

State” initiative would end incentives for “illegal aliens” to immigrate. Instead, the initiative would have denied basic human services to thousands and bounced many children from the public schools. Al-though the measure passed, it was never implemented, and was finally ruled unconstitutional.

In 1994, University of California regent and Black Republican Ward Connerly began pushing to overturn affirmative action in the nine-campus system. The University, a recurring right-wing target, was one of the most diverse elite public systems in the country. On July 20, 1995, Connerly and Governor Pete Wilson combined to force a proposal through the Board of Regents to end affirmative action in hiring and admissions. The following year, Connerly’s Proposition 209, ending affirmative action throughout California state government, was passed by the electorate. Nineteen ninety-six also marked the first year in the state’s history that spending on prisons and corrections exceeded spending on higher education.

When the ban took effect in 1998, the number of Black and Latino freshmen admitted to the system dropped by 10 percent. At U.C. Berkeley alone, the numbers plunged by over 50 percent. By the end of the decade, the Justice Policy Institute estimated that nearly 50,000 Black males were in a California prison, while 60,000 were in a California university. Across the country, 800,000 black males were in prison, while 600,000 were in college.

Sentencing Project assistant director Marc Mauer tells this story: shortly after President Clinton took office, he proposed a \$30 billion aid package for job creation and economic development for urban America. Congress reduced the proposal into a \$5 billion allocation, primarily for unemployment insurance. The following year, Congress pushed through its own \$30 billion proposal-for crime prevention. The bill included sixty new death penalty offenses, \$8 billion in prison construction and federal “three strikes” sentencing. Clinton, of course, signed it.

Harvard criminologist James Q. Wilson, the father of the “Broken Windows” theory, had begun telling another story:

Meanwhile, just beyond the horizon, there lurks a cloud that the winds will soon bring over us. The population will start getting younger again. By the end of this decade there will be a million more people between the ages of fourteen and seventeen than there are now. . . . This extra million will be half male. Six percent of them will become high rate, repeat offenders-30,000 more young muggers, killers and thieves than we have now. Get ready.

Here were the naked post-riot fears of imminent racial and generational change codified into more crackpot conservative pseudo-theory, into an ideology that could preserve the War on Youth.

The truth was that juvenile violence had already peaked. National homicide arrest rates dropped by forty percent between 1993 and 1997. In 1998, California reported its lowest juvenile felony arrest rate since 1966. National crime rates were at their lowest since the mid-’70s. But fears outweighed facts. It was as if the generation that had coined the aphorism, “Never trust anyone over thirty,” was now unable to trust anyone under thirty.

Sister Souljah’s declaration no longer seemed hyperbole:

“We are at war!”

No we can’t all just get along: hip hop, gang unity and the LA rebellion

Excerpts from the book
Cant Stop Wont Stop
by
Jeff Chang

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Introduction

I literally read *Cant Stop Wont Stop: a history of the hip hop generation* in one sitting, in the back yard of my house last summer. It sounds cliché but I just could not put this amazing book by Jeff Chang down. Chang has managed to write one of the finest history books dealing with the US from the 1950s to present. One of the best things about the book is that while one only need look over the first few pages of the book to realize how radical Chang is, he attempts to tell history like a grandfather telling stories to the younger generation, instead of weighing his analysis down with over played radical jargon.

I chose to reprint parts of the section *Stakes is High* because I feel like Jeff has captured the spirit of actual people living in LA that signed peace treaties and fought the police better than any other observer. The reason this section is so good is because Chang is less of an outsider than most who have looked at the riots, he grew up within the west coast hip hop community and he is a Korean American; both of which play a pivotal role in his analysis of the historic events of April 1992.

A little side note on the title: I thought it was a funny joke to use *No We Can't All Just Get Along*, because of the fact that the riots actually united the city of LA more than any other event in recent years. White, Black, Latino and Asian communities united together against their common enemy, the police.

For folks who are interested in understanding the LA riots of 1992 this is the zine for you. While the zine *Three Days that Shook the New World Order* is an alright attempt at understanding the riots, one is left with the notion that the Chicago Surrealist Group just seized upon the riots as a way to explain their manufactured boring rhetoric. Also that zine continually discounts the role of gangs in the riots, which is just a fallacy.

This zine is broken into three chapters the first one is titled *Black Los*

In Los Angeles, City Attorney James K. Hahn pioneered the gang injunction strategy when he won a court order against the Playboy Gangster Crips of West Los Angeles. The injunction named dozens of alleged members of the set, and, within a twenty-six-block area, prevented them from hanging out together, talking on the street, or being seen in public for more than five minutes. In effect, the gang injunctions removed alleged gang member's freedoms in their own neighborhood without actually sending them to jail. This tactic proved so politically popular that it attracted millions in state and city funds. But in a study of the effects of this strategy, the ACLU concluded that the injunction did not suppress violent crime in the area and may, in fact, have forced gang members simply to shift their activities outside of the area covered by the injunction. 18 Still, the strategy spread to other cities with the blessing of tough-on-crime, tough-on-youth politicians.

In Chicago, anti-youth-of-color hysteria had begun to mount in the late '80s. An anti-cruising ordinance was passed in the southwest portion of the city, and similar measures soon spread across the city's suburbs and exurbs. By 1992, the sweep solution came to the city in the form of the nation's broadest anti-loitering law, which sponsors had drafted with Los Angeles's gang injunctions in mind.

Although it was pitched as an anti-gang initiative, legal experts likened it to Jim Crow laws that were established to restrict Southern Blacks in their leisure time. The law made it illegal just to stand on the street with any person whom a cop "reasonably believed" to be in a gang. Under the ordinance, 45,000 young Chicagoans—mostly Black and Latino—were arrested in just two years. Only a small fraction of them were actually charged with a crime. The Cook County gang database quickly became more than two-thirds black.

"They were arresting lots of innocent people," said Jeremy Lahoud, a youth organizer with Chicago's Southwest Youth Collaborative, who noted that the ordinance distorted police priorities. "It takes police away from the real work, and pushes them to simply sweeping youth off the street." The law was so broadly dismissive of basic liberties that it was declared unconstitutional by a conservative U.S. Supreme Court in 1999.

The racial effects of all of these sweep laws were lopsided. While white youths made up 79 percent of national juvenile arrests, 62 percent of youths in juvenile detention facilities were of color. Even when charged with the same offense, Latinos and Native Americans were 2.5 times more likely to end up in custody than whites. Black youths were five times more likely to be detained.

Fear and the Ballot Box

The politics of containment moved next to the ballot box. In 1993, the state of Washington passed the first "three strikes" initiative in the country, establishing life without parole for convicts with three violent felony offenses. The following year, although crime rates were lower than in 1980, California voters passed Proposition 184, a much harsher three-strikes law. The effect was to imprison thousands in life sentences for nonviolent crimes."

Right-wing anti-immigration ideologues also pressed Proposition 187, an initiative to ban all government services to undocumented immigrants, like health care, social services and education. Playing up the image of young Latino looters, they claimed the "Save Our

were added by virtue of an arrest, whether or not the arrestee was charged. Others merely fit a “gang profile.” STEP’s attempt to define this profile fostered a multitude of local variations. By 1999, wearing baggy jeans and being related to a gang suspect was enough to meet the definition of being a “gang member” in at least five states. Abuses were rampant.

In 1992, a Denver community organization, Actions for a Better Community (ABC), protested that the city’s gang database had unfairly captured thousands of innocent youths of color. A year later, investigations revealed that eight of every ten young people of color in the entire city were listed in the database. Appearing in the database was no neutral thing. Gloria Yellowhorse, an ABC organizer, says, “Employers could call the gang list to see if a young person was on the list.” Police met with ABC and quietly changed their protocols.

But minutes from downtown Denver in suburban Aurora, any two of the following could still constitute gang membership to the local police: “slang,” “clothing of a particular color,” “pagers,” “hairstyles” or “jewelry.” Nearly 80 percent of Aurora’s list was African-American. One activist said, “They might as well call it a Black list.”

In California’s Orange County, where less than half of young people were of color, 92 percent of those listed in the gang database were of color, primarily Latino and Asian. “The ‘gang label’ has everything to do with race,” says John Crew of the California ACLU. “Frankly, we do not believe that this tactic would have spread so widely, and come to be accepted within law enforcement generally, if it was not being applied almost exclusively to people of color.”

The rapid growth of the databases coincided with the rise of sweep laws anti-loitering laws, anti-cruising laws, and curfews-that proliferated as local municipalities searched for methods to limit the movement of young people in public spaces.

Cruising bans came after a decade of street scenes-boulevards and neighborhoods where young people’s cruising and partying overtook local traffic on Friday and Saturday nights. In Los Angeles, cruising bans ended the scenes in East Los Angeles, Westwood, downtown and Crenshaw Boulevard. In Atlanta, outcry from white homeowners over the city’s annual Freaknik event in 1996 resulted in a cruising ban that ended one of the nation’s biggest Black collegiate gatherings.

Between 1988 and 1997, curfew arrests doubled nationwide. In California, they quadrupled. Washington, D.C.’s law, which punished parents along with their children, went so far in abridging civil liberties that it was declared unconstitutional. Curfew enforcement was not color blind. In Ventura County, California, Latino and Black youths were arrested at more than seven times the rate of whites. In New Orleans, Blacks were arrested at nineteen times the rate of whites. But these laws, such as the stringent weekday curfews in Detroit, did nothing to stop increases in crime. They did fatten gang databases with false data.

During the mid-1980s there had been scattered anti-breakdancing ordinances and out-breaks of boombox citations. But what united the sweep laws of the ‘90s was a new logic of erasing youths-particularly youths of color-from public space. Not only were there to be no more boomboxes, sagging jeans, street dancing, or public displays of affection, there were to be no more young people. Youth itself was being criminalized. The most extreme forms of this logic emerged in Los Angeles and Chicago.

Angeles which breaks down, in short form, the history of LAs racial hostilities and class conflicts, along with giving a brief history of the Watts riots of 1965. In this chapter we also learn about the desperation that led to the birth of the postindustrial gangs, and how they sprang out of the corpse of the black power movement of the late 1960s.

The second chapter, *Peace Treaties and Burning Buildings*, focuses on the rebellion of 1992 and the gang unity project that led up to the riots.

Chapter three entitled the War on Youth, shows us how the state purposefully targeted gang peace makers for fear of a united army of poor youth.

The only major downfall of this version of the LA rebellion is that Chang never speaks of the nation wide solidarity rioting that took place in the last days of April 1992. According to wikipedia:

Smaller, copycat riots occurred in other United States cities. San Francisco police arrested 1400 rioters in the downtown area and established a curfew. The Nevada National Guard was deployed to Las Vegas and 200 people were arrested. Seattle was hit by overnight mobs of up to 100 people rampaging through business districts. New York saw a mob looting a shopping mall, and another at Madison Square Garden. Hundreds of protesters confronted police in Atlanta. Minor incidents were reported in Tampa, Pittsburgh, Birmingham, and Omaha. Major incidents took place in Dallas and Madison, Wisconsin. Violence even spread to the Canadian city of Toronto.

Policy Adviser and Vice
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John Min Ko Naing

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Chapter one: Black Los Angeles

Gangsta rap and postindustrial gangs did not begin in Compton, but a short distance north in Watts. Just like the Bronx gangs, they rose out of, as the ex-Crip warrior Sanyika Shakur would put it, “the ashes and ruins of the sixties.”

Watts was a desolate, treeless area located in a gully of sand and mud, the flood catchment for all the other neighborhoods springing up around down-town. In the 1920s Blacks had nowhere else to go.

They had been present at the very first settling of Los Angeles in the late eighteenth century, and established their first community one hundred years later. Starting at First and Los Angeles streets in downtown, they spread east and south along San Pedro and Central Avenues, where they began developing businesses.’

While the national Black organizations established offices in the city by the 1920s, Los Angeles’s Blacks were different-less idealistic, more pragmatic, even a little mercenary. They joined together to break into all-white neighbor-hoods by sending a light-skinned buyer or a sympathetic white real estate agent to make the down payment. When Blacks moved in, whites moved out. In this *way*, they won blocks one by one. Sociologists had a term for this process of re-verse block-busting: “Negro invasion.”

But during the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan burnt crosses at 109th Street and Central Avenue, and whites erected racial covenants and block restrictions that prevented blacks from moving into their neighborhoods under legal threat of eviction. Watts, literally the bottom, called “Mud Town” even by its own residents, was the only place left to go. Because so many Blacks were moving into the city, and a Black mayor was certain to be the result, Los Angeles hastened to annex Watts in the mid-1920s.

When World War II broke out, southern migrants poured into Los Angeles to fill the need for over half a million new workers in the shipyards, aircraft and rubber industries. Now African-American neighborhoods, especially Watts-which had become the center of Black Los Angeles-were overwhelmed with demands for health care, schooling, transportation and most of all, housing. Racial discrimination kept rents artificially high, and led to overcrowding as slumlords exploited poor families, who often joined together to split a monthly bill. Historian Keith Collins writes, “Single-dwelling units suddenly became four-unit dwellings; four-unit dwellings became small apartment dwellings; garages and attics, heretofore neglected, were suddenly deemed fit for human habitation.”

Farrakhan put it more bluntly, “Why is there an apparent conspiracy to destroy the youth? In 1992, our fearless Black youth are ready to move for liberation.”

The Politics of Containment

After the riots, a generation raised on the politics of abandonment saw that it now also faced a sharply evolving politics of containment.

From the beginnings of the juvenile justice system in America, a central doctrine had been that youthful indiscretion could be corrected through proper rehabilitation. The juvenile justice system was there to save as much as it was to punish. This was a benevolent and essentially paternalistic view of how the state should treat youth. With the arrival of the boomers, a more liberalized, permissive view emerged.

But by the late 1980s, a reversal began, and after the riots, the trend accelerated. Forty-eight states made their juvenile crime statutes more punitive. Forty-one states made it easier for prosecutors to try juveniles as young as twelve as adults. A number of states began to consider the death penalty for juveniles as young as thirteen. Teens were too young to hang out, but too old to save.

Social ecologist Mike Males explained the source of the reaction: The Census Bureau reports that 80 percent of America’s adults over age forty are whites of European origin (Euro-white). Thirty-five percent of children and youths under age eighteen are nonwhite or of Hispanic (Latino) origin, a proportion that has doubled since 1970. In most of America’s big cities, white elders govern nonwhite kids. In California, two-thirds of the elders are Euro-white; three-fifths of the youths are nonwhite or Latino.’

The Los Angeles Uprising had clarified these abstractions in a dramatic, unavoidable way, fanning fears of a browning nation, and unleashing a political and cultural backlash of massive proportions. The War on Gangs expanded into what young activists came to call “the War on Youth.”

The 1988 killing of Karen Toshima had precipitated the War on Gangs. That year, California Governor George Deukmejian signed the Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act (STEP), the broadest legal criminalization of street gangs in history. Gang-related offenses received enhanced punishments, and new categories of gang crimes were created. Under STEP, gang membership it-self was punishable by up to three years in state prison. By the end of the century, most major cities and at least nineteen states had laws similar to STEP, and anti-gang units to enforce them.

One of the most profound implications of STEP was its attempt to write into law a process of determining who was a gang member, a move that helped fuel the growth of gang databases. In 1987, the Law Enforcement Communication Network and the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department had begun developing a large database-the Gang Reporting, Evaluation, and Tracking System (GREAT)-to collect, store, and analyze personal information about suspected gang members. Its creation, and the spread of STEP-type laws across the country, spurred the Justice Department and the FBI to fund national databases.

But these databases could be indiscriminate, often identifying “suspects” before any crime had been committed. There were no universal standards for entry. Many youths

eye, a tooth for a tooth. If LAPD hurt a black we'll kill two. Pow. Pow. Pow. From there, the anti-gang rhetoric accelerated. The sheriff's office issued a gang intelligence briefing which stated Black Muslims had organized the gangs to loot and burn, and warned that Crips and Bloods were preparing to attack police stations. Mike Davis scoffed, "This is right off that movie Assault on Precinct 13."

Was there a disinformation campaign afoot? On May 22, the CBS Evening News reported a bizarre story alleging gang members were trading drugs for military weapons from local U.S. Army bases." No one was ever arrested in connection with the alleged transaction, and the story sunk like a rock. But the next day, the Washington Post reported that four thousand weapons had been stolen and were probably in the hands of gang members. By May 27, outgoing Chief Daryl Gates was spinning on Larry King's CNN show, "You know, I'd love to see peace in the city, peace among gangs," he said. "But I just don't think it's going to happen. These people simply don't have it in them, I don't believe, to create peace among the gangs or in any other way."

Gates was contradicting at least one of his own officers on the ground. Deputy Chief Matthew Hunt, the police commander of the South Los Angeles area, admitted to the Police Commission, "There's no question the amount of violent crime has decreased. People in the community say they haven't heard a shot fired in weeks. They are elated."

But it had become clear to peacemakers that LAPD was out to disrupt and harass peace meetings and parties. At some events, cops appeared in large numbers without provoking an incident. At others, they forcibly broke up the meetings. In Compton, Congresswoman Waters and City Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas came in person to intervene with police who were harassing gang members leaving a peace meeting.

At Imperial Courts, police helicopters and riot squadrons swooped in to break up truce barbecues. When they did the same thing at Jordan Downs, residents and gang members sent thirty police officers to the hospital. With this clash as a pretext, LAPD created a special "crime suppression task force," transferring forty police officers from the San Fernando Valley and the Westside to the South Bureau. Then, in what feds touted as their largest anti-gang effort ever, the FBI beefed up its Los Angeles office with twenty-six additional agents and the ATF added ten. They announced they would use racketeering laws to sweep up the gang leadership.

In August an important peacemaker was taken off the streets. Dwayne Holmes, the cousin of Henry Peco who became one of the key architects of the peace, was convicted and sentenced to seven years for a ten-dollar robbery that community organizers and politicians like former Governor Jerry Brown insisted he had not committed. Community leaders wondered if he and others had been targeted for political reasons, not criminal ones.

Author Luis Rodriguez and peacemakers Cle "Bone" Sloan, from the Athens Park Bloods, and Kershaun "Lil Monster" Scott, from the Eight-Tray Gangster Crips, wrote in the Los Angeles Times, "The Los Angeles Police Department told the media that the gangs were going to turn on police officers, even ambush them. Yet no police officer in South-Central has been killed or severely hurt since April 29, the day the King-beating verdict came down."

"Now that we're chilling, they want to attack us," Scott said in an interview. "Isn't that ironic?"

These conditions were barely eased when racial covenants were ruled unconstitutional in 1948 and huge public housing projects—the largest of which were Nickerson Gardens, Jordan Downs, Imperial Courts and Hacienda Village—began opening in the mid-1940s. Watts soon had the highest concentration of public housing west of the Mississippi. But after the end of World War II, a deep recession set in, and much of Black Los Angeles never recovered.

To the south, Compton looked like a promised land. The bungalow houses were clean and pleasant; the lots had lawns and space to grow gardens. At one time, the Pacific Electric Railroad station had hung a sign: NEGROES! BE OUT OF COMPTON BY NIGHTFALL. But after desegregation, Blacks filled the Central Avenue corridor from downtown all the way through Compton—the area that would come to be known as South Central.

Black Los Angeles now had a rough dividing line down Vermont Street, separating the striving "Westside" from the suffering "Eastside." East of Watts, in towns like Southgate and Huntington Park, white gangs enforced a border at Alameda Avenue. And when whites began to leave the area in the 1950s, they were replaced by an aggressive, zero-tolerance police department under the leadership of Police Chief William Parker, a John Wayne-type character that made no secret of his racism." Black youth clubs became protective gangs.

Los Angeles was a new kind of city, one in which most of the high-wage job growth would occur far from the inner-city outside a ring ten miles north and west of City Hall. When these suburban communities proliferated after the war, people of color were effectively excluded from the job and housing bonanza. Indeed, from nearly the beginning of the city's history, Blacks and other people of color in Los Angeles had been confined to living in The Bottoms—the job-scarce, mass-transit deprived, densely populated urban core.

These were the conditions that underlined the city's first race riots, 1943's Zoot Suit riots, in which white sailors, marines and soldiers brutalized Chicanos and then Blacks from Venice Beach to East Los Angeles to Watts. And these conditions had only worsened by the time a late summer heatwave hit Watts in 1965.

Remember Watts

On the night of August 11, a routine drunk driving arrest on Avalon Boulevard and 116th Street escalated into a night of rioting. White police had stopped a pair of young Black brothers, Marquette and Ronald Frye, returning from a party only a few blocks from their home for driving erratically. As a crowd formed in the summer dusk and their mother, Rena Frye, came out to scold the boys, dozens of police units rumbled onto Avalon. In an instant, the scene began to deteriorate.

Marquette, perhaps embarrassed by the appearance of his mother, began resisting the officer's attempts to handcuff him. Soon the cops were beating him with a baton. Seeing this, Frye's brother and mother tussled with other cops and were arrested as well. Another woman, a hairdresser from down the street who had come to see what was going on, was beaten and arrested after spitting on a cop's shirt. Chanting "Burn, baby, burn!" The crowd erupted.

Over the next two nights, the police lost control of the streets. They were ambushed by rock-throwing youths. They were attacked by women who seized their guns. Their helicopters came under sniper fire. Systematic looting and burning began. Among the first things to go up in smoke were the files of credit records in the department stores. Groceries, furniture stores and gun and surplus outlets were hit next. After these places were ransacked, they were set ablaze. One expert attributed the riot's blueprint to the local gangs—the Slausons, the Gladiators and the mainly Chicano set, Watts Gang V who had temporarily dropped their rivalries.

"This situation is very much like fighting the Viet Cong," Police Chief William Parker told the press on Friday the 13th. "We haven't the slightest idea when this can be brought under control." Later he called the rioters "monkeys in a zoo." By the evening, the LAPD and the Sheriff's Office had begun firing on looters and unarmed citizens, leaving at least six dead. Two angry whites reportedly drove into Jordan Downs and began shooting at Black residents. Newspaper headlines read ANARCHY U.S.A.

The National Guard arrived the next day. The death toll peaked sharply in the last two days of civil unrest. Rioting lasted five days and resulted in \$40 million in damages and thirty-four dead. Until 1992, they were the worst urban riots ever recorded.

After the riots, Watts became a hotbed of political and cultural activity. Author Odle Hawkins wrote, "Watts, post outrage, was in a heavy state of fermentation. Everybody was a poet, a philosopher, an artist or simply something exotic. Even people who weren't any of those things thought they were." It was a time of new beginnings: A week after the

Gang peacemakers seized on Minister Farrakhan's up-from-the-bootstraps optimism and leapt into entrepreneurship. Two men from Jordan Downs secured a contract from the Eurostar shoe company to sell a "Truce" brand sneaker. With funds from Congresswoman Maxine Waters, they opened a storefront they called the Playground, where they sponsored basketball games, created a community hangout, and sold the shoes. In a year, the venture was over. The burden of economic and community development, one of the shoe company's representatives later said, was "more of a job for the president of the United States than for a shoe salesman."

The most audacious idea, came from made Sherrills, had come to the first peace meeting at the Masjid with a proposal for a nonprofit organization that he called "Hands Across Watts," a government-funded group that would create jobs for former gang-members and sponsor job training, child care and recreational programs. A week after the Uprising, when the Crips and Bloods publicly announced their truce at a press conference at Jordan Downs, Sherrills and Tony Bogard presented the plan, announcing \$100,000 as their fundraising goal. When corporate money did not rush in, they took to the streets to sell car-washing solution, soft drinks, and peace treaty T-shirts. The organization secured federal, city and private grants and job-training contracts, but Sherrills left after disagreements with Bogard over its direction.

Soon after, Bogard was shot dead by another PJ Watts Crip, allegedly as the result of a dispute over cocaine profits. The deal had nothing to do with Hands Across Watts, but grants, contracts, and donations evaporated, and the organization crumbled. "Economics plays a major role in maintaining the peace," Bogard had once told a reporter. "If we had industry and venture capital, we wouldn't have all the drug selling and robbing that's going on. Economics is the key to everything." It was a tragic epitaph.

At the corner of Florence and Normandie, three of the four corners remained burned down. Tom's Liquors was the only building that remained. Behind it, one billboard advertised the television talent show, "Star Search." The other read: "Looking for a new career? Join your LAPD. Earn \$34,000 to \$43,000."

"A lot of things was promised," Daude Sherrills says. "They didn't put a billion dollars in the truce movement. So this is where we're at today."

Pressure Drop (Yet Another Version)

But against all odds, the gang truce held in Watts and spread. In the weeks after the uprising, gang homicide tallies plunged, and stayed there.

Police were skeptical. "I'm concerned as to the true motives of the gang members as to why they would make peace," one policeman said. "Is it so they can better fight with us, so they can better deal dope or so they can better be constructive in their neighborhoods? That would be the last item I would choose because gang members have a thug mentality."

Peacemakers came to believe that police were actively trying to undermine the truce. Hours after the National Guard had left town, newspapers reported the appearance of a crude flyer that read: To all Crips and Bloods: Let's unit [sic] and dont [sic] gangbang and let it be a black thing for the little black girl and the homie Rodney King. An eye for an

three continents to invest more than \$1 billion in the city.’ Economic consultants told them that to begin to turn around the inner-city, they would need to raise \$1 billion and create more than 90,000 jobs. But by any measure, the organization was a complete failure. Ueberroth stepped down from the leadership after only a year, leaving the organization in disarray. Over the next four years, Rebuild L.A. raised less than \$300 million. Only half of the thirty-two supermarkets that the organization had been promised were actually built. Vons Corporation had pledged to build two stores but opened only one, in the supermarket-starved city of Compton, and sold it as soon as it could. Rebuild L.A. was, in Mike Davis’s words, “the cruelest joke of all.”

At the same time Rebuild L.A. was announced in May of 1992, an alternative proposal to rebuild Los Angeles, purported to come from the Bloods and Crips, circulated through the streets, the media and upper levels of government. Its provenance was in question, particularly because of the document’s closing words-”Meet these demands and the targeting of police officers will stop!”-a threat that clearly had not been sanctioned by the peacemakers and that seemed inimical to common sense. But the proposal’s details drew interest and support from many gang leaders.

Among other things, the \$3.7 billion plan for inner-city investment called for three new hospitals and forty additional health care centers to be built and the replacement of welfare programs with manufacturing plants. It demanded increased lighting of city streets, \$20 million in business loans and community job creation, new books and accelerated learning programs in inner-city schools, and community policing that incorporated former gang members. “Give us the hammer and the nails,” the document read, “and we will rebuild the city.”

For a brief period before and after their 1971 truce, the Bronx gangs had turned to the government for relief as they sought to turn themselves around. But two decades later, this generation of gangs would have no Great Society and no Mayor Lindsay. The infrastructure of aid and rehabilitation had been re-placed by Bush’s “thousand points of light,” which usually took the form of do for-self, faith-based grass-roots nationalism or the trickle-down charities of the anything-goes, everything-is-for-sale marketplace.

To be sure, the new generation was not interested in government promises. Kam put it in the Nation of Islam’s terms: “Less government relief checks, more labor.” They readily admitted that they would need to do their part to make peace work. “We’ve got to show people that this eye-for-an-eye stuff is out the door,” Charles “Q-Bone” Rachal of the Five-Duce Broadway Crips said. “But we have to do it ourselves. All that hand-out stuff from the ‘60s was messed up, and those people who did it messed up. We’re the generation of the ‘90s, and we’ve got to show action.”

So gang members met with the Korean American Grocers Organization, who immediately got the point but could only promise a handful of jobs. That was a path Ice T had already known to be useless. “They aimed at Korean people because they felt Koreans were one step above them, so that’s the closest step to the system,” he wrote of the burners and looters in *The Ice Opinion*. “They didn’t know the Koreans are just as broke as them.” In time, many more Black and brown faces appeared behind the counters of these stores, but most of the 2,000 destroyed Korean-American businesses would never be rebuilt, and tiny markets and laundromats could never replace the hundreds of thousands of jobs that corporate flight had spirited away.

riots, the Nation of Islam’s downtown mosque had been shot up and nearly destroyed by LAPD officers who claimed to be searching for a nonexistent cache of looted weapons. But the mosque survived and thrived. Soon the Nation would welcome Marquette Frye as its most prominent new member.

The gangs, as Mike Davis wrote, “joined the Revolution.” Maulana Ron Karenga put together the United Slaves (US) Organization by recruiting the Gladiators and the Businessmen. Members of the Slausons and the Orientals formed the Sons of Watts, another cultural nationalist organization. The powerful Slauson leader Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter led many more ex-Slausons and other gang members to reject Karenga and the cultural nationalists and affiliate with the revolutionary nationalist Black Panthers.

On 103rd Street, the Black Panthers set up an office next to the Watts Happening Coffee House, which housed Mafundi, a cultural performance space. In 1966, the screenwriter and poet Bud Schulberg opened the Watts Writers Work-shop there. It quickly became a cultural haven for some of the most promising artistic voices in the area, including Hawkins, author Quincy Troupe, poet Kamau Daa’ood, and three young poets that would call themselves the Watts Prophets. Anthony “Amde” Hamilton, a Watts native, was an ex-convict and an activist when he found the Workshop through Hawkins. Soon he was working at Mafundi and serving as the Assistant Director of the Workshop.

In 1969, Hawkins and Hamilton assembled a group of poets from the Workshop to record *The Black Voices: On the Streets in Watts*. In a bulldog voice-one that Eazy E would later evoke, and that would be sampled by dozens of gangsta rap producers-Hamilton growled, “The meek ain’t gon’ inherit shit, ‘cause I’ll take it!”

During the Watts riots, they had seen a racial apocalypse outlined in the “freedom flames” blackening the structures they did not own and could not control. Their poems were decidedly edgy, imbued with righteous rage, full of worldly pessimism.

They chronicled tragic pimps, recounted drug-addled and bullet-riddled deaths, and called for the rise of ghetto warriors in the mold of Nat Turner. It was Black Art that drew blood. But this ferment could not last forever.

Panthers to Crips

The Prophets were close to the young Bunchy Carter. Once a feared leader of the Slausons, as well as its roughneck inner-core army, the Slauson Renegades, he met

while doing time for armed robbery, and was now the Southern California leader of the Black Panther Party. He was formidable—an organic intellectual, community organizer, corner rapper, and “street nigga” all at the same time—“considered,” Elaine Brown wrote, “the most dangerous Black man in Los Angeles.” The Slausons had started at Fremont High in Watts, but Carter now commanded the love of Black teens of the high schools in South Central. His bodyguard was a Vietnam veteran named Elmer Pratt, whom he renamed Geronimo ji Jaga. The two were enrolled at UCLA, where they studied and planned the Revolution.

The Panthers and Karenga’s US Organization were fighting for control of UCLA’s Black Studies department, as FBI and LAPD provocateurs secretly and systematically raised the personal and ideological tensions between the two. On the morning of January 17, 1969, a Black Student Union meeting ended with the organizations firing on each other in Campbell Hall. Carter and Panther John Huggins were shot dead. Coming after a year of bloody confrontations with authorities across the country that had left dozens of Party leaders dead, the Panthers called Carter’s and Huggins’s deaths assassinations.

A year later, after the beef between the two organizations had been squashed, L.A. police arrested Pratt, the new Panther leader, on false charges, found an informant to pin a murder to him, and had him sent away for life. Even the Watts Writers Workshop was destroyed through the efforts of a FBI double agent who had been employed as the Workshop’s publicist.

Filling the void of leadership was Raymond Washington, a charismatic teen at Watts’s Fremont High School who had been a follower of Bunchy Carter. By the time Washington turned fifteen, the Slausons and the Panthers had both died with Bunchy. In 1969, Washington formed the Baby Avenues, carrying on the legacy of a fading local gang, the Avenues.³² Over the next two years, he walked across the eastside with a gangsta limp and an intimidating walking cane, kicked his rap to impressed youths, and built the gang.

The Baby Avenues wore black leather jackets in a display of solidarity with the Panthers’ style and credo of self-defense. But somewhere along the line, the goal changed to simply beating down other Black youths for their jackets.³³ Godfather Jimel Barnes, who had joined in the early days when Washington came to the Avalon Gardens projects, says Washington had summed up his vision in this *way*: “Chitty chitty bang bang, nothing but a Crip thong, Eastside Cuz. This is going to be the most notorious gang in the world. It’s going to go from generation to generation.”

The origins of the name are now shrouded in legend. It may have been a corruption of “Cribs” or “Crypts.” It may have stood for “C-RIP,” all words that represented the gang’s emerging “cradle to grave” gang-banging credo. Or it may have come from an Asian-

Chapter three: The War on Youth

First there were the parties. With calm restored to the streets, spontaneous celebrations broke out across from Lynwood to Watts, South Central to Compton, Willowbrook to Inglewood, as rival gang sets tied their colors together, fired up the barbecues and broke bread. Parks that had once been exclusive turf were thrown open. Public spaces were public once again. The rapper Kam summed up the vibe in his epochal single, “Peace Treaty,” its hydraulic “Atomic Dog” bassline pumping a giddy joy:

*I’m always remember this
Because my niggas made the history books
And now the mystery looks a lot clearer
The man in the mirror’s got power
It’s now or never
More than ever
Black people got to stick together*

For Los Angeles’s war-weary youths, the gang truce and the Uprising unleashed a burst of creative energy. Rappers like DJ Quik, Compton’s Most Wanted and Above The Law were making noise on the national charts. From the fiercely competitive freestyle ciphers at the Good Life Café on the westside to the intergenerational ferment of spoken word, free jazz and hip-hop in Leimert Park to the free floating parties at the Pharcyde Manor in Hancock Park, an underground was taking shape. At the Hip-Hop Shop on Melrose, b-boys and b-girls gathered to advance the elements. Graffiti writers like HEX and SLICK were engaged in a new age of style wars. Some were joining the surge of energy that was transforming street fashion and graphic design. A number of grass-roots magazines, led by URB and Rap Sheet, captured the local scene and articulated a new West Coast aesthetic.

In the streets, gang members turned their attention to creating a future for themselves and their city.

Give Us the Hammer and Nails

Everyone seemed to agree that economic development was the key to saving Los Angeles. On May 2, Mayor Bradley named Peter Ueberroth, the head of the city’s 1984 Olympics, to be the head of a private-sector organization that would be called “Rebuild L.A.,” charged with mobilizing business, government, and community investment. It began assembling a board of directors of nearly one hundred city, corporate, Hollywood and community players, including the likes of Jim Brown, Danny Bakewell, Johnnie Cochran, Michael Ovitz and Ed-ward James Olmos.

Ueberroth predicted that Rebuild L.A. would convince five hundred corporations

guttled. During the Reagan-Bush era, federal spending on subsidized housing had been slashed by 82 percent, job training and employment by 63 percent, and community service and development programs by 40 percent.³⁸ Because Bush faced a difficult reelection battle, he agreed to sign an emergency \$1 billion aid bill for the cities, largely in the form of disaster relief and summer jobs, an amount the nation's mayors agreed would make little long-term difference. In fact, Bush had forced Congress to cut another \$1 billion from the bill before agreeing to sign it. But after losing the election in November, he vetoed a much broader \$30 billion bipartisan urban aid and tax bill. The politics of abandonment tied the Bronx of 1977 to the Los Angeles of 1992.

Some had called it an Uprising, others a Rebellion. The official term was "civil disturbance." Korean Americans simply called it by the date it had begun, 4-2-9, Sa-I-Gu. Whatever the name, these days would mark the hip-hop generation's passage through fire. After this, there would be the backlash, and the politics of containment.

American victim's description of her attacker, a "crip' with a stick."³⁵ In any case, as O. G. Crip Danifu told L.A. gang historian Alejandro Alonso, "Crippin' meant robbing and stealing, and then it developed into a way of life."

For years, Mexican pachuco gangs had been the most organized and most feared in town. Now the Crips would transform young Black Los Angeles. Spreading through the Black corridor south to Compton and west to South Central, the Crips became, in Davis's words, "a hybrid of teen cult and proto-Mafia" and "the power source of last resort for thousands of abandoned youth."

During the Nixon years, Crip sets proliferated and gang rivalries intensified. When Washington was kicked out of Fremont and sent to Washington High on the westside, he recruited Stanley "Tookie" Williams, and Crip sets expanded into South Central Los Angeles. By 1972, where there had recently been none, there were eighteen new Black gangs.

Youths on Compton's Piru Street organized themselves into groups they called Pirus or Bloods. Other Crip rivals also emerged. In 1973, the beefs turned bloody. Through the efforts of Bobby Lavender, Sylvester "Puddin'" Scott and others, Brims, Bloods and Pirus formed a Bloods confederation. Gang fashion had shifted from Black power dress to an appropriation of cholo style—Pendletons, white tees, khakis—and when Crips began flagging blue, Bloods flagged red.

Like a national map on the night of a presidential election, the Los Angeles grid was now being tallied into columns of red and blue. In the unbreachable logic of turf warfare, sets proliferated in the Black corridor, stretching through the colored suburbs west to the beach at Venice, south to Long Beach, and north to Altadena. Soon there were so many Crip sets they even went to war with each other.

"During the late seventies it slowed down," Athens Park Bloods member Cle "Bone" Sloan says, "because niggas started working in the factories. When they took the jobs *away*, shit started back up. Then cocaine hit the streets and niggas were in it for real." As the 1980s dawned, Raymond Washington was dead in prison, killed by a rival, and 155 gangs claimed 30,000 members across the city.

The Bottoms

Firestone, Goodyear and General Motors closed their manufacturing plants in

South Central. In all, 131 plants shuttered during the 1980s, eliminating unionized manufacturing jobs in the rubber, steel, and auto industries and leaving 124,000 people unemployed in the center city. Job growth shifted to service and information industries located beyond the rim of the ten-mile ring. Bobby Lavender saw the effects: “Thousands of parents lost their jobs. Homes and cars were repossessed. People who had just started to become middle-class were losing everything and sinking down.”

In 1978, California voters, spurred by the same right-wing strategists who would soon lift Reagan from his former governorship into the presidency, passed Proposition 13, an initiative that capped property taxes and dramatically altered state and local government financing, launching a national tax re-volt and permanently plunging the state into the cruelest cycle of state budget crises in the country. Passage of Proposition 13 had the kind of effect on California’s cities that turning off the water might have had on its farm belt. Three decades of investment had made the state’s primary and secondary education, college and university systems the envy of the nation—a model of access and quality. After Proposition 13, the state’s K-12 system tumbled down all national educational indices, and as fees exploded, its colleges and universities became increasingly inaccessible to the working-class and the poor. Now that the post-war generation had gotten what it needed for itself and its children, it was pulling up the ladder.

In Los Angeles, the signs of the new mood of the state’s aging white electorate read, “Armed Response.” Around the downtown and at the edges of the ten-mile ring, in what Mike Davis called “post-liberal Los Angeles,” security fences and security forces sprung up in commercial buildings and around gated communities. Meanwhile, Chief Darryl Gates’s army locked down the interior—the vast area running south of the Santa Monica Freeway, along both sides of the Harbor Freeway and back west with the Century Freeway that had been swallowed up into the construct called “South Central,” a heaving barbarian space behind the walls, the Everywhere Else at the bottom of the ten-mile ring, viewed mainly through the nightly news or from behind the surveillance camera.

During the Reagan recession of 1983, Los Angeles’s official unemployment rate hit 11 percent. But in South Central, it was much higher, at least 50 per-cent for youths. The median household income there was just half the state median. While white poverty rates in Los Angeles County actually declined to 7 percent, a quarter of Blacks and Latinos and 14 percent of Asians lived below the poverty line. In South Central, the rate was higher than 30 percent. Almost half of South Central’s children lived below the poverty level.⁴⁵ Infant mortality in Watts was triple the rate in Santa Monica, only twenty miles *away*.⁴⁶ By any index, conditions had deteriorated for the generation born after the Watts Uprising.

What the South Bronx had been to the 1970s, South Central would be for the 1980s.

Later that evening, in a national address, President Bush told L.A. residents what they already knew, that American firepower was on the ground in their city—including FBI SWAT teams, U.S. Marshal riot control units and the Border Patrol. He said:

What we saw last night and the night before in Los Angeles is not about civil rights. It’s not about the great cause of equality that all Americans must uphold. It’s not a message of protest. It’s been the brutality of a mob, pure and simple. And let me assure you, I will use whatever force is necessary to restore order . . .

Television has become a medium that often brings us together. But its vivid display of Rodney King’s beating shocked us. And the America it has shown us on our screens these last forty-eight hours has appalled us . . .

Let me say to the people saddened by the spectacle of the past few days, to the good people of Los Angeles, caught at the center of this sense-less suffering: the violence will end, justice will be served, hope will return.

Thank you and may God bless the United States of America.

History’s Loop

The next day, L.A.’s Korean-American community marched thirty thousand strong—elderly, children, immigrants who no longer had livelihoods. They wore the white headbands of the young men of April 30. They banged Korean drums and chanted “No justice, no peace.” Their signs read JUSTICE FOR ALL PEOPLE, BLACK PEOPLE ARE NOT OUR ENEMIES, and WHERE IS THE GOVERNMENT WHEN WE REALLY NEED THEM? In the intervening years, some would become homeless, some would commit suicide, families would fall apart, many would lose their worldly possessions, but at that moment, they were taking a stand, showing what side they were on.

From the streets to the halls of power across the country, a loud chorus began calling for renewed investment in the inner cities. So, over the weekend, the right-wing went on the offensive. An executive memorandum by Heritage Foundation Vice President Stuart Butler was distributed to key Republicans and to the media. It praised Bush for being “wise and forceful” and set out the new terms of the debate over the nation’s urban crisis:

Bush next must address the anger and hopelessness that created the environment for the violence. In doing so he must first reject the phoney [sic] argument that what is needed is a “Marshall Plan” for urban America. Vast new public housing projects, even more generous welfare benefits for single mothers and another army of social welfare administrators will do nothing to improve America’s cities. Indeed it is such programs, which underpinned the Great Society and continue to be the basis of today’s “anti-poverty” strategy, that are the root cause of the problem.

On cue, Republicans like Bush press secretary Marlin Fitzwater, presidential candidate Pat Buchanan and Housing Secretary Jack Kemp called the riots the result of failed liberal policies of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society programs, the final repudiation of the progressive urban agenda. When Congress opened its most important debate on urban policy since Carter set foot in the Bronx, the Heritage Foundation’s message dominated the discussion.

In fact, the Great Society programs that conservatives were blaming had long been

On May 1, Lerman finally agreed to let King speak. King was still badly bruised, looked bewildered and unbearably sad, once again a tragic symbol of a broken city. King's voice was shaky and unstable, as if he could not close all the thoughts chasing around in his head.

I just um
I just want to say
you know can we can we all get along
can we can we get along
um
can we stop making it
making it horrible for
for the for the older people and and the and the kids?
Yet, fleetingly-perhaps when he thought of how he had been demonized in the trials or when his mind's eye fixed on the blood spreading across the white shirt of Edward Song Lee-he rose toward the clarity of an unfathomable fury.
I love
you know I I'm neutral I love people every I love people of color you know I I'm not uh
I'm not like they
making me out
making me out to be
um we we've gotta we've gotta quit we've got to quit
you know after all I mean

I can understand the
the first upsets of the first two hours after the verdict but uh to go on to keep going on like
like this and to see the security guard shot on
on the ground
it uh-huh-hum
it's it's uh
it's just not right it's just not right
because those people will will never go home to to their families again and uh
I mean
please we can
we can get along here
we we all can get along
we just gotta
just gotta you know
I mean we're all stuck here for a while
let's
you know let's
let's let's try to work it out let's try to be you
you know
Let's try and work it out.

It was the epitome of a growing number of inner-city nexuses where deindustrialization, devolution, Cold War adventurism, the drug trade, gang structures and rivalries, arms profiteering, and police brutality were combining to destabilize poor communities and alienate massive numbers of youths.

The Sound of the Battering

Chaos was settling in for a long stay. Even an otherwise innocuous knock on one's door could bring the threat of fathomless violence. The chief symbol of the new repression was the Battering-a V-100 armored military vehicle equipped with a massive battering ram that police used to barge into suspected crack-houses. With the drug war in full swing, the Battering was getting a lot of action.

By the summer of 1985, nineteen-year-old rapper Toddy Tee's "Battering" tape was the most popular cassette on the streets. Telling a story of a working-class family man whose life is interrupted by cluckheads and the Battering, the tape was one of the first to describe the changing streets. Toddy had written and recorded the rap in his bedroom as he watched the Battering crash through a crackhouse live on television, then duplicated the initial copies on a cheap dubbing deck, and gone out in the streets to hawk them. To his surprise, the song be-came a sensation, a top request on KDAY. By the end of the year, he was recutting the track in an expensive studio with a major-label budget over music produced by big-name funk musician Leon Haywood (whose 1975 hit, "I Want' a Do Something Freaky to You" would later be used on Dr. Dre's "Nuthin' But a 'G' Thing").

Toddy Tee was one of several teenagers who had hung out in the garage of a local rap legend named Mixmaster Spade. If Lonzo's empire was one center where South Central rap talent gathered, Spade's was the other major one. Spade was an older cat who had come up on '70s funk, and had developed a singing style of rap that made him a mixtape and house party legend from Watts to Long Beach. Although he never became more than a local rap hero, his style was carried on by artists like Snoop Dogg, Nate Dogg, Warren G and DJ Quik.

At Spade's house on 156th and Wilmington, right under the flight path of the two-strip Compton Airport, he held court with a kind of advanced rap school, teaching the finer points of rapping, mixing and scratching to a burgeoning crew of kids. But classes ended for good one afternoon in late 1987 when L.A. county sheriffs tried to raid the house, and Spade and seven associates engaged the sheriffs in a shootout. During the fracas, one

of the sheriffs plugged another in the back and sent him to King-Drew hospital. When the smoke cleared and Spade and his crew had surrendered, sheriffs confiscated \$3,000 in cash, a MAC-10 and twenty-five gallons of PCP-better known in the 'hood as "sherm" or "water." The local rap school had been doubling as the neighborhood narcotics factory.

These South Central rap songs were like the new blues. But the Mississippi blues culture had developed under the conditions of back-breakingly oppressive work, the toil of building a modern nation. Hip-hop culture, whether in the South Bronx or South Central, had developed under alienated play, as solid jobs evaporated into the airy buzz and flow of a network society. As Greg Brown, a resident of Nickerson Gardens, put it, "In the sixties, General Motors in neighboring Southgate was the future. In the seventies, King Hospital was the future. Now the future in Watts and South Central is jail. You see that new Seventy-seventh Street LAPD station? It's beautiful. You see anything else in the community that looks better than that jail?"

Hip-hop was close to the underground economy because, more often than not, it was being made by youths who were not exploitable, but expendable. The flatland ghettos of South Central had more in common with the distant hill-side favelas of Rio De Janeiro, 'hoods switched off from the global network, than with the walled estates of Beverly Hills just miles away. The main difference, though, was the proximity of the L.A. 'hoods to the heart of the most advanced culture industry in the world. So from homemade cassettes, grandiose dreams were swelling.

These new blues captured the feel of the serpentine twists of daily inner-city life on the hair-trigger margin. With their urban-canyon echoing drums and casual descriptions of explosive violence, the new myths of crack, guns, and gangs sounded a lot larger than life. On Straight Outta Compton, they reached their apotheosis.

Gates's new sweeps were supplemented by federal agents. In open violation of Special Order 40, a city order limiting local police intervention in federal immigration cases, agents rode shotgun with police as they swept through the 'hoods looking for stolen merchandise. When stupefied residents could not produce receipts for anything in their apartment that looked new, the object—a bed, a television, a bicycle—was confiscated. One activist called it "reverse looting."

Cops and agents swept up anyone who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time—day laborers on the corner, security guards trying to get to work, families at bus stops. Many were taken in for curfew violations. Many were never charged with any crimes. All now faced deportation without due process.

Between April 29 and May 4, 37 percent of the nearly 10,000 arrestees were Latino, more than any other racial group.³² The LAPD and the Sheriff's office turned over 1,500 to the INS for deportation proceedings. Detainees were forced to sign voluntary deportation forms or face long prison terms and up to \$20,000 in fines. At least seven hundred were deported. One desperate mother was certain her mentally retarded fourteen-year-old girl had been picked up by the INS and bused to Mexico.

City Councilmember Mike Hernandez, who represented Pico-Union and Koreatown, was livid. "The response to me when I needed the National Guard to protect the people of this area and I needed to protect the businesses, protect the homes, is they gave me the Border Patrol. It was totally an insult," he said. "To arrest people and put them into custody or to turn them over directly to INS for deportation and to do it simply because they look Latino does not make sense. That's not what this country is about."

Yet right-wing race-baiters like Congressman Dana Rohrabacher and Pat Buchanan had already picked up on Mour and Gates's message and were using it to batter President George Bush and moderate Republicans, whom they accused of tolerating "illegal aliens." On May 12, Bush belatedly claimed credit for the deportations, and claimed that a third of the first six thousand arrested were "illegal aliens," a number that has never been substantiated. The backlash against immigrants culminated two years later in the passage of California's appropriately-named Proposition 187, an initiative that banned all state services, including health care and education, to undocumented immigrants.

Two Speeches

By Friday, May 1, the National Guard had posted tanks at the entrances to Westwood Village. At the same time, all but two supermarkets and dozens of Black businesses in Compton had been burned to the ground, and Korean American-owned businesses had suffered nearly \$400 million of the estimated \$800 million to \$1 billion in total property damages.³⁵ When it was all over, 2,383 had been wounded and 53 were dead, most by gunfire.

Rodney King believed he should make some public statement. After the verdicts were read on April 29, Rodney King had returned home, and as the images of fires and the smiling faces of acquitted cops repeated in an endless loop, King had locked himself in his bedroom and raged at his television. "Why? Why? Why? Why?" he screamed. "Why are they beating me again?"

at-home store owners who hoped the young men would protect their businesses. As they reached the restaurant, Lee's friend in the lead car fired a warning shot in the air. The men on the roof loosed a barrage of bullets. They were, in fact, also young Korean Americans who had come to protect the businesses.

When the shooting ended, Kang was wounded. Another friend, Sam Lee, came and pulled them out of the car. Eddie Lee lay on the pavement, his white shirt stained red shoulder to shoulder, neck to stomach, and died. "I still can't forgive for this," Kong said later of the incident. "It didn't need to happen this way."

Attacking "The Aliens"

The twelve hours between noon and midnight on Thursday were the most intense of the riots. The fire department received nearly 5,000 calls, five times the norm.²⁶ Hospitals reported over 750 injuries, 10 percent of them critical.

Thursday was crucial in another way. The media had portrayed the riots as a Black thing, an echo of Watts. But this frame was obsolete; it rendered the flood of satellite images incomprehensible. Here were shots of children wheeling shopping carts of diapers and food. Most of them were not Black, but Latino. The "race riot"—with Blacks centrally cast as Blacks and Korean Americans in the role of the long-gone whites—had suddenly become what Mike Davis termed a "postmodern bread riot," and the images seemed as if they were coming from a Central American country, not from within U.S. borders.²⁸ Newscasters were confused.

Most of these Latinos were recent working-class immigrants or refugees. For years, they had quietly transformed the inner city. Jordan Downs was nearing 40 percent Latino. Koreatown was overwhelmingly Latino. Southgate, the town on Watts's east border, where the Spook Hunters had once patrolled, was now the home of a trio of rappers—Italian, Cuban and Cuban-Mexican—named for an imaginary piece of real estate they called Cypress Hill.

That crew's 1991 debut opened on Pico Boulevard west of downtown, in the heart of the growing Central American and Mexican neighborhoods of West-lake and Pico-Union, with the hot hum of a police dispatch and a seething anti-pig rant over a steamy Albert King blues beat. Cypress Hill described yet another hole in the network society where English was broken, jobs were endangered, paranoia was palpable and the most advanced technology was in the killing hands of the cops. It was as accurate and specific a predictor of the riots as any record from Compton, South Central or Watts.

On KABC-TV Channel 7, white reporter Linda Mour had tried vainly to find looters who would agree to be interviewed. When she returned to the studio, she was asked by the studio anchor Harold Greene, "Did you get the impression that a lot of those people were illegal aliens?" Mour answered, "Yes."²⁹ Her botched assignment seemed to give assignment editors and Daryl Gates a new target: "illegal aliens." By May 2, images of burning buildings had been replaced by images of Latinos facedown on the pavement in mass arrests—including plastic-tied pregnant women and mothers with confused toddlers at their sides. A thousand INS and Border Patrol agents set up command posts in Pico-Union and MacArthur Park.

Chapter two Peace Treaties and Burning Buildings

By the time the Simi Valley jury delivered its verdict on April 29, 1992, in the trial of the four white officers who had beaten Rodney King, a gang truce had already been secured fifty miles away in the housing projects of Watts.

Since the 1970s, gang peace workers had struggled to establish peace agreements between gangs in various neighborhoods and had been hounded by the enormity of the problem. Gangs were growing and beefs were escalating much faster than the ability of any shoestring agency to keep up. Even if gang peace workers could get two gangs to agree to a peace, it did not automatically mean others would follow. Indeed, other gangs might figure that the peacemaking sets had given up their neighborhoods and that they were ripe for conquest.

Los Angeles's demographics also made peace work complicated. Inner-city gangs once largely fought along racial lines. Mexicans against Mexicans, Blacks against Blacks, Asians against Asians. But by the 1980s, the ethnic math had become trickier. Samoan gangs formed from Carson to Compton, often affiliating with Black Blood or Crip sets. Cambodians and Latinos turned bloody rivals in Long Beach. Salvadorans clashed with Mexicans from MacArthur Park to the Valley. Blacks and Latinos warred on the beach in Venice.

In 1980, a gang peace conference at California State University Northridge drew 1,500 Latino gang members, and ended with a treaty that lasted a year and a half. In 1984, a treaty in Hawthorne brought together a number of Sureño sets. But both these peaces were doomed by the quickly changing conditions on the streets. The crack trade was spreading. Giving up one's 'hood was no longer an option.

After the Long Beach Arena riots in 1986, KDAY sponsored an anti-gang radio show with Run DMC and Barry White, a former member of the pre-riot Watts gang, the Businessmen, that received over 1,500 calls. The station decided to hold a "Day of Peace" concert and rally in November. These events supported the efforts of the Community Youth Gang Services (CYGS) to organize a holiday truce from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day.

CYGS was successful in lining up dozens of gangs, including a number of eastside Latina gangs and the mostly Black Bounty Hunters (Blood) set of Watts's Nickerson Gardens projects, to sign temporary truces. By 1988, black churches, civil rights and nonprofit organizations mounted competing efforts to forge a broader, permanent truce. Bickering between community leaders ended these initiatives, but the idea took root among key gang leaders and activists. The breakthrough moment came at a peace summit later that year, when a Circle City Piru named Twilight Bey stood before flashing cameras and shook the hand of Danifu, one of the Founding Crips.

Brothers weren't a shot-caller. He had never made that claim, but soon his own Blood comrades were coming to his house to threaten his life. Bey stood his ground. He told them he was ready to die for peace, and then he demonstrated with his fists, and slowly won the respect of his homies. He was one of a new breed of street soldiers.

The Deadly Geography of Watts

Bey was from the Watts projects of Hacienda Village. During the 1950s, Simon Rodia's gift of beauty-from-rubble, the Watts Towers, marked the physical and psychological center of the city. After the '65 Uprising, the action shifted to the revolutionary motion and light on 103rd Street. As the long decline began in the 1970s, the four major public housing developments—Jordan Downs to the northeast, Imperial Courts to the southeast, Nickerson Gardens to the southwest and Hacienda Village to the northwest—became Watts's irregular heartbeat and tortured soul.

Down the middle of the city ran the old railroad tracks. The train line that had once delivered big-dreaming southern Blacks to Watts was now the dividing line between the Bloods on the west and the Crips on the east. At Hacienda Village, there were the Circle City Pirus, and at Nickerson Gardens, the Bounty Hunter Bloods. On the other side, there were the Jordan Crips and at Imperial Courts, the PJ Watts Crips. Edwin Markham Intermediate School, located directly across the tracks from the three major spires of the Watts Towers, was literally in the troubled heart of the city.

Administrators at Markham figured that 10 percent of the students banded. (The 1,600 seventh-to-ninth graders knew the number was closer to a third.) They called it "Gladiator School." It was where youths underwent their rites of passage into ganghood.

"All of the factions went to that school," says Aqeela Sherrills, who grew up with his older brother, Daude, in the Jordan Downs projects. "In '78, one of the brothers from my neighborhood got killed up there by a brother from Nickerson Gardens. And that started the war. So when I got there in '81, it was scary."

The older guys in the neighborhood, Sherrills says, "told us when somebody asks you where you from, you fire on him. That was like a sign to say you about to get jumped. Somebody asked me where I was from, I was like, okay, those are the words. So I stole on this cat, we got into a fight, and then eventually I was associated with the crew that I ran with." Whether he liked it or not, he was representing for the Jordan Downs Crips.

In 1984, when Aqeela was in the ninth grade, he and his homies got into a fight with kids from Nickerson Gardens. Later that afternoon, as they sat on the track-field bleachers, their rivals came back with guns and shot his best friend in the head. Boys who played with each other in athletic leagues just a few years before were now deadly enemies, handed a cold destiny by history and geography.

New Black Nation

By 1986, the gang leadership at Jordan Downs was changing. The Jordan Downs Crips were fading, and a new generation of Crips grew from the ground up. In the sprawling projects they cliqued up in different factions like the Playboy Hoo-Rides, the JDC, East-side Kids, the Sunset Ave. Boys, the Young Hustlas and the Watts Baby Locs. In time the Baby Locs took over, and began "courting in" all the shorties from the cliques into a set of sets, the Grape Street Crips. "Courtin' in," says Daude Sherrills, "is when everybody got to fight each other. That was a part of your initiation process." The new Grape Streets po

the fundraiser to a police force hamstrung by indecision and incompetence. Rather than take control, Gates immediately demanded a helicopter tour of the city. "He took something like an hour-and-a-half ride and never issued any instructions as far as I could determine," said William Webster, the former FBI director who would be appointed to lead an investigation into LAPD's response to the riots. "So he is just up there watching Rome burn."

At 11 P.M., near Nickerson Gardens, a liquor store was ablaze and the streets were full of looters. When cops and firefighters pulled up, snipers opened fire on them. For hours, the shootout continued, with police expending hundreds of rounds. When it was all over, three Black men were dead, and three more were wounded.

By midnight on April 29, the riots had taken fourteen lives. Three new fires were being reported every minute. Governor Pete Wilson had declared a state of emergency and Mayor Bradley established a dusk-to-dawn curfew. Eighteen hundred officers had reached the command post. But most were still standing around awaiting instructions. The few deployments in the field were mostly placed at the edge of the inner city.²¹ The urban core was once again abandoned to looting and war.

Paying the Price

At dawn on Thursday, the writing on the wall read: MEXICANS & CRIPS & BLOODS TOGETHER TONITE 4-30-92.

Seeing evidence that authorities had no interest in maintaining order in the urban core, and hearing reports that the National Guard was on its way, some figured it was last call. Rusty, junk-ready cars filled the streets, the mini-malls, and supermarket parking lots.

People got their essentials—diapers, canned goods, milk, butter and guns. After all, these were wartime conditions. "I felt some shame," said one Salvadoran refugee. "But I thought, if we don't take the food now, what will we give our children to eat? When will we be able to buy food again?"

By nightfall, the air was acrid and smoky, and there was no electricity. The only light came from the fires in the building across the street. "Fuck the police," Joe thought, bitterly. "Koreans and Blacks pay taxes into the system and ain't nobody getting shit back from nobody."

When it was all over, the young volunteer security forces had saved most of Koreatown from being burned to the ground. Damages to Korean-American businesses in Koreatown were less than half as much as damages to Korean-American businesses in South Central.²⁴ A shift began to take place within the community, as leadership and power pushed toward the "1.5ers"—the generation born in Korea but raised mostly in America. They had come of age, but not without paying a dear price.

Two miles away from the Ahns' bakery, eighteen-year-old Edward Song Lee, James Kang and two other close friends headed up to Koreatown. All day, they had fired warning shots at looters who drove into the neighborhood to scope the pickings. After dark, they heard a call on Radio Korea about looters on the roof of a restaurant on Third Street. They got into their cars and headed up there.

As it turned out, the call was false. Radio Korea was being flooded with calls by stay-

open her door. “Bitch, you’re gonna die,” he yelled. Castillo hit the accelerator and sped south down Normandie, her face bleeding.

Twice police tried to take back Florence and Normandie; twice they gave up. So the crowd moved north on Normandie. By now, disturbances were breaking out across the inner city. At Western and Slauson, three fires burned. Near U.S.C., another crowd was throwing rocks at passing cars.

Downtown, at the police headquarters called Parker Center, political protestors gathered to denounce the verdicts. Michael Zinzun, one of the city’s leading anti-police brutality activists, told a reporter, “This community has got to realize that an unstable Black community means an unstable L.A.”

When night fell, the activists were replaced by young men who set American flags and a parking kiosk afire and tried to storm the glass entrance before being repelled by riot police. They moved into downtown, overturning police cars and setting them on fire. They threw rocks at the Los Angeles Times building.

Gold and Hot

Despite the growing reports of unrest, and the apparent inability of LAPD to do anything about them, Chief Darryl Gates left his command post and headed out to the posh Westside. He was a lame duck. The Christopher Commission, created by Mayor Tom Bradley a month after the King beating, had already passed judgment on Gates’s tenure, finding a pattern of racism in the police department and proposing broad reforms of the department’s leadership, operations and accountability. His successor had already been chosen.

So instead of reacting to the riots, Gates was being driven to a right-wing fundraiser against a Commission-initiated police reform measure on the June ballot, Charter Amendment F. His motorcade sped down the Santa Monica Highway past the First African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Thousands were jammed into the church. On the dais, Mayor Tom Bradley, City Council members, church and community leaders and Rodney King’s mother exhorted people to keep calm, to express their anger through the political system. Pastor Cecil Murray prayed for peace, and the gospel choir sang. “Operation Cool Response” was underway. But outside, angry young men and women from the neighborhood weren’t having it. “We ain’t gon’ turn another cheek so they can come and kick us in the ass,” one told filmmaker Matthew Mc-Daniels. “We gotta do shit!” The crowd outside the First A.M.E. started doing shit-destroying cars, looting stores.

Soon the streets were jammed: boys slow-rolling in their rides as if it were a Crenshaw night blasting “Fuck Tha Police,” flash mobs of young girls protesting, “No more Simi Valley!” In West Hollywood, lesbian and gay activists marched toward Sunset Boulevard. Near U.C.L.A., students poured down Westwood Boulevard. From the site of the Rodney King beating, hundreds marched to the LAPD Foothill Division headquarters, all echoing the same cry across the city: “No justice no peace.”

At 8 P.M., fifteen fires raged. Two hours later, there were nearly fifty. Rioting had spread to Long Beach, Baldwin Hills, Inglewood, Pasadena and Hollywood. Gates returned

sitioned themselves outside the traditional Crip/Blood axis. Instead of red or blue, Daude says, “The whole ‘hood started banging purple.”

In high school, Aqeela distanced himself from gang life, got a job after school selling candy in the shiny exurbs of Orange County, and was accepted to Cal State Northridge in 1988. Daude had a more difficult time. He was determined to make up for getting kicked out of junior high and being held back a grade. He attended night school to graduate with his class in 1986. But as just another eighteen-year-old in Watts, he had no job prospects, and returned to his old ways.

“I was crackin’, selling weed, beefing with rivals, escaping raids and escaping shootouts, the whole nine, just trying to survive. I didn’t care if I lived or died. It was no role models, no teachers, no preachers, no imams, none of that was around,” he says. Instead he saw his friends heading off to prison or into early graves. On his twentieth birthday, with the news that his girlfriend was expecting his first son, Daude finally decided to save himself.

Both the Sherrills, who had grown up with the Nation of Islam, noticed that Minister Farrakhan had launched the “Stop the Killing” campaign. Across town, Imam Mulahid Abdul-Karim from the local Masjid al-Rasul was working to end the violence with Nickerson Gardens O.G.’s—an effort which included Loaf, one of the Bloods who had set off the war with Jordan Downs at Markham in the late ‘70s. At the gym in Nickerson Gardens, the peacemakers put up a new mural, entitled “Crossfire (The First Word on Peace),” a memorial to the dozens of residents who had been killed in gang warfare. The words on the wall read, KEEP

THE FUTURE ALIVE, and NOBODY CAN STOP THIS WAR BUT US.

At Northridge, Aqeela soaked up the music of KRS-One, X-Clan and Public Enemy, read *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, James Baldwin’s account of the Atlanta child murders, and was stirred. He joined the Black Student Union, and embarked on a journey into knowledge of self. He became a fundamentalist Shi’ite, and studied Egyptology, the Supreme Mathematics and esoterica. He was searching for a life mission, and staring at a map of Watts one day, he found it.

“One of the things I came to is that three of the four major housing projects the Jordan Downs, Imperial Courts and the Nickerson Gardens—fell in a perfect ninety-degree angle. And the hypotenuse runs from the Nickerson Gardens to the Jordan Downs, which in my studies, was the Line of God, the infinite line,” says Sherrills. “My epiphany was if we connected the Jordan Downs and the Nickerson Gardens, if we brought those two neighborhoods together, we would create a domino effect for peace all across the country.” Geography had been destiny, but history did not have to keep them shackled. Here was the evidence of a higher creative power, a master plan.

Aqeela took this insight back to Daude, who had already thrown away his purple Grape Street gear for African garb and begun organizing peace efforts in Jordan Downs. First they organized the African Brothers Collective, recruiting Black student activists from UCLA, Cal State Northridge and USC to join brothers from the projects in Watts. They held study group sessions and demonstrations. Then they started speaking to their Grape Street comrades, framing peace in the new language and imagery of the streets.

Aqeela says, “I had to convince the brothers in the neighborhood that we had to be the ones to initiate the process. The way that I was explaining it is that when you take the colors red and blue, which are both represented by the Nickersons and the Pis, you get

purple, you get the Jordan Downs. And the whole concept of grapes, they're all on the vine, but they're all connected."

At Jordan Downs and Nickerson Gardens, the collective broke up dice games, and gave speeches under a red, black, and green flag. They chanted, "I don't know but I've been told, African people on a mighty road. Let's destroy the old plantation, now we're gonna build a new Black nation." They were updating the spirit of '66 with the unique outsider knowledge of the gang-ridden '80s.

"Because of this transition that was taking place, law enforcement was struggling to keep things the way they were. We were job security," says Aqeela. "So we started standing up to the police."

They distributed information about citizens' rights. They put up anticop messages on the walls. They intervened to stop police beatings. In the projects, fascination slowly replaced fear. The group of voices calling for peace grew.

Father Figures

At the same time, Jim Brown, the football and movie hero, was looking for the next generation of leaders. After his storied NFL career and big-screen stardom, Brown had devoted his life to Black nationalist causes. He had developed a life management skills curriculum that he was teaching in prisons, but he felt he had a bigger calling. When he saw Chuck D on a TV interview, he was inspired. "It's a whole new culture out there, new music, a new language," he said. "The NAACP has been good in courts, the Urban League helps with jobs. They're all above these guys on the street and the guys coming out of prison. They can't re-late to them." With fascination and concern, Brown watched his old friend Minister Farrakhan expand his work with the gangs.

From its mosques in Compton and South Central, the Nation of Islam was sending "God Squads" into the neighborhoods to convert gang members and talk peace. But the squads suddenly seemed to be drawing unwanted attention from the authorities. Just before sunrise on January 3, 1990, a car of two L.A. police officers tailed a God Squad caravan of three cars of thirteen Black Muslims leaving for a morning workout at a Crenshaw gym. The police pulled one of the cars over on a traffic violation. One of the Muslims stepped forward to question why they were being ticketed, while the others surrounded the officers. The cops radioed for backup, and a fight broke out. By the end, twenty-four officers, four of whom were later treated for injuries, had used a stun gun and batons to subdue the thirteen Muslims.

Representatives of the Nation of Islam met with the LAPD a few weeks later to ease tensions. But the day after the meeting, on January 23, L.A. sheriff's deputies wounded one Black Muslim and shot Oliver X. Beasley in the head, after a confrontation that had begun with another traffic-stop gone awry. Elders were reminded of the authorities' vicious attacks on Nation mosques and the Black Panthers. Youths—whether gangbangers or not—were looking for someone to defend and protect them, something like a father figure.

Minister Farrakhan hastily returned to Los Angeles. At Beasley's funeral, Farrakhan praised him as a man working for an end to gang violence and crack slanging. "Drug dealers deal on the corner and they let it happen," he said. "The moment someone puts on a

acquittal 8-4.

Thirty miles to the southeast, near the intersection of Florence and Normandie in South Central, the young men debated what to do. This was Eight Tray Gangster Crip turf, the territory of the set made famous by prison memoirist Sanyika Shakur in his previous life as Kody "Monster" Scott.

While Shakur served out his sentence, his brother, Kershaun, had gone to college like Aqeela Sherrills, and become a peacemaker. But his position was clear. "There were homies who said, 'Let's get some signs and have a peaceful protest,'" Kershaun told reporter Jeffrey Anderson years later. "I said, 'Let's rip shit up, let's show the powers that be how we feel.'"

At 4 P.M., five young associates hit Pay-Less Liquor and Deli on Florence and Dalton, and grabbed bottles of 8-Ball. When the Korean-American owner's son, David Lee, blocked the entrance, one of the kids smashed him on the head with a bottle. "This is for Rodney King!" they shouted, and ran into the street.

Down the block on Florence and Normandie, guys were drinking and carousing. Some started taking baseball bats to passing car windows. As cop cruisers screeched into the intersection, their cars were pelted with rocks. Two policemen chased a sixteen-year-old rock-thrower down an alley, pulled him down off a chain-link fence and hog-tied him as he screamed, "I can't breathe!" More than two dozen cops arrived, and they made two more arrests.

But the mass at Florence and Normandie Streets had lost its fear. In the 1970s the chant had been, "It's Nation time!" Now the streets filled with the cry: "It's Uzi time! Cops gonna die tonight!" At a quarter to six, on orders of Lieutenant Mike Moulin, the police unit retreated with the three arrestees to a command post assembling at a bus depot further north, at 54th and Arlington.

First Blood

Anyone not Black and unlucky enough to enter the intersection was attacked. Driving his big rig through an hour later, Reginald Denny would become the riots' most celebrated victim. But most of the victims were Asian or Latino immigrants. In almost every instance, African Americans came to their aid, a fact that would later be lost in the rush to declare it a "race riot."

Community and civic leaders were gathering for a peace service at the symbolic heart of Los Angeles' civil rights movement, the First African Methodist Episcopal Church, seven miles north. Two South Central activists, Karen Bass and Sylvia Castillo, the director and assistant director of the Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, were heading toward the Church west down Florence after another day of counting and mapping liquor stores in South Central. They had been conducting research for a campaign they launched in January to close fifteen particularly noxious, crime-inducing liquor stores in the area.

Castillo followed Bass as she slowed down at Normandie. The crowd had broken down the riot gates to Tom Suzuki's liquor store and hauled the alcohol back into the streets. They had grabbed tires from the gas station and set them on fire, the beginnings of a roadblock. When Bass, an African American, signaled to turn right, they let her car pass. But they rained rocks, concrete and malt liquor bottles on Castillo's car, shattering the passenger-side windows and the windshield. Suddenly a guy was in Castillo's car, trying to

“We all drove into the Pis, got out,” Aqeela says. “When all the brothers from the PJs saw us, they all came out and they was like, ‘Man, come on in the gym, we need to talk.’ So we all went in the gym and Tony Bogard was there [saying,] ‘Man, this shit can’t just happen like this, homeboy. It’s gon’ take years, man.’ But a whole group of our OGs was there, older brothers from the Jordan Downs, so they argued back and forth.

“A lot of the youngsters, we went outside and was like, ‘Shit, y’all with it?’ ‘We with it! Y’all with it!’ ‘We with it!’ “ he laughs. “So while they in the gym still talking, we all celebrating outside. Whooooo! Watts! Watts!

“After that it was just on. Like, phone calls-”The peace treaty on!” I mean, everybody, that night in the PJs, it was probably two or three thousand people over there. Everybody outside. Mamas crying, dudes coming over to see the girl that they been sneaking to see for the past couple of years. Oh man, it was wild. Peace Treaty babies!”

Two days later, the party moved to Nickerson Gardens. Blue, red and purple rags were tied together. Generations celebrated. It was like a family reunion. The war was over.

Sets came from all over town to the parties, often expressing disbelief that a peace was actually on. “All the neighborhoods started saying, man, if Watts can do it, we can do it,” says Daude. “You had brothers from Compton, brothers from South Central. We had rivals coming in, we was negotiating cease-fires with their rivals, right inside the housing project developments.”

The stakes were much higher now. Against all odds, they had built an infra-structure of communication for peace. But for the peace to last, it would take more than talk. There would need to be jobs, services, and support. So on April 28, as the party went down at Nickerson Gardens, the peacemakers marched with 250 Crips and Bloods from seven different neighborhoods to City Hall to announce the truce at a Los Angeles City Council meeting.

“We made a presentation to the City Council, telling them that we was coming together to bring an end to all the violence in the ‘hood,” says Aqeela. “We told them we would like to have access to funding.”

But Council members didn’t exactly jump out of their chairs. One suggested applying for a \$500 grant, Aqeela recalls, “And they were like, ‘Thank you very much,’ and ushered us out of there as quickly as they possibly could.”

The next afternoon, the peace parry came back to Jordan Downs, the final point on the triangle. The courtyard was full and the music was bumping when the verdicts came down.

Show Them How We Feel

At 1 P.M. on Wednesday, April 29, 1992, the jury in Simi Valley sent out word that it had reached a decision in the ten verdicts against the four cops, but were intractably deadlocked on the last. They had been deliberating for a week, leaving the city agitated and breathless. Judge Stanley Weisberg announced that the verdicts would be read at 3 P.M., giving authorities time to prepare for any potential unrest.

At about 3:15 P.M., the ten “not guilty” verdicts were read. The last charge-one count of assault under the color of authority against Lawrence Powell-had fallen in favor of

suit and bow tie to clean up the problem, here come the police to shoot them dead.”

The following week, Farrakhan delivered another public address, this time to a massive crowd of twenty thousand at the Sports Arena. He warned the police and sheriffs that the city was on the verge of erupting. “If we reach a point where we can tolerate this abuse no longer, we will rise up against your authority,” he said. “And we would rather die than live like dogs under your roof.”

Thousands of Crips and Bloods were in the audience, and Farrakhan directed the rest of his speech to them. “Stop the killing,” he said, standing beneath a fifteen-foot picture of Beasley. “Why can we take the trigger and pull it at each other? We are killing ourselves.” As he spoke, another message rippled through the crowd: The Minister and Jim Brown would be hosting a meeting that weekend to discuss a ceasefire. It would be held at Brown’s mansion in the Hollywood hills, on neutral ground high above the city.

Learning to Speak

From Brown’s deck, the city grid sprawled for to the south, from the hills west-ward to the coast. Even the city’s violent, smog-altered sunsets would look a lot different up there.

More than two hundred Crips and Bloods from neighborhoods across the city came to Brown’s house, including the Sherrills, Twilight Bey and an O. G. Blood from the neighborhood of Inglewood known as “The Jungle” named T. Rodgers. Minister Farrakhan said a prayer for peace. Brown took the floor to say that the meeting would not have an agenda, it was a safe space for them to get things off their chests and discuss starting a peace movement. Then Minister Farrakhan, his son, Mustapha, and Brown sat down to listen. And slowly, putting years of bloodshed behind them, the gang members, one after another, stood up to speak.

After this gathering, the peace work intensified. Brown opened his house to the gang members, first throwing parties, then holding regular Wednesday night meetings. Members of the Rolling 60s, the Rolling 40s, the Harlem 30s Crips, the Venice Shoreline Crips and the Van Ness Gangster Bloods-sets engaged in some of the city’s bloodiest wars-came to participate.

“Young men expressed their anger and pain but also expressed that they would try to communicate,” Twilight Bey said. “We were asked questions that weren’t ever asked before: What are we going to do to change our situation? Do we have the power? . . . Do we have any say on what happens in political arena? What does it take to change things?” The Sherrills, Bey, Rodgers and several others became the core of Brown’s new organization, Amer-I-Can. They revamped Brown’s curriculum, which, Aqeela says, “became the foundation for the peace being able to happen. It created a common language for us to be able to communicate with. And also it required individuals to take responsibility for their own lives and not blame people for where they were.”

Twilight Bey and his comrades began organizing peace among the Bloods in Hacienda Village. Imam Mujahid, Big Hank, Donny, Brother Bobby and others did the same at Nickerson Gardens. The Sherrills brothers opened a storefront across the street from Jordan Downs to sell incense and thrift clothes, to feed the homeless and to hold peace

meetings. Brown picked up the rent. When Amer-I-Can got its first contract at Nickerson Gardens, all of them came together to teach classes to the next generation of young bangers from Markham.

Uprisings

But even as the peace work intensified, gang wars had left 690 dead by the end of 1990, yet another tragic record. The new year brought a new sense of urgency. In March, Rodney King was beaten and Latasha Harlins killed. In June, three cops in the Dalton Avenue raids were acquitted of misdemeanor vandalism counts.

At Nickerson Gardens, Hacienda Village and Jordan Downs, the leadership was almost in place to broker a truce. But Imperial Courts remained a major question mark. The PJ Watts set at Imperial Courts was run by an O.G. named Tony Bogard, who had recently been arrested for shooting at a sister of a Grape Street Crip. The war between the PJs and Grape Street had been running for at least two years, and it seemed to many that Bogard was in no mood for peace.

The day after Thanksgiving, two weeks after Soon Ja Du was sentenced to probation, police were called to Imperial Courts during a temporary blackout. They heard gunfire and feared they had walked into an ambush, so they began blasting rounds into the playground. When the shooting ended, Henry Peco was dead, hit by five police bullets, one between the eyes, lying in a sandbox. Residents poured out of the projects to stone and bottle the cops. Before the cops retreated, they took into custody one of Peco's cousins who had been cradling his bleeding body and trying to resuscitate him. They questioned whether she had tampered with evidence.

Peco was a former resident of Imperial Courts who had moved to Sacramento after serving a two-year bid in the early '80s. He had taken in a younger cousin, Dewayne "Sniper" Holmes, an ex-PJ Watts Crip trying to escape the life. The two had returned that weekend from Sacramento to Imperial Courts for Thanksgiving dinner with the family. When Peco was shot, residents said, he was leading children out of the playground to the safety of their apartments. Police claimed that Peco had fired on them with an AK-47. No rifle was ever found.

Community activists organized anti-police brutality protests and picked up the support to Congresswoman Maxine Waters and Jesse Jackson. Three weeks after the incident, cops destroyed a memorial to Peco in the housing developments' courtyard. Now residents greeted every police patrol with bottles.

Police responded by initiating regular sweeps of residents. Then on New Year's Eve, under the pretext of stopping holiday gunfire celebrations, police staged their largest raid, confiscating no weapons but arresting forty-four residents. Tension in the city over the King trial and the Harlins shooting was already thick, and now Imperial Courts threatened to become a third flashpoint. Before long, FBI investigators and a U.S. Justice Department mediator were en route to the housing development. When they arrived, the walls read, LAPD KILLA.

Cease-Fire

Peco's cousin, Dewayne Holmes, watched the tensions rising, and tried to persuade the PJs not to go to war with the cops. At a meeting of the Henry Peco Justice Committee, Imam Mujahid approached Holmes and persuaded him that a permanent truce might come out of Peco's murder. Holmes decided to put his body on the line. In a life-risking journey, he walked first into Jordan Downs to ask the Grape Street Crips for a truce until Peco could be buried. He turned and walked down the Line of God, crossing the tracks into Nickerson Gardens to ask the same of the Bounty Hunter Bloods.

So on a Sunday in March, the delicate peace meetings, facilitated by Daude Sherrills and Imam Mujahid at his Masjid al-Rasul on 1 12th and Central, began. At the first meeting, there were less than ten people in attendance, including Holmes and his mother, and Twilight Bey. "A lot of brothers didn't trust the situation," says Daude Sherrills. "They wanted to make sure that nobody was going to get ambushed."

But the meetings grew, expanded exponentially and organically. "Instead of eight brothers in there, it was damn near fifty brothers, then a hundred brothers in there," he says. There was a feeling of destiny to the talks. By April, Daude says, "It was time."

He dispatched another staffer of Amer-I-Can, Anthony Perry, to find a document that could codify the peace. In the library of USC's Von Kleinsmid Center for International and Public Affairs, Perry dug out a 1949 United Nations cease-fire agreement that had temporarily ended hostilities between Egypt and Israel. Struck by the historical weight of the document, he copied it by hand, and then attempted to translate it into terms that could hold in Watts.

He and Daude finished the drafting together, altering the armistice agreement to refer to drive-bys and random shootings, and to take into account the loose structure of gang leadership, with its shot-callers and soldiers. Now called the Multi-Peace Treaty, the document called for "the return to permanent peace in Watts, California," and "the return of Black businesses, economic development and advancement of educational programs.

"The establishment of a cease-fire between the community representatives of all parties is accepted as a necessary step toward the renewal of peace in Watts, California," it read. "The right of each party to its security and freedom from fear of attack by each other shall be fully respected."

Daude Sherrills added a United Black Community Code, a code of conduct for gang members. It began, "I accept the duty to honor, uphold and defend the spirit of the red, blue and purple, to teach the black family its legacy and protracted struggle for freedom and justice." It warned against alcohol and drug abuse and use of the "N-word and B-word," and even laid down rules of etiquette for flagging and sign-throwing. It called for literacy, school attendance, voter registration programs and for community investment.

Sherrills and Perry presented it to the truce leaders at the Masjid. All agreed to endorse it and to take a message back to their respective neighborhoods. On April 26, 1992, three days before the Rodney King verdict, the truce was officially in effect.

Making It Real

And yet, as Aqeela says, "Nobody had went into anybody's territory yet." By the afternoon of April 26, he was sitting at Jordan Downs with other Grape Street Crips. Twenty years of bloodshed, and four years of peace work had come to this moment. The Sherrills and Grape Street peacemakers piled into a van and headed south.