, philanthropist, and community leader.

However, on that January day, Bidy Mason stood between slavery and liberty. She and her family had accompanied their Mormon master, Robert Smith, from Mississippi to Utah and Southern California as part of the "Great Mormon Experience." In Los Angeles, Bidy was free. But her slave master planned to leave California and reenslave his captives in Texas. Bidy, Hannah, and their children were encamped with him in the Santa Monica Mountains. Captive, illiterate, even a woman of such remarkable resources as Bidy Mason could not act alone. In a drama indicative of the sophistication and dedication of the tiny black Los Angeles population, a businessman, Robert Owens, and a woman named Elizabeth Flake Rowen helped Bidy and her family escape from the canyons surrounding the city. Owens, one of the wealthiest men in the city, whose own descendants would later intermarry with Bidy's, produced the writ of habeas corpus that resulted in the liberty of the slaves.

The political leadership, particularly of the African-American middle class, has exercised an incalculable influence over the city. Bidy Mason learned the lessons of this leadership early: no one is empowered alone. Among her achievements was the founding of the First African Methodist

Episcopal (AME) Church—a pivotal institution, the base for political upstart Tom Bradley in the early 1960s, and the site of contentious crowds the night of the 1992 uprisings. She was eulogized as leading a life "filled with good works" in her 1891 obituary in the *Los Angeles Times*.² A monument to her now stands on the site of her former home on Spring Street downtown.

African-American institutions in Los Angeles are testaments to the community's faith in salvation as a "beautiful city of God." The urban ideal has been potent in black culture. For generations, congregations have sung the lyrics of the traditional hymn, "City Called Heaven,"

I am a poor pilgrim of sorrow,
I'm tossed in this wide world alone,
No hope have I for tomorrow,
I've started to make heaven my home
Sometimes I am tossed and driven, Lord,
Sometimes I don't know where to roam,
I've heard of a city called heaven,
I've started to make it my home.³

Rural life for blacks has meant, among other things, slavery, peonage, isolation, and terror. It is not surprising that the city, symbolizing escape from the racist excesses of the Deep South, is an object of black enchantment. But it is also a cause for despair as immigrants, even those early pioneers like Bidy Mason, discovered, as all utopian searchers must discover, that the beautiful city of God is not of this place.

Sometimes it does seem that Los Angeles is the promised "city called heaven." Blacks in the early history of the city found an economic ease unparalleled in the country. One hundred years later, black-owned firms were responsible for California's 1990 title as the "home of the largest number of successful black entrepreneurs" in the nation, moving ahead of New York on *Black Enterprise's* top 100 list.⁴ Census figures show Los Angeles has the highest concentration of high-income African-Americans in the country.

The ethnic diversity in the city allows blacks to participate in a cosmopolitan urban culture; it mediates the relations between blacks and white power. As far back as 1905, one writer argued its benefits: "Perhaps the presence in this section of the country in large numbers of the representatives of every nation on the globe, has much to do with the success that has attended our men, as representatives of the so-called backward races; they have no monopoly of the embarrassing attention and prejudice so often directed mainly at them."⁵ Then there is Los Angeles as that fictional space, "Black Hollywood," which, like Hollywood itself, in the words of *City of Nets* author Otto Friederich, "is really an imaginary city that exists in the mind of anyone who has, in his mind, lived there."⁶ In the city itself,

black stars preside at civic events; it was a point of note that Dionne Warwick sang at Bradley's first swearing-in. Even in the bedrock of community life, among the three hundred or so African-American churches, the most prominent and affluent vie for identification as the "church home" of Arsenio Hall, Magic Johnson, and other famous stars.

However, while Los Angeles has the highest concentration of high-income blacks in the country, it also has the highest concentration of low-income blacks. The celebrated ethnic diversity threatens to collapse into a "retreat into fortress identities" as the city divides along racial and ethnic lines. And the glowing imagery exported by Hollywood belies the fact remarked by the film director Charles Burnett that "the Los Angeles Police Department has more affirmative action than Hollywood."⁷

In the foreword to his novel of early L.A. life, Jess Kimbrough plaintively acknowledged what most blacks still know and feel about their city.

Los Angeles is . . . a dream. . . . [I]t encompasses more of everything than the wakeful mind is capable of imagining. . . . No other group of people on earth has had such a varied cultural background to build upon. . . .

But there is something more. On the outer fringe, well removed from the mainstream, the hand of fate has haplessly dropped the Negro, the unsolvable social headache with all of its accompanying tensions. . . . Yet in some vague way he, too, calls the city his home, and there was a time when he considered it a haven.

. . . It is likely that the lush valley, walled in on the north by a mountain range which breaks the fierce wind, seemed a perfect place to rest . . . a fit habitat for heavenly angels.

[But] . . . it appears that the eternities are definitely marked on the basis of color. All the redeemed of heart in heaven are white, and all the damned in hell are black. And with a background so firmly rooted in antiquity, it is not surprising that the same demarcation of color is a fact of life in the City of Angels.⁸

EARLY BLACK POLITICS

All great cities, to use Rainer Maria Rilke's words about Rome, have an abundance of pasts. In Los Angeles, an extraordinary period, just ended, has become one of the city's pasts. The period began with the convening of political and social forces that elected Tom Bradley to the city council in 1963, then made him the first black mayor of a large American city in 1973. It continued, for a generation, through the maintenance of tacit bargains and intricate relationships, to keep him there. It ended with the refusal of Mayor Bradley to run for reelection in 1992, the election of Richard Riordan, and the extraordinary events surrounding the succession, particularly the 1992 civil unrest. A change in mayor rarely can be considered one of

the great events in a city's life. However, Bradley's election marked a rupture with history. Crucial to that change was the catalytic role of black Angelenos, as infiltrators of the city's political imagination, as heralds of its political transformation and shapers of its political edifice.

The powerful black influence in the events of the city helped to create a new ethos of political rule, opening city government to elites of racial, ethnic, and political communities that had previously been excluded. It also helped to bring the entire city around to facing black leadership's historical bedrock concerns: political representation and police brutality. In the post-Bradley setting, a major uncertainty is whether the diverse black community will continue to be as pivotal a force in the public life of the city and whether the prevailing ethos of the Bradley era will continue to inform city life.

Throughout its early history, the black community in Los Angeles had agitated for political power with scant success. By 1960, the *California Eagle* editor, Charlotta Bass, was forced to declare, "Los Angeles is one of the most laggard cities in the nation when it comes to entrusting public office to Negroes."⁹ In a 1961 comparison of black representatives on the city councils of the nation's largest non-Southern cities, only Los Angeles, Cincinnati, and Boston had no black members. In contrast, New York had two out of twenty-five; Detroit, one out of nine; Cleveland, eight out of thirty-three; Chicago, six out of fifty; St. Louis, six out of twenty-nine; and Philadelphia, one out of seventeen. In 1960, the only black elected official from Los Angeles was Augustus Hawkins, who had been in the state assembly since the Great Depression. By this time, the black population comprised 13.5 percent of the overall population in 1960. With its growing numbers, and the added force of the Southern civil rights movement, grew a pent-up demand for political representation.

The exclusion of blacks from public office resulted from a variety of factors. There were deliberate tactics, such as gerrymandering. As part of the reform movement, district elections for city council had been established in 1925, eliminating at-large elections. Many cities around the country were forced to eliminate at-large elections by civil rights court challenges on the grounds that they diluted minority votes. In Los Angeles, district elections "did not prevent city leaders from purposely crippling Black political power. . . . [A]s far back as the 1930s, the city divided up Black districts that went naturally north-south and joined them to adjacent West Side white areas. When . . . Black westward mobility increased, the city then drew the lines north-south to prevent the creation of Black majority districts."¹⁰

Additionally, the political culture itself was a barrier to black participation. The odd admixture of reform policies and conservative civic sensibilities proved hostile to challenge. Reform efforts destroyed machine politics,

which in other cities ironically functioned to include African-Americans, albeit with limitations, by taking advantage of the political base provided by segregation. At the same time, the civic culture in Los Angeles managed to exclude, violently at times, labor, the Chinese-, Japanese-, and Mexican-American communities, liberals, and Jews along with blacks. In fact, the history of Los Angeles politics is a history of animosity in the extreme toward each of these groups. When it came to blacks, the rude expression of this political culture altered over the years, but it was evident enough in a *Los Angeles News* editorial in 1867: "The soul of the Negro is as black and as putrid as his body. Should such a creature vote? He has no more capacity for reason than his native hyena or crocodile."¹¹

It is also possible to argue that the caution of local African-American leadership contributed to the long years of exclusion. The black community here has been a "sober residential and business settlement," declared Bass.¹² From the nineteenth century until after World War II, perhaps the greatest preoccupation of the community was securing its economic status, not its political power. Indeed, despite segregation, the rates of home ownership for blacks in Los Angeles were higher than those for other minorities in the city and higher than those for blacks in other cities (for example, 36.1 percent compared with 2.4 percent in New York). Despite discrimination, the wages and occupational gains for Los Angeles blacks exceeded other cities. In 1920, it was observed that African-Americans made "a better adjustment in Los Angeles than any other American city."¹³ This sense of well-being persisted for many generations and formed the ontological core of black experience from the city's earliest days.

THE GOLDEN ERA

From 1850 until the 1920s, with all its tenuous liberties, legal restrictions, and customary racism, life in Los Angeles proved an atypical, almost halcyon, urban experience for its growing black population. The numbers of blacks burgeoned in L.A., from 12 in 1850 to 15,579 in 1920, hovering under 3 percent of the population. That group lived an anomaly compared with their African-American compeers elsewhere. This period is characterized by the defeat of Reconstruction, terror, and persecution in the South and the privations of large-scale migration to the North. In Los Angeles, in dramatic contrast, these years have been referred to as "the golden era."

In those early years, black economic strength was predicated on a unique set of factors in the Los Angeles labor market and economy. The sheer diversity of industries here meant that black areas of employment included housing, construction, and transportation as well as domestic work. The wages available to skilled black artisans and semiskilled workers were

among the highest in the nation. In addition, Los Angeles was the first city in the country to hire African-Americans on its police force and fire department, hence initiating an early black entry into the city's civil service. Even L.A.'s largely open-shop factory employment, while noxious to trade unions, meant wider opportunities for black workers because of the absence of the layer of preclusion practiced by white-run labor organizations. Also, as the black newspaper *Liberator* crowed in 1904, "The colored people are not all laborers and white washers. . . . [T]hey are evidencing a disposition . . . to go into business for themselves."¹⁴

In the early nineteenth century, California was optimistically seen by African-Americans as "the western wilds . . . where the ploughshare of prejudice has at yet been unable to penetrate the soil."¹⁵ Actual experience quickly mitigated this view and helped to stimulate the formation of several early civil rights organizations and campaigns. These efforts were singularly successful and include gaining the right to testify in court and participate in juries in 1863, outlawing separate schools for "colored children" in 1890, passing one of the first equal public accommodations laws in 1870, and overturning a city ordinance mandating whites-only jitney buses as public transportation. By 1921, the first black state legislator, Frederick Roberts, was elected to the assembly in Sacramento from the Watts district. To protect and extend these gains, civic organizations and local chapters of national groups—Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Associations, the NAACP, and the Urban League—flourished in Los Angeles.

In politics, the long-lived Los Angeles Forum, founded in 1903, had what the historian Rudolph Lapp called an "umbrella effect" over diverse black organizations. Run by the sober burghers and business owners of Central Avenue and meeting weekly in the E. 28th Street YMCA, the Forum set the agenda for blacks in the city, while holding open meetings and providing services for newly arrived black migrants. The Forum, and later the 1960s Committee on Representative Government, while in no way reflecting monolithic black political sensibilities, did temper the infighting and antagonisms that became prevalent in other cities such as Chicago and New York and may have helped to create the long-standing, relatively peaceful coexistence among Los Angeles's black political structures.

The NAACP held its first western convention in Los Angeles in 1928 in the Dunbar Hotel, a just-built, elegant establishment (a product of black money and fierce discrimination in the city's hotel industry—a not unprofitable combination for the African-American entrepreneur) on the bustling corner of 41st and Central, south of downtown. W. E. B. Du Bois had already traveled to Los Angeles on behalf of the newly founded civil rights group in 1913. In a graphic display of how middle-class comfort and race protest have often been wedded in black life, Du Bois rode in a motorcade of about ten cars and later posed for a photograph with the obvi-

ously prosperous motorcar owners. The contact with the cream of the Los Angeles black population stirred Du Bois to write in the August 1913 *Crisis*, "Los Angeles is wonderful. Nowhere in the United States is the Negro so well and beautifully housed, nor the average efficiency and intelligence in the colored population so high. . . . Out here in this matchless Southern California there would seem to be no limit to your opportunities, your possibilities." In the same issue, however, Du Bois couched a warning in his glowing words: "Los Angeles is not Paradise, much as the sight of its lilies and roses might lead one at first to believe. The color line is there sharply drawn."¹⁶

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE GHETTO

It wasn't long after Du Bois's observations were published that spatial restrictions on the black presence intensified, underpinning and facilitating social and economic discrimination. Nowhere was the color line more sharply drawn than in housing. Strict housing segregation, enforced by restrictive covenants, block agreements, law, custom, and violence, existed in all American cities. However, in Los Angeles residential segregation had not been typical of the African-American experience. When housing segregation emerged in Los Angeles it was swift and doubly cruel, representing a retreat from an almost unrestricted spatial dispersion for blacks.

From 1850 until the 1920s, in the words of one early inhabitant, "Negroes lived anywhere they could afford to live. Homes were rented to anyone who had money."¹⁷ African-Americans, rather than being restricted to one or two primary residential areas, lived in the various neighborhoods of Boyle Heights, West Temple to Occidental between 1st and 3d streets, San Pedro to Santa Fe, 35th and Normandie, and Pico Heights, as well as other places. It was a point of pride that black residency was autonomous of the ghettos that had long formed in other urban areas. "The Negroes of the city," the *Liberator* boasted, "have prudently refused to segregate themselves into any locality, but have scattered and produced homes in sections occupied by wealthy, cultured White people, thus not only securing the best fire, water, and police protection but also the more important benefits that accrue from refined and cultured surroundings."¹⁸

With the large-scale migration of Southern blacks and whites by the 1930s, racial lines began to harden and a formidable array of forces had the practical effect of herding African-Americans into designated areas of the city. The factor of intense, forced residential segregation contributed more than anything else to the deterioration of the quality of black life in Los Angeles. The ghetto was created.

The black influx to Los Angeles was rapid and immense. In 1910, the black population was 7,599; in 1920, it was 18,738; in 1930, 30,893; in

1940, 75,209. By 1950, the black population was nearly 200,000, and it continued to increase through the 1960s. With the start of increased migration, the boundaries were set for black residency; by the early 1930s, 70 percent of all black Angelenos resided in one assembly district. That pattern continued until the Watts riots, which sparked the initial out-migrations from the crowded black neighborhoods described by *L.A. Times* literary editor, Robert Kirsch, in 1965 as "a kind of forgotten archipelago in the garish basin of the region."¹⁹

The early dispersal of the black population had not been complete; there were black neighborhoods, particularly around Central Avenue in the early part of the century, which have been called "spatial ghettos" because the only characteristic in common with the well-established ghettos in northeastern cities was that the inhabitants were African-American. These spatial ghettos, peculiar to Los Angeles, were almost uniformly composed of owner-occupied single-family bungalows. Moreover, although the bourgeois press rarely admitted their presence, so strenuous were its effort to demonstrate the worthiness of the black population, poor blacks often lived in the housing courts around railroad tracks or found themselves, along with other poor migrants from Mexico and China, in makeshift housing downtown. Also, Watts, variously known as Mudtown or Nigger Heaven, was a stark contrast to the urbane black existence in the central city and west side. As Arna Bontemps put it in his 1931 novel, *God Sends Sunday*,

The small group in Mudtown was exceptional. Here, removed from the influences of white folks, they did not acquire the inhibitions of their city brothers. Mudtown was like a tiny section of the deep south literally transplanted. Throughout the warm summer days old toothless men sat in front of the little grocery store on boxes, chewing the stems of cob pipes, recalling the 'Manipation. . . . [T]he women cooked over fireplaces in the yards and boiled their clothes in heavy iron kettles. There were songs in the little frail houses and over the steaming pots. Lilacs grew at every doorstep. In every house there was a guitar.²⁰

These areas were exceptions. For the most part, in Los Angeles, blacks escaped wholesale involuntary residential segregation common to the rest of the country.

A study of residential title law alone would reveal the patterns and practices that distorted and segregated city life beginning in the 1920s. Popular white aversion to the growing black population was expressed in campaigns to "keep the neighborhood white," through block protective associations and use of individual deed covenants. Black and white realtors capitalized on these sentiments through the block-busting tactics long used in other cities. The extremes of this sentiment were acted out by the Ku Klux Klan whose activities "nearly always involved issues of homeownership and accom-

modations."²¹ As late as 1940, the "hooded terror" marched through downtown Los Angeles from City Hall to Broadway and 8th Street and back again.

As with many political issues, black concerns over housing segregation were both an expression for racial justice and an indication of middle-class desires. As the *California Eagle* editorialized in 1940, "When the Negro property-owner buys in 'white' neighborhoods, it is usually because there is no section in the Negro district which can offer him a home honestly reflecting his economic position and cultural tastes. To be told that he cannot live in property bought outside the narrow confines of the accepted black belt, as though his presence contaminates the very atmosphere, is a biting humiliation."²²

The fight against housing segregation became a preoccupation of the black movement. L.A. leaders were among those who welcomed the 1940 Supreme Court decision that ruled unconstitutional a property restriction that forced the wealthy Carl Hansberry out of his home in an exclusive area of Chicago. So profound was black concern over residential segregation that, before the decade was over, the issue became the turning point in the now-classic Broadway play, *Raisin in the Sun*, written by the daughter of the plaintiff in the Hansberry case. And Los Angeles would become "the nation's leading center for legal challenges to restrictive covenants."²³

The case that provided the national rallying focus against housing segregation was known as the "92d Street Outrage." In 1939, Mr. and Mrs. Lee Lofton bought a home in the Good Year Tract along East 92d Street. The Good Year Tract extended south from Manchester Boulevard to 92d Street and west from Central Avenue to Hooper Avenue. The first African-American moved there in 1908 and left in 1935. In October 1939, the Lofton couple moved to the neighborhood with their children. By the summer of 1940, white neighbors sued the Loftons, saying the "use, lease, sale, or occupancy of the property to persons other than Caucasians" was prohibited. As their case against the injunction developed, the Loftons were the targets of racial harassment. Refusing to obey an eviction notice, the entire family went to jail. The arrest was a dramatic event; the Loftons were forcibly led off their property by the police as white neighbors jeered. The Loftons' own suit precipitated years of national litigation and became part of a set of similar cases brought before the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed restrictive housing covenants, declaring them unconstitutional.

By the late 1940s, crowded, inadequate housing was a citywide problem and public housing was viewed as a response to the situation exacerbated in the post-World War II population boom. The real estate lobby, an intricate network of banks, property owners, and the *L.A. Times*, was able, however, through its considerable clout, to red bait and agitate the city into

refusing to build the number of units needed. This defeat of public housing had a ripple effect throughout the region and in the loosely structured political culture of cities such as Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, Seattle, Akron, and Portland, which was "inspired" by the "success" of L.A.'s landed interests. As a consequence, Los Angeles led the country in the loss of federal funds for public housing. The local effect of this Pyrrhic victory was increasing overcrowding and inadequate housing in the inner city. In the meantime, white working-class and middle-income families, including the war veterans for whom public housing was also intended, took advantage of the suburban boom, departing the scene of the problem.²⁴

The growth of the San Fernando Valley as an enclave long reserved for white home owners was directly dependent on the concentration of black renters in the city core. Real estate interests "worked hand in hand" with the federal government, to create residential segregation. Between the 1930s and 1940s, the federal program of mortgage loan guarantees "administered, advised and sometimes required developers of residential projects to draw up restrictive covenants against nonwhites as a condition of obtaining F.H.A.-insured financing. . . . [T]he policy closed almost all African Americans out of the federally insured mortgage market and excluded them from the new suburbs altogether." Even after restrictive covenants were outlawed, "between 1946 and 1959, less than 2 percent of all the housing financed with the assistance of federal mortgage insurance was made available to blacks."²⁵

The slightest opening in housing provoked black flight from the inner city. Between World War II and 1960, the black population swelled to nearly 14 percent of the population—a high for L.A. but far behind other urban centers such as Chicago or Detroit where blacks made up half or more of the residents. It was during this time that the Supreme Court decision outlawed restrictive covenants. Black migration began out of the central and south central parts of the city into the west side.

By the 1980s, redlining replaced housing covenants as the main form of segregation. African-Americans are more consistently denied home mortgage loans than any other group. In addition, recent studies such as the 1993 Consumer Union's "The Thin Red Line: How the Poor Still Pay More" provide evidence that all low-income residents of Los Angeles, particularly blacks, live in areas where goods and services, from health care to food, cost more and provide less compared with middle-class communities. Again, in response to the newer forms of segregation, there has been large-scale flight. During the past decade alone, about 76,000 African-Americans left South L.A., heading past the San Fernando Valley into San Bernardino and Riverside counties and beyond. According to one report, "the African-American population of South Los Angeles actually decreased by 20 percent during the [1980s] while the African-American population in the rest

of the City increased slightly. The African-American populations of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties . . . increased by 99 percent and 134 percent, respectively.²⁶ More than 60 percent of these migrants were considered "traditional" households: professional, two-parent families.²⁷ This flight from Los Angeles of working black families can be considered a long-term, quiet revolt with consequences far outweighing the city's outbreaks of violence in 1965 and 1992.

One consequence is that only 7 percent of black Angelenos live in "all-black neighborhoods" compared with 37 percent in other cities.²⁸ Most formerly black neighborhoods have become reintegrated: in South Central, by mostly poor Latin American immigrants; in west side neighborhoods, by gentrifying whites. As a recent L.A. United Way study suggests, "What we commonly knew of the Black community over the last twenty to thirty years was geographically presented, based on a cluster of neighborhoods with a concentrated majority of the city's black population. . . . However, as demonstrated by the impact of diversified population growth, the notion of a geographically determined black community is no longer correct or viable."²⁹ In other words, the ghetto no longer exists.

Those who remain concentrated in the areas once considered ghettos live in conditions described by demographers in the 1980s as "hypersegregation." Hypersegregation keeps residents "isolated from the resources that would help them escape the ghetto. . . . [R]esidents . . . would be very unlikely to come into regular contact with a member of Anglo society, except through participation in the labor force, an option that is denied to the . . . central-city blacks who are under or unemployed."³⁰

The black population in Los Angeles is enormously kinetic, its patterns of movement a response to continuing patterns of housing discrimination. Importantly, these movements corresponded with differences in income and resources. The west side became the hub for an affluent stratum of blacks with an influence that could be compared to the early dons of Central Avenue. By 1960, after several waves of changing black residential patterns, there was enough concentration of population in the Eighth and Ninth city council districts for black voting strength to override the attempts to limit black political participation in the city. Significant, too, was the base of affluent blacks in the multiracial Tenth District. Together, these areas would launch the juggernaut that in one year elected Thomas Bradley, Gilbert Lindsay, and Billy Mills to the city council and reshuffled the balance of political power in the city.

A MEDIATING FORCE

It was not inevitable that Los Angeles would have a black mayor. While the number of blacks in the city was behind only New York and Chicago, the

proportion of blacks in the overall population, especially among voters, was far behind many urban centers. Blacks alone could never have mustered the clout needed to put one of their own in citywide office. It took the combination of three conditions to elect Tom Bradley mayor and transform the political character of the city: an apt public persona, a new coalition of voters, and a sense of political urgency.

If a persona were to have been manufactured to fit the emerging exigencies of Los Angeles following 1960, it would have been Tom Bradley. First among his characteristics was his lifelong ability to maneuver between contested territories in the city, between black and white, Jew and gentile, police and populace, privileged and poor. Bradley acknowledged this trait in himself beginning as a student at Poly High where he successfully campaigned for offices formerly closed to minorities. There began, he said, "what was to become a whole pattern in my life, . . . working with and trying to serve as a mediating force among people of different backgrounds."³¹ Before entering electoral politics, Bradley's public life was centered in networks of interracial, interreligious organizations, from the time of his student involvement in UCLA's campus Religious Conference to his formation of an ambitious LAPD community relations program while he was a police officer to his activities in the progressive California Democratic Council. By the time he was elected to the city council in 1963, he had a web of citywide contacts that would provide the infrastructure for seizing City Hall.

Once elected to the city council, representing the Tenth District in 1963, Bradley also proved his aptness as a citywide leader by establishing a reputation that both accommodated and defied traditional politics. In L.A.'s political cosmos, this meant being seen as independent of machines, fiscally conservative, and enamored of the distance between the city and Washington, D.C. Except for the latter, Bradley differed little from mayoral antecedents while on the council, voting separately from fellow black members Billy Mills and Gilbert Lindsay, resisting the established Democrats, and favoring spending cuts, including and foreshadowing sterner conflicts, in the LAPD budget. Conversely, Bradley instituted a public style perhaps unprecedented in the city. Not only did he hold regular monthly meetings in public places in the Tenth District; to the discomfiture of fellow council members, he also held meetings on issues he was concerned about in their districts. Not only did Bradley initiate this "characteristic of an accessible public official" in a city that had been virtually closed politically, he also increased his visibility among citywide voters and widened his network of contacts.

That Bradley had been a career policeman was also salient to his rise to mayor. In a city whose police force operated as a political leveraging force on the office of mayor and whose voters were still overwhelmingly white and conservative, no mayor could reign without the pleasure of the LAPD. Cer-

tainly, no black candidate, regardless of his other qualifications, would have been palatable to voters without strong, visible attachment to the police department. And it was Bradley's career in the LAPD that bolstered his early public critiques of the police force, particularly before and after the Watts riots. However, at the same time, it is questionable whether a black candidate could have been elected without criticizing the police, for the black vote hinged on this issue. And, following the Watts riots, police reform again emerged as a compelling theme for all voters in citywide politics.

The coalition that formed around Bradley expressed the pent-up aspirations of the elite representatives of those who had been traditionally and systematically excluded from political participation. A breakthrough had been made with Ed Roybal's election as the first nonwhite to the city council. Bradley and others participating in that campaign would later draw resources from the Roybal camp. However, when Roybal was elected to Congress in 1962, the vacuum remained in city politics, as glaring as ever. The Bradley coalition drew on Asian, Latino, and labor leadership. It drew great strength from liberal gentile and Jewish leaders. But the core of the coalition, the force that provided the others a rallying point, was African-American leadership.

African-American political leadership in L.A. has shown a remarkable calm and unity, compared with other cities. This has meant an absence of the destructive divisions experienced elsewhere. Black leadership here is characterized by sangfroid, the imperturbability personified by Bradley. But it has also produced a middling leadership, lacking the creative disunity that has been a hallmark of the black community. On a national scale, the antagonisms between black leaders provided the force behind a century of social and racial reforms: abolitionist Frederick Douglass fighting insurrectionist Henry Highland Garnett; socialist A. Philip Randolph contending with the Harlem elite; the black agitators of the Congress of Industrial Organizations upstaging the probusiness Urban League; the direct action movement of Martin Luther King vying with the litigious NAACP. In other cities, such antagonisms gave rise to memorable political leaders: the fiery militance of New York's Adam Clayton Powell, the labor clout of Detroit's Coleman Young, the civil rights credentials of Atlanta's John Lewis, the leveraging ability of the Black Panthers' Elaine Brown in Oakland. Los Angeles's primary contribution to the pantheon of black political leaders has been Tom Bradley, along with few others. Bradley was a precise reflection of a fundamentally conservative city and an African-American community that had as its origins a "sober business and residential settlement."

There were, however, serious divisions between Bradley and other forces in the African-American community. These fissures would have profound consequences for the city as the Bradley administration distanced itself from the very black neighborhoods whose massive dissatisfactions—fero-

ciously expressed in the 1965 Watts riots—had supplied the urgency that propelled him into office in the first place.

First was Bradley's independence from what many progressive Democrats considered the Unruh machine. As a consequence, Jesse Unruh "regulars" Mervyn Dymally and Julian Dixon, both eventual members of Congress, supported Bradley's opposition in both 1969 and 1973. Dymally was concerned that the mayor would not "lend his resources to develop black politicians" but instead would dilute his influence and be "mayor of all the people." This was a sentiment shared by some black voters, particularly in South Central neighborhoods, who felt a Bradley victory would not necessarily be a black victory, particularly not a black working-class one. One observer noted the class distinctions between the multiracial Bradley camp of "reformers" and the traditional Democratic "regulars," calling them "cotton socks vs. silk stockings."³² But the momentum, exhilaration, and organizing ability of the Bradley campaign was impossible to withstand. Whatever fissures existed beneath the surface disappeared as Bradley captured an enthusiastic 91 percent of the black vote in his successful 1973 mayoral campaign.

During the time of Bradley's ascendancy, between 1967 and 1987, one national trend helped carve the emerging divide in black political leadership. The ranks of the middle class swelled as a result of an expanding economy and the successes of the civil rights movement, which opened up jobs and education. Black households with incomes of more than \$50,000 grew by 350 percent. In California alone, the number of blacks in elected office went from one in 1960 to 300 in 1989. These gains contained the seeds of later disunity based on an unprecedented economic differentiation between blacks and growing class distinctions.

The Bradley coalition could not have survived without the successful mobilization of poor and working-class black voters. However, the Bradley coalition was built with an elite African-American leadership at its center. Bradley himself, though born poor, had rapidly ascended the hierarchy of the city's income ladder. He decided to attend Poly High rather than Jefferson, his South Central neighborhood school. He departed the church of his domestic worker mother, South Central's New Hope Baptist Church, to join the affluent First AME congregation. He purchased a home in upscale, west side Leimert Park when it was an all-white enclave; indeed, a white friend had to buy the house. Bradley was a creature of west side black affluence, and the coalition that formed around him was inspired by the leadership representing that sector of black life.

The Bradley administration was remarkable for being a force in history that opened City Hall to the excluded. Additionally, it initiated affirmative action in City Hall and developed ties to the federal government and access to federal funds, previously spurned by Los Angeles mayors. Under Bradley,

redevelopment of commercial corridors around the city, production of high-income housing, and the publicly subsidized creation of a new downtown helped produce a new city environment and sensibility that was a far cry from the old conservative outpost. But the Bradley administration also presided over a city undergoing wrenching changes—massive migration, economic changes, political shifts—that were more easily overlooked than in other cities because of the economic boom that persisted throughout the 1980s. Where the transformations were being most painfully experienced was in poor neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles. But the administration itself did little to alleviate the explosion of poverty in areas such as South Central. For instance, the *LA Weekly* found that in the administration's final years, from 1988 to 1992, South Central received fewer "per-person-in-poverty" funds for economic development than better-off West L.A., fewer job training dollars per-person-in-poverty than West L.A. or the North Central area of the city, and only 29 percent of human services funds compared with 49 percent in the valley and 40 percent in West L.A.³³

In postriot L.A., with redistricting, population changes, and the absence of a black figurehead at the top of city government, black political leadership is up for grabs. Tensions have already sporadically broken out in the wake of the Bradley administration. In a series of skirmishes between outgoing Mayor Bradley, City Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas, and Congresswoman Maxine Waters, it appears that a realignment is in process. Before Bradley left office, these three represented distinct forces in Los Angeles who, nonetheless, had maintained, if not a common front behind Mayor Bradley, then a shared assenting silence. However, the realignment of African-American leadership will not occur as a result only of personalities. As in Bradley's time, the bedrock concerns of the community, not yet determined in postriot Los Angeles, will find expression in the political process itself.

Regardless of what the emerging issues will be, it is doubtful that Los Angeles will experience the kind of entropic rivalries common between African-American leaders in other cities. A likely scenario points to a lengthy transition period defined by three or four types of leadership in competition for representation of African-Americans: conventional, liberal, career politicians who will hold on to their seats as long as they can before Latino or Asian constituents emerge, isolationists who stand outside the political process vying for the political imagination of poor blacks and the race-conscious, more conservative voices whose critiques of big-city liberalism will resonate with black residents weary of such failures. Perhaps, though, Los Angeles will witness the rise of a new kind of leader.

Historically in California, black leaders "agitated only for their own group."³⁴ Black political sophistication far exceeded that of other "minority" groups, and many of the early black migrants to California were prac-

ticed abolitionists and public leaders. In the contemporary age, as economics and race and nationality newly commingle, black strategies will also rearrange themselves. The British writer Kevin Robins describes the tensions and temptations that arise as cultures directly confront each other in the new, multiethnic global cities: "Older certainties and hierarchies of identity have been called into question. Of course, they do not disappear. Cultural nationalism and patriotism are always posed to reassert themselves in a storm of jingoism and xenophobia. . . . How do we cope with the shock of confrontation? . . . This is perhaps the key political agenda in this era."³⁵ Richard Rodriguez speculates that because, in L.A., "African-Americans must live within a new kind of national complexity, alongside Russian Jews, Syrians, Mexicans, Armenians and Vietnamese," a black leadership might emerge here "different from any other in America."³⁶

Any new black leadership that emerges in Los Angeles would have to undertake the burden of the failures of the civil rights movement as well. It was upon the problem of the poor in the cities that the black political movement stumbled, and Watts was its first stumbling point. When organizers of the 1963 March on Washington censored Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee leader John Lewis's speech, the act presaged the movement's failures in the cities. "In good conscience," Lewis was to have asserted, "we cannot support the Administration's civil rights bill. . . . What is in the bill that would protect the homeless and starving people in the nation? What is there in the bill to insure the equality of a maid who earns \$5.00 a week in the home of a family whose income is \$100,000 a year?"³⁷ What was considered by civil rights leadership too divisive to be even uttered in official public discourse now seems obvious to the point of banality.

After the 1992 Los Angeles riots, now-Congressman Lewis confessed, "It was easier to go and sit at a lunch counter all day and let a lighted cigarette get put out in your hair. . . . It was easier to march across the bridge in Selma and get tear-gassed" than it is to bring equality to the poor in American cities.³⁸ Black leadership made its own contribution to the urban crisis with what scholar Gerald Horne calls "a de facto Faustian bargain."³⁹ This tacit agreement was a trade: racial concessions from the establishment at the expense of a programmatic critique of economic injustice. When the glittering evidence of this bargain was on worldwide display during Nelson Mandela's 1990 visit to Los Angeles, Horne argued that, as quiet as it was kept, civil rights leadership had forsaken the road taken by Mandela's African National Congress, which explicitly speaks of the redistribution of wealth as the basis of black equality in South Africa. Ironically, the Mandela visit provided, among other things, a virtuosic display of the mobilizing capabilities of the black elite, but that mobilization has stopped short of the population most in need. Los Angeles gang members interviewed by reporters did not even know who Mandela was.⁴⁰ As 60,000 spectators in the

Los Angeles Coliseum chanted "Free South Africa," one woman could be overheard devising her own slogan: "Free South Central." These incidents illustrate that poverty, as an issue for modern black leadership, has been utterly without glamour. Or, as one observer put it, "It's easier to think about sending money to Johannesburg than to think about . . . crack-addicted babies."⁴¹

"HOLD YOUR CLUBS FIRMLY"

The political fates of black Angelenos and the LAPD have been closely intertwined. Beginning in 1991, with the repeated airing of the videotaped beating of Rodney King, the warring personas of Mayor Tom Bradley and Police Chief Daryl Gates became the catalyst, as in a mythological conflict, for immense tragedy. The two men's personal enmity, however, was a symbol of the long-standing animus between black Angelenos and the LAPD. Ultimately, it expressed, as well, the central conflict at the heart of city governance: the historical antagonism between the Los Angeles Police Department and what the political scientist Raphael Sonenshein labeled its "extreme bureaucratic independence" and the weak office of the mayor.

The first paid police officers were hired in 1869. Along with their badges and weapons, those officers were admonished to "keep your coats buttoned . . . and hold your clubs firmly."⁴² By 1890, the city had a black police officer, said to be the first in the nation. Many cities throughout the nineteenth century, fearing a retaliatory urge in blacks for injustices done them, prohibited blacks from joining their police and fire departments. Additionally, these public jobs were typically protected for those favored by the local political machine. The turn-of-the-century hiring of a scattered few blacks into LAPD ranks bolstered black optimism about their "matchless" city. When a black officer, Robert Williams Stewart, posed for a photograph with fellow members of the department's "strong man" boxing and wrestling team, there were 85 officers for a city of 52,000, including 1,258 blacks.

From the start, the LAPD was a volatile, corrupt fortress that had sixteen police chiefs in the thirteen years after its founding. In its earliest years, the LAPD was known for two characteristics: graft and corruption and extreme aggression toward the Chinese population, the largest nonwhite group in the city. Indeed, the first occasion of Los Angeles making national headlines was following the lynching, on 24 October 1871, of nineteen Chinese residents. The mob violence was instigated by the LAPD breakup of a dispute in Chinatown. By 1890, the police force had "an obsession with downtown vice" and, under Police Chief J. M. Glass, concentrated its efforts on dismantling Chinatown "practically board by board."⁴³

Perhaps the first major attempt at reforming the department's relationships with minority communities was the citizens committee appointed by

California Governor Earl Warren to investigate the Zoot Suit riots in 1943. By this time, the LAPD had been revamped according to the city charter of 1925. In the charter, still the foundation document for city governance, the mayor was removed from all citizens commissions, especially the police commission, to prevent political influence. The authority to appoint the chief of police was removed from the mayor to prevent corruption in the department. Even with these changes, the LAPD remained an unstable agency; it had twenty police chiefs between 1900 and 1933. By World War II, the Mexican-American community, which had become and would remain the predominant minority group in the city, was the target of "mass arrests, drag-net raids, and other wholesale classifications of groups of people based on false premises [that] tend to merely aggravate the situation," in the words of the Warren-appointed committee. This erupted in the 1943 skirmishes between Mexican-American youths and servicemen, riots, attacks against and mass arrests of Mexican-American youths called the Zoot Suit riots. The committee's recommendation that "law enforcement agencies should provide special training for officers dealing with minority groups" would be echoed again in responses to violence in the city.

By this time, the black population was on the rise in Los Angeles, forced by housing segregation into distinct areas of the city. Although never as large as the Mexican-American community, blacks began to become a special target of the LAPD. Tom Bradley had entered the police force in 1940, the end of the period during which, in the words of former LAPD Commander Homer Broome, "working conditions were extremely harsh for Black officers. Racial prejudice and discrimination were evident at all levels, assignments, and tasks. Most Black officers were assigned to work foot traffic beats on Alameda Street . . . and were assigned to Newton Division. . . . First and foremost, Black officers were always assigned to work together or alone. There was no integration."⁴⁴

In the 1940s, Bradley became part of the first quartet of blacks to reach the rank of lieutenant. The department, in order to prevent them from commanding white personnel, established an all-black watch for them to command. As Bradley acknowledged, the LAPD attracted blacks because it "paid better than any civil service job, any other job generally available to blacks at the time." However, the strict discrimination in the department pushed Bradley and others to develop alternative careers, particularly in the law.

Despite its reputation for violence in minority communities and discrimination within its own ranks, the LAPD entered its heyday in the 1950s under Chief William Parker. The department achieved a mythical status, emulated and acclaimed around the country. In 1955, the International Managers Association anointed the LAPD "the most soundly organized large police department in the country."⁴⁵ The purported virtues of the

LAPD, toughness, efficiency, and a kind of L.A. cool, were insinuated into the mass psyche through the radio and television series, "Dragnet." Chief Parker coined the term "the thin blue line," which resonated throughout America's suburbs as an accurate description of the fragility of the force of order countervailing against urban threats. The department was considered an innovator, for its high-tech weaponry, special units replacing foot patrols, and autonomy from elected officials. Above all, its paramilitary style and practice appeared to distinguish it favorably from its counterparts in other cities. In television imagery, Los Angeles was conveyed through the crewcut dispassion of Jack Webb in "Dragnet." New York was portrayed by the anarchic buffoonery of "Car 54 Where Are You?"

Chief Parker symbolized the obliviousness of L.A.'s institutions to the eruptive, expansive nature of the city itself. In a 1955 address to the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Parker, unwittingly describing the very conditions that would feed subsequent violence in the city, asserted confidently,

I refer your attention to Los Angeles. That city is, today, characterized by a quality of intergroup cooperation which renders it almost unique among our great cities. . . . If organized violence occurred anywhere, it should, by all socio-economic standards, have been Los Angeles. In the last decade, the city has nearly doubled in size; it has suffered the intense dislocation of adjustment to an industrial economy; it has been and still is the focus of one of the greatest migrations in this nation's history. . . . [It] is a melting pot of races, colors, creeds, and ideas. . . . The story of that city's freedom from strife is largely the story of the professionalization of its police department.⁴⁶

Perhaps during the quiescent 1950s there was conceivable merit in such a statement. However, as late as 1965 in its 1964 Annual Report, the LAPD was claiming (in response to alarms by City Councilman Bradley and others) that "racial conflict would not occur in Los Angeles. Compatibility between the community and the police was well-established."⁴⁷ Chief Parker himself argued in a speech on crime and the Great Society six months before the Watts riots, "The progressive curtailment of existing police authority is destroying this nation's ability to protect itself against its criminals. . . . The law has lost its majesty and is treated by many with demonstrated contempt." He ended with a strangely anachronistic recitation of Rudyard Kipling's "The Recessional."

If drunk with sight of power, we loose
wild tongues that have not Thee in awe—
Such boastings as the Gentiles use,
or lesser breeds without the law—
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—Lest we forget!⁴⁸

When the Watts riots hit six months later, Parker replaced Kipling's polite, colonial "lesser breeds," calling Black rioters "monkeys in a zoo" and proclaiming "We're on top and they're on the bottom."

The well-known spark that ignited the Watts riots was the LAPD's long-standing abusive treatment of black and other minority residents, crystallized at the moment of the arrest of Marquette Frye. The McCone Commission, appointed by California Governor Edmund "Pat" Brown recommended police reforms already familiar to a city that had been scrutinized by the citizens commission report on the Zoot Suit riots twenty years earlier. The two motive issues in the Los Angeles black movement, political representation and police brutality, joined after 1965. But neither the election of Tom Bradley as mayor nor attempts at community policing under Chief Ed Davis mitigated the continuing hostilities between the LAPD and the inhabitants of the occupied territory its officers roamed.

In 1979, Bradley's sixth year as mayor and head of the city's ruling political coalition, the LAPD shooting of Eulia Love again aggravated tensions in the city. Two police officers shot Mrs. Eulia Love to death on her South Central front lawn in January. They had been summoned by the gas company after an employee had been threatened when trying to collect an overdue bill of twenty-two dollars. Subsequently, the district attorney refused to file criminal charges, the attorney general found no basis for prosecuting under the civil rights statutes, and the LAPD's own investigation found the officers involved "complied in all respects with Department policies concerning the use of firearms and deadly force." Only the police commission dissented from these exonerations, questioning the testimony and actions of the officers as well as the department's training and preparation. Again, recommendations were made to strengthen "community relations" and provide training for "assignment to minority areas."⁴⁹

One of the ironies of the uproar that followed the shooting is that it occurred during a five-year decline of police shootings—from 208 in 1974 to 146 in 1979. Fatalities were decreasing as well. But the incident quickened black disaffection with the LAPD. A *Los Angeles Times* survey after the Love shooting showed black satisfaction with LAPD performance at only 30 percent, what the Police Commission called "a precipitous decline of 24 percent over a period of eighteen months."⁵⁰

The feebleness of Bradley's response was caused by his own ambiguity concerning the LAPD and the limits of his office. It also highlighted the limitations of political representation for blacks, demonstrating that access to the highest municipal office was not the guarantee of redress that some in the leadership sought. During the Eulia Love crisis, one change, however, was evident. The involvement of established black leadership was institutionalized for the first time through the Police Commission Steering Committee "representing a broad constituency of the black community, with

the aim of improving police-community relations in the 77th, Southeast and Southwest Divisions." Church leaders, too, were consulted and a series of public hearings held. During these, Mayor Bradley publicly rebuked Chief Gates, who, responding to the stinging reproofs of black ministers, said they were not representative of their community. In a display of the ambiguity and denial that characterized his public stance toward the LAPD, when asked if his defense of the black clergy caused problems in his relationship with the chief, Bradley answered, "Not at all. Not at all."

In 1991, by saturating the national consciousness with the images of the Rodney King beating, it seemed that television broke its own spell and, finally, helped demystify the LAPD. The nation voiced an outrage similar to what blacks had experienced and tried to convey. In the city itself, amid the fallout from the April 1992 riots, the public careers of both Mayor Bradley and Chief Gates were sacrificed. The appointment of the Christopher Commission was the last important act of the Bradley regime. The commission, its critical findings and recommendations, and the 1992 passage of the charter amendment to curtail the "extreme bureaucratic independence" of the LAPD demonstrated that the historical indifference of the city had been ended. The city had finally been engaged by the remaining core preoccupation of black leadership: the need to transform intolerable practices of the LAPD. However, between the time of the beating of Rodney King and the passage of the police reform measure, it took the 1992 civil unrest to provide the most persuasive evidence of unacceptable police practices.

POLITICS BY RIOT

In the experience of the crowd, which has become our national culture, Americans shared hours around thousands of television sets in April 1992, watching the aerial helicopter views of uncountable buildings burning in Los Angeles. The grid of South Central and Mid-City streets resembled a well-laid, if shabby, garden exploding with black, sky-high blossoms. One passive crowd of television watchers observed the actions, or the consequences of the actions, of another, mobile crowd in the street. In the city, it was possible to drive west on, say, Manchester from Central Avenue and see block-long charred hulks of buildings that once were the area's signature ratty storefronts and strip malls with their jumbled signs and second-rate goods. The sooty broken frames now reached jaggedly skyward in some forlorn mockery of a cathedral. With the stench of arson yet fresh, the majestic Western notion that we can build our way to grace was itself just a ghostly irony.

By watching Los Angeles, the country was scrutinizing its own possible future, the likelihood that the facade of social cohesiveness everywhere would splinter as surely as any structure torched in the riots. The Police

Commission report on the civil disorder states, "When the unrest began on April 29, the City's Mayor and Chief of Police had not spoken to one another directly for more than a year"—since Bradley had publicly called for Gates's resignation after the Rodney King beating. The divisions in Los Angeles began at the top. They were so profound that for a few days the marines, national guard, sheriff's deputies, and the police department ruled L.A.'s neighborhoods like the Four Powers in the rubble of Vienna's inner city after World War II.

At the heart of the divisions is the breakdown of black unity. For thirty years Los Angeles has, unconsciously, relied for its peace on the relative accord among sectors of the black community. That unity was held together by the racial symbolism in the mayor's office and the tacit acceptance of the ruling political coalition of liberals, Jews, and labor. But the night of April 29, as Mayor Bradley presided over a nervous forum at First AME Church, where his political career was first launched, demonstrators outside expressed their rage toward those inside. Black unity dissolved and with it, the ruling coalition's power over the city.

Los Angeles has now become identified as the city whose contemporary history is bracketed by two violent, large-scale riots that have provided revelation of the plagues in America's social reality. This, perhaps, is L.A.'s perverse gift: the city as oracle, the prophetic urban place that utters a message no one wants to hear.

The 1965 Watts uprising predicted the subsequent economic degeneration of low-income black communities and the inability of national leadership to cope with the trends. When Martin Luther King spoke at the Westminster Neighborhood Center auditorium days after the riots, he was booed off the stage. Responding to Watts, Southern Christian Leadership Conference strategist Bayard Rustin was forced to examine the premise of the mainstream black movement and the liberal agenda attending it. "At issue," he wrote in *Commentary*, "is not *civil rights* strictly speaking. . . . [T]he Negro today finds himself stymied by obstacles of far greater magnitude than the legal barriers he was attacking before. . . . These are the problems which, while conditioned by Jim Crow, do not vanish upon its demise. They are more deeply rooted in our socio-economic order; they are the result of society's total failure to meet not only the Negro's needs, but human needs generally."⁵¹

That the 1992 outbreak is connected to the spread of the general condition of poverty and "society's total failure to meet human needs" appears undeniable. In South Los Angeles, the rate of poverty is above 30 percent—twice the overall city rate, three times the national rate, and higher than at the time of the Watts riots. More than half the population age sixteen and older is unemployed or out of the labor force altogether. The proportion of households on welfare increased from 19 to 25 percent, and welfare

benefits are less than they were twenty-five years ago. South Los Angeles has the highest school dropout rate, 26 percent, in the county. And residents of South L.A. are hardest hit by high rents and housing shortages.⁵²

Once, this litany of the immiseration of the population of South L.A. would have described "the Negro." In 1965, the area was 81 percent black. Today, it is at least 52 percent Latino. And the downward spiral of poverty in the city is hardly limited to the confines of once-black neighborhoods. The concentrated Central American community of Pico-Union, near MacArthur Park, compares with South L.A.'s desperate circumstances. Explaining the outbreak of looting and rioting in the area, a representative of the Central American Refugee Service Center said the reasons "are simple. . . . [T]here is an incredible amount of poverty, lack of jobs, shortage of housing. Add to that a gang and a drug problem and complete lack of response from the government and you have the recipe of social unrest."⁵³ The city was taken by surprise when it witnessed the new temperament among the immigrant poor. Less reminiscent of other immigrant experiences, they are more like the offspring of Southern black migrants to Los Angeles twenty-five years ago who were "unwilling to settle for the luxury of being an American and the token gestures of gradualism."⁵⁴

The underside of what is optimistically called the New Majority is exposed in the high rates of poverty extending through all communities. Asians, including immigrants from Cambodia, Vietnam, Korea, and the Philippines, have, at 14 percent, a poverty rate twice that of whites.⁵⁵ Even those least associated with poverty in the public mind have had, in order to make a living, to scuttle at the bottom of the region's economy.

Extremes of poverty in Los Angeles rival the Third World; extremes of wealth flourish here, too. During the past decade, median household incomes in Los Angeles County outgrew the nation's by 19 percent; the number of California households with a yearly income of \$75,000 or more increased 800 percent.⁵⁶ According to the United Nations, "the U.S. has the largest gap between wealth and poverty in the developed world and that ratio is widest in New York and Los Angeles, comparable to Karachi, Bombay, and Mexico City."⁵⁷

The violent events in April belong—as nearly all else in Los Angeles—in a global context. Wrenching changes have permanently transformed the economy and, by doing so, have created a profound inequality in the lives of low-income Angelenos that is becoming increasingly characteristic of American cities. The brunt of this restructuring, which forcefully emerged in the 1970s, was felt in low-income black neighborhoods with plant closings, the loss of manufacturing jobs, and the disappearance of commercial neighborhood enterprises. Decreases in public funds exacerbated the losses. A UN analyst has described the riots as being part of "an urban revolution taking place on all six inhabited continents, brought on by con-

ditions very similar to those in Los Angeles: crime, racial and ethnic tension, economic woes, vast disparities in wealth, shortages of social services and deteriorating infrastructure." Los Angeles has emphasized, according to the World Bank, that "urban poverty will become the most significant and politically explosive problem in the next century."⁵⁸

The 1992 events in Los Angeles have ended the familiar "race riot" and its cycle: police provocation in a black neighborhood, bedlam, white fears, the restoration of "calm," the hurried assembly of an official report, and amnesia—until the next race riot. The police commission report said that "members of all racial groups were involved in the spreading physical assaults and looting. People of all ages and gender participated in the looting."⁵⁹ As the writer Tim Rutten put it, in Los Angeles the country experienced its first "multiethnic riot."⁶⁰

The multiethnic inner cities of Los Angeles have yet to be included in conventional politics; political representation is again a motive issue in the city. Voter participation in inner-city council districts is so low that out of 1.4 million residents, only 37,000 voters participated. Rather than chaos, the violence in 1992 was, at least in part, a reaction to exclusionary local government, the crowd engaging in desperate political discourse with those in power. Writing of such outbreaks in early urban history, Eric Hobsbawm said, "This mechanism was perfectly understood by both sides."⁶¹

HOW TO SURVIVE

The raplike syllogism in vogue on the street during the April riot—"no justice, no peace"—could have been anticipated with any systematic attention to the Los Angeles contribution to rap music. So-called gangsta rap can be many things: racist and sexist, brutal and insipid, but it also can be a guidebook to the challenging terrain in the shifting neighborhoods once called ghettos.

Rapper Ice Cube asked, in the sound track of the film *Boyz n the Hood*, "How to survive in South Central?" A generation of residents have asked the same, as manufacturing shut down, working families fled, crack invaded, migration increased, and the government safety net was yanked out from under thousands. In April 1992, the country (as it is prone to do with irresistible black popular expression), found itself rapping, too: Indeed, how to survive in South Central?

New urban maladies have merged with the tragic proliferation of guns. The American fetish of gun-toting and gun-wielding is indulged in more intensely and more frequently in Los Angeles than anywhere else. The LAPD and its high-tech arsenal was perhaps the most obvious symbol of gun culture in the city. The population is armed as well: one in four homes in L.A. County has a gun, and, contrary to national trends, more people

in Los Angeles are killed by gunfire than by traffic accidents. There are more licensed and unregulated gun dealers here than in any other county in the country, and one in six households was victimized by gun-related crime in 1991.⁶²

In South Los Angeles, low-income residents, particularly African-Americans, are more likely to be victims of violent crimes than any other group, and a greater percentage of them perceive crime as among the worst problems in the city.⁶³ Accordingly, black residents, who make up the majority of voters in the wide sweep of South Central Los Angeles, voted twice during the 1980s to approve police taxes "by majorities topping 70%" as "these revenue-raising measures were shot down by conservative white districts."⁶⁴ Contrary to former Police Chief Gates, who repaid the pro-protection sentiment among black voters with what the world now knows is widespread harassment and brutality, Willie Williams, the new police chief here, will most likely find vast support among these voters, not only because he, too, is African-American, but because South Central residents deeply want peaceable conditions in their gun-scarred neighborhoods.

Black leaders generally promote the liberal argument that jobs are the missing ingredient in the stark postindustrial landscape that has produced L.A.'s "gangsta" culture. But the proposals for these deproletarianized youth are negligible. These young people are the most expendable of a black working class that is becoming obsolete. They could, in Marxist terms, be considered the shock troops of the unemployed reserve army of labor. But the difference between previous classes of unemployed and these post-industrial casualties is that they can no longer expect their fortunes to rise with the next economic tide. The inequalities for this generation, like the global metastasis of the economy, are permanent. Despite this, liberal politicians call for "job training" and welfare reform. These proposals display an extravagant cynicism for they pretend that jobs for these young people, like the dead souls in Gogol's story, exist.

Remarkably, following the April 1992 riots, the immediate product of the truce declared between the two major South L.A. gang cartels was a set of recommendations that went beyond a jobs program and addressed comprehensive community needs. This Crips/Blood document reveals a faith, amounting to an apotheosis, in the virtues of capitalism, the responsiveness of government, and the goodwill of the community. Flyers distributed by the gangs in neighborhoods hit by the riots declared gang members' good intentions. "We will clean up our community from graffiti and trash and prove to the media, police and everyone else that we are not outcasts just out to do wrong."⁶⁵

The nine-page Blood/Crips document includes suggestions to fund a community face-lift and infrastructure improvement; an education program that will refurbish school buildings, supply computers, and reward

high achievers in math and science; a community policing proposal; a plan for funding economic development that would hire local employees; a demand that welfare "be completely removed from our community and . . . replaced by state work and product manufacturing plants," and a proposal to clean up parks and increase hospitals. In exchange for nearly \$4 billion requested to support these programs, the gang leaders offer to stop drug traffic and divert funds from the drug business into "business and property in Los Angeles." The irony in the reasoned demands for modest urban aid in the Blood/Crips proposal lies in the fact that there is no leadership prepared to meet it.

The children of the black working class face extraordinary challenges that a generation ago would have been unthinkable. They face a labor market unable to absorb them, a political system that has abandoned them, and a culture unwilling to embrace them—except as criminals. In postriot Los Angeles, following the repudiation of liberalism in the 1994 elections, participation seems again to be a key issue for black leadership.

At First AME Church—the establishment founded by ex-slave Biddy Mason, the launching ground for Tom Bradley—the Disney Corporation held interviews for two hundred summer youth jobs. It was June 1992; the effects of the riots were everywhere. A crowd of working-class kids materialized, wearing their Sunday suits and clothes. A *New York Times* photograph showed one of them, a seventeen-year-old girl, smiling with the combination of guilelessness and watchfulness that seems the province of the adolescent. The girl appeared slim and well attired. She seemed unaware that she represented, as James Baldwin put it, "a social and not a personal or a human problem" that brings to mind "statistics, slums, rapes, injustices, remote violence, . . . the beast in our jungle of statistics."⁶⁶ The newspaper described her background with its impeccable proletarian credentials: she is the daughter of a nurse and a disabled roofer; her brothers and sisters work in a school cafeteria, as a cashier at Dodger Stadium, as a mail carrier, as a bus driver, as a custodian. In the logic of newspaper fairy tales, she inevitably gets one of the summer jobs at Disneyland and is thrilled; this quite transcends her previous employment at McDonald's. When confronted with her and the rest of the crowd, a Disney spokesman admitted being "taken aback." The sight of several hundred presentable black youngsters eager to work seemed to stun him as he confessed, "We didn't know they were there."

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TWELVE

Latino Los Angeles

Reframing Boundaries/Borders

Raymond A. Rocco

I think that probably the biggest change is that now we are everywhere. When I was growing up in East L.A. in the fifties, you knew where the Mexican areas were, and when you wandered out of those, you saw very few of us in places like Santa Monica and the west side. But now, it doesn't matter where I go in L.A., there we are. It feels so different now. When I was a kid sometimes my dad would take me with him on his deliveries over in Culver City, West L.A., Santa Monica, even Beverly Hills, and I would feel kind of funny, you know what I mean? I felt out of place; I wouldn't see any other Mexicans at all. But now, hell, I feel at home almost everywhere because I know there is going to be somebody that looks like me, that talks like me, no matter where I am.

ROBERT GONZALEZ

Robert Gonzalez grew up during the 1950s in Belvedere, one of the oldest Mexican neighborhoods in East Los Angeles. He is one of the participants in an ongoing UCLA-based study, "Latino Community Formation in Los Angeles," designed to examine the causes and dynamics of the development of Latino communities that have been established during the last twenty-five years. The above is his response to a question we posed regarding what he thought had changed most about Los Angeles during his lifetime.

What Gonzalez describes, the extensive growth in the size and location of Latino communities, is indeed one of the most basic features of the dramatic and rapid changes that have transformed Los Angeles. This "Latinization" of Los Angeles, as some commentators have referred to the growth in the Latino population, has been part of a wide-ranging process of structural transformation in the region: a reconfiguration of the structure of social location (racial, ethnic, class, gender), of the demographic composition and distribution of the population, of political alignments, political actors, and policy agendas, of economic and fiscal landscapes; and the expansion of spatial boundaries and the development of new, nearly self-contained residential communities far removed from the urban reality.¹