

Billy X's Weekend in Los Angeles, Calif, May 1

I had to go to Southern California the other day, so I called Emory Douglas to find out what was happening. I knew he was there last week. He told me of the Nina Simone exhibit that was curated by our friend, Alden Kimbrough. The exhibit closed Saturday, the day I arrived.

I packed up my ride, grabbed a stack of Big Man's CD's from his radio show and off I went at 4am headed to L.A. The ride was nice with very little traffic at that time of the morning. I love driving and will drive anywhere. I remember a conversation in New Orleans a few weeks ago. Geronimo and Robert King both had done 29 years in prison and were talking about how they enjoy driving and had dreamed about driving for many years while in prison. Robert just got a car last year. They both enjoy the same sense of freedom I feel when I'm driving.

I got to Bakersfield, which is at the foot of the Grapevine (mountain area), at about 7:30am. I wanted to reach L.A. early to have Breakfast at Mama's House Café on Crenshaw Blvd (Home of the L.A. Panthers once a month breakfast) and get to the Southern California People's Research Library, which opens at 11am on Saturdays.

The Research Library is located on Vermont between Gauge and Slauson Ave. I have done two major Panther exhibits there, had brought Charlotte O'Neal there to speak and also held an event with the L.A. Chapter Panthers for Black Panther History Month last October. But this was a special trip there, because after a year they have opened up the 100 boxes of material that comrade Michael Zinzun left to the Research Center. The Library is a great place to research the BPP in L.A.

As I drove up to the front of the Center, I saw a large mural of Michael Zinzun painted on the building. I was totally surprised to see such a wonderful face of Michael. I walked into the center beaming from the artwork. I was greeted by members of the staff who knew me, including the director who is a Panther Cub from Chicago. Michelle, one of the head staff members, told me the artwork was done only 3 months ago.

After four hours of going through some of the over 100 boxes, I took a break. Many of the boxes have rare government documents inside of them. The government's "Weed and Seed" Program, Operation This and Operation That. Michael sued all those governmental and police organizations and agencies to get full disclosure. This led to many police files being opened and illegal practices revealed.

Before Mike died a couple of years ago, I would stay with him when in the area and we would stay up all night talking and going through government files that he had gotten from the "Freedom for Information Act. Mike was also head of CAPA (Community Against Police Abuse) and had a cable TV program that came on once a week for an hour.

L.A. police are known as one of the worst police departments in the country. They are known for killing, framing and beating people. Two cases stand out - Rodney King and Michael Zinzun back in 1991. Rodney was beaten because he was black. Michael was beaten because he was black and a community leader and former Panther. Both received a lot of press. Michael lost an eye in the attack and received a settlement. Michael is also one of the people who helped negotiate the gang truce between the Bloods and the Crips. Mike also won some awards for his many years of community service. He and Johnnie Cochran shared the "Man of the Year" Award one year. I could have gone through Michael's archives all day, but I also wanted to catch the Nina Simone exhibit.

It was the last day of the Nina Simone Exhibit and I got there about 3:30pm. As I drove up to the William Grant Still Gallery at Adams and LaBrea, My mind started racing again. I saw this artwork on the building and said to myself that I'd been here before. Yes, I was with Charles (BOKO) Freeman, a well known Panther and artist, one day while in LA and he brought me here to do some touch up work on the art.

Once inside it was NINA, NINA, everywhere - photos, album covers, poems, and artwork of every type. This was a breathtaking exhibit by one of the best curators around, Alden Kimbrough. He is a person I have learned a lot from over the years. Seeing me at the gallery made him smile and he showed me around personally. I asked him where he got Nina's first and second grade report cards. He told me that when his mother died some years ago, Nina's brother came to the service as they knew each other. So in doing the show he remembered that,

contacted the brother and was able to get many valuable items connected to the brilliant life of a Warrior Sister and Entertainer. Being the last day, they had special entertainment. There was a cast of sisters doing poetry and other pieces of work from Nina. This was a great ending to a wonderful exhibit. Please check the photos.

Alden told me he had another exhibit up at his store in Lemert Park so on Sunday I came through and he gave me a tour of the Malcolm X book exhibit. It included almost every book written about Malcolm. Alden even had some photos that he bought from Malcolm's photographer - Billy Higgins. Some of the photos showed Malcolm with African leaders while he was in Africa. The exhibit even had some of the first newspapers that Malcolm edited. It was a great collection - check out the photos.

Billy X











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