

Shockwaves

Report from the Los Angeles Rebellion

by Michael Slate

A collection of unique and intimate interviews with participants of the L.A. Rebellion reprinted from a series run in *Revolution* newspaper from May to September, 1992.

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The fire and smoke may be gone but the signs of the rebellion are everywhere as we drive through the streets of Los Angeles's Black and Latino neighborhoods. On one corner an entire shopping mall has been turned into a charred shell criss-crossed on the inside by hundreds of blackened metal rods. A block away a three-sided building with no floors is identified as a bank by the sign that seems to have melted into what remains of the front wall. "Fuck tha Police" is spray-painted everywhere; so is the slogan "Black Power." In some neighborhoods "Revolution Is the Only Solution" and the RCP May Day Manifestos decorate the walls. And these scenes are repeated mile after mile all across the city. That's one thing that is really striking about the L.A. Uprising – it was huge! When the fires burned they must have looked like a wall of flame coming across the city.

But more important than the physical evidence of the uprising, you can see how alive the rebellion still is in the people themselves. You can see it clearly in how quick they are to smile and laugh – and how their eyes dance – when they talk about those few days of freedom. And you can see it in the way the oppressed brothers and sisters carry themselves these days – in a way they have changed forever. As we rode through these neighborhoods just trying to get an overview of the situation and gathering up some initial impressions, the words of a brother I had met just a few hours after arriving in the city rang in my head. As we sat talking about the rebellion this brother, a Black man in his late thirties, talked about how he saw the uprising. "When you go out and see the communities I want you to remember what I say. They all talking about how could we just go and destroy the communities we live in. Well, to me it's more like these are the communities we are dying in and that's why we need to destroy them. And I'll tell you one thing, something happened to me after this riot that I didn't ever think was going to happen. For the very first time in all my 38 years of life, I went into a store and someone said, 'Good morning, sir. Can I help you?'"

The Sound of Gunfire

The L.A. freeway system is an amazing network of highways designed to carry hundreds of thousands of people from one end of the metropolitan area clear across town to the other end and to do it without these travelers ever even having to look at the neighborhoods of the oppressed peoples. Most of these highways just skirt around these neighborhoods. But there is one, the Harbor Freeway, that cuts through South Central Los Angeles, through the center of the uprising. When the rebellion broke out, fires licked the edges of both sides of the freeway and each exit ramp led right down into the middle of the festival of the oppressed. This was the one freeway the powers closed during the rebellion.

One night shortly after I arrived in L.A. a couple of local revolutionaries took me for a ride on this freeway, a ride that ended up in the heart of Watts. We had come out that night so I could get an idea of what was happening in the city these days. Things were overall quiet and calm, but the calm was so intense it felt like it was just stretched out to the limit and laid down over the city. It was the kind of calm just waiting to shatter.

When you take the Watts exit ramp it feels almost like the freeway is spitting you out.

We came off the highway into a desolate no-man's land. There are no buildings, no shops, nothing but an empty field and a new highway under construction. In one of the empty fields some homeless people had just built a campfire and in the flames we could just make out the outlines of a dozen or more broken-down chairs lined up on the edge of the field. We talked about the seeming calm and the comrades in the car with me commented that the cops had just seemed to disappear from the streets.

After a few minutes we came up on one of the projects where things had been really hot during the uprisings. We were taking a quick tour of the area, but as we started to drive down one of the boundary streets for the projects the traffic started to back up. In front of us a number of cars began to make U-turns to get out of the area. We could see groups of youth beginning to gather up ahead. Suddenly an unmarked cop car – with the cops riding four deep and armed with shotguns – backed out of one of the project streets and sped out of the area. Another cop car came from the opposite direction and it too left the area. A couple of minutes later all we could hear was POP POP POP POP – the sound of gunfire – up ahead. At a fast food joint a block away, half a dozen sheriffs' cars parked in the lot with the sheriffs routinely gearing up out of the trunks of their cars. As we crossed one of the main streets, no less than forty cop cars, pickup trucks and tow trucks all filled with riot-gear turned into the projects. Within minutes the streets were blocked off and an invasion of the projects had begun.

There wasn't a word about this attack or any of the other police operations we saw or heard about that night on local news or in the next day's newspapers. These things are being done in the dark and behind a curtain of silence. Instead, the press reports are filled with talk of how the National Guard and the Federal troops are leaving the city. Ten thousand Federal troops are gone and 4,000 National Guard have been withdrawn. That still leaves 6,000 National Guard troops stationed at various posts around the city. In addition, the U.S. Marines announced that they have formed a special "rapid reaction" force at nearby Camp Pendleton that could be ready for duty in the city within three hours of being called on. These marines are a special unit trained to deal with urban uprisings. They travel in armored vehicles with a 25 millimeter cannon mounted on top. As I learned about all this I couldn't help but be reminded of the way the South African apartheid government occupied Soweto and other black townships during the uprisings of the 1980s. And, as we drove through the city that night, it became real clear just how deceptive a calm it is that has been nailed down over L.A.

Let In the Light

I returned to the Watts projects the next day to talk to people about the rebellion and to find out what had gone down the night before. A middle aged man on his way to work was the first to stop and talk. His face was a mix of pride, anger and excitement as he talked about the rebellion. "You know who was behind this all? The rebels of L.A. are the oppressed people living in the ghettos of the city. We came out on the street to show how frustrated we are and how we hate the kind of suppression that comes out of the upper class and the people who just don't give a fuck about the oppressed people. We getting dominated and we ain't allowed to have no freedom. We can't get a job, we can't get no education, and all human beings should be able to do these things. I like this riot cuz it was a call for all the doors to open. It was saying that all the doors got to open. The doors got to open up on racism and all the suffering we got. We was saying we ain't gonna let the doors be closed no more. We're gonna let in the light for the whole world to see what is happening here.

"This is my second big rebellion. I was in the 1965 Watts Willowbrook riot, and now here it is and I'm in the 1992 L.A. riot. Nothing changed for us between these two. I still see we are oppressed. We still need to get recognition on our freedom and recognition on equality. Look, man, I know what happens to us here. I been arrested and beaten myself. I was arrested for assault on a police officer. You know what happened. I was playing dice and the police came. I started to run and they caught me. They told me to lay down on the ground, face down, and then they took to beating me. By the time they was done I needed 28 stitches in my head. When I saw the Rodney King video I thought of myself laying on the ground and getting beat. I felt the same way all our people felt when we blew up. Equality wasn't in my favor for a long time now. Look, we are tired of this. People all over felt the same way in their hearts. Not only people in L.A., but people all over the country. Not only people of color, but a lot of white people too. People just tired of it, that's what it is.

"Look here, when this riot first started the cops could not come in here. The projects would not let the police come in here. A lot of people say that some of the people were armed and they would not let the cops come in. The cops, they lined up on the perimeter and they shot two homeboys that died right there on the scene and they shot another one that died later on that day. But the people would not let the cops in the project. They set up their own perimeter and would not let the cops past. The cops was even going backwards trying to get out of these projects when they saw how the people were. The people would not let them in, people were saying, let's take our freedom, let's take our justice, let's take our equality. We saw the enemy – we saw that we are not enemies among ourselves. The enemy is the one who is keeping us down. When we saw the cops that night we were looking at them like they had on KKK helmets and they were the enemy. We would not submit to anything more. We was gonna stand up and let everybody know that. America wants to treat people like animals. They want to treat people their way. Well, this ain't Burger King, they can't have it their way. That's right!"

Real Angry Folks

The sister was standing with a friend waiting for a bus to take her downtown. She laughed as she told me how the people had kept the pigs out of the project during the rebellions and how it seemed like the cops were now trying to retake the projects from the people. She couldn't talk long herself but as she rushed us around behind one of the buildings to talk to some of the "real angry folks" she knew. Right before we came up on her friends we passed by some graffiti that read "Congratulations Crips and Bloods – Black People are Proud of You!" The sister flashed a huge smile as she pointed out the graffiti. Her voice was full of joy and hope as she explained how much the people in the projects wanted the two rival gangs to stop killing each other and concentrate on other things to help the people. She had just finished her sentence when she yelled out to a knot of four brothers standing about twenty feet away. The brothers agreed to talk about what was going on in the projects and about what had happened the night before. They were Bloods and Crips standing together and talking for one of the first times in their lives. They talked about how they only lived a few blocks from one another and had gone to school with people living in each other's neighborhoods but that they hadn't seen these people – and in some cases their own relatives – for twelve years or more because of the gang warfare. But this was one thing that rebellion had changed among the people, and for these brothers it was a very important change. One brother, a Crip in his early 20s, told the story. "Look, this is a Blood here and I'm

in his hood. No way this could happen before the Rodney King riot. I'm proud of that riot. It was harder than the 1965 riot, we kicked up a lot more shit down here. Fuck the police. The police is scared right now cuz this riot is getting all the Blacks together and that's what we need. This is what it's supposed to be, all the Blacks together as one. We can do anything if we unite as one. We're not Crips and Bloods no more, we're Blacks, and that's the way it should be. The white man don't want to see that.

"Last night about ten o'clock the Bloods and the Crips was kicking it out here. We was together, having a little party, just getting to know each other. I mean people was drinking, dancing, listening to music and talking. We was together, but the police came in to try to stop it. They don't want the Crips and the Bloods to stop this animosity we got going on cuz they don't want the Black people to stop killing each other. That's the whole thing! You know those gunshots you heard, they were warning shots fired by the police to break us up. They came in and shot up in the air and we all started running. When we knew it was the police we stopped and then we started to throw some rocks and bottles but soon the National Guard came in and we all left the area. What is this? This just shows how scared they are when the Black people start coming together. I mean, we ain't doing nothing but just trying to get to know each other after so many years of killing each other. Why are the police so scared of this?"

Enough Tormentation

Anyone who has ever wondered why the people attack the bourgeois press so hard during these uprisings should take note. Less than a week after the L.A. Rebellion quieted down, all of the local newspapers and TV stations were, to one degree or another, working with the police to help them identify "suspects" from the uprisings. While the media has so far balked at supplying unpublished photos and videotape, they have willingly turned over original copies of photos and tapes already made public – the police say they need the originals to get a clearer picture of people. In addition to working with a cooperative media in this effort, the FBI and local police have even staged a nighttime raid on an amateur photographer in order to confiscate videotape he made of the early hours of the rebellion. So far, the videotapes from the media have been used to arrest and charge four young Black men for beating a white truck driver in the early hours of the rebellion. These brothers, who now face state and federal charges, were arrested in a series of predawn raids by 200 police and FBI agents on their homes. If convicted, these brothers could spend the rest of their lives in jail. L.A.'s chief pig, Daryl Gates, donned a bullet proof vest and personally went out to arrest one of the young men.

The message from the system was sent but the people refused to accept it. The word on the street is definitely: "No Time, We Did No Crime!" In one Watts project, a member of the Bloods spoke about this situation. As he began to talk he nodded his head toward the wall behind us. The wall was covered with a huge mural and there was a list of dozens of names painted across the mural under the words "Gone but Not Forgotten." The Blood explained that these were the names of the people from the project who had been killed in the hood. He pointed to his grandfather's name while another young boy no older than ten ran up and pointed out his father's name. The Blood continued: "Look, it's all about we want Justice. That's all there is. And if there is another verdict or anything like the Rodney King thing then the riot is gonna be worsen. That's it. That's all it is. I look at these names up here and I know that there's a whole lot more who never have their names on that wall. This is only a few of our people who have been killed here. You know I hate to say that so many of these people

died for no reason, but a whole lot of them did, especially the ones that died cuz of gangbanging.

"But I think of one thing now and that is my life means nothing to me. I'm not afraid to lose it. I could give my life for the liberation of my people. My people been through enough tormentation, they been through enough hell from the white man to go through some more shit. Rodney King got his ass whipped on video and no justice was served. Know what I'm saying? Now some white motherfucker pulls up in a truck and starts talking shit to the Black man about Rodney King and gets his ass beat by the Black man. Now this motherfucker didn't get beat by billy clubs and Taser guns, he got his ass beat and it wasn't by no ten men either. Now a Black man ain't getting no justice, but when it comes to a white motherfucker it's in the house.

"Now let me say that if this shit goes down with the Eight Trays (the Crip gang accused in the beating of the white truck driver) then things are gonna happen all over, only worsen. I'm not stupid, I see what they are doing. A videotape wasn't good enough to put those cops in jail for beating on Rodney King but it is good enough to grab up the Black man for beating that truck driver.

"These young brothers are facing all that time and nobody even wants to talk about why the videotape evidence is so different and nobody wants to talk about how one of the people they say witnessed the whole thing is saying that the white man came out and said some things he shouldn't have said about Rodney King – some racist things about how Rodney King got what he deserved. This shit started a long time ago. I say I don't want to hear no shit about videotapes. Videotapes don't mean shit – right? Rodney King proved that. Look here, a white man ain't never been executed or sent to jail for doing something to a Black person. But Black people, we catch hell all the time cuz what they say Black people do to whites."

End of Part 1

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Part 2: Voices on the Edge

“The first time wasn't shit. That was just a little piece of cake. You just wait if this shit goes down with the four brothers from the Eight-Trays, then it gonna be the whole cake, nah man, then it's gonna be the whole damn catering business that we take down. We got the whole motherfucking catering business going.”

Truce

The neighborhoods in South Central are hot. The people are righteously angry and the situation stays tense. This is especially true in Watts, and even more so in the projects. We were in one of them, talking to two brothers – one Crip and one Blood. The brother was kneeling down taking care of his pigeons. He keeps them in a cage improvised out of wood scraps and milk crates. It was a trip – each of these young brothers had been stabbed, shot, beaten and thrown in jail. A month earlier they would have been trying to kill each other but now we were all standing together talking about the rebellion, the power of the oppressed and the road to revolution. The only tension came from the constant pig surveillance – they were riding four deep and shotguns up, and whenever they passed by it was real slow and real careful.

The brother from the Crips continued. He wanted to talk on the truce and what it meant to be a gangbanger and what it means now that the truce is in effect. "Look, we got together and we gonna stop this shit. We came together by ourselves. No motherfucker did for us, we, the Crips and the Bloods did for self. The Crips came with the Bloods and we said 'Look, why are we killing each other.' And nobody had the fucking answer. Know what I'm saying? I don't have no answer, I'm just a Crip cuz I wanna be a Crip. He a Blood cuz he wanna be a Blood. Now this is just stupid that we killing each other. We ain't got no answer for why we killing each other. We together as one now and didn't nobody think we could do this shit. We been kickin it together for two and a half weeks and ain't nobody tripped on nobody, ain't nobody had no fight with nobody and ain't been no gang violence."

The gang truce has been big news in L.A. There have been hundreds of unity meetings and parties over the last few weeks and each one has been attacked and broken up by the pigs, geared up for a war and guns drawn. This whole scene has been an out-front exposure of the LAPD and the powers that run them. For years they have been complaining about "gang violence" and then using it to carry out wholesale attacks on Black and Latino youth. The brother from the Bloods jumped in here. He had some definite thoughts on the truce. "Let me tell you how it is. We got to watch the police. The police is tricky, know what I'm saying? Let me tell you how this shit is kicking. They don't want to see us together. They'll try to kick it back off some kind of way. They send a bastard over here, some kind of agent ass motherfucker, know what I'm saying? Then this agent, he gonna shoot one of us and say some Crip set from way over there did it, they say the Crips done it. Or they might kill a Crip and say some Blood set done it. That cause floods up in people's brains!"

The rebellion brought on some major changes in these gangs. And it's not only a question of making peace with each other. For the first time some of these youth and other

gangsters are feeling challenged to look beyond their own hood and to take up the struggle against all oppression. It's a real mixed bag of ideas, but the struggle is live and the idea of revolution and how to do it is one major topic of debate. The brother from the Crips put out his ideas. "Now I think we need some real change and in a way I think the gangs can do it. In a way we are a revolutionary organization. We are something that is dominant over all – we are Black. Black Power is dominant over all. All I want is peace for the Black man. Now we can have war, if they want war we can have war. If we together as Crips and Bloods or Bloods and Crips then we dominate the police department. But we ain't out to do this. Now the police might come in here and kill a Blood and say 'What's up Cuzz?' like it was one of us that did it. Or they might come and kill us and say 'What's up Blood?' And what we gonna do. We got no choice, we got to believe it. Instead of us acting like Black people and coming over here and saying 'Man, which one of you all homeys done that and that?' – instead of that the homey's gonna come over here and trip. And they these Bloods over here gonna come back on us and retaliate. That's they obligation! That's what they supposed to do. We obligated to hold down our hood and they obligated to hold down their hood. But now we as one and we obligated to hold down each other's hood. We obligated to hold down each other period, know what I'm saying? Not as a gang, not as a set – but as Black people."

The Blood was trying to bring in one of his pigeons – a dark red one that he was working on mating with other colors. He had listened to the brother from the Crips and wanted to speak his piece before he left to catch a phone call. "You know the whole thing was when Latasha got killed (young Black woman killed by a Korean storeowner), then people was like we gonna wait and see what happens with Rodney. Then when we found out that Rodney didn't get no justice, then we felt we had to serve justice for ourselves. We had to make some noise to show we don't appreciate what shit is going on. We out here getting fucked over by the police every day and we can't just keep taking it. Man it's rough for us. We don't get no breaks. We already got it kinda hard over here in the hole and we don't need no police coming in and trying to ride us all the time. Look, we killing each other and then we got the LAPD coming up and killing us too. They the biggest damn gang in L.A. We in the projects – know what I'm saying? – everybody in the projects is like one big family and now it was just time for all of us to come together. We all know what time it is."

Real Education

When you drive south through L.A. you eventually end up in Watts. If you continue to drive south you come to Compton. People all over the world know about the city of Compton today because it's the home of NWA and the song that became an anthem of the L.A. Rebellion, "Fuck tha Police." It's a small town just hanging off the edge of Los Angeles. It's row after row of one-story, bungalow ghetto housing. It looks a lot like the black townships in South Africa. It's hardcore proletarian. Years ago Black people coming from L.A. had to stop at Compton city limits because it was a "whites only" stronghold. Today most of the people living in Compton are Black with a small and growing Latino population. The people in Compton were part of the L.A. Rebellion and the scene there is still very tense. Hundreds of heavily armed police broke up a gang unity party just about a week ago. Then, a few days later a Compton pig was given a mistrial when nine out of twelve jurors voted to acquit for the savage murder of two Samoan brothers last year. The Compton police and the LAPD were both put on tactical alert – the last step before calling an all-out mobilization – the night the mistrial was announced.

Two of the things that really marked the L.A. rebellion were how broadly it cut across the metropolitan area and how people from all nationalities actually took part in it. According to some of the statistics released from the L.A. courts, about 45 percent of the people arrested during the rebellion were Latinos and almost 14 percent were white. Compton was one of the areas where Latino youth enthusiastically took up the rebellion, and we had come there to talk with a Latino high school student who had taken part in the uprising. A broad smile crossed his face as he began his story. "My father is from Salvador and my mother is from Mexico, I came here from Salvador to L.A. since I was six years old and now I'm like fifteen years old. When I saw the verdict on the cops I just thought, No, this is too horrible. Those police, they need to be in jail. They beat Rodney King and it was even on video and they need to be in jail. It was too terrible what they did. It was so bad, man, I was in my room when I heard what happened and I got so mad I wanted to rip my pillow. These cops they supposed to be in jail. My mom agrees with me and so do my sisters. When we talk to people who say that the jury says they are innocent so they should not be in jail, I just say, 'No, you are wrong!' After the verdict my friends called me up and said, 'Hey, vato, come on let's go' and so we left.

"We went to school the next day and we found all of the people there arguing and some were even fighting. When people would say that there was some reason that the cops went free, my friends and me would just go to arguing with these people even if they were Black, white or Mexican. I got friends from every race and if they were wrong I would argue with them.

"You know in my school on the day after the riot started, it was cool in my school. There wasn't supposed to be school that day but we all came to school anyway. We came to school to talk about it, Everybody was mad and we were all over the school shouting 'Guilty, Guilty.' Some people in the school went and painted on the walls and set fire to the trash cans. People were writing 'Peace' and 'Guilty' on the walls. Some people say we went real crazy but I think we were real mad. Somebody brought a video to school – the video of Rodney King – and then somebody put it on the television and then everybody just started to break windows and everything. Then some people got so mad they broke the television. You know what, no cops came to the school either, they were too scared because there were so many of us. The cops came later and them and the security for the school made us take the writing off of the walls, put boards up on the windows and clean up the school. They suspended one of us because he stood up to the securities and said a whole bunch of things to them. They said they were making everybody who 'looked suspicious' clean up the school. When we got there they gave us paint and told us to go and paint the walls. I threw the paint on the floor and the security he took out his club and tried to hit me but he didn't.

"You know, after the school a whole bunch of us, we went from the school to other places. We went to the library and talked to all the people there and told them to come out and join us. Then we went all over the town to talk to people. Some people disagreed and we just left them but other people agreed with us and we told them to come with us. We went around the whole place and when we ran into some soldiers we told them to go. Some people said to leave the soldiers alone because they were just doing their job. But I said, 'No, they got to go. We don't want them here.'

"Now in our school things are getting cool. When people talk about the rioting then some of us agree and some of us disagree and there are a whole bunch of fights there. When

I met people with this newspaper and they gave me a whole bunch of papers, these RWs, I took them into the school to get to people. Some people got mad and ripped them up and I said, 'okay, later for them.' But other people read them and took them home for their parents to read. Some friends came and said they really liked this newspaper and they said to give them some more so they could get it to their friends and so I gave them some more. I brought mine home and I underlined and circled things I disagreed with but I pretty much agreed with everything I read. I talked with my friend about all of this and we said that all we want is freedom. That's what everybody wants is freedom. This is what we went to talk to people about. When we went back to school some of the teachers told us to just write what we thought about the Rodney King verdict. They told us to write what we felt and I was so angry I could have written a book. Me and some other we were so angry we were breaking our pencils on the paper. And some teachers agreed with us too. I'm still very angry!"

“Right on the Edge”

Reading the walls while driving through South Central Los Angeles today is like reading a book on the rebellion. In the space of about four blocks we passed by taggers with names like "No Fuckin! Limits." A few walls down someone spraypainted the names of the cops in the Rodney King case and drew a big red X over them. "Fuck tha Police" and "LAPD 187" (187 is the legal code for murder) are among the most common graffiti. In one part of South Central there's a sign on a corner advertising the stores in a mini-mall. One of the signs is a bright new announcement for a U.S. Armed Forces Recruiting Center. When you look past the sign there's nothing left but a pile of twisted metal and ash. If you turn right and drive down a few blocks there's one wall of a building left standing and "Shut 'Em Down! No Peace" is painted across it in large bright letters. A few walls away "It's Right to Rebel" and "No more Rodney Kings" stand out. In the middle of all this the police have taken up a pitifully stupid graffiti counteroffensive – crossing out some of the people's slogans and replacing them with things like "Fuck Rodney King."

We turned west off of the main street and parked the car. As we walked through the neighborhood we passed by people sitting out in their yards talking and sharing a few drinks with friends. We approached one run-down old building on a corner and I could hear an argument going on. I couldn't catch all of it but it seemed that the group of men sitting on old packing crates and broken chairs in front of this building were arguing about who killed Kennedy and what the CIA and FBI have done to people over the years. When I went up to talk with them and told them I was with the *Revolutionary Worker* they invited me to sit down and talk. They told me that they had just been discussing revolution before I came on the scene. They introduced themselves from left to right. They were all Black men ranging from 38 to 65 years old. They were homeless proletarians. One was a disabled steelworker, another was a mechanic who hadn't been able to get a job for 12 years. The youngest was a recently laid-off janitor while the oldest was a house painter who had done time on a chain gang in Louisiana. They all wanted to talk about the rebellion but decided that the disabled steelworker could tell the story and they would add on when they wanted to.

"I figure it all got started this way. See, it wasn't no surprise that these cops got off. Everybody already knew that them white guys was gonna get away with beating Rodney King up like that cause this isn't nothing no more than just another white man beating up another Black man and that's been going on in this city ever since I been here and I been here about 30 years. Did you see Gates. He knew those cops was gonna be not guilty – he looked like

he was about to go to laughing when he was giving that press conference. But he didn't know there was gonna be this rebellion like there was. And once it started, I do believe that Gates got the word that he couldn't stop it cause they would have to go out in the street and just start shooting people. They couldn't do that cause that look worse than Tienanmen Square over there in China or that Kent State up in Ohio years back.

"The police couldn't do anything to stop it. They was running up and down the street with their sirens on but they wasn't stopping nowhere, they was too scared. When I heard that verdict it made me sick. I didn't know what to do. I was in the hospital when I heard and I'll tell you the whole damn hospital was ready to explode. And, if you think what happened now was something, well you just wait and see what happens if they sentence them young guys they got in jail now for beating on that white truck driver. I'll tell you what, this time it won't be just youngsters out there. This time we'll be in it. We gonna get in it this time and we gonna make sure it's real organized this time. We'll take it all to those buildings downtown. Look, how come the videotape works for that white boy when he gets beat but it don't work for Rodney King. And that little sister, Latasha Harlins, the videotape didn't work for her either. You know what they saying to Black people? And I'm saying Black people but I mean especially the poor people – they say, 'Fuck all you poor motherfuckers!'

"Black people been the most oppressed in the country. And this was worse in the last twelve years ever since Ronald Reagan, and he wasn't nothing but a lap dog for the rich. Reagan and Bush done pushed the Black people all the way down. There ain't nothing for a Black man out here no more. I know what Ronald Reagan was about when he told them he was gonna have to cut school lunches and when he was asked what the kids gonna eat he said let 'em eat ketchup. He wasn't nothing else but a lap dog for the rich. George Bush ain't nothing but a lap dog. They all lap dogs for the rich.

"Look man, we are so depressed and so tired – we can't go out there and get a job and we want to work, I don't want to be like this, just sitting out here and having no work. But then you got these people come here from other countries and they set up business. We can't do that. And then these businesses like the Koreans, they just don't respect us. But I don't think it's the Koreans just cause they are Koreans, if you cut me and you cut the Korean who owns that store there we both gonna bleed red. We're both just human. But it's just not right the way they treat us. It's not right what that Korean store owner did to Latasha Harlins. That's just the way it is. I don't see no color.

"You know Black people only gonna get what they fight for. Nobody's gonna give nothing to us. And you know another damn thing, we got to get rid of these goddam churches you see all around here. They need to just stop building all these churches up and down these streets. They ain't teaching the people nothing. They just keep talking about going to heaven, but heaven is here and we got to deal here and they don't teach us nothing about this. And too many of these preachers just going to ride off with your money in his pocket. And the liquor stores, we got liquor stores on every corner. Only thing a person can do around here is get high. They say we'll put a liquor store there and keep them drunk, cause if we don't they might just think about what we doing to them.

"There you go! That's what we need to do but this kind of overthrow is hard. It's hard but it's needed and it's true. Now we can't overthrow them unless we all come together to do it. You know we get nothing but lies here in this country. Somebody is lying to us. They tell us

that America is the richest country in the world but from down here it looks pretty bad. They tell us they done won the Cold War but they ain't won nothing at all.

"Look here, there's a whole lot changing out here now. These youngsters around here – these gangbangers – now they gonna stop killing each other, they trying to get their shit together. But the police are not gonna let them get together, they riding around now backed up by the National Guard. Now as long as the youth quit killing each other and keep themselves together, people like me and everybody else ain't gonna let the police slaughter our young folks. I ain't got nothing left anyway, I'll die and go to hell first before I let them slaughter those young folks. It ain't got to be my son – every one of these young people around here is my son or my daughter. You know what happened here had to happen. The world had to see what was going on here. I was glad of it. All it took was a little tilt to set it off and, you know, it's right on the edge to go again and not only here but all over the United States. We ain't got nothing lo lose no more. We can't live it. We don't see no way out."

"No Time, We Did No Crime"

Around Florence and Normandie, the intersection made famous as the place where a white truck driver was beaten by Black youths in the opening hours of the rebellion, the people are defiant and proud of the rebellion. The pigs have stepped up the pressure on the people. In this neighborhood and a number of others they ride four cars at a time and four deep in the car – all armed to the teeth. They turn off the street lights and turn off their headlights to patrol the streets under the cover of darkness just like their racist South African soulmates in the black townships there.

All of this is justified in the name of attacking gangs. U.S. Attorney General Barr has given the official okay by announcing that the L.A. rebellion was nothing but young gangsters, so-called criminals and thugs. The powers in L.A. have just released their own study announcing that there are almost 1,000 gangs and 150,000 gang members in L.A. The study also revealed that 50 percent of all Black youth between the ages of 21 and 24 are listed in the L.A. police computers as gang members. What this means is that if you are a Black youth who wears baggy pants and hangs out with friends you are going to be listed by the LAPD as a gang member. One young brother told the LAPD that he was listed as a gang member and stopped by the LAPD about one hundred times in his life even though he was not a gang member and had never even been arrested.

This situation has sharpened up the polarization among the people. While the authorities are trying to paint the four young brothers they arrested for beating the white truck driver – the LA4 – as ruthless and vicious gangsters who deserve life in prison, the people in the hood see the whole thing different. The arrested youth have been held in maximum security, without bail for a week. Then, their bail, was set outrageously high, from \$50,000 to \$195,000. And when family, friends and supporters came up with bail for one of the youth, instead of letting him out of jail the federal government put a hold on him, saying he was wanted in another case.

The word on the street continues to be "No Time, We Did NO Crime." Two or three blocks into the neighborhood we ran into a carful of young sisters who had been down with the rebellion and were eager to tell their story.

"Now you see how the police coming back down here trying to act like they so bad and they can deal with us, they ain't scared. That's what they was doing when they arrested those four brothers last week. Daryl Gates, he down here showing how strong he thinks he is. But he's scared. You know what when he came to arrest those brothers he had to bring 200 police with him and he had to put on two bulletproof vests, not one but two. And before they did come in here at two o'clock in the morning, they still had to cut off all the electricity in the neighborhood and turn off all of the phone service for all the people around here. Yeah, man, Daryl Gates is a hard guy, the LAPD are real strong and brave."

"Look, I was down with what jumped off on April 29. I heard about it at work and I was just boiling. There's only seven of us Black people where I work and so while everybody else was voicing their opinions we got together to talk about it ourselves. We just couldn't believe this was happening but I think deep down inside I wasn't really surprised. I could see it when the trial started to get so technical. The video stood for itself but when they started going through it frame by frame I knew there was gonna be trouble. They kept saying 'well in this frame it don't look like they hit him in the head.' I said what, well how did he get all them fractures and injuries on his head? You don't get them kind of injuries by falling down, not unless you gonna lay there and just keep beating your own damn head on the concrete. This should have just been open and shut, same thing with Latasha Harlins. This was all to let us know that they don't care nothing about the minority life. They saying 'We don't care, kill them all.' But that's okay, our people can deal with this.

"I came home from work and walked right around to that corner and supported Rodney King. It wasn't just a Rodney King thing, it was a lot of things. It was that little Latasha and a whole lot of things. They going to continue to treat Black people like that if we continue to let them – that's what I was thinking. We are tired of it. We need change.

"They keep talking about how we burnt down all these stores and did some looting. Well don't nobody want to talk about what it is to be a mother with two children and trying to survive on \$695 a month. They put you on welfare and tell you that you can't have this and can't have that and then tell you that you got to live off of this \$695 each month. They want you to feed and clothe the children and have a decent place to live off of this. Look, everything is against the Black people. Even when you get a job you can't get nowhere in it. I been at my job for two years and I'm still where I started. A whole lot of positions came open and I asked for them but couldn't get them cause I'm Black. It all very unfair. But then they want you to come to work and smile and be happy and support their government and all. HA-HA-HA-HA – That's a joke, that's a damn joke.

"Look, when I came home from work on April 29 I went right out there to the corner to stand with my people. It was the first time in my life it felt great to be Black. I was standing out there with my people and saying loud that we're all together and we ain't gonna let them run us into the ground. Hey now, Fuck tha Police!"

End of Part 2

Shockwaves: Report from the L.A. Rebellion

Part 3: A Festival of the Oppressed

The old woman leaned across the porch rail to make her point. "I'm glad they raised up all this and I hope they raise some more hell. They gonna do it. I'll tell you one thing. They got the message over, yes sir! I was happy to see them rise up. And it ain't over. Now the police, they say they don't know what happen with all them guns. Well, they gonna know what happen, just wait." And with that she let out with a broad, broad smile and a roaring laugh that came from deep down inside.

Verdict in the Jungle

The sister's name is Z. and she lives in an L.A. neighborhood called "the Jungle." It's a dense collection of two- and three-story apartment buildings. The streets in the Jungle seem to wrap around one another. There's a hill to the rear of the Jungle and up on top of that hill are the homes of Black professionals. The neighborhoods on the other sides of the Jungle are home to some better-off Black workers and professionals. The Jungle originally got its name when it was a white neighborhood and the name came from all the trees and lush vegetation in the area. When the Jungle became a Black neighborhood the cops and the powers they work for gave the name a whole new racist definition and pushed the idea that the neighborhood was, as Z. put it, "full of heathens, savages and beasts." The truth is, the Jungle is poor, it's cramped and it's full of very angry Black proletarians these days.

Z. and her cousin F. are two young Black women. They grew up in the Jungle and Z. still lives there. They worked as clerical workers for department stores and banks. When we spoke they had been laid off and were looking for work and toying with the idea of trying to start their own business. They were in the heat and heart of the rebellion and one of the things that happened to them is that they have begun to really seek out and examine all kinds of programs for how to end the oppression and suffering of the people. Since the rebellion, F. keeps a pile of RWs, reflecting the revolutionary program, on her coffee table and a taped speech by Minister Farrakhan, reflecting the bourgeois nationalist program, in the tape deck.

F. began to talk about life in the Jungle. "They been killing our kids for years and getting away with it. They been stepping on Black people for years. Every Black person in America experiences racism and police brutality, every last one of us. It doesn't work like that for everybody else. It is disgusting. I have been pulled out of my car, thrown against my car, called bitch, told what the fuck am I doing – this, that and the other for them to come and find out that I'm the wrong person. They pulled over the wrong car. They don't apologize, they don't anything. They pulled guns on me and what can I do? Nothing, because the system is to protect them. And they supposed to protect me so what am I supposed to do. There's nothing I can do because nine times out of ten I can't even get a lawyer to take a case cuz they know it so hard to prove. This is sickening to me. And I'm not gonna let them come after my little son and treat him like this. I don't care what I gotta do, I'm gonna do it. I refuse to let this happen, to my son and I know that there is every chance of this happening to him because of his skin color, because he's Black and he's dark skinned and they are intimidated by that.

"You know in the Jungle they turn off the lights on certain streets and they roll four cars deep, filled with agents and provoking people. There's been no Black on Black crime. And

there ain't no gang violence. The media wants to say 'Is this truce really true?' Well I know it is cuz I was there. I saw a brother with a red rag hug and kiss a brother with a blue rag and say it's time to end this shit. We're tired of being like this. They programmed us for too long and what they don't realize is that they educated some of us along the way of oppressing us. That's why this riot was much worse for them. That's why this rebellion was much worse for them. And when they try to hang those four brothers, well, if they thought it was a riot before, it's really gonna be a riot then. We ain't going for it no more. The whole damn country gonna be shut down."

Z. cut in here, her voice was on fire: "Look, I saw the whole damn thing on TV and I felt sorry for that man. But the media only shows you what they want to show you. Now I don't believe in violence unless it is necessary. I don't believe in hurting innocent people. But when you have a war there are casualties and sometimes the innocent has to suffer. Okay, that's the bottom line. The police was at war with Rodney King and he was innocent and he suffered. So the same thing with this Reginald Denny thing. Now you know the media did not tell us that before they beat him he might have said something to the brothers. Now there are witnesses to this, there are people there who saw it all. Now they say he, come riding through the middle of a riot shouting 'Fuck Rodney King, he got what he deserve.' Oh no, that man is lucky to be alive. Now they got a fund for this man. Ain't nobody ever said nothing about a fund for Rodney King. Both instances were wrong but Rodney King did not provoke his beating.

"You know where I was when I first heard about the verdict. I was laying down in my bed asleep and when I heard the words not guilty on my TV I instantly woke up. It was a pain that went from the top of my head to the tip of my toes. It was a empty, hollow feeling. It was a rage inside of me, burning. I wanted to kill, I wanted to kill. When the Korean lady killed Latasha, we let it go to court. We said no, we got to deal with the system. It's on videotape and we know what happened and the system will take care. She went to court and the system say that's okay, it was just a little Black child and we know you won't do it again.

"Then with Rodney King, I think the reason why Black people were so upset and the reason why we didn't really fight when they said change of venue was because it was on video and we just knew – I mean, you know, it was just right there, it was on video and everybody seen it. I mean I don't care what Rodney King did – I mean if they really thought that he was coming at them and that they life was in danger then they should've shot him. To me that would have been much less painful than the way they beat that man. And to see that and to hear that verdict, I was enraged, I cried, there was tears in my eyes. I just hurt because I couldn't believe the system had let us down. And now, as a result, I do not believe in the judicial system. I do not believe in law enforcement. I do not believe in these so-called Congresspeople. I do not believe in any of that shit. And I will never believe in it cuz they showed me on April the 29th what America is made of.

"They showed me and I was enraged. I didn't realize that so many other Black people felt the same way I did. I didn't realize that people were out there on the streets immediately. I was like we gotta do something, we gotta do something. All I could think was we gotta vent, we gotta vent. So we went to the 'First Commercial AME' church. It's just a commercial church that's all about entertainers and being on TV and being commercial and all that old bullshit I'm not into. We go over there but we can't get in because they have crowds and stuff. So some of the people there start a march down the street. Then after awhile we started to go on

home. We're walking down the street and we start seeing that all these people are really angry. Buildings are being torn up and being set on fire, just people going stone cold, crazy mad.

Z. stopped for a moment and when she started talking again she was explaining how she and her cousin had tried to hold their own press conference in the Jungle. She talked about how they had written speeches and announced the conference but none of the press came to hear them. She talked about how angry the lies of the media made her. "This was what was going on. And for all those news media who sit and say look at these heathens, look at these animals, look at these savages, look at these hoodlums – the hoodlums are those twelve goddam jurors who set those four fucking thugs free. Those are the hoodlums and thugs. Now you want to talk about hoodlums and thugs, let's break this shit on down. Put me on the news so I can break it down to you. I want to go one on one with some of these newspeople cuz I got something to tell them. You don't call my people heathens and animals cuz if we go back through history we'll see who the heathen and animal is. This goes back to the beginning. And it's not only us, we talking about what they did to the Indians, the Jews, the Spanish and everybody. So if they want to call somebody a goddam heathen they better look in the mirror cuz they talking to themselves. Now this is what we were seeing on TV and that made us even angrier I was ready to die those three days. People out in the streets did things that the average person would say 'my god, did they really do that?' People didn't care cause that's how much of a rage we were in.

"The police are scared right now. They're real worried right now about all those weapons they use against us being turned around and used on them. I go walking all the time and I live in the Jungle. I see six and seven carloads of police on one block and then they have one car on the other block and one car on the next block watching their back. They say they driving through trying to find where the guns are. They're trying to intimidate, they turn off the lights at a certain time of night and then drive through cuz they scared to do it in the light, you know, just like the Klan. They do this block by block every day. Let them keep coming in the Jungle and talking shit, they gonna have to deal with the brothers soon. Yesterday me and my sister was driving through the Jungle and we saw the cops arresting this brother. My sister yells out to leave the brother alone. And the cops turn and say 'Shut up nigger, that's what you guy's problem is now.'"

F. got up and stood behind her chair. As she spoke she hit the back of the chair with her fist to emphasize her point. "We are sick and tired of this. And we are sick and tired of the Black people who are scared to fight for their rights. We have to come together, we have to not be scared to say something. We can only do it together, we cannot do it separate. And we're not saying people of other races don't come and join us. We're saying everybody who is down for the same cause get out here and join us. They trying to say to everybody in the world that they have everything under control and that it is all over now. Everywhere I call people are like saying so it all over, everything's done. I'm like, 'No, I'm still out there. It's not over till the fat lady sings.'

"On Sunday night alone we saw seven instances of the police pulling brothers over. They was on every other corner and the brothers were on their knees and their arms were over their heads. Some brothers were trying to protect their head with their arms cuz they was scared they gonna be shot. It's time for us to say if we got to die for what we believe in, so be it. It's not gonna change if we don't and we're already dead, we can't get no lower than we are. We

have to say we're tired."

Z. stood and joined F. and with a smile she closed out the conversation. "Our attitude in the neighborhood is Fuck tha Police. That's our national anthem in 1992."

A Strong Power

There was nothing but crumbling concrete and ash on the four corners of the intersection. The neighborhood was home for Black and Latino people. It's one of the barricaded zones in the city – areas where police barricades have been set up against the masses as part of the so-called "war on drugs." The brother who had come to help me with translations had grown up in the neighborhood. He was a student at one of the local universities now and he was anxious to return home and talk with his neighbors about the rebellion. There's a lot of immigrants in the neighborhood and people are careful about what they say in public. La Migra and the LAPD are constant threats. There is also a lot of discussion and debate going on – especially among the immigrants – over whether the rebellion was a good thing and whether it accomplished very much. There is also quite a bit of seething anger in the area.

One of the first people we spoke with was a young Mexican immigrant on his way to cash his paycheck at one of the local markets. Cop sirens constantly wailed in the background and a helicopter occasionally hovered overhead as the brother talked. "The verdict was wrong and the people went out to get vengeance against the verdict. The problem is that I don't know if much was accomplished and changed. I think it was really good that this rebellion brought Latinos and Blacks together to fight against the system. And it was good to tell the system that we will fight back if they keep doing this to us.

"I come from Mexico and I work as a wood assembler in a factory. I left Mexico four years ago. I came to this country and thought I would find things peaceful and tranquil but I have found things very different. Sometimes things are calm here but most of the time there are problems. I came here expecting some good life and I found that I cannot make enough money and I always have to be working and I can't have a good life. Right now I am only making \$6/hour. I came here thinking that I would be here to make money and then be able to return to my home in Mexico. But I can't do that, I am stuck here now.

"Like a lot of other people I was very angry when I heard of the verdict for the police in the Rodney King case. I realized that the people in power are really trying to keep the majority of the people of color down. But what this rebellion was showing was the unity of many people together. This is one way that we can show the powers-that-be that we can act against them. As long as they have the power and we don't, then we will keep losing."

I cut in here to talk with the brother about what the rebellion really did accomplish and how things were never going to fundamentally change without a revolution led by the proletariat of all nationalities. We talked about how this revolution will be made and what the rebellion has to do with bringing us closer to the day we can go all the way over.

The brother continued on. "I agree with you very much. When we were united it showed our power and as long as we are united we cannot be defeated. I went out on that night and I saw so many people fighting and doing things to show their anger. I spent most of

my time with my friends. I sensed a strong power in my unity with my friends and with all of the other people who were out here that night. We stayed out and didn't return to our homes. The first thing that came to my mind when I heard the verdict was anger and that made me want to go outside and be with my friends. When I was with my friends the first thing we did was try to reason about the verdict. We tried to understand why the verdict was not guilty. We immediately knew that the people had to go out for vengeance for what the police had done. Our group of friends, we decided that we should show that we won't tolerate what happened to Rodney King because we don't want it happening to other people from our community or from other communities."

Watching California Burn

"I thought that verdict was awful. I got angry but didn't do nothing about it. They have a guilty verdict for the Black and the Spanish people but they don't have a guilty verdict for the white people – they can do anything they wants to. I will speak out against that and I'm not ashamed to say it. I tell them I don't hate nobody but I don't like what went on"

The speaker was an 83-year-old Black proletarian woman. We had met her by accident. One of the OGs (Original Gangsters – someone who had run with a set in his younger days and who was generally well known and respected throughout his neighborhood) had sent us down to an alley to meet with some of the youth in the area. On the way to the alley we cut across one of the barricades set up by the powers in L.A.

A Mexican woman was sitting on the porch of a tiny, weather-beaten house inside the barricaded zone. She was watching her young kids as they played on the sidewalk in front of the house. When we spoke with her she told us that she was going to bring another woman from the house out to talk, a woman who spoke and understood English. She was gone before we could say we spoke Spanish. In a few minutes this older, Black sister was out on the porch. Immediately the kids climbed up onto her large lap to hug and kiss her. The Black woman explained that this was her family. The parents had come to her when they got married and needed a place to stay. That was thirteen years ago. She explained that the Latina sister we had met stayed home to take care of the children and the husband worked in a garment factory. The old woman told us that she had worked for the gas company herself and then had become a housekeeper. She hadn't worked for about twelve years now. Talking about how she and the Latino family had become family themselves got the sister onto the subject of the rich and the poor in this country. "You know if you read your bible, the bible says that the government and the law is crooked. That's what the bible says. Now they want to do them Black men but they don't want to do them white boys. If they don't let them guys out there's gonna be another one. I told them that way before this one blow. I say there's gonna be war right here in the United States. I say that all the time. And we don't have no president and we don't have nothing up there in Washington. All they is doing is money grabbing. They don't care about the little person."

As we spoke the sister let us know that she had no great love for America and the oppression it brought down on people. At the same time, she had a real mixed bag of views – everything from religion to voting – about how to change things. But her heart was firmly planted among the people, the proletarians of all nationalities and the other oppressed people who rose up in rebellion.

"I thought they was right and I still say they was right. And I still say they gonna do some more too and I'm gonna be with them when they do. I can't get out there and do it but I can be right joyous about what they did. People ask me wasn't you scared and I tell them no I wasn't scared. What am I gonna be scared for, they wasn't bothering me. No, they was picking on somebody else. Before the verdict, before they even got halfway through the trial – when they first got on there and I seen the way it was going when they first opened up, I said they gonna let them dogs walk. I say if they let them walk then everybody better start to running. People asked me where you going. I say I ain't going no place, I'm gonna sit right here and see them burn down California.

"The whole world seen what was happening to Rodney King. And they caught another one on tape where they was beating up on people. Did you see that yesterday? I say I don't believe this here. This has been happening – and God gonna let it run on – you see they been sweeping this up under the covers. They wasn't paying no attention when people told them but when this guy take this tape, well, tape don't lie. You know, they put everything against King to try to keep him from talking. But you know, they messed him up, they really messed him up. I felt so sorry for him I cried when I saw him on TV. I told the people burn some more. And I laughed when I saw that girl say 'we ain't through, burn baby burn!' I said that was good!"

The old woman loved the rebellion and she loved the people. And she wasn't hesitant at all about upholding the uprising or knocking down any backward fools she had come up against. The rebellion had clearly made the sister feel stronger and bolder. "I was at a doctor's office about a week ago today. A white guy was in there too, he goes to the same doctor I go to. Now he gonna try to put the Latinos and Black people down. And when I got through with him, baby, everybody got shy. The doctor laughed and told me I better watch myself cause I could get killed and I told her they can kill the person but they can't kill the soul. I say long as I can open my mouth I'm gonna talk, especially when somebody racist. What he said got me shook up, you know like that old song, 'I'm All Shook Up.' And when he did one of my people was sitting right beside me. Boy, everybody got quiet in that office. And I say to him like this, 'I'm gonna tell you, that's what's a matter with you white people. Who do you think you is? Really, who do you think you is. Don't you know you ain't nothing. I am somebody. What are you? A big old piece of dirt just like I am. God made you out of dirt just like he made me. Now do you think you any better than I am. Surely I'm better cuz I got a better heart than you has. You don't have no heart. All you think is cuz your skin white and mine Black, you somebody. But you not.' Now everybody say lord how you talk, ain't you scared? What am I scared of? I am not scared of nobody. Now that man say oh lady I didn't mean it. I said yes you did, you meant exactly what you said."

When it was time to go the old woman leaned across the porch rail to make her point. "I'm glad they raised up all this and I hope they raise some more hell. They gonna do it. And I hope all us Latinos and Blacks get together. I'll tell you one thing, they got the message over. They got the message over, yes sir! I was happy to see them rise up. And it ain't over. They said it ain't over. And now the police, they say they don't know what happen with all them guns. Well they gonna know what happen, just wait." And with that she let out with a broad, broad smile and a roaring laugh that came from deep down inside. Her laugh shock her entire body and then rolled on down the block, bouncing off houses and lighting up the street. With that great laugh the sister brought home a real sense of what it means to have a festival of the oppressed. End of Part 3

Shockwaves: Report from the L.A. Rebellion

Part 4: Rage from Below

It was a warm, sunny afternoon when we walked through the neighborhood to get a feeling for one of the main flashpoints in the beginning of the L.A. Rebellion. We were in the neighborhood around the intersection of Florence and Normandie. By now everyone in the country has heard of these two streets. But what people have heard through the TV and mainstream press is a pack of vicious lies. As part of attacking the rebellion the national media has launched a fascist campaign painting the people in this neighborhood as brutal and savage hoodlums, mindless thugs and criminals whose rebellion had nothing to do with oppression and injustice.

The sisters and brothers in the area were eager to talk. Everyone had a story about the rebellion – the days of fighting with the powers that gave people a taste of freedom and a feeling that what they were doing really mattered. And out of those stories came a true portrait of the people and a clear vision of who are the real thugs and savage criminals in this society.

Verdict On The System

One of the first people we ran into was a young woman standing in front of her house. Her 15-year-old son had been shot to death in the rebellion. He was standing in the yard of his father's house when he was hit by an "unknown gunman." The sister's voice shook as she told her story.

"When I heard about the verdict I knew there was gonna be a Civil War. My fifteen-year-old son was standing out in the yard with his father just watching people, and then somebody came by shooting and now he's dead. Fifteen years old and he's dead. They tried to get him to the hospital but wouldn't no police or ambulance or nothing come out to get him. His father ran down the street with him and started beating on a fire house door but they wouldn't come out. There were three people killed right there. I was scared for my family, I tried to keep them safe. I'm just so mad. And I get madder when I think about Rodney King when he come out and start whining about how people should stop and all. Rodney King should've never said that. He should've stayed with the people. He should've said, 'You all helped me and now you keep on helping me.' That's right! It all boils down to justice. People shouldn't be tripping just cuz the colors of their skins. Underneath we all the same. But why can't we be treated the same, why can't we all be equal."

The sister stopped midway through the discussion. Her eyes watered up and she started to cry. Her other son came over to comfort her and put out his views. "I was mad. We was at the park and this lady came up and told us what happened. She was going crazy. She was an old lady and she was walking around yelling, 'It's fucked up, it's fucked up!' We was like, 'yeah, it is fucked up!' Now police cars was out there riding by and all and some people got to throwing rocks. Then people went down to the stores. People went on every store and I heard some people even went and hit the gun stores too. People was mad. It was fucked up what the police did. And now they come and arrest Twan and them, the ones they arrested for beating on that white man – that's fucked up too. First they beat Rodney King half to death

and now they arrest these brothers. That just shows there ain't no justice, they still beating on Black people. The system, the whole system is just fucked up! This whole system is just saying fuck all you Black people, that's what it saying to me."

Crossing The Line

There are two completely different and sharply divided worlds in Los Angeles. UCLA, a relatively privileged university, sits smack in the middle of one of those worlds. You can almost throw a stone from the campus into the mansions of Bel Air and Beverly Hills. If you are part of this world you can actually fall asleep on a public lawn and not worry about ending up in jail or dead. In fact, if you play by the rules of the system, you never even have to see the other world, let alone live in it. But the people in the other world – the world of the oppressed – don't always play by the system's rules. And when these brothers and sisters break the rules, they have a tremendous influence on some of the people in the more privileged world – especially on progressive and revolutionary-minded students but also in terms of moving many others to stand with the oppressed.

The L.A. Rebellion had this kind of effect on many students at UCLA. A couple of weeks after the rebellion I sat at a picnic table on Bruin Walk talking with a young white student about the rebellion. "The verdict was kind of the match that lit the flame and then the whole city burnt down. But it wasn't just that one incident, it was years of bad policies. When I heard the verdict I was outraged and I knew other people would be outraged. And I knew that the police were supposedly ready to respond to something like this. But I didn't know how big it was gonna get and I had no clue that the police were going to respond in the way that they did. I was outraged by it and had to do something.

"A bunch of my friends from the Free Speech Movement, the Radical Students Alliance and the African Student Union came out early on Thursday morning and organized a big rally. It got really big and there were a lot of different speakers there. Afterwards, we moved up to Murphy Hall, the administration building, and then we found out that school was canceled for Friday, the next day. We tried to mobilize and decide what we were going to do from there.

"On Friday I drove down into South Central during the day. I drove around with a bunch of my friends and checked it out for myself. We drove around and then stopped and tried to help clean things up. We wanted to get a feel for ourselves about what was going on. We were really upset about the media's portrayal of the whole thing. They tried to portray it as social deviants and thugs out committing random acts of violence. And I thought it was more the beginning of a revolution. It's just different words that they use and different selective things that they say. Like they call it looting and I was thinking more along the lines of economic redistribution. I mean I was thinking revolution and things like that and I was really disappointed with the establishment-sided media. But I guess I shouldn't have expected anything different since we all know that the media is part of the establishment.

"But driving through South Central I got my own perspective of it all and saw it from a completely different angle. I stopped and talked to some of the people. I was worried that people might think it was a slap in the face for me to go down there, you know, a white guy from a privileged school on the west side. But I was hoping that people could kind of see through my skin color. So I drove down there anyway and when I was driving through Compton some people were throwing things at my car. I got out of the car at different places

and talked to people about it. People in the community had all kinds of feelings about what was happening. Some people were disgusted that it had to come to this. But if you make people angry enough and if you lock them in a cell long enough they are going to burn down their own cells. A lot of people had that kind of opinion.

"We saw an incredible police presence when we were driving around on Friday. But the Parker Center was the biggest military presence we saw. On Saturday we went down to the Parker Center. After we heard that the First AME Church had called off the rally we decided to go down anyway. We came here to UCLA on Saturday morning to figure out what we were all going to do. We were planning on going down to the Parker Center but then we were told that the rally down there was called off by the First AME Church. But we were going to go down there anyway just to have our voices heard and see what was going on.

"When we went down there we were met by an incredible amount of force on the streets – everything from National Guard to police, sheriffs, DEA people, INS and Border Patrol. Anybody who had a gun and a badge was down there out on the streets. They were telling us that we couldn't stand on the corner with our protest signs so that was when we got into our rights – freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. We kind of got in their face a little bit and said that this was a blatant violation of our Bill of Rights. So they said to us that, 'You can practice your freedom of speech but not today. You can practice your right to assemble but you will be arrested for it.'"

Words From Watts

Watts is one of the centers of the other world in L.A., the world of the oppressed nationalities and especially of the proletarians from those nationalities. There's none of the glitter, lights and wealth that stands out in so many other parts of the city. Most of Watts is just stone poor – so poor you can feel it. The little stucco, single homes look like they might have been modeled after the matchbox homes in the black townships of South Africa. And Watts is flat. It's way down flat so it almost looks like the downpressing from the system has shaped the physical design of the community. Even the planes coming in low over Century Boulevard as they head for a landing at the airport emphasize this kind of flatness.

Watts Towers stand in the midst of all this flatness. In a neighborhood where tagging and graffiti decorate every surface, the Watts Towers remain clean. I've been told that the people in Watts love the Towers. On one level it's a work of art sitting in the middle of a field in the ghetto. It's a series of towers and other structures made of concrete, metal and bits and pieces of glass, ceramic tiles and dinnerware. It was built over the course of 33 years by an Italian immigrant who worked as a construction worker by day and as a sculptor by night. Today the Watts Towers stand as a symbol of the defiance of the people of Watts. Its 100-foot-tall tower punches up through the flatness like a fist. It's a fitting symbol of people who refuse to be crushed under oppression and who have risen up in a powerful rebellion.

It's this kind of defiance that characterizes many of the streets in Watts as a result of the rebellion. It's a defiance where people are not only walking proud – even in the face of constant and heavy police repression – but where they feel a real necessity to get into some pretty heavy questions. The streets are dotted with knots of people and no matter who you talk to it doesn't take long before they start summing up the rebellion, digging into what was

behind it and trying to figure out where to go from here.

In a neighborhood about a mile from Watts Towers I met a woman sitting on a curb reading some medical texts. She told me she was a teacher's aide in a school and that she had been injured on the job last year. She lost her job because her injury meant she couldn't go to work for a while but she also couldn't afford to get a doctor to verify that. The sister said that when it came time to hold a hearing over her absences from work the city showed up with an X-ray showing that she had no injury. The only problem was the sister had never gone to a doctor and had never had an X-ray taken. But no one would listen to her and so she was fired. She was reading the texts to try to figure what might be wrong with her back.

When I explained that I was a reporter for the RW and why I wanted to talk with her, she put away her texts and jumped into her assessment of the rebellion and the types of things it had brought up in her mind. "I heard the verdict on the TV. I was by myself at home when I heard it and I just felt kind of numb all over. I felt the case was sort of the end. It just doesn't matter who is right and who is wrong anymore. It just doesn't make too much sense to me. I didn't like the verdict but I think it isn't the first time a verdict come out and hasn't been right. It showed me, though, that it isn't what you do but who you are and who doesn't like you that determines if you spend time in jail. I feel poor people spend the time in jail because poor people cannot afford justice because justice is very expensive. They say that it is free and that's a lie. When you don't have any money, everybody tells you a whole lot of bullshit.

"In this system we are set up to fail. Everybody is set up against one another. This is the situation with health care, this is the situation with schools – everybody is pitted against each other. And it has nothing to do with the next guy, it's how the system is set up. If people don't have some direction and some firm footage about where they going then it's going to be a hell of a problem. Everybody is supposed to be out for self cause it's god bless the child that has its own. There's this kind of elusive thing and they dangle it in front of you but you can't get it and nobody gets out of this world alive. You know damn well nobody gets out of the world alive, but you don't have to screw people up before they are 18 and they can't take dare of themselves cause they are running after this dream. This is what I call a real screwing by the corporate America.

"Like with the police and the gangs – who sets up all this shit and who benefits? To me what they are saying is they just want to kill off all the Black males. And then when they kill off all the Black males they say that the Black women are domineering, they're bossy they're aggressive – they are all these things. And they say we should have a man at home. Well, how the hell you gonna have a man at home when there is none? And if you got nobody to take care of you, what can you do but take care of yourself? I think they trying to kill off our whole race. I just don't believe that the powers that be have all this happening by accident. I don't know who is behind it all, but I just don't feel as though it is all an accident. I don't know what is making it happen, but I do know it hurts like hell."

Quick Response

The wall to the side of the abandoned building had "It's a Black Thang 1965 - 1992" spraypainted in foot-high blue letters. This was Crip territory, and youth who ran with the local set were hanging out in the doorway of the abandoned building. When I approached them the youngest in the group, a guy about 13 years old, tried to shine me on by shouting, "Fuck that,

man – what's it gonna get for me?"

There's no being shy about struggle and debate in this neighborhood. Before the young brother could finish his sentence another brother a few years older jumped in to set him straight. "Nah man, fuck the verdict, not fuck Rodney King. You got to look at that man. It's fucked up to say what you saying. I saw the verdict about four o'clock and I was mad. I mean, you know how they do it. A brother gets his ass whipped on film – man, all you got to do is watch the film. I was in the house when I heard that verdict. My moms was in the other room crying and all and then I saw my boys out on Florence and Normandie and they was just tearing shit up. I knew what I had to do."

The 13-year-old who had first tried to dis the whole thing now wanted to say his piece. "Why you think they put that thing in Simi Valley anyway. Them motherfuckers was from Simi Valley anyway. Why anybody think they gonna convict them anyway. That's like me beating the fuck out of a white boy and then getting my homeboys right here to be the jury for me. What kind of shit is that."

Waking Up

Concrete mixers and tools used by a bricklayer's laborer were stashed in one corner of the yard. A 1972 Ford sat in the street out in front of the house – the hood was open and wrenches were scattered on the ground. An old dog came down off the porch and stood growling at the gate as I approached. Three youths were sitting on the porch having a pretty lively discussion. One of them came down, grabbed the dog and invited me to join them on the porch. They explained they had just been talking about how the rebellion could have been done a little different. They were trying to figure out how they could take on the enemy in even more powerful ways. They explained that they weren't real sure how much things had changed after the rebellion but that they had definitely learned a lot themselves about what Amerikkka means.

The brother who lived at the tiny house did the talking. "I'm 19 and I been working as security on the other side of town. I live here with my grandfather, my mom, my brother and my sister. When I heard the verdict I was here just kicking it on the porch. My grandfather had the radio on in his car and when they came on and said that the verdict was 'not guilty,' I couldn't believe it. When they said 'not guilty,' it was over. It wasn't right, it just wasn't right. I said I know we ain't got no justice now, I know we ain't got no kind of justice. I know we don't got no rights or nothing.

"I didn't want to believe it at first. I thought that at least some kind of justice would come out of this case. But it didn't and it made me so mad. I didn't know what to do when I heard the verdict, I was in a state of shock. When we heard what went down we just decided to roll. We went rolling and the first place we went to check was Florence and Normandie where they said everything was happening.

"This whole thing made all of us minorities come closer together. We're waking up. I had to go to work the next day and there wasn't nothing going on there. But I know if there was something going on I wouldn't be out there to protect that property by going against the people. I grew up in Watts and I got to say it's hard to do that. I go out of Watts now with my job and I see that Watts is real different, it's real different than some other parts of L.A. that I

work in. Now I'd like to live in these nice places sometime but I wouldn't want to sell out my people to do it. I just wish there could be some kind of equality. It's bad now."

Rained Out

We were sitting on a bench at a bus stop. The brother had been waiting for almost an hour. He was getting worried because he was due at work at six and it was getting pretty close. He explained that he worked with the homeless in downtown L.A. He said he had been homeless himself a few years back and so he knew what the scene was. He explained that he had been sent to prison for a crime he never committed and so he had three years to sit and think about the society and what goes on in it. He said prison made him wake up and see what this society is doing to the people and it made him want to dedicate his life to working with homeless people once he got out.

"The Rodney King verdict – I found it not to be a surprise to me at all. Number one, when they transferred the trial to Simi Valley, I knew then that they was gonna bring back an innocent verdict on all counts. You don't take a trial into Ku Klux Klan country and expect to find another Klansman guilty. It just don't work. And if any Black man or woman in America think that it could have been a guilty verdict there in Simi Valley, they is stuck on stupid.

"This riot was not about Rodney King. It was about oppression, it was about oppression of not just Black people but people in general. There are white people who are being oppressed due to economic depression. These problems have built up to be so catastrophic that the only way to vent them is to find a crutch and Rodney King happened to be a crutch for the depressed and oppressed people of America. That's why it rained out – not just here in America, but in Canada as well.

"Now, as I see it, the aftermath is asking 'well, what caused it.' Well, what caused it is a bunch of Rodney Kings added to the economic conditions that it is in America and the treatment that is being given out to the people by the people they put in office to treat them differently. Society itself is starting to rain out. This was the people's voice."

End of Part 4

Shockwaves: Report from the L.A. Rebellion

Part 5: Comin' Up Hard in the Hood

It seems like there's a church on every corner in Watts. It's mainly little storefront churches that sit empty most of the week. But on Sundays the walls of these churches throb to the sound of packed-in congregations belting out gospel music. But there is one corner in Watts that doesn't have anything to do with a church. When you get to the intersection of Imperial Highway and Success Avenue you've arrived at one of the hardest places in hell. This is one of the boundary intersections for Nickerson Gardens, a project that the powers and their police consider straight-up enemy territory. Nickerson was one of the places that drove the *L.A. Times* slackjawed as it described a war zone and over a hundred rounds of gunfire exchanged with the police on the opening night of the L.A. Rebellion.

Nickerson Gardens is cinder-block style housing pounded onto rock-hard dirt and then covered up with a couple of coats of paint, the kind that only comes in dull and flat institutional colors. This is home for more than a thousand bottomline poor proletarians. Most of these folks are people who got nothing to sell but their ability and desire to work. These days there just aren't too many buyers. Only a small fraction of the people who live in Nickerson Gardens are employed proletarians, the vast majority of people are unemployed and only manage to survive by relying on welfare or taking part in the underground economy. When I walked into Nickerson I knew that these were our people.

I had arranged to meet T., a brother in his early 30s, just outside the Nickerson gym. T. had grown up in Nickerson, his father had raised him and his seven brothers and sisters in the project from the time they were little babies. Now it was just him and his brother left there. T. knows the projects and the people in them. He wanted to make sure that other people – readers of the RW – get a taste of the truth about Nickerson Gardens so he offered to show me around and introduce me to some of his friends.

We headed off across a narrow dirt path that cut between a couple of project buildings. As we walked to meet our first appointment, T. talked some about growing up in Nickerson. "It was hard growing up around here. It was hard and fucked up in a lot of ways. You really got to earn respect when you grow up around here. You got to fight and shit, you got to know what the divisions are, where you can go and where you can't go and who you got to stay away from.

"You all the time seeing shit like people laying dead on the dirt. I used to walk out my front door and find them laying dead right there. That was the junkies. I remember the first time I come across one. I was about twelve years old and come out my front door and there he was, just laying there. He OD'ed in the night and somebody come by and throw this raggedy-ass old sheet over him but you could see him."

"With My People"

We turned around a corner and off of the path into one of the parking lots that sit in front of the project buildings. Before T. finished his story a midnight blue car with dark tinted

windows slowly pulled up next to us. We walked a few more steps and stopped. The car door opened and T. introduced me to P., a long-time friend who wanted to talk a little.

"I been living here 27 years – I grew up here. You know what the rebellion was about? It was about oppression. I see oppression through my eyes as more or less taking all this bullshit off of these so-called law enforcement officers. You know since the riot the gang violence totally went down but there ain't been no comments on that. The crime wave gone down but there ain't been no comment on that. Since 1972 on down the people here in Nickerson Gardens ain't been able to go to Jordan Downs (another project), Jordan Downs wasn't able to come here and same with Imperial Courts. Now it's an all-together thing. But the law don't want to see this. They see Crips and Bloods getting together and they don't like it. In my opinion, I think it's these off-duty police officers that going around doing these drive-bys that they say is still going on.

"I'm down with my people and whatever they do. I'm with my people. You know the cops wouldn't come in here when all the rioting was going on. They knew not to come in here cuz the focal point was on their ass, everything was turned against their ass. It looked good to me. All over the city it looked like Black people, some whites, Hispanics, Asians coming together cuz they tired of all this bullshit that going on around here.

"You know they treat us like we some goddamn pop tarts or something. We didn't just pop up no goddamn way no how. We ain't no pieces of toast, we didn't just pop up out of the toaster. Man, we been here for years, for a long time. Our ancestors was brought over here in shackles and chains and then we, Black people, we done built this motherfucker up. Now see Black folks starting to get their knowledge about white folks. White folks see Black folks starting to get themselves together and they start trying to beat their ass back down into the toaster.

"It's like I thought about that war over there in the Persian Gulf. They didn't have no business going over there to fight them people. That was their shit and America didn't have no business going over there to fight them. The only reason they went over there was – I think deep down in my heart – them people over there in the Middle East is Black. They straight up Black as far as I'm concerned. And then everybody on that frontline over there was Black too. You know they just use us Black people as guinea pigs. They stick our ass on the front lines over there in the Middle East to get beat up and then get the shit beat out of us when we get back over here like with Rodney King.

"When I heard that verdict all I could think of was that here you got the video over here and then they telling you that what you see on the video is not what you see. I heard about the verdict when I was at work. I work at one of the biggest factories in this area, and when I heard it, anger came down in my head. I just wanted to go out and beat the shit out of somebody. I came back here after work and it looked like a damn football game back here, all these people in huddles all over the place. All kinds of people was out in the street. There was just this one police car patrolling in here then – they must have been rookies cuz wouldn't no other cops come in here. They knew better. They knew not to fuck with nobody.

"I want to say something about these Black cops out here. They so dumb and stupid – they riding around in a car with a white boy who might be a sergeant or lieutenant or something or whatever and they feel that they got to impress him. Now all along they don't

know that when something jump off people gonna go after their ass just like the white folks. I was pulled over about three weeks ago and the one driving the car was a Black guy. He pulled me over cuz my music was loud. He pulled me over and told me to put my hands up. I had my hands up and the motherfucker pulls his gun out. I said, 'hey, hey, wait a minute, what's all this for?' He say, 'I'll shoot you, man, I'll shoot you.' I said 'Man, I ain't got no gun or nothing. 'He say, 'I will shoot you.' Now these Black cops, they just so dumb and stupid. Motherfuckers be talking about 'my job, my job.' Their motherfucking damn job gonna get their ass hit by the people. These goddam cops keep fucking around with people trying to get their shit together and they ain't gonna just have a job, they gonna fuck around and get an adventure."

Home Court Advantage

T. had set up for me to meet with a few other people in another part of the projects. It was about a ten-minute walk and involved all kinds of shortcuts and cut throughs. It was a beautiful day and so dozens of people were out in back of their places barbecuing in an old steel drum. The drum was cut in half lengthwise so that the bottom half held the coals and the grill while the top half served as a hinged cover. At one point we crossed a sidewalk that was cut off from the street outside the project by a large wrought-iron fence. This was definitely a prison camp fence – the top of the fence was sharp spikes turned in towards the project as if to keep the people imprisoned. T. laughed when I asked him about the fence. He said the powers had also put up the fence because every time the police tried to snatch somebody off the street they would just run into the project and disappear. T. swept his arm out in front of him and talked about the projects belonging to the people and how the people know every nook and cranny there is inside Nickerson Gardens and can disappear for however long they want. T. looked back at the fence and let out a defiant laugh as he explained that the fence didn't seem to stop the young folks in the project anyway since he had heard a number of stories about people just cutting a hole across the fence to get in and out.

I had spent a little time in Nickerson and Imperial Courts, another big project in Watts, and I was telling T. how it seemed that no matter which project I was in, I was always running into someone who had a relative or close friend killed by the police. As we walked T. talked a little more about coming up in Nickerson. "When I was coming up the police, they mainly got their ass whipped a lot of times. People older than me was ambushing them, making fake calls and then ambushing them when they would come out. Everybody in the projects knew about this. Everybody knew the police was getting their ass blown up. Now the police, they hit back. I mean they was always coming here after a while and fucking with people. I remember they was in here on horses one time and all these cops started to beat up one brother and then a sister jumped in to try to stop them and they started to beat on her with they guns. That night people was walking around the project saying that those cops got to be dealt with and later that night they was shot at. When I was young cops was always getting shot at around here, especially on foggy nights.

"I mean nobody should be surprised about this. Man, look at what they do. It's like a motherfucker come over here and you not fighting this man but he beating the shit out of you everyday. Fuck that, I ain't taking no more beating. You understand what I'm saying."

End of Part 5

Shockwaves: Report from the L.A. Rebellion

Part 6: The Fighters of Nickerson Gardens

Sister With Attitude

At the intersection of Imperial Highway and Success Avenue, I continued my journey through the Nickerson Gardens projects of Watts. T. was taking me around. He wanted to make sure readers of the *RW* got some of the truth about the people in Nickerson Gardens, and he was in the middle of a story about how, when he was comin' up, the folks at Nickerson would deal out some people's justice to the police on a regular basis.

T.'s words were cut off by a woman running up and giving him a big hug. T. had described her as a sister who is loud and rough, a sister with attitude. It was immediately clear that this sister had the attitude that revolutionaries love and the revolution needs. As soon as she heard that I was writing for the *RW* she said, "I want to talk about my friend's brother, Steven Clemons. He was killed by L.A. cops at Willowbrook Park. He was at a party or something and they was dancing and drinking. Some kids were running and the police came. Now Steven Clemons didn't want to be violated cuz he had just got out of jail. So he was running with a beer and he threw the beer in the water. The police just shot him in the head. He had his hands up, he surrendered to them, but they just shot him in the back of the head and said, 'Nigger, you just like all the rest.' They tried to say that he had a gun but all he had was a can of beer. His two brothers was there and the police beat them too. They let the police go back to work and they trying to say that the case is just dead. We won't let them get away with this.

"You know when I seen Steven he was laying on the ground with a sheet over him. They wouldn't let us through – not his mother, not his wife, not nobody. They even beat his wife. Steven just loved everybody. He had a wife and four kids and he always tried to help people. He wasn't a gangbanger. And in a way, if you gonna say Steven was a gangbanger then you can say all of us around here is gangbangers. He was always trying to do things for people. He loved everybody.

"You know Black people can't even live no more. They innocent and they still get killed and we can't do nothing about it. At the same time, the people who are really doing bad shit go free. It's messed up, it really is!

"Now there are a lot of Black people getting their shit together. It'll happen in time. But if they don't get their shit together it's gonna be really messed up. Just imagine, if Crips and Bloods really come together there is gonna be a war. It ain't enough police and it sure ain't enough National Guard and the Army ain't much – there are Crips and Bloods all over the world."

I talked with the sister about the Party's strategy for revolution – what it means and how the people could do it. I didn't get much beyond the first couple of sentences when the sister jumped back in. "Let me tell you about somebody like me. I'm just like Robin Hood and the Three Musketeers. You know, take from the rich and give to the poor. I'll take their dreams if I can. That's me! I'm not gonna lie to you, every chance I get that's me.

"The thing about me, you know what, I'm a realist. I might get my butt kicked or whatever but I'm gonna tell you how I feel. I be trying to talk to the people all the time. And sometimes they just tell me that I'm tripping. But then we be together – it comes time to do something. When I heard about the Rodney King verdict I thought about all my brothers that been killed by the cops right away. I thought about Steven and all the others. And later I thought about Slow Drag and the others killed by the cops in the riot and how they wasn't justified in killing them. This is what makes us all so angry and it makes us really think about what we want to do. See, they just don't know – we ain't gonna keep taking this.

"Of course I joined in with my people on the streets. I was at war – I was ready to whatever. The National Guard and all them came in and they tried to tell us to go inside, but I did not go in the house. They said they was gonna take us to jail but they couldn't bust me – not me, I'm too legit for that. See they are always trying to get me. They got me once but it was only for public nuisance. They keep trying to say that I'm a prostitute but I ain't – I'm just like Robin Hood and the Three Musketeers."

Conversation At The Front Yard Salon

A few houses down, C. was having her hair done up out in front of her place. She called me over. C. sat on a kitchen chair in the dirt yard listening to Ice Cube blasting out of a box on the steps. C.'s friend worked on her hair while C. asked what I was talking about with people. We talked some about the rebellion and I told her some of the stories I had heard about the women in Nickerson who took part in the rebellion. Her whole face beamed as I told her that I had heard of sisters forming up posses and leading them – including some of the men who had joined in with them – throughout the uprising. She told her friend to turn the volume on the box down so she could talk awhile.

"When I heard what they said with that verdict, I thought it was messed up. That's what it was for me. I feel like if they get away with it this time they gonna keep on doing it. And then what we got to look forward to? I already got to be scared to go out, I got to be scared that the cops gonna do something to me.

"It's hell on earth to be a Black woman here today. They say it's a free country and it don't feel like it to me. Don't seem like it to me. There are certain places we go and people be looking at us all funny and stuff. I'm not no racist or nothing, I don't have nothing about no different color people, nothing about what different colors they skin is or nothing. But I feel like it is unfair for Black people to go out and get looked at all kinds of ways like we not human. You know that's not fair to me. We want to make a better place for our children just like everybody does."

C. was throwing out some ideas of how to get that better world. I threw out the idea of revolution. She looked puzzled for a moment and so we talked about what this would mean. Once again her face lit up and she could hardly sit still as she spoke. "Oh, yeah! I'm down with that. But not just put the poor Black people in power cuz it's not just us Blacks – it's Mexicans and other peoples too. I think that's messed up what happened to those Korean people too. I mean, to me them Koreans is just trying to make a better life for their kids too. Even though there is certain Koreans that do have attitudes. But you know, to me they shouldn't have done them like that.

"This government wants to snatch all you got. Then they give you County money. But now they cutting that and they cutting food stamps. It's kind of hard for Black people to get a job. Half of us don't got no education – there are Black people out here who can't read or write and so they can't do nothing. And the people that are in the government ain't trying to help them. You know, like you can go to school and they like saying they gonna help you find a job. They put you through all of that and then here you is done signed something that they done lied about – you know what I mean. Like I went for security guard. They had me sign these papers and stuff saying that they would help get a job and everything. You know and I finished school and everything – got my papers and everything. They did not help me find no job. They sent me a bill saying I owe them – I think it was something like \$2,300. I was just saying 'No, no, no!'

"Now, I ain't gonna lie to you. I was down with the people. You know they all talking about the looting and shit – people was just there getting stuff cuz it was free and it was what they needed. There's a lot of things people don't have that they be wanting to get. A lot of times people pay out bills, put shoes and clothes on the kids and whatever – people don't have no money left. People took that stuff cuz they felt like it was free.

"I was in the house when I heard about the verdict. I was in there looking at it. When I heard it and then I saw them Black people out there protesting I said, 'It's gonna start, you watch.' But I had said before then that the white man was gonna let them police officers free. They always let them go. And it ain't even over. If they give time to them brothers in that Reginald Denny case then there gonna be another. A whole lot of us just don't got nothing to live for in this place.

"I still think they should do something about what they did to my friend's brother Steven Clemons. I mean he had just called her on the phone and said that he was gonna come and get her. She waited about 30 minutes, but he never came. So she went down to her friend's house. Somebody came up and told her about what they did to her brother and then his wife came up and told her again. At first we all thought they was just playing with her. Then we found out it was real. Her other brothers that was there was all beat up too. They beat them up, locked them up and stomped them. They locked all the sisters up and had them handcuffed. They didn't get out for 24 hours. They locked his wife up and they let his kids run all around the park and see where they shot their daddy, seeing all that blood and all. It was a trip. I was like, 'They wrong, they wrong!'"

Rethinking The Gangsta Life

T. had gone off to an ice cream truck with a trail of young kids-three and four years old – behind him. He had a few dollars and he was going off to buy the kids some ice cream cones. While he was gone a young brother crossed the street and started to ask what I was doing and who I was with. I explained I was with T. and the youth smiled and told me everything was fine because T. was an OG that everyone knew and respected.

When T. came back I told him what had happened and he started to talk about the gangs and what's out there for Black youth today. "I was in gangbanging all my life but not always to the real serious point. That happened when I went to jail. I went to jail for selling narcotics, did 18 months that time. I wasn't banging when I went in, but I came out that motherfucker banging like crazy and then went back in for banging. I done about four years

so far in my life. You understand?

"You got to run with some gang when you're in prison. They got nothing but gangs there. You couldn't run by yourself. There were a whole lot of Crips in the prison, but I had to be a Blood cause that's what's here in these projects. And you know there were a whole lot of people from down here in these projects. So they come to me and say, 'Well, are you in.' 'Yeah, I guess I'm in.' I mean it was like a war zone in there. And the guards and police and all, they set us against each other too. They do shit to provoke us at each other. You know they might take a bunch of us and throw us in a bus with a bunch of Crips and then we start at each other in the bus. Or they take one of us or one of them and chain us all down – chain our hands down at our sides – and then throw us in with a bunch of Crips.

"I worked for a long time before I went to jail so I was able to not be so serious about banging. I did security and all kinds of other jobs. I studied to do electrician work but I couldn't really deal with the math. So I studied to be a mason, a bricklayer, 'til I had to leave the school. They took my scholarship away. I was on an athletic scholarship and then one year I tried out for the pros and when I went to go back to the school they said it was against the rules for me to play for the school and the pros so I couldn't have my scholarship. I had to leave the school before I could finish. So I didn't have nothing and this friend of mine he offered to cut me in on some business. I made a whole lot of money and got a taste of that gangster life and all and I just said 'It's on!' I made a lot of money for about two years and then got arrested.

"I lost all that money. The gangster life is expensive, other g'sters trying to take from you all the time and it takes a whole lot of money to keep on paying lawyers. Somebody that I never saw was making a whole lot of money off of all this. I wasn't the big time – by the time we got the shit it was stepped on fifty times. I was doing this cuz that's all there was for me, but I did think about how this shit was fucking people up in here too. It used to bother me that all the people I'm selling to was sisters and brothers from right around here. I had a lot of friends killed over that shit. I thought about it and I didn't want to sell that shit, but I didn't see nothing *but* that shit out there for me. And then I ended up doing time off all that."

A little while later T. introduced me to K. The hood of K's sweatshirt was pulled way up over his head and the sides all but covered up his face. He sat with his back against a wall. As we spoke, his eyes watched over every move out in the parking lot. "I come up in the projects, right here in Nickerson. I'm 18 and I live with my mom right over there. I graduated from school and right now I'm just trying to look for some work. I'm looking for any kind of work, just looking for something to put some money in my pocket. It's hard, man – it's real hard.

"I don't like the police. I don't like them period. They tried to do me for sitting in my mom's car. They tried to take me cuz I was sitting in my momma's car. They threw me up against the car and I was cussin' them out. They handcuffed me and threw me in the car. They was talking to me when they put me in the car and I told them I just don't like them. They started to tell me what they was gonna do to me if they see me out in the street – I told them that if I see them out in the street they better watch out. They said that the next time they see me they ain't gonna be so generous. I say if I see them first they won't have to be generous. I just don't like them, never did and never will.

"They just keep harassing us over here. It's like with these unity parties we been having. They just keep trying to break it up. They can't stand seeing Blacks coming together. I was over JD, Jordan Downs, last night. The police come in and break it up. They came in with riot gear and everything to break it up.

"Look, people just treating each other real different now. We treating each other like brothers and sisters. It's working fine. People who haven't seen each other since high school or junior high can come see each other for the first time in years and coming together just to get along. This is something Black people should've done twenty years ago. I think this gangbanging stuff is played out. Black people are coming together. I think this is what is gonna last for a very long time."

K. kept talking about his hood and his set in a way that showed that these two things were the most important things in his life for a long time. Since the rebellion, and especially since the truce, people like K. have been doing some hard thinking about their experiences. Many of them are in a lot of turmoil right now trying to sum up the whole gangbanging experience. This was K's situation.

"After you die the neighborhood will remember you. Over here if you die, your name goes right up on the wall and people walk by and say, 'I knew him. He used to run with us.' I know quite a few of them up on that wall.

"You know, like I said, I think gangbanging is played out and it shouldn't have started in the first place. I lost a couple of my close personal friends off of all this. I lost somebody who was like my brother cuz of gangbanging stuff, right. This guy – I'll call him my brother – he died in my arms. That right there, when that happened, well my mental state at the time was like gone.

"I was 15 years old when my brother died. It happened just a little ways from here. We was getting some food and we had to go back and forth to bring out the food. We had our girlfriends and a lot of other friends in the car. When we came out these other gangbangers started shooting. I got behind the car but he was on the other side and they got him on the chest. When he laid down they left. I went around and he was up there trying to breathe. I kept telling him to breathe and he said he wanted to close his eyes. I told him to not close his eyes. Then a few minutes later he was gone. The paramedics didn't get there for a long time – about 20 minutes to a half hour. I was so mad, I just started going off on people. My brother's mother was at work and when she got home I had to go tell her what happened. She broke down and seeing her like that made me even madder. I had to take care of all that shit.

"A month or two months later I had to look back on all this and see how many people and families got fucked up over these two colors, the blue and the red. Later on I saw the guy who did this to my brother and we had to talk it out. You know, my brother and me was real close, we went everywhere together. We had each other's back. Since he died I'm just alone a lot. Sometimes I think of myself leaving this place. And if I did and I got something I would come right back and put it into the community. I'd try to help people out."

"When The Night Comes, It's On!"

The sun was beginning to set and the air was getting a lot cooler. T. had to work that

night. And as we walked out to the car he returned to the rebellion to finish his story on Nickerson Gardens. "Let me tell you how serious this was when this verdict happened. My brother told me. He's a real gangster, and when he told me that verdict he was *crying*. He was standing right out here and crying. My brother was crying. Man, that tripped me out.

"When he told me that them cops was acquitted, I said, 'Wha, you gots to be bullshitting!' And now I know everybody was thinking the same thing as me – 'When the night comes, it's on!' I mean people was just steady going to their cars and getting out bats, axes, hatchets, bolt cutters – every damn thing they had. People knew what was going to happen. Everybody just went and sat up on they porch. Then at eleven o'clock it was just like everybody knew it was time. People just went on and hit every damn thing. Some people started to go out of here too. I mean people was getting in cars and going out to other parts of town. They was taking trucks and even taking U-Haul trucks to go out to these areas.

"People was tearing shit up and saying how fucked up that verdict was. Tape told it all. That was wrong, that should've been a guilty verdict.

"We don't have no way to be heard but make a riot. What we gonna do – fill out some paper and say we want this and we want that. That's crazy! Only way we have to get our message over is throw a riot. People was so mad they just said we got to burn down this whole damn city. I mean there was just so much agony and people was so mad. The police were scared cuz of this. They couldn't come in here at all. They couldn't do nothing but set up a perimeter and try to keep it and wait for people to stop. And now if peoples could come together and have a revolution like we throwed that riot, that revolution would be a motherfucker. That's just the way it was."

End of Part 6

Shockwaves: Report from the L.A. Rebellion

Part 7: The Latin Beat

More than any other city in the U.S., Los Angeles is a city of immigrants. There are people from about 140 countries living here, and each group of people has had some kind of impact on the overall scene in the city, some kind of effect on shaping Los Angeles into what it is today. At least half the people living in L.A. do not speak English as their first language. At least 40 percent of the population is made up of Latinos, many of them immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Central America. You find these sisters and brothers everywhere in L.A. today. But most of all you're going to find them shoved into ghettos and working the bone-grinding, dirt jobs that pay nothing and keep the U.S. humming.

Like many immigrants to this country, the Latino immigrants come with all kinds of experiences. They know what it is like to live under the savage rule of U.S.-backed dictatorships. Many also know what it is like to fight in revolutionary struggles against these regimes and the Yankee forces that prop them up. They also bring this experience to the U.S. – and they bring it right into the heart of the oppressed in this country. The system hates and fears these proletarians. Those who want to see an end to the U.S. empire embrace them.

Latino immigrants played a major part in the L. A. Rebellion. Their participation in the uprising really made it a multinational festival of the proletariat and other oppressed people. Some of the most intense uprisings were concentrated in the Latino neighborhoods. At least 45 percent of those arrested in the rebellion were Latinos.

Seeking Revolution Across The Border

I thought of all this as I sat across a picnic table from a man in his late fifties. He is a recent immigrant from Central America and we were meeting in a local park so he could talk about his background and the rebellion. An evangelical church was holding its Sunday services on a grassy spot on the north side of the park. A soccer game was drawing a large crowd on the eastern end. To the south, a wall filled with gang graffiti cut the park off from a school. All around us mothers and fathers, Latino and Black, relaxed in the late morning sun while their kids played in the spray of the water sprinkler system. Off on one of the border streets, an old Black man wrestled with a furniture dolly as he tried to move a dresser into his house. The Latino brother shook hands and began to tell his story. The man spoke so energetically and enthusiastically that he seemed to be half his age.

"In Guatemala I built houses. First I worked as a laborer and then I worked more for myself. Unfortunately I had to stop that because for the more intelligent workers, the more prepared workers, things got very bad. That is always the situation, because the military cannot tolerate prepared and intelligent workers. I have always liked demonstrations.

"I lived in the capital with my family. I came to the capital when I was young. My family were campesinos in the countryside before this time. One of my relatives had even gone to the Soviet Union in 1950 for an international conference of campesinos. I remember when he came back to our village, he brought this big coat and hat with him from the Soviet Union. I

remember he would talk about the Soviet Union whenever we asked him.

"I had my biggest disappointment when someone I thought was a leader of the people, a leader who was one with the people of Guatemala, was killed. Soon after this happened I became involved in revolutionary politics. This was from 1963. First I was a tile setter at that time, but then I began to work by myself and started to build stuff. I became active with a group called the Third of November group, a political group. But then I saw they were wrong. When this group got broken up we saw that they were really counterrevolutionary military people.

"Then talking with people just like we are talking now, I became acquainted with another Guatemalan group called the Revolutionary Armed Forces. They are still around in my country. I was under arms in the capital when some other comrades were taken. Then I lost contact with my comrades. This was the time when the government tortured and killed a revolutionary. They just left his body on the street. We all knew the government would do that if they caught you. That's why I was willing to die rather than get caught.

"When all this happened I went off for a while, and when I returned I started to look for work. I worked as a tile setter then, because to work in construction would have really exposed me. I was 23 then, and I met a young guy of 16. We became close friends and we were together for years. He also became a tile setter. Then he began to get into construction for himself and the money changed him. He introduced me to some guys including the commander of a guerrilla group. I wanted to join this group and fight so I interviewed with this commander. They took my documents, asked about my experience and what kind of fighting I had experience in, and then I joined. While I was doing this my friend was changing. He began to build a for one of the leaders of a real anti-communist group. I found out later that my friend was an informant and had betrayed us.

"At that point I started making plans on how I could leave my country. I began to say good-bye to my family. I planned to go to Cuba because I heard that they were a country that cared about people. But then a guy came and offered me \$1200 to go to work in Panama. So I accepted that.

"I never went to Panama though, I came here. When I accepted the contract to work in Panama I was so unhappy about having to leave my family. I was supposed build big tunnels in Panama but I didn't know the name of the contractor or anything. I was just supposed to trust in the man who gave me the contact. I left my country in January of 1988. I started to go, but when I crossed the border into Mexico I was assaulted and they took everything from me, including all of the contacts I had for the job in Panama.

"There was nothing I could do, so I decided to stay in Mexico and work. I went to the place where they give you work and I asked them for construction work. They asked me if I was an officer and I said, 'Hell No! I'm not an assassin.' Then they explained to me that this is what they call contractors in Mexico. I worked in Mexico for about five months. But I wasn't just working, because I was talking with the Mexican youth about the political situation in Guatemala. I told them about the assassins and criminals. I have seen how they light up the house of those they want to kill and how they finish off even the cats in the house. I know about all of these assassins and what they do. They asked me, so I got into it. I made friends with the Mexican youth there. I have always been able to get along because of my way, of

thinking.

"After five months in Mexico I came to the U.S. The Mexican youth kept telling me that I could make some money here so I thought I should check it out, and I also wanted to see what the political and social situation was here. For a real revolutionary, whatever place you find yourself in, that is the first thing you got to do. In Guatemala we all knew that the U.S. was responsible for what was happening in our country. We know of America's ties with our government and the advisers it sends to our country. And we know that when America sent those advisers, the first thing they said to the government was to get rid of all those Indians. So it was important to me to see that there was a revolutionary movement in this country. It was also important to continue with the struggle.

"I walked across the border into the U.S. I came across the border on my own. I put it upon myself that I wanted to test myself to see if I was still capable, old as I am. I put that as a test. La Migra caught me the first time at San Clemente, at the checkpoint. I told them I was Mexican, and they sent me to Mexico. I said, 'How is this possible? I was a campesino and I lived in the mountains. For me this isn't a mountain, this is a garden.' So I crossed the border again and was able to do it.

"I came to Los Angeles. But I wasn't able to work right away. I suffered for about a year. I slept in abandoned houses and on park benches. I was without work and without food. I survived because of will. A revolutionary has to survive, you have to live by your wits and not give up.

"I did all this stuff to survive. I distributed pamphlets each day for \$20 per day. It was starvation but I did it. I started selling ice cream from a pushcart and you think of saving money but you can't because you are not making enough money to save anything. So it was a very desperate situation, but I kept telling myself that a revolutionary has to fight through.

"It is sad looking for work and being in that situation. They shut the door in your face when you don't have papers. You go through all of these circles, and then finally I had to buy fake papers. You know, nobody would hire me with fake papers. After two years here I was able to get this work permit and the papers. The employers would always tell me to fill out the application but they would never call me. Then there was this situation where I went to these Koreans who owned a factory. I went to this place and I knew they were hiring because the security told me that I was on time and they were hiring. When they asked me for my papers I gave them my good ones. They said that I should come back in eight days. When I left the security asked me if I got the job, and I told him what happened. He asked if I gave them my papers. Then he asked if the papers were good ones. When I told him they were good, he told me that I should have given them the bad ones. He said the problem was that they don't hire people with real papers because they would have to give them a real wage.

"Little by little I began to accumulate the tools I needed to work and I finally got a job as a tile setter with this American guy. So I was able to stabilize myself, and then I said that now I can begin to look for a group I can work with. But things are not really too stable. I mean, even when I was laying tile I could make a lot of money when I worked, but then I would be out of work for two months. So I would work from 7 AM until ten at night to make a lot of money when I worked. It was too unstable to work for a couple of days and then be unemployed for so long. So I got a job at this factory making \$4.35 an hour. This is what I do

now. This is another place where they don't hire people with papers so they can pay people shit.

“My intention to get stabilized was to get on my feet as soon as possible and be able to find political work – because that is what is in my blood. I have said that if I have to I will die fighting for the cause.”

We were interrupted for a moment, and we had to seek out a new spot to continue our talk. As we walked, he explained that he loved to read and that he especially loved to read revolutionary literature. That was how he found Libros Revolución in downtown L.A. and became friends with revolutionaries here. I remarked to the brother that I had noticed him buying the paper and hiding it away before he had left Libros Revolución the day before. It was clear that this was a product of his own experience in the struggle. He began to talk a little bit about his experiences with the police here in the U.S. Within minutes the conversation turned to the Rodney King verdict and the Rebellion.

"When I saw the Rodney King beating and the verdict I thought that, shit, there is no security with the police. If that can happen to someone who is an American, then what can be done to us who are not from here? I heard people talking about the verdict and I picked up the newspaper the next day. When I saw what happened I said, 'Damn, let's see what the American people do about it. Let's see what happens.' When I saw what happened it made me feel real good. That was the answer that had to be given. You have to respond to the enemy in the same way and even a little bit more. I joined in to put in my little grain of sand in the rebellion.

"I was working when all of a sudden we started to hear all of these things outside. We heard shots being fired and madness starting to erupt. So we went outside and there were some Black youth who were starting to set fire to cars and buildings. Some of my fellow workers were going to try to stop them by throwing stones and stuff. I told them, 'No, let them do what they have to do.' So my fellow workers stopped, they listened to me. I mean they did this so that the youth would not give us problems at our factory, but they also seemed to like it. I think there was some spark of consciousness and some revolutionary feeling among my fellow workers. They dug what was going on. We talked about the rebellion in the factory and people thought it was cool.

"Later, five or six days after the Rebellion, I had an experience with these stickers and the Army in Compton. The stickers said, 'Army Out of L.A.' I took the opportunity of being in Compton when the army was there to use the stickers to show that there are some people who know what is going on. The army likes to think they are so heavy, so hot. So I thought I just have to be a lot cooler. A revolutionary has to have a lot more ideas. I made it seem like I was just kind of drunk and that I was throwing up. Then I would just stumble up and lean on their vehicles and put the sticker on it.

"We were all united during the rebellion, Black and Latino. There weren't any questions of races then. It was like going up against it. It was like, altogether we can do it. You could see that in the rebellion people do get happy when they see the unity among the people. I could see it when I gave out the leaflet in the park here – the leaflet on the Rodney King verdict and that it is 'Right to Rebel.' You could see the joy in people's faces when they would read it. And when the Black people read it you could see the joy in their face, and they would

say, 'Hey, he is one of us.' They were very happy when they would see that the leaflet was in Spanish and English so it could reach all of the people.

"People are ready. They are tired of the repression. They are tired of the lack of jobs and all the misery. In the rebellion you could see people are ready for revolution. For me it was like a tonic to strengthen my resolve a lot more."

Landless In Mexico, Homeless In L.A

Many of the Latino immigrants come from the most grindingly poor and brutally oppressive countries in the world. And they come from many different types of backgrounds. They come to the U.S. hoping to escape all of this and they often find they haven't escaped at all. In fact, many times the conditions of their life at home are just recreated in the ghettos and barrios of Los Angeles.

We had just crossed a street in Pico Union when we came upon a group of six very tired looking Latino men. They were sitting on a curb outside of a fast-food restaurant. They were hungry but they didn't have any money. Most of the men didn't want to talk, but one of them was eager to speak his piece.

"We worked in a car wash. We all got fired and so now we have no jobs there. Now we collect cans. Fifteen days now we are on the street. We weren't to blame, they just fired all of us. We have been working there for years, ten years at minimum wage. And now they take new people on. For what reason, that is what I want to know – for what reason?"

"We are from Mexico. We had families that we were supporting, but they need to support us now. We can't help them now. Without work we cannot support these families. I came here to look for work. I borrowed money, I took a mortgage on my house and I came here. In Mexico the government fucks you and there is nothing to eat. We all worked in the fields in Mexico. The government doesn't feed you. You only get rice and beans and you work like a motherfucker in Mexico. This is the truth, my word. This is the truth, I swear it.

"We are all from Yucatán and we all used to work in the fields in Yucatán. I came in 1978 and the others came in the 1980s. We left our families working in the fields. We all want to work but we don't know anybody. So how can we go and get a job? So we go to work a day for somebody. And then they pay you, and then you have some money to eat and you can send some money to the family. We have been able to work four days in a week but that is not enough. Other times they only give me three days of work. I don't know what to do. I don't want to steal, really. There is my bag of cans that I collect to get some money when I'm not working. It is very difficult. I live in the streets. I go downtown and I toss my jacket on the pavement and I lay myself there. A friend gave me my pants and my shoes and now look at this, look at the holes in my shoes. Sometimes I am able to take a bath but not all the time. Sometimes someone takes me in and I can take a bath and they give me some clothes. What I am telling you is the truth.

"The situation right now in Mexico is desperate. My family works in the fields but this week they will lose their jobs and there will be no more work. They work for the government in the fields. This month there will be no more work in Mexico. Our families once owned their own land in Mexico but now the government owns everything. The government took our land

away and now people can only look for work. Many people come here looking for work. Now we don't have anything."

End of Part 7

Shockwaves: Report from the L.A. Rebellion

Part 8: The Reality of El Norte

The Transfero Youth

Los Angeles is a city where huge chunks of it don't seem to be in the U.S. at all but in the Third World. The old part of downtown L.A. is one of those places. In old movies the tall buildings of downtown L.A. would be filled with secretaries, talent agents and private detectives. Today the buildings still look the same on the outside. But if you check out the windows in the buildings close enough, you'll see that it's rolls of fabric and strips of bright colored cloth that block the windows – not venetian blinds and shades that usually decorate office windows. If you look at the windows hard enough you'll probably catch sight of the Latino women and men endlessly cutting and sewing cloth in these sweatshops.

Downtown Los Angeles is the garment district – one of the main places where Latino immigrants work. It is also the major shopping area for these sisters and brothers. Many of the businesses in downtown L.A. are Spanish-speaking. The travel agents lure in their customers with "super bargain" deals on travel to and from every Central American country. This same area is also a cultural center for the Latino people – the old-time movie theaters show Spanish-language films and current Hollywood films with Spanish subtitles. Some of the theaters are major venues for Mexican musicians and singers.

If you walk around some of the blocks in downtown L.A. you wouldn't have any way of telling that it wasn't a part of another city in a Central American country. Even the graffiti on the walls is in Spanish. One particular bit of graffiti caught my attention, since it was slashed across the walls around one of the busiest intersections in the downtown area. In big red letters were the words "DF Transferos."

I asked a comrade familiar with the area about the graffiti. He told me that it referred to the youth who sell bus transfers for a living on downtown comers. They are known as "transferos" or "chilangos." DF is a reference to Mexico City, and the youth are generally from Mexico City or nearby areas. Many of these youths have been on their own since they were little kids in Mexico City and were involved in anti-authority movements and the whole punk and rock music scene in Mexico. They survive by relying on their wits and staying out of the grip of the police. Because of their healthy in-your-face view of the world, many of these youth are attracted to Libros Revolución – which sits right in the middle of this whole downtown scene. The comrade mentioned one "transfero" youth he met. The youth told the comrade that when he first saw the windows of Libros Revolución and how the bookstore was against the police and the government, he knew that this was a place he had to visit often.

A few days after this I had an opportunity to talk with one of the "transferos" myself.

"My family is in Mexico. My dad worked in a factory for ten years and then they let him go. They gave him some little money – but it was nothing, it was shit He worked in a factory that made cloth, and everything they made was exported to this fucking country.

"I come from a small village about two hours from the capital, Mexico City. We all farmed there, even me. My job was to walk behind the horse while we were plowing and throw in the seeds. I did this when the earth was ready for the seeds, and then I harvested when the crops were ready. In between I helped take care of the fields. My father worked in the factory because we couldn't live from the farming. I also worked when I wasn't busy on the farm. I worked in carpentry in a small shop in the village.

"I started to see the exploitation and what America does to Mexico when I was about 17. I started questioning why my father worked so much and he didn't have anything. He should've been making more but he wasn't. He would come home, and he would hardly have enough to be able to sustain my family. I was thinking this is not right, how can that be.

"I started to question this whole export of things. If the United States has so much money and is so wealthy, why is it that Mexico is exporting everything? I thought it should be the other way around. The United States should be exporting things to Mexico because the people of Mexico need a lot of things. But they weren't. When I started to question I used to think Don't the people in the U.S. work? Don't they produce anything? How come they are always taking stuff from here, how come we are producing everything? I knew there was something wrong – but I never knew they exploited so much, not just in Mexico but in Central America and all over the place. It wasn't until I got here that I realized what imperialism is and how much it wants to dominate the whole world."

The "transfero" youth spoke about the clash between what he expected to find and reality. "I came here two years ago, on September 30 at 2 in the morning. I came here for a better job, for money and a better life. I heard that you could have a better life here. I heard stories that if you go to America you will live really cool, really kicked back and stuff. I heard that you could make \$4.50 an hour. You start multiplying in your head, and then when you transfer it to Mexican pesos you think you will make a fortune. That's why I wanted to come here.

"But when I came here I went to my brother, and he told me that he didn't have anything to eat I said, 'Come on, you don't have anything to eat?!' I asked him what he meant, because he would write these letters to my mom about how he was living real good here and everything was fine. And now I come here and it's not like that. I was thinking that he did that so my mom wouldn't worry, so that she would think things were okay when they weren't okay.

"Here I am cold, here I'm hungry here I don't have anything. I started to think after three months that I was going to leave, that I was going to go back. But my brother wouldn't let me leave, and as time went by I started to get adjusted. But just because I am adjusted doesn't mean that I like this country; I hate this country."

The youth told me about his border crossing. He first went to Tijuana to hook up with a coyote to guide him across. While in Tijuana he had a frightening experience with the police, who treat the youth from Mexico City with special brutality. He was caught in a police roundup, and while in jail the cops threatened to chop off his hand. But the cops finally let him go, and he was able to get together with the coyote.

"I paid the coyote \$250 to get me across. We got to the border and we waited and waited. It was like from ten o'clock at night to midnight. We were just waiting there to see

when we could cross. We saw people trying to cross, and La Migra was there picking people up and throwing them back to the other side. Then we saw groups of people just go for it. We saw all the vans move over to the group of people, and we thought that was our opportunity. Since it was just the two of us, we thought we could make it and so we started to run across. We ran, and I was getting so tired and weak that I said to the coyote, 'I can't make it.' But then I thought that I must be strong and make it. So I just kept going.

"I got to my brother that night. He was working in the garment factories – where everybody works – but it wasn't enough for him to live on. The next day my brother took me to work where he worked I looked for other work too, since I also know carpentry. I applied for one job – I could do the job, but he wouldn't give it to me because I had no ID and no permit to work.

"Soon I found I was working in the garment industry cutting little strings off of blouses and pants. I was working from seven in the morning to seven at night, and I was only getting \$35 [per day]. Then in December my brother lost his job, and the most I was able to get was \$90 in one week for sewing fabric. My brother's job had finished, and he had to wait to see what other work would come in. You know it is really cold in December, and all I had was these white T-shirts so I was really cold. I was bent over the sewing machine all day and my neck began to hurt I didn't want to tell my brother that this was happening. Then I didn't have any more work, and so both my brother and me had no work.

"I started selling transfers. When I was working in the garment factory, there was this guy who used to come about 8:30 in the morning with all these books of transfers, and he would tell me how he already made some money. I asked about this and he told me how to do it. Some of my friends warned me that doing this would put me in jail. But I kept the idea in the back of my head. And then came the 1st of January, and nobody at my house was working and there was no money. So I started to sell transfers.

"I learned what I had to do to sell transfers. I didn't know about the police – where they hung out or anything. On the third day I was selling and the cops were watching me. This blond cop yelled to me, and I started running. Somebody tripped me, and I took the opportunity to hide in a shoe store and later escape into another building by running up eight flights of stairs. I was scared and out of breath so I just waited. Then after a while I came down and started selling transfers again.

"It was cool selling transfers then because there were so many youth there. Everybody would just get together when we were done, and there would be this whole scene. We were just kicking it, talking about what happened during the day. We listened to music and just kicked it. I would spend some of my night there.

"Sometimes we would notice these other youth standing on a street corner for a long time with their suitcases. So we would go up to them and say, 'Hey, you're new.' And they'd say, 'Yeah, I'm new.' Then we'd ask where they from, and they would tell us. When we found people from Mexico City, we would be very excited. We would ask them what neighborhood they were from. And then we would say that we have to help this guy and we have to hook him up to sell transfers. So we would buy him food and stuff and hook him up to the whole scene. When we met people from other places like Guatemala, we would still help them out with food and find them a place to stay. But it was only the people from the capital that we

would hook into selling transfers."

We had spoken for quite a while and the youth was beginning to seem a little anxious about wrapping up the interview. There were a few other things I wanted to talk about, though. When I brought up the Rodney King verdict and the Rebellion, the brother got a whole new jolt of energy and enthusiasm.

"I heard about the Rodney King verdict but I went to school that night. They came on the public speaker system and said that those people who live in South Central should call home or go home because there is no transportation and there are fires and stuff. They had a TV there, and they turned on the TV and we saw all these fires. I said, 'Wow!' It was about eight o'clock, and I said, 'Let's go downtown!'

"So I went downtown and it was about ten o'clock. I saw that the other youth were there – my friends who sell transfers with me downtown – and we started discussing things, talking about the Rodney King verdict. We kept saying, 'They saw the tape, so how could they say that the cops are not guilty if everybody has seen the tape?' We had this big debate, and we talked about how they got the power. Then we decided that we were in with the people and what they had to do. I heard that many of the youth were down for it, because they had the feeling that now the authorities would have to pay for everything they did to the youth all this time.

"After talking, my friends decided to see if they can take the bus home, and they started walking to the bus. I heard from some of my friends that when they were walking, they started to hear SPSHHH! CRASH! BANG! No one knew what those sounds were so they kept walking to the bus. Then they saw these Black youth destroying things, and they saw many Mexican youth joining with the Black youth and running all through downtown. By the time these youth had gone a few blocks, they were a group of Black youth, white youth, Mexican youth – all nationalities and all kinds of youth together in this one big posse.

"People told me that the transit cops came by, and for the first time in their lives here, they had the luxury of actually saying to them, 'Fuck you!' They said that they yelled this to the cops and then waited for the cops to stop and come over, because they knew that the youth in the posse would not let them down and would back them up. The cops didn't stop. The transfero youth were laughing, because they said that the cops always come by and shine their light on your face and all. But not this time – this time they didn't even slow up, they just kept going. LAPD came by and got the same treatment. People told me that the cops started to cordon off the area about 1 AM, and that is how it started to calm down.

"The next morning about nine o'clock I was out there with my friends selling my transfers. The people were getting off early or not coming to work, and we couldn't sell any transfers. We all said that was okay. Then we saw Black youth coming downtown and starting things all over again. The youth went all through the garment district, and they were joined by Latinos and everybody.

"Before this we didn't have too much contact with the Black youth. You know Black people were waiting for an opportunity to rise up against their oppression. And Latino people, too – people here are always hounded by La Migra and the police. This was an opportunity for the Black people to rise up against this oppression. And also it was an opportunity for the

Latino people to rise up against oppression, too.

"I liked the rebellion, I liked it a lot! In this rebellion a lot of people were able to see who the enemy is a lot clearer. And even people who before didn't dare say who the enemy is, now they dared to say it."

Born And Raised In Watts

It was Saturday, a day to kick back and relax. The Latino family that lived in the old wood frame, railroad car style house sat on overturned milk crates in the backyard. They were enjoying the sunny afternoon and talking while waiting for their dinner to cook. Three little children played with a pit bull puppy further back in the yard. Smoke from the meat on the barbecue grill gave the whole yard a pleasant smell.

The house is near one of the projects in Watts, in a neighborhood that is mixed Latino and Black. The sister who had invited me to sit, a Chicana born and raised in Watts, began talking about how the system treats Black and Latino people the same. She told me about a police raid on a gang unity party in the projects the night before. She saw the police march across the projects arm in arm and all decked out in their riot gear. A friend had told her that the cops ordered people in the projects to stay inside their homes and to turn off the lights. When one young Black guy refused to turn his lights off, the police used their clubs to smash all of the windows in his house. The sister shook her head in disgust and began to tell me about her own experiences.

"My husband works in Las Vegas, in construction. He just started two weeks ago. He works in the union and everything is dead over here, there is no work here. They laid him off in December and he only got started back to work just two weeks ago. He has a contract for a year and a half work in Las Vegas. He's gone all week and he comes back every Friday. But hey, he's making some money.

"My husband is Mexican. He's lived in this country 20 years and I've lived here in Watts about 30 years. This house used to be my grandmother's house. She came from Mexico. My mother was born here in this house, and I was living here in 1965 when Watts happened. The police are always just coming around here bothering people. They come and harass us. Cars that are passing by, they just stop them right away. The other day they stopped this car right here. They pulled them over. And then another cop car came. The cops had their rifles out and they were pointing them at the people in the car. There wasn't no need for that. That's just violence, they are the ones who bring up the violence.

"Don't even ask me what I was thinking when I heard the Rodney King verdict. I think it was terrible – I was a victim like that too. The police beat my brother-in-law, they arrested my husband and then they started with my sister-in-law and then me. I was about six months pregnant.

"They had all different stories about why they came to our house. One was that we were disturbing the peace with our car radio, that it went too loud. They said it went all the way to the other side of the other block. And then a second was that two women were outside fighting with each other and the husbands went in and got some guns. Nobody had a gun, nobody owns a gun. Then they said that we had a party. We didn't have a party, there was a

party down the street but it was barely starting.

"See, a beer bottle fell out in the street. I went out to pick it up. The cops pulled up. They called my brother-in-law over and started harassing him. They started beating on him. Then my husband and me went out there and started asking the cops why are they hitting him. We said if you're going to arrest him then just take him in. Then the cops told my husband, 'You want to go to jail?' My husband told them to let his brother go, and then they arrested him too. I started yelling that they should leave my husband and his brother alone. I said they were supposed to be here to protect the people, not to dog them. Then they beat me up and I was six months pregnant. The cops even pulled a gun on the woman who came out to take pictures when they were beating us up. They put a gun on her face."

End of Part 8

Shockwaves: Report from the L.A. Rebellion

Part 9: Voices of the Dispossessed

Rebel Without a Home

After the evening rush hour the streets of downtown L.A. are empty. This is the time that the street people and the homeless really stand out. The homeless in L.A. live hard – police harassment, jail, muggings and other vicious attacks are the constants in this life. The homeless spend hours begging on street corners and freeway ramps for a few dollars. At best they spend the night in one of the squalid transient hotels downtown – if not they might sleep under the freeway or in a doorway off the sidewalk. When the rebellion erupted the fury of the homeless was a significant part of the downtown uprising.

One of the staff at Libros Revolución told me about Nancy and suggested I talk with her. She is a middle-aged woman with a disabled husband and three kids. She severely disabled herself in an accident a few years earlier. She and her family live in a box on the street. She won't go to a shelter because of the rotten treatment and because she wants to try to keep her family together. Nancy was eager to talk about her life and the rebellion. "I think the verdict sucks! I was surprised. Honest to god, I was really, really surprised. I didn't think it was gonna turn out that way because it was right there in black and white. It was on the video, it was nothing like 'he said, she said' – it was right there in black and white. I think they were either bought out or they were scared or something, but I never dreamed in a million years that it was gonna turn out that kind of verdict. I was right here working that night when I heard the verdict. I was right here on this corner and somebody came and said that they were tearing up the streets on Broadway. I asked why and she said that the jury came in with the verdict and said the police were innocent. She said that people were rebelling against it cuz they don't feel that it's right. And it's not right!

"What about those guys that they got for beating up on that white trucker? They're gonna be convicted. Well, it was the same thing with Rodney King except that it was police involved. With the white trucker incident people just had that anger in them and they were just trying to get their frustrations out and they just took them out on somebody. What I'm trying to say is that the Reginald Denny thing was in the video – it was in black and white. And the thing with King was right there in black and white also. So how come in one the people are guilty and in the other the cops are getting off Scot-free. It was cuz it was the law and they got over again.

"I didn't go over to Broadway that night. I got really scared, maybe because I can't run as fast. But the people came down this street here and I watched from inside that building there. We stayed in that building for quite a few hours and it was really weird. That whole week was really weird – downtown here really looked like a ghost town. I think a lot of people were out there in the street fighting for the cause and I think there were a lot of others who fought for the green. They were all mixed in together.

"The cops were running around in big bunches. Anybody on the streets those days, they were told once to leave and then they were arrested. A lot of people got arrested down

here for curfew trouble. A lot of people were down here after curfew and they got arrested, especially the homeless. They had a big war on homeless people. I know a bunch of guys got picked up cuz they had nowhere else to go. The cops came up and told them to leave and they said they had nowhere to go so the cops told them that they would put them some place. Then the cops just picked them up and took them. A lot of homeless got arrested for curfew violations.

"I didn't get arrested – I don't know, maybe it was because of my condition. I stayed right here til eleven o'clock hoping that some people I knew would come by with maybe a few bucks or something. It was weird though, nobody was here. The only restaurant that was open was over there a few blocks. You know, the rioting and stuff really hurt our stomachs. We depend on what we make on the streets. But I think the rebellion was good. It taught them a big lesson, a big lesson in life. In other words, they can't just fuck over anybody. They have to think before they do now because people aren't going to take it anymore, especially the minorities. What I liked most about the rebellion was the way the people came out and really showed themselves. They showed that they aren't gonna take the crap anymore. They showed that anytime anything happens they are gonna come up and show their face for other people. People are gonna get involved. They're tired and they're not gonna take it anymore.

"I'm telling you, people are tired of being pushed around. I know this is especially for the homeless. They are always trying to push us around. There are some of these cops down here, they know who is homeless, and every time they see you they stop you and tell you that you have to move way over to the other side of town. He tells you that if he sees you again he will run you in. About six months ago someone gave me a lot of personal supplies so that I could keep some and sell the rest to make some bucks. I had it all in a box and it was over \$500 of stuff in that box. The man even gave me his card so that I could prove that he gave me the stuff and I didn't steal it. Two days later the cops took the box from me. What could I do? I didn't get a ticket for it. I didn't get a receipt. Who could I go to? The cop just got out of the car and took the stuff. He said he didn't want to see me out here with that stuff and he said that he knew it was hot. I tried to explain but he just took it. He wouldn't even let me keep some of the stuff for myself. He just took it and threw it in the car and left. You know, they just think that if you're homeless then you steal. Well, not all of us steal. I'd rather beg than steal.

"I came here from New York. Well, I was born in another country but my parents brought me to New York when I was real young. I grew up in the Bronx, the core of the Apple. I had a bad marriage back in New York so I split. I figure I'd come out here for awhile and see if I liked it. And I did like it. I got a job in restaurant as a waitress and then I went to work for a department store in Beverly Hills. Then I got hurt bad in an accident. I spent months in the hospital and lost everything. The system sucks! You know, I can't get welfare, I can't get Social Security, I can't get nothing. They say I can't get help cuz I can't prove I'm an American citizen. I went to welfare several times and they say I don't qualify. Those were the exact words, I don't qualify. I said what the fuck do I have to do, keel over and die? I already live in a cardboard box. What the hell do I do? They said that it was a problem because I didn't have an address. I said I know I don't have an address, I'm fucking homeless. I asked if I could get a PO box and they said no. People come out looking for the American Dream and it ain't here.

"After my accident I had to go out and take care of myself and my family. I decided that I wasn't going to bother anybody but that I was gonna make it. I came out here and tried to

panhandle \$30 a day to get a room for us. But then I got sick and it kept getting harder and harder to get that \$30. And we needed food, clothing, medicine and stuff. And when you have kids, you know it's always something – they always need something. My oldest boy is living with a family out of town right now and I send him money from what I can make. So it got harder and harder to make that rent every night. I just decided one day I'm gonna get some plastic and some boxes and I'll make a little house and if I make enough money for a room then I'll get the room and if not then we'll sleep in the little house. I had to do this cuz it was starting to make me sick, I thought I was gonna have a nervous breakdown from the pressure of it being 1:30 in the morning and me only having \$15 and I need another \$15 to get the room. And if I didn't make enough, then where was I gonna sleep? So I just got together this little house.

"The cops haven't hassled me so far, thank god. And the people don't bother me. I'm real good to everybody. If somebody needs a quarter and I got an extra quarter then I give it to them. If somebody needs a blanket and I got blankets or clothes I give it to them. And if anybody does bother me then I usually just call anybody on the street and they help. It's hard and especially it's hard on the streets for a woman. But a lot of people respect me and when they don't – then the real me comes out and then they back up. I tell them 'don't let my situation fool you.'

"So somebody told you that I said that the only thing that keeps me sane is the bookstore, *Libros Revolución*. You know what I mean? I mean the people in there are for real. How can I explain it? It's hard for me to explain it. I guess I first met the bookstore people when they were constantly getting harassed by the police. The cops were constantly attacking people in the front and they came into the store a couple of times and started knocking things off the shelves. They were getting really nasty with the bookstore. That's when I started to come to the store and those people in there are really real, they got a heart. You go in there and it's like going into somebody's house, the warmth and the caring. You walk out that fucking door and it's back out into this. You know, a lot of people don't like revolution. A lot of people don't understand it."

Nancy paused for a minute or two. She was thinking hard about what to say. As she thought about it she asked a few passers-by some spare change. She looked up toward her makeshift shelter and then turned to me and with a big, bright smile finished off the interview. "I like it! And I like revolutionaries cuz they don't let anybody push them around. They fight for what they want and they won't let anybody push them aside, they're gung ho. And I like that. I like fighting for what I want and what I need. If I need a piece of bread I'm gonna fight for it. That's the way I am and that's the way they are. You know things don't work the other way so maybe this is the way they will work."

Pico Union: Red Flags Under a State of Siege

You know when you come into the Pico Union neighborhood of Los Angeles. It's another one of the neighborhoods that could be a whole other country. In fact, the people call the neighborhood *La Centroamericana* and it is the largest Central American barrio in the country. Spanish is the language of everyday life. The streets of Pico Union are alive in ways different than most other areas of the city. The whole block in front of one of the main markets in the community is jammed with vendors selling everything from horchata – a Mexican rice drink-and mango slices to take the edge off of a hot summer afternoon to clothes, music

tapes – and discount cigarettes smuggled in from Mexico. A few blocks away another corner has been designated as the spot to go if you need to purchase forged documents. The sights, sounds and smells of every block in the community belong to Mexico, El Salvador and other parts of Central America. Sitting inside a small Mexican lunch counter you can hear Salvadoran music coming from an apartment across the street. A short walk away on the same block and you can buy clothes and groceries from Guatemala. On Saturday nights the back parking lot of one of the neighborhood restaurants is filled with scores of people getting together to socialize and eat food sold by two or three lunch trucks.

But Pico Union is a hard neighborhood too. It is said to have the highest population density in the United States. Large, crowded and run-down tenement buildings and huge old houses converted into many small apartment units are home to hundreds of thousands of proletarian immigrants. In this neighborhood people work in places like Burger King, garment sweat shops or as janitors. A "good job" often means steady work in a minimum wage factory. In this neighborhood you'll find landless peasants from Mexico or Guatemala desperately trying to survive on the \$15 a day they might earn by selling ice cream from a handcart. Many times the truly desperate end up selling drugs on the streets. A hideous insurance scam was recently uncovered in L.A. that involved small cars slamming on their brakes in front of large trucks in order to stage accidents on the freeways. The organizers of the scam were collecting major settlements on these accidents. The people recruited for the outrageously dangerous jobs of driving and riding in the cars were desperate recent immigrants who got paid \$100 maximum for each accident.

This neighborhood is, as one Mexican youth told me, "in a state of siege from the police and the Immigration." In the middle of the rebellion the streets were swept, buildings and restaurants were raided and hundreds of immigrants arrested were deported. Under Operation Cul-de-Sac, Pico Union was one of the communities where whole sections were barricaded off and subjected to intense police terror. Although the barricades are righteously hated by the people, the powers have concrete plans to expand the barricaded areas in the community. Everywhere you turn in Pico Union there are signs of the brutal reality of immigrant life in America. But there is one especially moving sight that you run across on many of the streets of the neighborhood. If you look at the walls when you walk around the neighborhood – and especially down near where the sidewalks join the walls – it's not uncommon to find a headstone or cross painted on the wall along with a name and some dates. Sometimes the sidewalk in front of the memorial will have a few vases of flowers or religious items neatly laid out. These are memorials marking the spots where immigrants – especially youth – have been killed.

There is something very significant flowering in Pico Union. It was one of the most intense scenes in the rebellion. Buildings burned everywhere and the streets belonged to the people. The hated barricades were attacked and one was left a twisted and charred ruin. The marquee on one of the old neighborhood theaters still announces the 1990 "Fear Nothing, Be Down for the Whole Thing" speaking engagement by RCP National spokesperson Carl Dix. A red flag flies from the top of a pole across from one of the busiest markets in the neighborhood. Across the street a wall has been decorated with May Day Manifestos and revolutionary graffiti declaring the neighborhood a "Zona del Pueblo." Further up the street silhouettes of Mao's face have been spraypainted on the sidewalks around a house where some members of the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade live. This is a neighborhood where revolution and revolutionaries are at home.

On a midsummer afternoon we sat talking with a group of neighborhood youth on a grassy hill next to one of the barricades. As we talked a wild-looking youth came running down the street. When he saw the *Obrero Revolucionario* he insisted on knowing if we were revolutionaries. When we said that we were he demanded to speak with us. "The rebellions happened because of racism. They always treat the Black people like shit and the Black people just said that they were tired of it. They do the same thing to Latinos. Now what the Latinos have to do is get united and get organized. We have to build an organization to defend ourselves and to fight against the government. The government comes down on people very hard. I've seen signs of Mao in the neighborhood and slogans about the struggle. It's a good thing to fight for the people. I think Mao is good. When I was in Mexico I knew about Mao. It has been a long time since I have known about this but I did know that Mao was for the people and he was trying to do the best that he could for the people.

"I came here from Mexico, from Yucatan. My father works for the utility company in Mexico and we were neither rich nor poor. I came here by myself. I didn't pay a coyote to take me across, I just came. I went to Belize and everywhere and I never pay anybody to take me across borders, I just cross them myself. I'm a Mexican and so it is easy for me to cross the borders. My first job when I came here was at a Sizzler's restaurant. I worked the salad bar at a Sizzler's. After working there I said, 'Fuck it, I'm not going to work for these pennies.' Now I hustle to stay alive here.

"I just came here because I wanted to come, not because I had all of these great aspirations. I came because I wanted to see the United States and what is this great United States. And then I came and I saw that this is just the United States and look at what the United States is. They say that they are such a great and rich country, a developed and industrial country, but if they were really so rich and great and developed and there was so much freedom then there wouldn't be drugs and drug addicts running around the streets and the streets wouldn't be so full of garbage and dirty and dilapidated and the people would not be so dispossessed.

"I was watching the news when I heard about the verdict. I was watching to see what would happen. I think what happened after the verdict was a good thing because it was an injustice what they did to Rodney King. If the police come and harass someone, if they beat someone up, then they better watch it later on because people will find a way to get back at them. When it all started the police would not come here. There was no law and no authority. Everybody was doing what they wanted to do. The police were afraid to come in here because they saw that the crowd was gaining ground and getting bigger and bigger. It was a good thing that the people rebelled against the injustice. In some ways the people here in Pico Union hurt themselves because they should have been fighting more against the police, but they burned down that store over there and some other stores and places that make things easier for the people. But this is a small thing in comparison to the rebellion. Of course I'm going to be happy because of the rebellion, because of the police and the way they treat the people."

End of Part 9

Shockwaves: Report from the L.A. Rebellion

Part 10: The Striking Drywaleros

It was Saturday afternoon and we were driving north out of the Pico Union neighborhood. It was hot all over the city, but it seemed to be ten degrees hotter in this part of L.A. We hadn't driven more than a mile when traffic started to back up. Up ahead three or four cop cars were pulled over to the side of the road. About ten yards in front of the cops there was a construction site. A few American-born construction workers – white and Black – were standing in front of the site and seemed to be guarding it. There was a high fence around the site and just outside the fence there were a few dozen Mexican workers holding up protest signs and shouting slogans at the American workers. We stopped to talk with the Mexican workers and they explained that they were striking drywall hangers fighting to form a union and demanding higher pay. They called themselves "drywaleros." The American-born workers on that site had just pulled guns on the strikers in order to scare them into leaving the site. The cops were about to move in, but it was against the Mexican strikers and not the gunslinging American construction workers. As the strikers piled into their pickup trucks to head out to another job site, one of the men pressed a piece of paper with a name and a phone number into my hand.

A few days later I found the strikers out at a Carpenters Union meeting hall in Orange County. The hall was being lent to the dry wall hangers for the duration of their strike. When we arrived there were a few dozen men sitting at cafeteria-style tables and sharing a noontime meal prepared in the communal kitchen. A few others were stretched out at the front of the hall taking a nap. As we moved through the hall talking with people, many of the workers grabbed up copies of the *Revolutionary Worker*. They scraped together whatever spare change they could find to pay for the paper. Soon little knots of workers were forming up around those reading the paper. One worker told us that the name of the union they were trying to form was the Union of Low Salaried Workers. As I stood talking to a few "drywaleros" a young man in a baseball cap and a T-shirt introduced himself as a spokesperson for the strikers. He began to tell their story.

"The story I can tell about us is that ever since three years ago things have gone downhill. They cut our salary in half. They cut all our extras and all of our hourly work. And then one day in November of last year one guy was talking to us and he was cheated out of some money on one of his checks. His check was \$60 short and he talked with us and we decided to do something about it. We decided to talk to all these guys, all the drywallers, and see if we could get together. So we did that, we went out from job to job and on the jobs that we were working, and we even took some days off to go and talk to the guys. And this was all geared to stop working some day. We thought that maybe it would be a month and it turned out that it was seven months later that we stopped working. On the day we stopped, this union hall was full of people. That was our goal then – to have this place right here filled with people.

"I'm from Mexico, from Guanajuato. A good portion of these guys are from Guanajuato, we are from the same town, from El Maguay, Guanajuato. There are at least two hundred of us from this one small little town in Guanajuato. It started about 22 or 24 years ago – the first

guy came and started to do well and other guys started to come here to the United States and heard about it and came to work with him.

"In Guanajuato most of what we do is farming, it is all farming. But we have factories there too. Guanajuato is so famous for its shoe factories and the sombrero factories. Some of us used to work in these factories, but most of us worked in farming and ranching. Some of us worked on our own land and others worked for somebody else. Yeah. it is hard to make it farming. We, the little people, have no protection so if something goes wrong then we can be totally ruined right away. We would have dreams for all year – especially with kids we would say that at the end of the year we will have money for this and this. But then at the end of the year we see that none of the dreams – were completed because we have no money. So that's when we think about coming to the United States. I decided to come to America to look for a better future.

"I'll tell you, we are proud to be from Mexico. Many other states like Guatemala and El Salvador have it much harder than Mexico. We live a better life in Mexico and we are feeling very sorry for the people who have to live with all these wars and all that. We can live a better life in Mexico but still we need a better future and that's the thing that made us come here. It's not easy to come here. Sometimes it can be easier for us in Mexico than it is for the people from El Salvador and Guatemala. I was sixteen years old when I crossed and I was scared. We had to hide in the hills for a day and a half before the guy decided to bring us out and across.

"I came to this country fifteen years ago. I had a lot of other jobs before I came to drywall. I work in a restaurant, I work in a nursery and I work in a factory. I came here eight years ago when I heard that drywall hangers are making good money. Five years later I found out that my salary was just going to keep going down and down. We are at the point where we can't take it anymore. We're paid piece-rate. You can work as a team, or you can work by yourself if you want to, but it will kill your back, you will not last very long. We are getting paid somewhere between four and six cents a square foot right now and we don't get paid for any of the extras anymore – we don't get paid extra for heights or for the rounds – the arches – that everyone wants to have in their homes. We used to get paid by the hour for that but we don't get that anymore, it is all piece-rate. Three years ago we would make five or six hundred dollars a week. Now we make somewhere between two hundred and three hundred and we work ten or twelve hours a day and six days a week.

"The conditions we have on the job are pretty bad. Starting with the tools we use on the job. We used to get most of the tools from the companies and they are very expensive tools. We don't get them from the companies anymore. Also the ladders and the scaffolding we use – the conditions of the ladders and scaffolding are so bad. We don't have no security out there no more. You see, when this was union work they always had somebody checking to make sure the ladders and scaffolds weren't cracked or anything. Now that these jobs are all non-union we don't have no protection from nowhere, from no one. And whenever the company wants to do something to us they withhold our salaries. So many times our checks are short or our checks bounce when we try to cash them. Sometimes we have to try to cash the check two or three times before it passes. We have no one to help us. That's what made us come to the decision that we have to fight. We decided that we must fight, we must go on a labor strike.

"The way we get work is with the foremen, the labor broker. The way it works is the foreman gets a job from this contractor and he gets a certain amount of money for doing these houses. This is all the money he gets for these houses. This way the owner of the houses and the company gets rid of all the responsibility. And he doesn't even care if the foreman cheats people. Now what happens is that if the foreman gets \$40,000 for the job, then he wants to spend only \$20,000 to do the job and keep the rest for himself. And the owner likes this because he might know that the foreman didn't spend the whole forty thousand and he figures that he can underbid some other guys on the next job and maybe only give the foreman thirty or thirty-five thousand and the foreman will be happy anyway."

We walked towards the communal kitchen and I asked the brother about how these workers were managing to get along during the strike. He talked about the tremendous sense of solidarity the workers felt with one another. He also stressed that survival was a very real question since very few of the "drywaleros" had any savings or cushion to fall back on. He told me how they had just begun to sign contracts with some of the builders in the area and that the men were sharing what jobs were available in order to help meet their expenses. As we got closer to the kitchen the brother pointed to piles of food and clothing donated by community groups and some other trade unions in the area. He went on to talk about the support they were trying to build – among the newer immigrants that the builders are trying to use to break the strike and the mostly Anglo former drywall hangers who were driven out of the trade when the "drywaleros" were used to bust the union.

"We have gone out there to so many job sites and talked to the new guys from Mexico or El Salvador and Guatemala. We tell them that we understand they must work but that the union will help all of us. We also go and talk to the Anglo guys and they just keep blaming us. They keep blaming us that we took their job away. We say how did we take their job away when they were here first. They were here first and they know how to do the work and they are good workers. We explain that it was the company owner's decision. He made this big decision because it was about money. That was why he made his decision, not because I was a better worker. We tell them that the owner couldn't even understand what I was saying because I was speaking Spanish. But he hired me because of money and he could break the union.

"You know, after the union was broken a lot of the Anglos went to the commercial work where they pay hourly wages. We work in tract homes and most of it is piece-rate. We have asked the commercial guys to join us or at least to promise not to do any work in the tracts. Sometimes when we go to talk to these guys or to some of the jobs then they pull out pistols and rifles on us and sometimes they fire some shots in the air to scare us. Sometimes the police are there but they don't do anything. Now some Anglo guys in other unions have given us support, money and donations."

Busted

My conversation with the spokesperson for the "drywaleros" was interrupted when he got called to the phone. A few minutes later he was up on the stage announcing that 68 of their members had just been arrested by the LAPD for picketing at a job site in the city. He also announced that the "drywaleros" had blocked the freeway before they were arrested and this led to whoops, cheers and shouts of "Si se puede" ("We can do it!") throughout the hall. When the brother returned he began to talk about the constant harassment the strikers face

from the police and La Migra.

"We had 149 people arrested out at Mission Viejo. Our guys went out to the job site and were doing the picket line. Then they got in the trucks and went to the next site. When they were almost there they saw that the police were following them. They stopped our guys on the freeway and they said that they had a report of somebody breaking in the other job site. There were six guys that were on the other job site and they came with us and joined with us. Now when the police stopped us they told these guys to come and testify against us. These guys said no, they wanted to stay with us. They didn't want to go with the police, they wanted to join us in the strike. So the police took them aside and had a little talk and then one of these guys started saying how he was hurt and needed an ambulance. We never could talk to these guys again to find out what the police said to them. The guy who said that we hurt him, though, was back in the company office two days later and was ready to go back to work.

"The guy who said he was hurt pointed out four guys and said that they were the ones that hurt him. So the police said that they were going to take the four guys and the others all said, 'No, if you are going to take those four guys then you are going to have to take all of us.' So the police took them all.

"Twenty-six of our guys were deported from all of this. They are all back now – the last one got back yesterday. A lot of our people they held in jail five or six days. Some they held a lot longer – three weeks or so. None of us have ever had any kind of record at all. But we were held in jail and treated like dogs. Some of the guys were held out on the cement all night with no blankets or anything. Then they would take our guys and when they were doing all the paperwork the police would say things to our guys like 'do you know this guy? He's the leader.' And our guys would say 'no,' but the police would just mark down 'yes, yes.' The police were doing whatever they wanted. And when they released our guys they put them out without their belongings, the cops kept their wallets and car keys and all that.

"They held more than 88 of our guys for two weeks because they said they were illegal aliens. They knew that this wasn't true because as soon as they took the fingerprints it would show up. They tried to say that my brother was a Cuban drug dealer so they had to keep him in jail. They arrested us at the beginning of the holiday weekend so they figured that the least they would keep us in jail was five days. They figured that they could break the strike down if they arrest 149 guys and that the builders would be pretty happy with them. But there are thousands more of us so it didn't work. All it did was make all of those guys and their families mad. They came out of jail mad, they came out swinging, ready to go back out.

"We had that feeling that the companies would use the immigration against us. So we told everybody who didn't have a green card or didn't have permission to work for whatever reason, we told them that there were some places where we thought the immigration might go and so we shouldn't have them go to these sites. That's how we worked it. Now there aren't that many of us in that situation, but still we look out for those guys. You know there were 88 guys that they held in jail and said that they were illegal and were going to be deported. Well a lot of these guys had their green card and they told them, but the cops would just say 'no, no you're illegal.' When our guys would show their green card then the police would say 'oh, you probably bought that thing in some alley somewhere.' It was just intimidation."

Our conversation was interrupted here by a lot of commotion at the door. The "drywalero" spokesperson pointed to the guys carrying piles of yucca plants into the hall and explained that a new supply of donated food had arrived. The brother left the table to go and help unload the food. He also explained that he wanted to tell the people delivering the supplies the latest news about the arrests in L.A.

Tired of Being Abused

The spokesperson was only gone a few minutes when a thin young man with long hair, heavy metal style, approached the table. He was carrying a plate of rice and beans and a small stack of tortillas. The bottom half of his Metallica T-shirt was covered by a green kitchen apron. He sat down at our table and introduced himself as one of the strikers who had been kept in jail for weeks after the Mission Viejo arrest. He explained that in order to get out of jail he had to plead guilty to a couple of misdemeanors and accept the judge's sentence of two years on probation. Because of this, the brother explained that he – and a few of his friends in the same situation – could no longer go out to the various job sites. Instead, they stayed behind in the union hall to prepare the food, keep the kitchen clean and help out in whatever else had to be done around the union hall headquarters. He was so eager to tell his story that he pushed his lunch aside until he was finished.

"I was in jail for nineteen days and then the immigration took me. They accused me of assault and holding hostages against their will. We got here at five in the morning and we agreed to go and protest at one of the job sites. We got there at six and then started to try to talk to the people that were working there. We don't know what it was that made people decide to come with us but a lot of people came out and joined with us. They came out to the trucks and then we stopped picketing at that job. We left for another job site and in the next block away the police blocked our way and stopped us. They took the six people that had come off of the job and joined with us – it was six people – out of the ruck. Three of the people went with the police and three of them stayed with us. Then the police talked with those people and then we were charged with kidnaping and also robbery. Then the police took us away on the bus.

"The police first arrested us and said that they were going to hold us for about eight or ten hours while they checked for information on us. Then they would let us go. The police took our fingerprints and then handed us over to the immigration. Some of us were released after six or seven days and some of us were held for longer. For some reason the police got my name and accused me of assaulting one of the workers at the site. The immigration tried to deport me but I refused to sign the voluntary deportation papers. They had five charges against a few of us. They were assault, kidnaping, rioting, robbery and something else. They let us go after we agreed to plead guilty to some misdemeanors and the judge sentenced us to two years probation.

"I'm from the northern part of Mexico and I was here only three months before someone taught me to hang drywall. I've been here five years now. In Mexico I worked in an electronics factory – making a certain part of an airplane. I was making very little money, only seventy dollars a week. I worked for American companies who come to Mexico and pay even less than they do here. I came here looking for better work here but it turns out that it is worse here than it is in Mexico. At least in Mexico I have my house and here I have to pay rent. In this country the Anglo thinks that he is superior to everyone else who is not Anglo and the

Latinos are put in a position of being a third-class citizen. The situation for Latinos is very bad. They say that there is no discrimination but there is a lot of discrimination. The way I feel now – and the way a lot of us feel now – is that we just want to get a little money and go back to Mexico because the situation is so bad.

"We just got tired of all of the abuse. And the pay is so low that we cannot support our families. The people who hang out in the street and hustle for money are making more money than we are. I make maybe thirty dollars a day and I have one child and there is no way I can support them with that amount of money. I just got tired of the abuse and that's why I joined the strike.

End of Part 10

Shockwaves: Report from the L.A. Rebellion

Part 11: Invasion of the Drywaleros

The charred and rubble-strewn lots that were everywhere when I first arrived in Los Angeles have begun to disappear. Fast food joints have been rebuilt and opened up in record time. Cleaning up the physical evidence of the rebellion is one thing, but the real impact of the uprising is a lot deeper and harder to remove than some burned-down buildings. If you take a walk through any neighborhood of the oppressed in Los Angeles and talk with the people, it is clear that the rebellion has changed people and that this situation scares the hell out of the powers-that-be. What one seemed so mighty and invulnerable has been exposed and deflated. People challenge things a lot more these days – from the common kinds of situations right on up to questioning the right of the rich to run society. The story of a strike by immigrant Mexican construction workers – shattering all the myths about immigrant workers is one powerful illustration of the aftermath of the LA Rebellion.

Since June 7, thousands of drywall hangers, almost all of them Mexican immigrants, have been on strike against the home construction industry in Southern California. The strikers are demanding a stable wage system with higher wages and recognition of their newly formed Union of Low-Salaried Workers. Construction sites in Los Angeles, Ventura, Orange, San Bernardino and San Diego counties have been shut down. The authorities, freaked out by the determination of these super-exploited proletarians, have responded with constant police harassment and almost daily arrests, as well as deportations and threats from La Migra (Immigration). The strikers have refused to be intimidated. They have won support from union members in L.A. and other parts of the U.S. and from immigrant rights, church and community groups. In last week's SHOCKWAVES some of the workers talked about their lives in Mexico, how they came to work in the U.S., the conditions they face on the job, and the kind of repression they've faced. Their story continues below.

The freeway had just started to back up when P., one of the striking drywall hangers, told us to take the next exit. Stretched out on all sides of us were the small hills and coastal valleys of Orange County. You couldn't imagine a more sterile and backward area. This is Reagan country, and the invasion of the striking "drywaleros" has everybody quite upset. After all, the Latino people in Orange County are supposed to serve and live an invisible life. The "drywaleros" have upset everything.

Parts of Orange County seem to be endless expanses of new tract-housing. These developments are nestled into the elbows of the hills as far out as the horizon. The tract housing neighborhoods all have fancy names and price tags that begin around \$300,000. Many of these developments are still under construction and they are the job sites the "drywaleros" have been picketing. As we approached one of the new sites, P. showed us the high fences topped with razor wire that have been put up around the sites since the strike began. The builders have done this to keep the Union of Low Salaried Workers away from the non-striking drywall hangers.

We came out to the area looking for one of the union's picket lines. No one was sure if we would be able to hook up with the strikers and their traveling picket line since they had already been on the road for more than an hour. But P. knew a few of the sites they were

supposed to hit that day and offered to help us find them. After an hour or so we still hadn't found the picket line. But, when we pulled out of one of the job sites, P. looked down the hill and excitedly announced that at last we had solid evidence that the strikers had either just left the area or were somewhere nearby. Off to the left side and down the hill there were six police cars parked on the side of one of the nearly finished roads leading into the housing development. The cops were literally scratching their heads and seemed to be pretty intensely studying a map. As P. laughed about the cops' predicament, I thought back on a conversation I had with P and one of his younger friends at the union hall.

P. lit a cigarette – he had just started back after quitting for ten years – and told his story. "I'm from Guanajuato and I've been here for about 24 years. My family worked in the fields in Guanajuato. They worked for somebody else, they didn't own their own land. We didn't work for big landowners but we worked on somebody else's land and we worked for ourselves. The way the system worked is that the profits that were made were divided into three parts – one part of the profits went to the landowner and the rest went to us. That's what I did when I lived there – I worked in fields that grew corn, peanuts and other vegetables and chilies and watermelons. Guanajuato is not a very big state but it is rich in vegetable farms.

"I could survive in Mexico but I saw that a lot of people were coming here to the north and so I decided to come here. It was very difficult when I first came here, especially because of the language barrier. When I first came here I worked as a dishwasher and a busboy. I worked in a place called the Japanese Village. This was all minimum-wage work and I needed to survive somehow so then I started working here in the drywall business in 1976.

"Things went good for about 12 years and then things went downhill. Since there was no union the companies just kept bidding lower and lower for our wages. If I don't want to work for six cents a square foot then maybe somebody else will come along and work for five and a half cents. It was the low wages that drove us to strike. Things were getting worse and worse."

P. loved the strike and he was especially proud that he had been chosen as one of the strikers assigned to go and convince the non-striking workers on the job sites to join the struggle. He was also very angry at the way the police had been unleashed against the strike. "We went to a job in Huntington Beach and when we first got there it was only security guards on the job. Five minutes later there were eight police cars on the site. The police told us that immigration was on the way. When we asked why they called immigration the police told us they called so that the immigration could take us away. I told the police that I had my documents and they said, 'Yeah, maybe you do, but your friends don't.' The police also went and checked all of the vehicle identification numbers on our cars and were going to see if they could get us for something. Then they told us that we could only carry six people in the back of our trucks. Then they gave us tickets. Then the police got one car in front of us and one car in the back of us and we were escorted out.

"There are areas where this happens all the time. They watch us very carefully and we can't speak to the people on the job or come near them or else we will get arrested. We wait for the people working there to come out to leave. But then they have one cop car in the front of us and one in the back and four on the sides. And sometimes the police will follow us for ten miles. The police make it so we can't talk to the workers. They also bring the workers in and out of the site in rented vans with the windows all blocked up. We can't go anywhere. If

we are going home or we are going to a job site, the police follow us. If we have five cars then there will be five police cars following us. When we went to a job site in Riverside, the Riverside police escorted us all the way back here to Orange County.

Nothing to Lose

As P, finished his story, F., a much younger striker, leaned against one of the trucks parked in the lot and began to talk about the importance of the strike and how he saw it connected to other big issues of the day. "I was one of the people that the immigration tried to deport. They said that I didn't have papers but I did. I was held in jail for 16 days. I was one of the people who had to accept a lesser charge to be released. Some of us were not even near the construction site but we were charged with trespassing. I only had to plead guilty to disturbing the peace to get out, but my three brothers had to plead guilty to other charges and they got two years probation. I'm from Guanajuato also. We are all either related or we know each other.

"I want people to know that because we are from the third world and are coming to the first world to work, that doesn't mean that we have to accept the worst conditions and to be treated like animals. We want people to know that. We can't just work here for food, we need something more.

"They treat us like slaves. All the governments and all of the owners of the companies, they treat all the Mexicans like animals. All they want is their money, they don't care about people. They just care about their money and as long as they make their money they are happy. They don't care if somebody got killed or hurt on the job. There are many accidents on our jobs here. This is some of the things we want to avoid. What's wrong with what we are asking for? We are asking for fair wages – what's wrong with that? But the police arrest us, immigration comes after us, some of us get two years probation. What's wrong with what we are asking?"

I asked F. what he thought of the L.A. Rebellion and whether it had any kind of effect on the strikers and the way they were carrying out their struggle. I also asked what he had learned through the struggle and if he had ever thought about the possibility of a revolution and a complete change in the way society is set up. F. thought for a while, grinned and then answered. "When you are seeing people fighting against an injustice, in a way it does influence you because you see things in a similar way. The rebellion in Los Angeles could have influenced me. It made me feel a little stronger, but we would have felt a lot stronger if it had happened in our own community.

"Yes, I think that a definite change needs to come about. I see that we have to face all these obstacles like the police and the immigration in our struggle. If things are not going to change then something else is going to have to be done. Supposing we win this struggle – the same thing might happen that happened before when we fought for a union a few years ago. It might happen again. If we win, the system is not going to change. It will continue to benefit the rich instead of the poor. Even if this same thing happens again we will still have to do it all again. We will have to continue. We have nothing to lose. We are at the edge of the very edge of society."

End of Part 11

Shockwaves: Report from the L.A. Rebellion

Part 12: Voices from the Barricaded Areas

When you take the Harbor Freeway down into South Central L.A. you come to an exit where you're just about halfway between downtown Los Angeles and Watts. About a mile or so off the freeway you come to the corner of Vernon and Central. People told me that before the rebellion this used to be one of the busiest intersections in the city. Now things are a lot quieter. The corner is just four vacant lots and a couple of bus stops. The whole neighborhood seems quiet these days. But this quiet is deceptive. A few blocks in off of the main streets is where the barricaded zone begins.

Inside these barricades life is anything but quiet for the people. On some streets you can feel the seething anger of the people. Since the rebellion there has been a lot of talk coming from every kind of authority about how to chill things out in the neighborhoods. There has been talk about improving police I community relations throughout the city. The most repressive programs have been given soft-sounding names like "community-based policing," "weed and seed." But, when you cut away all of the frills it all comes down to drastically stepping up the repression of the people in these neighborhoods.

One of the earlier models for these police-state moves on the ghettos and barrios is the establishment of barricaded zones – a scheme where whole neighborhoods are sealed off by street barricades to create what the city officials call "artificial communities." As always, this repression is carried out in the name of the community and making things better in the neighborhood. But what it comes down to is giving the police free rein to terrorize the people in these "communities." The barricaded zones are actually the first steps in creating Nazi-style ghettos of the oppressed in the USA. The people in the barricaded zone around Central and Vernon were eager to tell the truth about life in this 'hood.

The Night Time Is The Best Time

It was a sunny, late afternoon when I pulled up and parked just outside one of the barricades. Down the street – on the other side of the barricade – men and women were just coming home from work. They stood in clumps up and down the sidewalk greeting each other and exchanging bits of gossip and news. Little kids and older people sat on the front porches and stoops that lined the street. A few bony old dogs circled around dusty front yards looking for some shade. About 50 feet away a group of six or seven Black youth – 14 to 16 years old – were half walking and half wrestling their way down the middle of the street. Their laughter was loud as they jokingly dissed each other. When I approached them the whole group gathered around me. I explained who I was and what I was doing in the 'hood. I held out a copy of the *Revolutionary Worker* for the youth to see. From the back of the crowd a very serious voice announced, "Yeah, we'll talk. This is the paper that's with the revolutionaries in the neighborhood. We're down with them!"

The youth who spoke wore a neon green whistle around his neck. He explained that they were a local tagging crew and that he had gotten his whistle from the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade. This crew was ready to blow their whistles and be part of a

neighborhood mobilization every time the police turn up to harass or bust people in the area. The young brother, T., motioned for all of us to sit on the curb just outside the barricade and then he started on his story.

"The cops treat people like shit around here. You be walking down the street and they just start fucking with you. They sweating us. They stop us for nothing. They don't have no search warrants but they start searching you. Last time they messed with me they threw me on the ground and I hit a big bar. I started running as soon as I saw them and when they caught me they just threw me on the ground and messed up my shoulder. They was chasing me cuz they said I was writing on the wall."

T. stopped for a moment to catch his breath and K., another member of the crew, jumped right in. "You just walking and they see you got a backpack then they think you got a spraycan or something and they just start messing with you. First they just stop and they say 'Can we have a moment of your time?' or something like that. They trying to get all nice at first. Then they just jump out and throw you against the wall, they start searching you, they go through your stuff. If they find something on you they throw the cuffs on you and they hit you up all around your head."

"We usually with a crew. We got our little posse around here and we just hang out. See, with all your homies around they usually don't fuck with you. They wait till you alone. They drive by, they slow down, and they looking at you funny. They keep looking at you like you stupid. They ask you too many questions – where you live, what have you been doing, where you going to, what school you go to, where you coming from. Then they ask you what gang you from. You don't even have to be in a gang and they ask you what gang you from. You just got to be dressed a certain way and they say you in a gang."

K. stood up and in his most defiant voice made a statement that had all of the other brothers rolling on the grass in laughter. "I tell them where I'm from. I'm from my tagging crew. Then they say that it is gang-related and they want to know your nickname, what they call you. I just tell them my name and I am the greatest of all times."

T. came back in after the laughter died down. "They always try to say you gang members. Last time they took me, him and my cousin cuz we walked by one of them barricades and I kicked it. First they got my cousin and when me and my mom when down to get him they got me. They said I was the one they wanted. They said I was writing shit and I was trying to burn down them barricades. They said it was gang-related."

As we talked, T. told me how he knew his neighborhood so well that he always had a good chance of getting away from the police if he had some warning that they were coming up on him. He also talked about some of the other ways he used to steer clear of the cops. "It's the best way at night. It the best part of the world for me. I love it. At night you don't care about the police. At night they stay away, they kind of like they scared. It's best at night cuz they don't be around."

Everyone was laughing and trying to get out their own favorite stories about the night. But F., one of the younger members of the crew, had one story that brought home how deadly serious the situation is. Everyone quieted down for a few moments while F. finished his story. "One night they did shoot somebody on my porch. That was on April the third. I was up in my

bedroom and I heard POW, POW. And then I saw in the morning this guy with two holes right here in his head. And I know it was the police cuz I was looking out the upstairs window and I seen the police pull off."

Living With Day-In-Day-Out Harassment

A half hour later I was walking down one of the main streets in the barricaded zone when I heard someone yelling about revolution. I turned to find an O.G. I had met months ago on one of my first visits to the neighborhood coming up on me with his hand outstretched. I explained what I was doing back in the area and he decided to walk down the street with me to introduce me to some other folks. As we walked he told me a little of what the police have been doing over the last month or so.

"You want to know about the cops around here now – just one night a couple of weeks ago they come up here to that alley and cut off the whole area around there. They sealed off the whole neighborhood. Come to find out that one gang from Compton come up here to fight with the young guys hanging out down that alley. The cops let the Compton gang go into the alley so that they could fight it out. The cops wanted them to stay in there and kill each other off. There was maybe 100 cops and they sealed off the whole neighborhood around that alley and whenever anybody came out of where they was fighting the cops would right away arrest them. What's that tell you? They sealed off another part of the neighborhood last night but I ain't heard what was going down that time."

The O.G. had just finished his story when a young woman sitting inside an old car with her boyfriend yelled out his name. We crossed the street to talk and after the sister heard what I was doing she insisted that I sit in the back of the car while she and her boyfriend ran down their experiences. Her name was W. and she had grown up in the neighborhood. She was raising her own child a block or so away from her mother's house. She knew the neighborhood and the people well. "I lived here for 20 years and I knew these barricades was wrong since I first seen them. Whenever the police come around here they always chasing you. Just cuz you're Black they saying that you got to be in some gang. They put you in jail for things you didn't do. They put you in jail for murder and things you didn't do."

M., her boyfriend, picked things up here. "They just put murders on people cuz they say they gang members. That's what's wrong with around here. That's what's really wrong. I saw it happen yesterday. It was a friend of mine and he was kinda like a gangbanger and because of that they got him. They picked him up somewhere around here for being a gang member. The police got him and the next thing you know they got him for some murder that he didn't do. I know he didn't do it. I be with the dude every day. Now I'm not no gangbanger but I be with the dude every day talking with him and trying to put some sense up in his head. Now all of a sudden he in jail for murder which I know he didn't do."

M. left to get a pack of cigarettes and W. continued with her story. "They always pulling me over. They look at this car and they pull me over. 'Where your baby's father at?' Then when they see him again then they handcuff him for murder. They handcuffed him with his hands in back and then tied his hands to his feet. They carried him over there and beat him, they beat him just like that. Now we didn't have no video camera so we couldn't go to court or nothing.

"Plus, they try to make it seem like I'm a snitch. It was in a murder case. Now just because I knew this boy who did a murder that don't mean I know where this boy is at. Now they kept on coming to my house acting like I was snitching on him. They handcuffed me and took me to the station and held me for three days.

"I wouldn't tell them nothing. I wouldn't be no snitch. That's why half of them boys in jail for murder and all around here are in jail – they won't tell and the police are just sticking them. I'm on probation myself for a robbery I didn't do. I busted some snitch in the mouth – so the police come looking for me and set me up on a robbery charge."

M. came back with his cigarettes and a couple of sodas. He passed the sodas around and picked up where W. left off. "I used to go to high school around here but I had to quit cuz the police were looking for me. They was saying that I did something wrong and I violated my probation. So I just had to quit school for awhile. I want to go back sometime.

"I had some trouble with the police outside of this neighborhood too – out there in Watts. Man, it's lonely out there. She was with me that night. Me and her and her cousin was driving and the police started flashing their light up in our eyes. So her cousin say, 'Stop flashing that light up in our eyes.' I couldn't even see. The cops pulled me over and snatched me out of the car and took me off to jail. Now I didn't say a goddam thing and he knew I didn't say nothing. But you know how cops are, he hit me all up in the ribs and all that. They held me for a day and a half and then they just all of a sudden let me go. They done me wrong, beating up on me and all that."

Just before I left I asked M. and W. what they thought of the rebellion. M. answered first. "When I saw that Rodney King thing I thought those cops had to go to jail. I thought there was proof so they had to go to jail. When they got acquitted I thought it's so damn backwards around here I don't know what is going on anymore. I don't know what to think. I was down in Nickerson Gardens when all this jumped off and I knew it was serious. I went up to see some friends and I was up in their house and I looked at my friends and they had those red beamers on their heads. Man they had those red dots on their heads, the red lights that the army uses on its guns, that's what they had in Nickersons. People get them red beamers on them and they just straight laid down. They had some sharpshooters up on top of some buildings down there and they was using these red beamers. I knew it was serious."

W. bent over to pick up her young daughter. Her eyes were bright and clear as she talked about how the rebellion was one time when she felt "everything was going to be good." "My mother told me that back in her day a riot jumped off like that too because of the police beating a Black person," W. recounted, "So when I heard what happened I went straight out there. And let me tell you what happened. I'm gonna tell you what all was out there. There was Eses, there was Mexicans, there was Blacks and there was a lot of white folks out there too. It was all of us out there in the mix. I ain't got nothing against anybody's race, we was all out there. It wasn't just Black people, we was all out there. It was everybody." W. said this was her favorite thing about the rebellion.

The Truth On The Stoop

A half a block away two Latino youth sat on the hood of their car drinking soda and talking. As I moved closer to them they called over to me and wanted to know what I was

talking with people about. I explained and showed them the *Revolutionary Worker* newspaper. One brother made a few comments while he searched his pockets for a dollar. "They pull you over and they ask you if you gangbanging. They ask if you got any tattoos on you. It don't matter if you gangbang or not. And when you tell them no, they don't believe you. They start tripping on you, they say you're lying and they start searching your car and all that. I don't know why they sweat the Latinos and the Blacks. Maybe it's because we're the minority here. Maybe it's cuz they think we the lowest people around. I thought that rebellion was real good – it was teaching them a lesson. They think that they can go around doing whatever they want and nobody's gonna stand up to them. It showed somebody will stand up to them. Here in this neighborhood the Black and Latino people, we get along good. We been around here a long time and we know each other real good."

The brother took his paper and explained that he had to get lo work. But he told me that if I really wanted to hear what was coming down in the neighborhood I should go around the comer and talk to the brothers hanging out there. I turned the corner and found 20 or so young Black men sitting on the steps in front of a house and on the cars parked in front of the house. They were laughing loud. One brother was in the middle of the group singing and acting out the Dr. Dre rap, "187 On An Undercover Cop." The afternoon sun was just beginning to sink and off in the distance the glittery skyline of downtown L.A. shot up through the horizon almost like it was mocking the barricaded section of the neighborhood.

As I joined the group and explained what I was doing there, one of the brothers told me. "You know what's so good about rap? It's just that it's telling people what's really happening." The brother, Z., went on to say that he was going to do the same thing and then he started in on his view of the cops and life in the 'hood.

"Fuck the police! They always harass us. We ain't no gangbangers, we ain't no killers. We just trying to survive. I'll tell you what happens. Them motherfuckers just pull up on them bicycles – you just stay here long enough and see if they don't roll up on your ass. They jump off their bikes and take your money, take you to jail and that's that. They make you mind with them nines they got. When a motherfucker jumps off a bike pointing a gun at you, man you can't do nothing else but mind.

"They got me the other night, pulled up here on me and had their gun out and put me up on the fence before they took me to jail. In some ways the bikes are the same as the cars, they still roll up on you. But in some ways the bikes are worse cuz they can just come out them alleys all over here."

G., a young brother who had stopped by on his way to the store, added on to the picture. "The police around here either gonna kick your ass or kill you. I'll tell you this, anybody live around here know that if you in a car and the police try to pull you over then you better keep driving till you get home or until you get someplace where you gonna have a lot of witnesses. Then you can get out. If you out there by yourself they gonna hurt you. If they don't kill you, you gonna wish you was dead."

S., the brother who had been singing earlier, joined the conversation. "Let me tell you about this cop named Duplex, man!" Everyone groaned and yelled in recognition of a familiar tale. "There was fifteen of us out here one night. Now one of us had on some purple shoestrings and this Duplex gonna make this guy say he's gangbanging. Duplex hit that

brother with his billy club til he broke his arm trying to make him say he gangbanging. The brother still wouldn't say he gangbanging so the cop finally let him go after he broke his arm."

R., a brother who had been quiet for most of the conversation was now visibly angry. He told everybody to quiet down while he made his points. "They come and fuck somebody up every goddam day. They had one partner kneeling down next to this car with a big old dent in it. The brother was kneeling there and the cops just kept beating his head so that his face was just steady going into that dent. I had them once when I ran away and then they caught me kneeling next to a house. I didn't see them coming up behind me, but this one come up and started to stand on my leg. I told him I give up, and he just steady stood on that same leg, putting all his weight on it. Another time they had this brother over there kneeling down with his hands over his head and they told him not to move or they was gonna kick his ass. They had that brother kneeling there for two hours. And it don't matter what you look like. We was standing in the market one time and I had on my silk. That cop come in there and took all the homies outside but I just thought he wouldn't come after me cuz I was dressed fine. Next thing I know he in there saying 'you too, you motherfucker.' Next thing I know we all out there kneeling in the parking lot."

Z., the brother who had spoken up first, turned the conversation towards the rebellion. He said everybody on that corner had been out in the streets for the whole rebellion. Now they are trying to figure out what the system is doing to the people in the wake of the uprising. He punched the air with his fist as he made his points. "We in South Central, man. They took everything away from us. They turned off our power, our electricity and all that. Then they took the news away from us and they say that Black people caused all the trouble in South Central. We ain't the cause of nothing. That verdict was the cause of it. The white folks was the ones who read the verdict! Now they got them brothers down there – the LA4 – trying to give them 30 years apiece.

"This is not our constitution. I can't see how they trying to make us abide this. There was this lady come out here for the news and ask this brother if he thought they was gonna convict them cops this time. The brother said 'no!' She look at the brother and say 'Man, you act like you on they side.' The brother looked at her and said 'Ma'am I'm not on they side, it's just that I know what's going on.' Why you think they got them cops on trial? They just trying to get the Black people to calm down."

M., a man who was a few years older than the rest of the group, had joined the crowd just as Z. began talking. M. threw his opinions out there and he wanted to make sure that I got his opinion of the new police chief, Willie Williams, on tape. "Willie Williams, he's a house slave. That motherfucker come down here and he wasn't even allowed to carry a gun. He's gonna do whatever they tell him. I think he's working for Daryl Gates. You think they just fired Gates. He's there in that man. He just gonna do what Gates tells him to do. They manipulating him. He's gonna do the same thing that Daryl Gates did cause he got to mind the people that manipulating him."

Z. finished things off just as the police rolled up and demanded to know what was going on. "There's some of us down here that will back them down now. Some of us don't play that kneeling down shit. What are we gonna get on our knees for. They come by here and jump out they cars and tell us to get on our knees. For what? We don't have to do that! Look, people just got to know something. The rich just gonna keep getting richer and the poor

just gonna keep get poorer. If you don't change that you gonna stay down here in the dumps. The white man ain't gonna give us nothing.”

Defiant Daughter

The park was full that day. People from the neighborhood were out playing baseball, using the local pool or just hanging out under some trees with friends trying to stay cool. The Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade was having a picnic in one part of the park. A number of youth from the neighborhood had come to check things out. One of them was P., a young Latina full of defiance. "I was born in Mexico but my parents brought me here when I was real young. I been hanging around here all my life. I'm 18 and I was working but I quit. I got Black and Latino friends but mostly all the people I hang out with is Black people. But a lot of Mexican people is my friends too. I know everybody and everybody around here knows me. Everywhere I go I talk to everybody. So it's cool for me here. I know how things go and all that.

“I was right here kicking with my homies and when we heard about that verdict. Everybody was talking about that stuff but I said nobody's gonna do nothing. My friends all said. 'That's what you think.' We left from here and went somewhere else and I saw all these fires everywhere and I saw all these people in the streets and coming out of their houses. I saw cops chasing some people and then I saw the people just stop and start throwing bottles and stuff at the police. And I just said 'Damn!' and went and joined them. I've had a lot of run-ins with the police. See, I don't take no shit from them. They say I got a real bad attitude problem.”

End of Part 12

Shockwaves: Report from the L.A. Rebellion

Part 13: Raid at La Costura

The California Mart is a huge mirrored cube, plopped down in the middle of the garment district and the Skid Row area of downtown Los Angeles. This is where you go to see the latest in designer fashions. Inside the cube the high-profile, ultra-glam fashion models are everywhere. Big-money buyers with dollar signs for eyes prowl the hallways, laying out small fortunes for the next season's smash hit, name brand line. This is what the world of high fashion is all about. At least that's what they like people to believe.

Just outside the California Mart, in fact on all of the streets around the Mart, are hundreds of garment industry sweatshops. They are small and large factories housed in aging and rundown nondescript brown and gray buildings. Inside these factories the name brand fashions are sewn together from pieces of cloth. The work is low paid and grueling. Inside these sweatshops the lives of the workers are sewn into the garment before the name brand tag goes on it. This is the industry known as La Costura and it is one of the biggest employers of Latino immigrants in all of Los Angeles. La Costura is the reality behind the mirrored cube.

One horrible side of the job – a day in and day out thing – is the constant threat of immigration raids and sudden deportation. La Costura is a prime target of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), La Migra. Lately there have been a number of immigration raids in the L.A. garment district.

On the morning of August 12, La Migra raided a large downtown sweatshop. Sixty-nine Latino immigrants were arrested and 56 of them were immediately deported. At least three workers were injured in the raid when they attempted to escape by jumping out of a fourth floor window to the rooftop of the adjoining two-story building.

Working La Costura

A couple of weeks after this raid I sat talking with Ismael, a young Mexican immigrant, in a small South Central apartment that he shared with four or five other adults. Ismael turned down the volume of the box playing a tape of a Mexican heavy metal band and started to talk about coming to the U.S. and what it is like working in La Costura.

"I'm from Mexico and I've been here two and one half years. I came here like everybody else, to find work. I went to Tijuana first and found some coyotes who took me from TJ to the U.S. for \$300. You have to walk through the hills and you have to always dodge the INS and the Mosco, the big fly, the helicopter. You dodge the Mosco by going among the weeds and hiding in the bushes. The amount of time you have to spend out there depends on how thick the immigration is. You have to cross through the hills, go up and down gullies, hiding from immigration in the bushes. And then you get really scared because all of a sudden immigration pops up in front of you and then you got to run until you find that exit wherever you can find that route. Then you can take the freeway and come to L.A. But you can only really do that when you have some knowledge and experience of having been in the United States.

"The first time you come here you are really disoriented and you don't know the score here, you don't know how things operate in the U.S. The first time I came here the coyotes took me all the way to Los Angeles. They dropped me off at my friend's in East L.A.

"I had to find a job but it really was hard to find a job. The greatest difficulty is not being able to speak English. I was searching for work in garment. My friends even took me to find work and they helped me to find a job. When I would look for a job the owner would speak to me in English and I wouldn't know what they were saying. Then I learned that they were asking me if I knew how to work, what kind of machine I could operate and how many years experience I had. To get good work you had to have two to three years experience in the job itself. They didn't want no trainees in the factory. In Mexico I worked in a textile factory making thread. I had some of that experience but I didn't have the experience I needed in the U.S. I would tell them lies when they asked me about my experience because I wanted to work.

"I work in the garment industry – La Costura now. At my job we make pants, pants that are like slacks. They pay us by production, by how much you make. They pay us piece rate and the rate depends on the kind of job they give you. Some jobs are paid very cheaply, 28 cents apiece. Some of the factories really want to kill people. They want to keep you from early in the morning until the sun is gone. I have worked on about 200 or 220 pairs of pants by the end of the day. I have really killed myself working.

"I have to force myself at my work. Here in this garment work you are hunched over all the time and to me it is really nasty. In the beginning of this work your back really begins to hurt you. Then your lungs begin to fail you. Your feet begin to get swollen up because you don't have any movement and you can't do any exercise while you are working. Then your fingers begin to hurt and you put them in water and your whole hand starts to hurt, you get these pains in your hands. And you are running the risk of losing your sight in this job because you are always watching the needle to make sure that the needle doesn't stitch your fingers. There are a lot of injuries in this work.

"They also fire people a lot. They fire you when you have an accident because the owner doesn't want to end up having any problems. So if you get hurt the owner will just tell you that there is no work for you. And there is nothing you can do because you have no papers. And even if you did have the papers they would not listen to you."

The Raid

Ismael stopped for a moment and the whole room was dead quiet. He looked out the window for a moment and then offered us more coffee. Police sirens wailed on the streets below as he started back up with his story. "We were alert that immigration was going to come but we didn't know when they were going to come. Earlier the Korean woman who owns the factory told us that the immigration was coming. When she told us this, they came. But they came just to check the papers, to see if you had migrated here or what. So the owner took us out when she heard that immigration was coming. Maybe this was a mistake by the owner because when the immigration came the factory was completely empty, there was only 15 workers in the factory. At the time there were about 80 of us that worked there. So all of these machines were empty of people, there were no operators. So the immigration asked, 'Where are the people? Where are the workers?' The owner said that she sent us home because her workers were afraid of being taken by immigration. So immigration

realized that there were a lot of people with no papers there so when they came back for the raid they did not announce that they were coming. They came back for the raid about a week later.

"Wherever you go for work in this country you are going to find immigration. But generally they come down on larger factories because they know that there are a lot of people with no papers. They usually don't go to the little factories where only 10 or 20 people work. They raided our factory once last year. I was working there but I wasn't there when the raid happened. I wasn't caught in this raid because I was told by some friends that the immigration was coming so I had to leave the job. Someone had reported the factory. I was warned by my friends and I got out of there. I got out of there one or two hours before the raid happened.

"So this time it was different. There I was, I was scared. I knew that immigration was coming but I didn't know when it was coming. But I had to go every day and sit at my machine. We were working that day in the morning when the word started getting around that immigration was here. Everybody there in the factory turned around to look at the doorway and then a lot of people started running trying to look for the exits in order to get away from immigration. But the immigration had blocked every entrance. The next thing was the windows and many people started going to the bathrooms and some people started diving into piles of clothes before the immigration came in. Immigration, when they came in, they started banging on the door saying it was the police so the people had to open the door. Immigration came through and started asking everybody for their papers. Anybody who didn't have papers was put to the side.

"Immigration just kept telling us, 'Don't even try to escape because it will just be worse for you.' Some people tried to run and they were the ones that they put in handcuffs. If some really resisted, immigration had chains with them to tie everyone up. The people who were working on the lower floors tried to get out the windows. Some people on the fourth floor were hurt when they tried to go out the windows. When they heard that the immigration was coming the people on the fourth floor got ready by tying this cloth and letting it hang through the window. They planned to jump through the window and use this cloth to get away by climbing down the building using this cloth. Some people tried this. They went out the window and because of fear they lost control. They were really scared and they were hurt. On the lower floors only some people managed to escape using the windows.

"Once the INS realized that the lower floors had windows they surrounded the entire building and nobody could really leave. We didn't have any plan to escape on the lower floors. It was only to try to escape by hiding or trying to run. But for us it was too late. They, the INS was everywhere and everything was under guard.

"When they took us outside to the bus I saw that there were a lot of immigration people there. There must have been about 30 of them there and they had the whole building surrounded. They also blocked the whole parking for the factory so that people couldn't take their cars out. I was really worried when I was on the bus. I was thinking about my family and that I was going to have to leave them behind. I kept thinking that when it came around afternoon time I was not going to be coming home. And then I was thinking that the rent was coming and I was worried about how I was going to come up with the money now. People on the bus were all worried. We were wondering how they were going to deal with us. We wanted to know if they were going to take us straight from the factory to TJ or were we going

to get locked up. The way it went down was that they took us over to the immigration place next to Olvera Street in L.A. and they locked us up. We were caught at 9:30 in the morning and we were detained until we were taken out of L.A. at about 4 or 5 in the afternoon.

"They asked us if we wanted to sign voluntarily. They told us that we could have a hearing and a chance to get an attorney. But if you get an attorney then you have to pay all of this money. They also told us that we could pay this bail of \$10,000 or \$15,000 so that we would not be deported to the border. None of us took this and we all signed for voluntary departure because we all needed to get back here as quickly as possible.

"When we were in the jail they told us that they didn't want us to raise any trouble. Anybody who raised any kind of scandal or problems would get it worse. They said if we created any problems that we would be locked up for 15 days or more. There was one person who really caused a lot of problems though. Maybe it was because he was afraid of being sent out of the country. You know INS would call us one by one to ask us where we came from, where and when we were born and where we lived in L.A. Many of us would just lie and give them false names and false addresses. But when they called this one person he started getting nasty with the immigration agents. They grabbed him by the hair and then they twisted his arms behind him and they handcuffed him to the chair. From there we don't know what happened to him but he remained there when the rest of us were taken away.

"None of us were able to call our families and let them know what had happened to us. When they took us in they took everything away from us so we had no quarters for the phone. My family found out about me because when immigration got there I left my telephone number with someone who had papers. And I left the keys to my car so that they could come and pick it up. It was only in that way that they realized what had happened to me and that they didn't need to worry so much for me.

"They put us on a bus to take us to TJ. Again they told us not to cause trouble. They said that if we caused trouble that when we got to San Clemente they were going to lock us up for a week. So everybody had to be cool to avoid being locked up and we could get to Tijuana in the shortest time possible. It took us about four hours to get to Tijuana. It was a really slow bus. They dropped us at the borderline, at *la linea*, the line. You know the line, the border where there are two signs – Mexico and the United States. The only divider there is this wire mesh and this is what we call *la linea*, the line. From there one way is TJ and the other is Los Angeles. I walked to Mexico from there."

The Crossing

"When I got to TJ, I called my family and told them that I was okay and that I was going to try to cross as soon as possible again. Then the first thing I had to do was find a place to sleep and figure out how I was going to survive with whatever money I had in my pockets then. There were three of us and we had to find a hotel to sleep at because we didn't know anybody there. Then we called L.A. and talked with a friend who plays football with us. Our friend told us to get some rest and he would come down for us.

"Our friend came for us but he didn't want to cross us from TJ because he said that it was really difficult to cross at TJ right now. So he took us to Nogales. At Nogales we crossed the line. In Nogales you only have to cross this hill and that is it. You just have to beware

before you hit the streets on the other side that you don't find the police or the immigration. And then once you get to the other side you have to find your way to a certain place and from there the coyote will just drop you off and he goes back to the other side of the border by car. From there our friend came by with his car and we got in. We had three hours on the road with him but then we were caught by immigration again. We hadn't caught on that INS in that area actually hides on the bridges there so we couldn't avoid them and we were caught again by the INS. They took us out of the car and our friend who came for us was let go.

"Since we were caught by INS and taken back to Nogales then we had to find a coyote again. But at that time we didn't have enough money, we only had enough for a hotel and maybe to eat some. The next day we got up early and took a bus to TJ because that was much closer to L.A. The trip from Nogales to TJ took us a whole day and a whole night. We only had enough money for the trip, and to eat we had to start selling the watches we were wearing. When we got to TJ we tried to get somebody to come down and pick us up. But by then we were desperate because we didn't have no more money. We got very nervous and so our group decided to break up and everybody had to find their own way back to L.A.

"So I tried to look for a coyote in the central truck station of TJ. The coyote didn't care that I didn't have money so long as I had somebody to cover me on the other side. So long as I had somebody who could respond for me then I was all right. If you don't have that kind of connection then you are left behind. They told me that they were coming over that very same night but it turned out not to be so. I was kept all night long in the house of the coyote and all of the next day. So then it was like Sunday at dawn when we got to the crossing point. It was a long wait and by six o'clock we were in the hills. It was dark and we had to live in the dark for a long time. We had to sleep there in some rags and some cardboards and we had to wait there until much later to cross. And later when we observed that there is not much vigilance by the INS then we could start crossing.

"I saw immigration again on this crossing. We were running with the coyotes who were taking us. At this time they were passing eight of us. The immigration came and caught everybody except me because I remained hidden and kept still. They had to bring in the Mosco and then they had to use the searchlights. I had to lay there for an hour, more or less. I was laying there in the middle of these brushes until finally I got to leave. Then I had to go over two hills and several ditches. From there all I had to do was spot the freeway. The freeway was my one last hope to actually make it back here. I was desperate. I didn't have no money and I didn't have no food.

"Twice they almost caught me but I ran across the freeway. I was hitchhiking but no one was giving me a ride on the freeway. About dawn a Mexican truck driver stopped for me, blew his horn and asked where I was going. I told him I was going to L.A. and I told him I would give him money if he took me to L.A. That's how I managed to get back to L.A.

"When I got back I went for my job but I couldn't get my job back because I didn't have papers. There are a lot of people off of that raid who no longer have a job. The owner only gave us the two weeks pay that was owed to us and told us never to come back around there because INS said that it was going to be making the rounds of that factory continuously.

"Not everyone who was deported with me came back. Some people are already sending for their belongings and asking that they be sent to TJ. They say that they are not

going to come back here again because it was just getting too difficult. It is getting very difficult to find work. It is like coming here for the first time, it is like starting all over again. It becomes difficult finding a job when you come back. This is especially now in this season because this season is very slow. So you have to take work that pays very cheaply and you have to tighten your belt because you know that there is no other job. So you sell yourself for whatever low wage and if you can't hang on you know that the owner will just replace you. The owner will always hire 15 or so people and only four will remain at the job."

Connections

Ismael had finished his story and we were sitting talking about different aspects of life in Los Angeles. As we talked I kept thinking about the tremendously important part these immigrant sisters and brothers have to play in the revolutionary struggle here. I decided to ask Ismael what he thought about the L.A. Rebellion. He thought deeply about his reply before he spoke. "I thought it was good that people rose up to fight against oppression in that rebellion. It was very ugly because of the police who beat this Black man. This was the cause and everybody really rose up. It was war and people took arms. That was the cause because there is no justice and because they would not accept that the police were not guilty. I think it was good that people rose up to fight against oppression. During that rebellion the police were not sticking their noses into anything. You could go up against the cops and they couldn't do or say anything. It was something where we all had to struggle to do something for ourselves and we needed to show them that we could deal with them.

"I see the connection between the raid and what happened here. The connection would be between the police and the INS – you could say that there is a connection there. They were telling us that they were going to just grab every Latino. This is what you learn if you walk on the streets. And right now they are doing all these raids on the factories and they are talking about how they want to get every illegal. This is because they are so mad because of what happened off of the rebellion. The police are afraid that maybe because of something else this will happen again."

End of Part 13

Aftershocks – The Rebels Of L.A.

Part 1: Pride and Pain at 114th and Central

A few blocks east of the Nickerson Gardens housing project there is a brand new structure that towers over the surrounding rundown, matchbox-size houses and motel-style low-rise apartment buildings that make up the various neighborhoods in Watts. This is the only major new construction in Watts. It's a state-of-the-art prison. Everyone knows it and everyone hates it. It's like some huge science fiction type monster planted in the hood to stand guard and enforce the downpression of the people. But it is a fitting symbol and constant reminder of how the system deals with the Black and Latino proletarians in Watts.

The intersection of 114th and Central Avenue is part of the western boundary line of Nickerson Gardens. Like every other intersection in Watts things seem bleak at first glance. Up and down the street there are vacant buildings, storefront churches, a few shops and some greasy-spoon restaurants. The new freeway interchange shoots up on the horizon and over the neighborhood adding to the pressed-down sense of things. Small clumps of men and women spend the day hanging out in front of the stores and vacant buildings on Central. Fifty feet off of Central Avenue, inside the projects, a large group of young men shoot dice against one of the project walls. Young women dis and joke with the men from a porch across the street. Little kids are everywhere.

This spot in Nickerson is also a symbol – a people's symbol. To many people in Nickerson and many others who know what went down here, the intersection of 114th and Central stands for the people's refusal to submit to the system. And more, it's a symbol of the fierce resistance – in action as well as attitude – of the people against the repression by the system and its police.

On the evening of April 29, 1992 – just a few hours after the racist verdicts in the Rodney King beating case and first outbreaks of the L.A. Rebellion – the people of Nickerson Gardens and the LAPD had a major gun battle. At least 30 cops were sent down to Nickerson to supposedly guard firefighters sent into the area. According to the police reports, the cops came under heavy gunfire from snipers as soon as they came into the area. According to many people in the projects and newspaper reports at the time, the police were never really able to go all the way into Nickerson that first night – at least not in the way they had set out to do it.

There were a number of fierce confrontations between the people and the police reported in different parts of the city during the Spring Rebellion – including a number of reports of people shooting at the police. But Nickerson Gardens was one of the most intense of these scenes.

The battle and the heroic actions of some of the people involved in it have become legendary inside Nickerson. People, especially the youth, really seem to come alive when they talk of this battle. They talk of how the youth who were on the frontlines of combat that night competed with one another over who could perform the boldest and most daring acts against the police. Their laughter celebrates the people's victory in this battle. The police were

completely pinned down and, in the end, they only escaped from Nickerson after being rescued by an armored car.

The youth aren't alone in their excitement about this scene. One of the first people I interviewed in Nickerson Gardens shortly after the rebellion was a 45-year-old meatcutter who could hardly control himself as he told me the story of the war in the projects. "Look here, when this riot first started the cops could not come in here. The projects would not let the police come in here. A lot of people say that some of the people were armed and they would not let the cops come in.

"The cops, they lined up on the perimeter and they shot two homeboys that died right there on the scene and they shot another one that died later on that day. But the people would not let the cops in the projects. They set up their own perimeter and would not let the cops past. The cops was even going backwards trying to get out of these projects when they saw how the people were. The people would not let them in. People were saying, let's take our freedom, let's take our justice, let's take our equality. We saw the enemy – we saw that we are not enemies among ourselves. The enemy is the one who is keeping us down. When we saw the cops that night we were looking at them like they had on KKK helmets and they were the enemy. We would not submit to anything more. We was gonna stand up and let everybody know that."

The Night the Police Killed DeAndre

The battle at 114th and Central continues to inspire many youth and others in Nickerson Gardens today. Many people are proud of the history that was made on that corner on April 29, 1992. But people also remember the battle with an intense anger. At least three people in the area of the battle were shot to death by the police on the opening night of the rebellion. A number of other people were wounded here on that same night.

There are different versions about what happened when the brothers were killed that night. A lot of people, especially the youth, say the deaths happened in battle. Others, including some of the relatives of the people killed, say the brothers were murdered by the police in cold blood after the battle.

But no matter which version people talk about, it is clear that many agree on a couple of important points. First, the police murdered these brothers and nothing has ever been done or said about it. And everybody is angry over this. And, among many people, especially those who see the importance of what came down in Nickerson that night and are inspired by it today, there is a growing sentiment that these brothers gave their lives in the cause of the people – and no one should ever forget that.

One of the young brothers killed that night was 17-year-old DeAndre Harrison, known throughout the projects as Fango. I met with a couple of DeAndre's friends on a warm spring afternoon. Before we started to talk, I was introduced to DeAndre's grandmother and grandfather. People wanted to let them know what we were doing. Fango's grandparents were retired now – after working 50 and 45 years in their factory jobs. The living room in their tiny house is stuffed with pictures of DeAndre and all of his different sports trophies. DeAndre's family and friends remember him as a youth who loved to play sports and just hang out with his friends. They also talk about how Fango was out in the streets scuffling to

make some money to help out his grandparents and to help support the baby he and his girlfriend were expecting.

DeAndre's grandparents are furious about the death of their grandson at the hands of the police. His grandmother is especially angry about the fact that nobody has ever said anything to them about the murder. There was no investigation or anything. The cause of DeAndre's death is still listed as unknown. And when DeAndre's family tried to get some financial assistance from the Victims of Crime fund in order to give him a decent funeral, they were brushed aside with a cold comment that DeAndre was not a victim of crime.

After we left DeAndre's grandparents, Tim and Tisha walked out to the front of the house and sat on the curb. Tim, a guy in his 40s who works in a hospital laundry room and who knew DeAndre and his mom for a long time, opened up the conversation. "DeAndre would see the police harassing folks and he did not like the way the police was harassing the other guys. Now, see he was big and he stands out. And in those situations he might hold his hands up or something and you know the police don't like you to even look at them. The police want to let you know they the law, they the big chief and that they can do this or that to you."

Tisha, who was a long time friend of the family and someone who hung out with Fango, joined in here. "DeAndre didn't like them and they didn't like him. Whenever they would see him across the street they would just stop and come over to him and throw him up against the car. They'd be feeling all on his pockets and he be asking what did he do. They tell him to shut up and they handcuff him and put him in the back of the car.

"That afternoon when the verdicts came out, DeAndre ran into the house saying 'Did you see that!' He was mad! Then he went on around to his girlfriend's house. He came back here one time that night and the next thing I knew later on that evening somebody come back around and tell me that DeAndre was shot over there by the church.

"Some guy was looking at it when it happened. He said a police car was going down Central with its lights out and that De Andre and all of them was standing on the corner and then the police opened fire. That guy who was across the street and saw the whole thing – he was looking at it and he told me that De Andre and his friends wasn't shooting at no police. He said they was standing out there. Yeah, the police killed a couple of them. That wasn't nothing but murder.

"That same night there were men with high-powered rifles walking around. They was all back through there. They got in one man's yard and was there waiting for people. Now these was SWAT, I seen the damn car dropping them off. Now these same SWAT men shot a man as he was getting ready to go in his door. He was trying to go in his house. They blowed his head off. They was hid, camouflaged. It was more than one that got killed over there. And they wouldn't let nobody to come and get the bodies. After they did their dirt they was picked up. The car come back through there, picked them up and they went on. But they done killed two or three people."

Tim had turned away from the conversation for a few minutes and when he came back in his voice was trembling. "They come to Nickerson Gardens cuz Nickerson always has had the reputation of being the worst. They say it's the worst because of the young boys around

here. When the police come up on folks out here they always make people get on the ground. They make the people kiss the ground. Hands in the back and kiss the ground – and then they gonna put a foot on your back. That's what makes the people feel the way they do. That's what makes them do what they do. The young people know, man, that the police gonna beat them or try to kill them and so they figure they gonna try to hurt them first cuz they don't know what the police gonna try to do to them.

"When I first heard them verdicts I had just got off work. I'm sitting here and thinking I'm fixina watch justice being done. When I heard the first 'Not Guilty,' I'm like thinking that was for something else. But then they kept saying 'Not Guilty, Not Guilty!' That made me mad. I didn't know what to do. I went to church. Then when I was on my way home from church I seen fires everywhere and people was like, 'Take your justice!' I saw people running in the streets with their signs. And everything was burning, gas stations was on fire. And it wasn't only Black people, it was Mexicans and white people too. It was everybody. Before we know it everything around here was burning.

"De Andre was angry too. He was angry because of the things that go on here. De Andre was angry and he was out there with his friends. Everyone was angry when that verdict came through, everyone. When we heard them verdicts down here everybody ran outside hollering, 'That's not fair! That's not right! It's wrong!' I mean people was coming out their doors.

"Everybody was mad. And I feel everybody had a right to protect themselves any way they could. Everybody saw Rodney King get beat on national television. Everybody saw that and those verdicts said that the police was above the law, that they can do anything to you. And my feeling is, if you had a gun that day, everybody had a right to have a gun that day cuz you don't know what the police was gonna do to you. If they can do Rodney King like that, they can do anybody like that, and for nothing you know. It's right that the people got a right to defend themselves and fight against this."

Tisha stood up to leave but she paused for a minute and turned around, She wanted to make sure she told me how much the people in Nickerson cared about Fango and how angry they were at his death. She told me that De Andre's friends helped his grandfather pay for the funeral. Tisha's voice cracked when she talked about how the people came up with enough money to give De Andre a tremendous funeral and she was really proud of the fact that so many people from the projects came to the funeral that they couldn't all fit inside the church. As Tisha began to walk away she made one last comment to wrap things up. "People have come together. And some people are still angry A lot of people got to know what was going on. That riot brought a lot of folks closer together and got a lot of them thinking straighter. They thinking straighter about life out there in the streets. If something come up they should all get together and try to stick together and think about the cause of De Andre's death. And they should get mad."

End of Part 1

Aftershocks – The Rebels Of L.A.

Part 2: Where We Going and What We Going to Do With It

"I grew up here in Nickerson." Dennis laughed and shook his head back and forth as he spoke about his early days in Nickerson. He is working full time now – one of the lucky few in Nickerson where the unemployment rate is up around 80 percent or more. And he is raising a large family in the projects. It seems everybody knows him. As we walk people – young and old – call out to greet him. One group of guys lifting weights in front of an apartment yell out some joking disses as we pass by. Dennis is a deep thinker and an arguer. In the short time I've known him we have spent much time in discussions about god, religion, evolution and the truth about the situation in Rwanda and South Africa. When I told Dennis that I was looking to interview people about the importance of the rebellion he insisted that I turn on my tape for him.

"Now I never was into gangbanging. I was a little what you might call politically aware or revolutionary aware. I think the first political book I read was *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, then the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. That begin to wake a consciousness in me and gangbanging just didn't jive with that truth and that consciousness. My thing was always rather than us fighting each other, let's go fight the white man. At that particular time that was really the only truth I knew.

"And then as I began to see and think and read different things and study Malcolm I found out that the white man is not the enemy. I found out that the enemy is the system – that those who have are opposed to those who have not."

Dennis' usual good humor disappeared and his eyes became very serious when he started to try to explain what led up to the rebellion in his view and why it was important. "I was in the house when I heard the verdicts that afternoon. I was sitting right there on the bed and those verdicts was like another cut, another hole in the Black man to just drain him. And it looked like that was a big hole, cuz you figured if not all, at least one – somebody – would be guilty. So it was almost like somebody took a shotgun and blew a hole through you but there was no blood and you was just sitting up there with a hole and you could see life going out of you.

"At that point it had gotten ridiculous. Man, you had Latasha Harlins, you had the people that they blew up in Philadelphia [referring to the bombing of the MOVE house by the Philadelphia police]. I couldn't believe that thing in Philadelphia, man. That was another case, man, how could you do human beings like that. For them to just throw that bomb in there on kids, on people period, I don't know man, it was just like SHWOO – slitting me down one side and grab some of the life out of me.

"So, you put all that together, man, and you sit there and you watch the TV and you reflect that this man Rodney King, if he did something wrong or whatever, he don't deserve to get beat like this. You know within yourself you got to do something. I got to do something, I just can't continue to let them do this. And this thing becomes even worse because you start thinking about all the things that happen to you in life – by the police, by the system. You start

thinking about all the things that happened to your mother, how different people talked to her."

Dennis is one of the people in Nickerson who wasn't quite sure that the gun battle at 114th and Central was exactly the right thing to do. He has gone over it again and again in his mind. "So when I heard about those brothers rioting, it was not a surprise. It was just that those brothers was so frustrated enough to go out and try to retain some of the life that was drained out of them. When I seen these brothers do something, it was like, well, it's about time somebody did something. When you see the Black man when he has taken all that he can take, that's when you know there is gonna be something. When they tell you to move and you just look at them and you tell them, 'I'm not moving nowhere. I'm not going nowhere and that's it. So you handle what you got to handle cuz I'm gonna handle what I have to handle.' A lot of times it just sparks up in you."

Dennis began talking about the scene in the projects during the early stages of the rebellion. He said that people poured out of their houses to vent their anger about the racist verdicts. And everybody was talking about what the people were doing all over the city.

As evening turned to night Dennis got word that one of his friends had been killed by the police in another part of the project. He heard that the police left his friend's body lying there until they could send in a tank to get it. By that time, though, news of the battle at 114th had also made its way down to Dennis' end of the projects. "Then later on I heard that the homeboys went up there and was shooting at the police. By the time I heard that all of this happened the gun fight had ended. But you could hear all about it all over the projects. People was talking about how some of the homeboys had got shot, some of them had got killed. And, some of the police had got shot too." When we reached Dennis' apartment – clear across the projects from where we started out – we sat on a couple of old kitchen chairs out on the tiny, dirt yard. One of his youngest sons came out to show his dad some schoolwork. When Dennis started talking again, he was clearly still struggling some things out in his own mind even as we spoke. He made it clear that he has some problems with some of the tactics people used in the uprising but at the same time there is nothing in the world that could ever convince him to stop supporting the rebellion.

"I think the most important thing about the rebellion is that the people did something, that they reacted. At least they did something! They reacted o get the deadness out of our souls and out of our bodies. It was important to do this, to react rather than to let the cancer defeat us. I don't even agree with particular things people did, but the most important thing was that people reacted and it was high time that we reacted here in L.A."

Dennis has thought a lot about the rebellion and the changes it brought on among the people. He is anxious about keeping alive the spirit of the rebellion and pushing things ahead off of the uprising. "Now at this point, I feel that instead of just letting the fire die down, letting the mood and the desire and the feel to do something die down, we need to sit down and figure out what is the best thing to do. What is the best way to go about doing it and when to do it. Not only in California but nationwide where it would catch on throughout the whole world.

"I've seen a lot of change since the riot. And not only with Black people and Latino people but with whites and even Asians. A lot of people woke up and now they see things in a different light. So they know that it is not necessarily Black against white, Black against

Mexicans, Black against Asians. But a lot of people can see now as far as the battle being against those that have – those that have against those that have not. Now the thing is how, when and where. I think that there is a whole new day among the people because of the awareness and unity that came during the rebellion. So, yeah, I seen an awareness but the thing still remains-where we going and what we going to do with it."

On the Frontline

"I think about revolution. I'm all for it. I wish it would just come down like that, just come down to all-out war. That would be dope to have a war like that, like it was on the first night of the rebellion. It was excitement like I never felt. We had an army back then and we did some real fighting with the police. Yeah, if it came down to it like that I'd go on the frontline."

The brother talking was Trick a young gangsta born and raised in Nickerson. We were sitting around a small table in his crowded apartment. Trick's mother worked in a warehouse until she was fired. He never knew his father.

Trick is 18 and he wears a bulletproof vest whenever he is on the streets. The front door of his apartment is pockmarked with bullet holes. More than once the police have raided his house in the middle of the night, forcing Trick and others out of the house and holding them at gunpoint. Trick's face was deadly serious when he talked about what the police do to the people day after day. But he laughed loud as he pointed to the bullet-riddled wall near his house that was the scene of an attack on the police in the fall of 1993.

When we started to talk about the rebellion he jumped out of his seat and paced back and forth in the small space between the table and the wall of the apartment, excitedly acting out parts of the story he told.

"That's what was going down out here in the rebellion. I lost a few homeboys off of that. They was killed in a shootout with the police on the first night. They shot a few of my homeys down right here on 114th. They was all posted up behind walls and stuff. And the police out there on Central with sniper rifles and scopes and shit-you know, those beamer rifles with the red beam. They was taking they time when they was shooting, making sure they hit right. That's how the homeboy should've did but some of them was so anxious to war and they got so frustrated that they just started running out from where they was posted and shooting at the police.

"That's how one of my best homeboys got killed – he ran out with his gun firing straight at the police. This lasted for a few hours on that first night."

Trick got quiet as he talked about his friends that were killed and wounded that night. But he made it clear that he thought the rebellion was worth whatever sacrifices had to be made. "The rebellion was cool. When I heard that the cops got off I was pissed. That shit just wasn't right. That rebellion was you just got to stand up for your rights. You got to stand up for what you believe in – whatever it takes. You have to know how to die for it if that is what you really believe in. You have to know how to handle that. The way I see it, you got to stand up and live or lay down and die." Trick had given a lot of thought to what happened on that first night of the rebellion. He liked to try to think about how he could take some of the things that happened at 114th and Central and use them to go up against and defeat the system and its

enforcers. Trick was totally clear on one thing – the people need an army if they are serious about ending all of the oppression coming down on the people.

Trick told me how his everyday experience with the vicious brutality of the police helped to shape a lot of his views on things today. "I'm 18. I'm not in school and I'm not working. I'm in the street doing the best I can to stay alive. One time the cops tried to kill me after they chased me across Watts and finally caught me up here in my hood. I got out of my car and they come up and kicked me down. They kicked me hard in the stomach a few times. They kicked me so hard it loosened up my bowels. They hit me with the billy club and they start kicking me in the kidneys. They really tried to kill me. And then after they beat the shit out of me, they throw me up in a jail where I got nothing but enemies. And this all happened after Rodney King got beat up."

But after a few minutes he began to talk about some of the changes that have come down among the people in the projects since the uprising. "You know, it's always tough in Nickerson. Cops coming in here on the right night find out how tough it really is. Sometimes they get shot and sometimes they just get fucked with. A little while ago there was a party down here and somebody called the cops. They show up in two cars and while they at the party talking to people, some of the homeboys went down and cut they tires up. When the cops come back the homeboys just started throwing bottles and shit at them. We don't feel they can come into where we live and harass us. The cops fucking us up and so people figure it's time to fuck them up too. "I think that they really want to do is take our clothes off and whip us, beat us up and then hang us. That's what they really want to do. But they can't do that."

End of Part 2

Aftershocks – The Rebels Of L.A.

Part 3: Truce Among the People and War on the Enemy

Growin' Up Hard

It was a late spring Saturday in Nickerson Gardens. It was warm and sunny enough for a few barbecues to be fired up. A religious group had set up a stage in back of the gym and was preaching like crazy to nobody in particular. In one corner of the field behind the gym a handful of kids were playing a slow game of baseball. On the other side a dozen other kids were kicking around a soccer ball. The strains of R & B music filled the empty spaces between some of the project buildings while rap boomed out of car stereo systems in the parking lots.

On the northeast side of the projects flak-jacketed police were storming a parking lot to roust the people hanging out in it. On the southwest side of the project a group of youth stood talking about how the sheriffs and Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms agents have been regularly raiding the projects. Some youth were angrily laying out some particulars about the raid two nights earlier by the L.A. County Sheriffs. The sheriffs were raiding the parking lot hangouts of the youth and forcing them to strip down for the sole purpose of humiliating them.

In the middle of all this the sound of bottles breaking on concrete bounced off the walls and shot down the streets. A small crowd rushed to the street to see what was coming down. A knot of youths stood on the sidewalk midway down the block. The police pulled into the street and slowly cruised towards the youth. The cop car pulled up and the cops glared out from inside. The young brothers on the sidewalk glared right back and refused to budge or even acknowledge the cops' questions. In less than a minute, the cops took off and the youth broke out laughing and flipping the police a one-fingered salute. When C.C., one of the youth on the sidewalk, saw me joining in their laughter, he stepped out of the middle of the crowd to talk for awhile about the situation facing the youth in Nickerson.

"Since 1992 we had a little peace treaty and everybody came together. The police started tripping and shit, they couldn't believe it was happening. They could not believe that all the Blacks was not shooting and killing each other no more.

"When that peace treaty first started I was surprised. I seen guys that I used to get down with every day at school. If I see them on the street before the peace treaty, he either try to kill me or I try to kill him. Now I looked at them in their eyes and they like 'What's up!' Now, I'm the type of person say fuck this, fuck the peace treaty. I'm still the same person. And I started realizing this person showing me respect and we from different gangs and we done fought every day and did this and that – and I'm like saying 'Hey, this shit probably do work out.' This was the first time, the peace treaty with the verdicts that first come out. These people was coming up and it was like nothing ever happened, like I never seen them before. I was tripping. So I started speaking to people.

"Now we got another peace treaty. It's going to be just like it was last year. We gonna

deal with every cop that don't like what's going on. They don't control the world, we do. The only thing they can do is take me to jail. Let me tell you something, I wouldn't just go after nobody. I wouldn't go after you cuz you ain't done nothing to me. I wouldn't go after the next man. But I'll deal with the police just for the simple fact that they been having us going through a lot of stuff for all these years. They been beating on people and getting away with it, you know what I'm saying. They think cuz they got a gun they got authority to do anything. That ain't working over here homey! They can't do that shit over here.

"We growing up hard, this is Watts. The first time I seen somebody killed I was like 11 years old and it shocked me. I was like, 'he's dead!' I was like – 'I never want to kill nobody.' But then as I grew up I looked at things differently. All them names that is on the wall at the gym – I knew half of them, man. Half of them was either my homeboys' daddies or was people I seen when I was young.

"They say you just a fucking gangbanger. You sag your pants and you just don't give a fuck; they talk about this three strikes and you out law. Look we already got two strikes – we Black and we male. And they want you to fuck up so that be your third one and you out of this motherfucker. We got to get out here and get what we gonna get cuz nobody ain't gonna give it to us. I ain't gonna let nobody, I don't care where he from, take something from me. And I sure ain't gonna let no police take my shit. And look, it ain't just the police. Fuck the police. It's the government killing us right now."

Searching for Answers/ Breaking Out of the Brainwash

C.C. and I walked back towards the ball field as we spoke. By the time we reached the bleachers on one end of the field there was another group of youth sitting there. C.C. made the introductions and one of the other youth, Tremaine, jumped into the discussion. It was clear from the direction things took that these youth had been doing some thinking and discussing of their own on some pretty deep questions. Many of them had spent much of the last two years in jail and were trying hard to use that experience to figure things out in Nickerson.

"I done grew up all my life in these projects, from the hospital to here. And I know what type of people around here. They don't bullshit when it comes down to the get down. That wasn't no riot, that was a rebellion. That was – 'get back!' It's gonna happen again."

Tremaine also made it clear that he had studied a lot of the history of Black people resisting the oppression that comes down in Amerikkka. He had paid a lot of attention to studying and trying to sum up the key lessons of the 1960s and especially the experience of Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party. Tremaine had a lot of questions and opinions about how the struggle has to be fought and led today. He is especially concerned over the way the system attacked, assassinated and destroyed revolutionary Black leadership in the past. He is steady chewing this question over in his head and hasn't yet come to any definite opinion on how to deal with it.

"They scared of us. They know we are capable. I myself can gather up over 30 or 40 motherfuckers and they will ride with me. That's what they scared of most. They scared that we could organize our people. Now if I try to organize my people and it's going on and going on, the media will come down cuz I got my people and they listening at me. So they gonna

come down and they gonna try to stop that. And if they can't stop that, if they can't get towards me, then they gonna send an assassin out to get me. How do we deal with it?

"Now there could be a sharpshooter in the tree. He shoot me and I'm gone. I mean I know you sure as hell gonna make it over there and capture the motherfucker and do whatever you gonna do to him. But I'm gone! But all I did was I stood up and my people know now that it could be a way. But I'm gone. I stood up for my people, but I'm gone. I made history it's cool."

Another question that Tremaine is rolling around in his brain is who are the people who can be united – and relied on – to take down the system. "You talking about revolution. It's hard, man. It's possible – anything is possible. But who you gonna put with you to help you go at this? Who you got for you? It's gonna take more than one."

Tremaine swept his arm out towards the rows of project buildings and explained how one of the big questions in Nickerson today is how the oppressed – in particular the Black and Latino people – should relate to one another. This was an especially hot topic among these youth. Opinions among those gathered around went all the way from pushing for an all-out war between Black and Latino people to others arguing for a unity based on common oppression. Tremaine went back and forth. He said that this was because of his experience in jail and that this was an especially sharp issue in California jails. As the debate heated up, I pulled out a copy of the May Day Manifesto and showed it to him. I told him that it had been written by proletarians from right here in Los Angeles. I showed the section of the May Day Manifesto that speaks about the need for unity among people of different nationalities, especially among the proletarians of all nationalities.

Tremaine read: "The capitalist vampires say that we can never unite. But they're the one's keeping us at each other's throats. Trying to get us to fight each other for a piece of this dog-eat-dog action. Right now they are trying to play Blacks off against Latinos and Latinos off against Blacks in this way; and Asians. They have kept us ignorant of each other's history, culture, and language even though we live side by side of each other in the same situation. They tell Blacks – you can't trust Latinos and Latinos you can't trust blacks. Trying to get us to fight each other for some crumbs from the master's table.

"They got us on a treadmill when they play us like this. You walking but you ain't going nowhere. And after you get all sweaty and tired you find you are in the same spot that you started from. You haven't moved a inch. You are still down here on the bottom. The thing that put you here is still here. The only thing you have done is bust and bucked on people who are just like you. Who have the same enemy. Who are part of the same class of have-nots, proletarians. And who have the same revolutionary mission. Every time we see this go down we got to ask the question: Is this hurting or helping our class of people?"

When Tremaine finished he looked like he was deep in thought. After a few minutes he spoke up again. "See, they put all those obstacles in front of us so it makes it hard for us to get at them. They put the Mexicans in front of us and we fighting each other. They do all that old shit just for us not to make to where they at. You cannot touch the motherfuckers, that's the main thing they want.

"Two years ago when I heard those verdicts I knew it was time to get out there.

Everybody else was doing it and it was time to get back! That's all I was thinking, 'Let's get back!' That verdict said that them white folks don't give a fuck about us.

"This shit stay on a motherfucker's mind. All the time when you looking at the TV you see they steady fucking us. Can't do nothing but stay on our mind. All we thinking about is get back, somehow to get back at they ass. It's hard though cuz they steady putting these obstacles in front of us. We got to fight so we can get to where we can touch them. Bill Clinton, our governor and our mayor-they sit back and just watch and feed off this shit. They enjoy it, this is adrenaline to them.

"They trying to set up divisions between the people. They saying we bad or you bad. That's how sometimes they cross examine us, to where they say that's the enemy and they say that they the good guys. They say they the good guys and they gonna help us do this or that and there go the enemy right there so go and hit him. That's how they got us brainwashed. Now it's not hard to break people out of the brainwash. It's just gonna to take a little time."

End of Part 3

Aftershocks – The Rebels Of L.A.

Part 4: Searching for Unity

Showdown at Fiesta Broadway

One hundred thousand people, mainly Latino, were jampacked into the streets of downtown L.A. to celebrate Cinco de Mayo at the Fiesta Broadway. It was the largest Cinco de Mayo celebration in America. Proletarians came from all over the city and the outlying areas. They brought their families – from the very young to the very old – and planned on spending the afternoon strolling, playing games, eating and just mixing with friends. Thousands of youth came down to check out the music and join in the party.

It was early in the afternoon, May 1, 1994, and I had come to the Fiesta to find out how the people there summed up the L.A. rebellion two years past. I had already encountered several youths from East L.A. – one of the areas in the city which had not joined the rebellion. And some of them had bragged about their non-involvement, saying "we were too cool to destroy our own neighborhood."

The irony was that only one hour later these same youths would be throwing rocks and bottles at the LAPD – when the police rioted against the people and attacked the Fiesta shooting rubber bullets and gas into innocent crowds of people.

But not everyone from East L.A. had a negative opinion of the rebellion. Shortly before the police attack, a group of Chicano youth from East L.A. were leaning against a wall – listening to the music with one ear and shouting out to friends and others who passed them by. A young guy called Wolf pulled me over to a quieter part of the street when I told him that I wanted to talk about the L.A. Rebellion.

"You mean the riots? What you call it? A rebellion – that's better. We was down with that from day one. No – from minute one. Look, they treat us like animals and we ain't living like that. They got us locked down and trapped all our life. They trip on us cuz of the way we look – the color of our clothes, the way they sag. They come after us cuz we brown and black. The Rodney King rebellion – that was our shit, we claim that. I was out there on the streets going at it with these fucking police and taking things I needed. We need more of that and the way they keep treating us, we gonna have some more. It's coming."

"Last time there was a lot of tension in the air. They say nobody is thinking about the riot no more. Well, nobody was thinking about it when it happened the first time. It just happened, you could feel the tension in the air. No telling what's gonna happen, man. When it comes down to do it, ain't nobody gonna talk about it, they just gonna get up and go. The next time it happens everybody is gonna go just like this last one."

One of Wolf's friends came up to see if everything was cool. When he heard what we were talking about, he wanted to put in his own piece. "We all the same to the system anyway. You know the powers-that-be, some people say that they are like singling out or trying to single out certain races and shit. To a certain extent you got to say that's true, certain

minorities get picked on more than others. We just some poor motherfuckers who ain't got no say in the matter cuz we ain't got no cash to back us up so we can't make no fucking statements. They never hear us, they never hear what we trying to say."

Wolf was almost bursting and couldn't help but jump in again. "But we give a fuck about what we got to say cuz we got to deal with this. We got to live it. First of all, they got us locked down like this because of the way they look at us. Like I said, they come up at you just for the way you dress. The other morning, you know what honest to god truth, the police raided my house, man. This was at 5:30 in the morning for something I didn't have nothing to do with. I was in my underwear when they came in and just because of the way I look when I put on my clothes, they took me to jail."

As we spoke, a line of riot-gearred cops suddenly began running down the side of the street. Wolf looked at them with contempt and cracked a few jokes with his friends. We continued to talk about rebellions and I raised the concept of a proletarian revolution. Wolf was excited when he spoke again. "You come up in my face, I don't give a fuck what you wearing man, we going down. You know, if I didn't do shit and you come up in my face, I don't care if you wearing a badge or whatever, I'm gonna swing. I said I can't wait for another one to happen. If it does happen I'm not gonna sit in the house and hide, I'm coming out. A revolution, you talking about everybody get together and go for what's right. The government, man – fuck the government. We don't need no government, not a government that's mistreating us. I think if we come together, man, where people can unite and come together and stand strong as one, that would be great. But first of all we got to get rid of all this racial tension. All this racial tension got to go. Everybody need to just come together and fuck the bullshit. The only people that gonna make this place better is us."

Allies from the Valley in Modern-Day Babylon

It was about an hour after the police had launched their first assault against the crowd at the Fiesta Broadway. The police had set up a skirmish line a few blocks north of where we stood. The guys I was talking with – a group of musicians and artists – had been stomping down the middle of the street headed away from the police skirmish lines. When they caught sight of the RCP May Day Manifesto they stopped to check it out.

They told me that they had grown up in the Valley but that their parents were originally from India and other parts of South Asia. They said that they were in the middle of the crowd that was attacked by the police. They had tried to pull people out of the line of fire as the cops let loose with a barrage of rubber bullets. Now there were rumors that the police were preparing for another attack. The guys were pissed and, as the police began to slowly move their battle line south towards us, they had their say.

"With that Rodney King thing, man, it's like if you beat a dog and you beat that dog every day there is gonna come a day when that dog turn around and bite your ass. That's exactly what happened with indigenous people all over L.A. and all over the world. People started getting hip.

"The most beautiful part about the whole rebellion is that it brought Chicano people, Black people, white people – all of them against the system together. We were out in front of Foothill Division on April 29, 1992. First of all we went right out to the spot where Rodney King

was beaten. We stopped traffic and everything. We had signs and everything and everybody came out. We said everything was cool. Channel 9 was out there. So we said let's take this up in front of the Foothill Division so we went over there and the same shit happened. Yeah, it was beautiful, man. That was the first time in my life that I seen Bloods and Crips together. And not only that, but the Chicano gangsters too. People started recognizing a common enemy rather than each other.

"We consider America to be like the modern day Babylon. You know, it looks all beautiful and hunky-dory from the outside. But when you see it from the inside out – for those who have the eyes to see – you can see all the bigotry behind it, the institutionalized slavery. Now a lot of us are lost to the realities of all this. But there is a path that we are taking. We're not re-energizing that lostness, we're energizing that revolutionary spirit. If we're gonna be fighting a war we got to at least know which side of the war we're on.

"The consciousness of the people has begun to change since the Rebellion. But as far as the structure of the government and all the political things – man, shit isn't happening, there ain't nothing happening. But there is more unity among the people. People are standing up more for what they believe in. Just the very fact that it happened, that example is too important. When the Rebellion happened over here in the belly of the beast the message that echoed all over the world was like, positivity."

Zena's Story

It was chilly down in Nickerson Gardens that day. As we sat on the sister's front porch she pulled a sweater closer around her shoulders. Her name was Zena and when I asked her to talk about the Rebellion she got one of those faraway looks in her eyes – the kind of look you get when you think back on some of the best times of your life. A really warm smile filled her face as she sent the kids inside and began to talk.

"The first night of the rebellion I was locked up in Long Beach. I couldn't get to L.A. The police was shooting everything moving. My cousin's friend got killed over here that night. A couple of people got shot here that night. I came down here the next day and they blocked off the freeway. I had to get off miles away from here and come back around. I rode up Broadway and it was still fires burning. Every other street I was seeing police standing there with their guns blocking off the street. They was standing there with their guns. Smoke was everywhere. Stuff was still burning. Stuff that was not burning was just black spots. I saw stuff that 'used to be there.' I know the police was mad – people done burnt down a gang of donut shops.

"When I was rolling down the streets with my son I was like, 'Look baby, look at that over there.' Then we was looking and he was like 'Mama they did all of this last night?' And I said, 'Yeah baby, they did this and you know why they did this. They did this because the police did Rodney King wrong and then they turned around and took him elsewhere and did him wrong.' He ask me why the people did this. I told him I don't know – all I know is it feels good! In some kind of way the people got the system back, they got the system back. And the police couldn't stop them. And that's the whole point of what was going on, they couldn't stop the people."

Zena began to tell me how she and her friends and relatives all had strong opinions

about the rebellion and whether it was good or bad for the people. Zena said she loved to argue with her folks because she was pretty strong in her feelings and beliefs. "There's a lot of people that still is talking about the Rebellion. That rebellion brought a lot of people together. I'm in my 20s and for the first time in my life I actually saw Black people working together. I mean I don't care if it was to tear down the community, they was working together to do something. They felt it was positive and as far as I'm concerned, if they felt it was positive, it was positive to me because people was all together and they wasn't fighting and killing each other. And then you had the truce between the gang members – you know, they came together.

"If the police see Black people working together then they feel like 'if all these people get together then they gonna break us down some kind of way.' And that's what scares them. Did you notice that when they go after gang members they go on them two or three at a time, not a whole crew? Because they know if they go a whole crew at a time, they gonna have a fight on their hands. They afraid if these people get together they gonna breakdown the system and they don't want that."

As we spoke a cop car made its second pass around the block. The two cops inside glared out at us. Zena stared back at them with cold contempt. We waited for the police to pull away before we started talking again and in those few moments I flashed on the new attitude in the projects since the rebellion and all of the different ways the resistance of the people against the police has shown itself.

I thought about the young sisters who had told me months earlier about the night the cops came in to bust up a party in the sports field and how the youth immediately began fighting with them and some of the youth even climbed up in trees to shoot at them. I remembered the old people who saw it as their contribution to the hood to keep a watch on the police – especially when they start vamping on the youth. And over these months I've heard the tales of phony 911 calls being placed to draw the police into the projects and set them up for an ambush. As recently as last Fall, a police patrol came under heavy gunfire inside the projects and was forced to scramble out in fear.

Even the kids are taking hold of this new attitude and resistance. A few days earlier a comrade told me that he had run into a group of young kids with Supersoaker water guns. He said the shorties had decided to let him pass without drenching him. And as he passed he heard the kids talk about the police coming up the street. As the comrade left he caught a glimpse of the shorties rushing up on the cops and hitting them full force with their Supersoaker water guns. The police were furious and chased the kids all over the projects.

Zena and I started up talking again. We began to talk about the police in the projects and how Police Chief Willie Williams held a press conference in Nickerson last fall – after the police patrol had been shot at – to announce that "'one time' is in Nickerson to stay!" Without missing a beat the sister shouted, "No! He need to be hip to the real!" When the laughter died down she continued with her comments. ("One time" is a local name for the police – it came out of the prisons where one signal meant that a guard was coming.)

Asked if she thinks the rebellion has changed things Zena says, "Yeah, I think some things have changed since the rebellion. For one thing, a lot of people are a lot more aware now. They are a lot more aware – not just Blacks but other races are aware too. I'm one of

those people that always thought that we never had protected rights. But people like my aunt who live out there in the suburbs, she always felt that like we are equal to everybody. But this Rodney King thing even hit people like her that our rights are not protected.

"I have a friend who tries to tell me we have some rights. And I have to say no, show me the rights we have. Do we have freedom of speech? I don't think so! If we all get together – you know, freedom of assembly – if we all get together for that the police is gonna be all around us. They gonna be in a circle around us 'just in case something happens.' If we had that kind of freedom then they shouldn't be there. Now ever since that rebellion my friend has even started to notice things. People have become a lot more aware."

As our conversation wound down, Zena was especially eager to talk about the need for the Black and Latino oppressed people to come together. She had a message she wanted to deliver to the Black and Latino people in Nickerson and all over L.A.: "Black and Latino people, if we could all get together, boy they just don't know. Boy they would really be stuck. The police wouldn't never come around. I want to tell Black people that they shouldn't be prejudiced against Latino people because they going through just about the same amount of things as we going through. We shouldn't be against them, we should work with them. They got just as much knowledge as we got. And they going through a lot of things too. And I want to tell Latino people they shouldn't listen to what is said about Black people. The media is just trying to make Black people look bad. They don't want us to have no unity. They fucking everybody. If everybody get together we could probably just wipe out all this. It's time for a change!"

End of Part 4

Appendix to Shockwaves

The Fire This Time: Anatomy of the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion

The Fire This Time, Part 1

Whenever you talk with the oppressed people in L.A. about the Rebellion there is a point in the discussion when they just smile. It's a very proud smile. And then sometimes, right after the smile, they let you know that, in their opinion, the L.A. Rebellion of 1992 was "harder than Watts in 1965."

It's an opinion that is worn like a big, bright badge of honor. People know the Watts Rebellion, they know how significant it was, and they know how much they have in common with the people who rebelled in 1965. In fact, some of the rebels out in the streets in 1965 were once again out there in 1992. People don't always know the cold facts, but they do know that both rebellions rocked the country and sent a message around the world on the oppression of Black people in the U.S.A. And more, both set a tone for the times and gave powerful expression to voices the U.S. rulers had bent every effort to suppress and silence – putting the possibility of revolutionary solutions on the agenda in a new way. A lot of times the comparison is made because people want to be the ones that slam the system the hardest and that is definitely a good place to be coming from.

While there is still a tremendous amount of material that needs to be uncovered and studied in order to more deeply understand the L.A. Rebellion, what we do know at this point is that it was, in many ways, harder than Watts 1965.

Take the scope of the uprising. In 1965 the rebellion began in a corner of Watts and built slowly over the next two days before the people erupted in a full-scale rebellion. By the time it was over, about 100 blocks of Watts and greater South Central were burned and destroyed. At least 200 buildings were completely destroyed and another 400 were burned and looted. In money terms, the overall damage in 1965 was \$40 million – which when adjusted for inflation and other factors, comes out to \$183 million in today's dollars. But fierce as it was, the authorities were able to pretty much contain it within the ghetto neighborhoods where it was born. Arrest statistics compiled in 1965 show that many people came from other parts of the city into Watts to join the rebellion but they did not spread the rebellion into the neighborhoods they came from.

The situation in the 1992 Rebellion is dramatically different.

When I first arrived in L.A. it seemed that every block in the city had been hit. But I was still only seeing it block by block and building by building. It was difficult to get a really full sense of how vast an area had been engulfed by the rage of the people.

Towards the end of the summer the city issued a fire report – the result of the largest arson investigation in U.S. history. A journalist friend of mine plotted out on a city map the location of each building that was at least 80 percent destroyed in the Rebellion.

The result was stunning. These were only the really major fires, yet every main north/south street from Central Avenue on the eastern end on over to Crenshaw Boulevard on the west – and running from Imperial Highway in the South to Hollywood Boulevard in the North – was densely studded with fire markers. When a rectangle was drawn around just this area of the heaviest concentration of the most severe fires, it covered an area of 45 square miles.

There was definitely some overlap in the core areas of Watts 1965 and the 1992 Rebellion, but the L.A. Rebellion was much larger still. It went further than anyone could have predicted, invading the privileged areas of the city like Westwood and coming within a few blocks of one of the main symbols of wealth and privilege in America – the city of Beverly Hills. It covered an area from the San Fernando Valley in the far north to the City of Long Beach in the South. It stretched from the beach at Venice all the way out to Pasadena and beyond to Pomona and Claremont in the east.

According to the Los Angeles Fire Department, there were 623 structure fires in the city during the rebellion. Two weeks after the Rebellion the *L.A. Times* announced that 900 commercial addresses had sustained structural damage of 50 percent or more and that there were 1,100 structure fires set throughout Los Angeles County between April 29 and May 5. At the same time, insurance claims alone indicate that the rebellion caused close to \$1 billion worth of damage. Based on these figures, the 1992 L.A. Rebellion was the largest uprising in U.S. history and the fifth largest "natural disaster."

There have never been so many fires set during peacetime in this country. And this is just what the authorities me admitting to. At the height of the Rebellion three fires a minute were being reported and original estimates stated that there were at least ten thousand fire calls.

Where the Rebellion Started

When Watts blew up in 1965 it was easy to pinpoint exactly where it started. The Watts Rebellion began with an angry but overall low-intensity confrontation with the cops and then built slowly over a period of two days. It began on a Wednesday, and up until 5 am. Friday morning city officials were still talking about "200 rioters in Watts." By the time the morning commuters hit the freeways, Watts and the surrounding neighborhoods were on fire and up in arms. And, although the Watts uprising did become very intense and covered 100 or more blocks, the authorities were able to contain it to one section of South Central.

The 1992 L.A. Rebellion is a very different story. The intensity and scope of the Rebellion from its earliest stages stunned many. City officials could only stammer about the entire city going wild in an hour and a half.

Where did it start? Everywhere! The much-talked-about comer of Florence and Normandie was hot, but it was only one flashpoint. The moment the verdict was announced the protests began. Hundreds of people had traveled from all over the metropolitan area to the Simi Valley courthouse to respond to the verdicts as soon as it was announced that a decision had been reached.

At the same time, at least 200 people had gathered way out in the San Fernando Valley – on the street where Rodney King was beaten – to protest the verdicts the moment they were announced. They held signs up and chanted to passing traffic. When cop cars drove by they were stoned. Eventually, the crowd marched on the Foothill Division police station, the home base of the cops who beat Rodney King. There were even reports in the *L.A. Times* that the Foothill division – where the cops had been celebrating the acquittals before the crowd arrived – came under gunfire attack from groups of youth a short time later.

And while all of this was going on, hundreds of others were coming together at the Parker Center, police headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. These were people of all nationalities and ages. In a very short time they stormed Parker Center and trashed a good number of official buildings in downtown LA.

As I spoke with people who were out in the streets from the moment the Rebellion took off, one of the things that became really clear is that television news coverage of what was going on in other parts of the city didn't spark the Rebellion. It did inspire some people to join the festival of the oppressed already rocking the streets – especially since it graphically showed the weakness and fear of the system in the face of the people's anger. But there was a universal rage that swept over the oppressed people, especially, but not only, the Black people, in L.A. when the verdicts were announced.

For many it was like illusions had just been hacked away and the naked reality of the system stood there mocking them. One youth told me that he and his friends had been moved to action by an old woman walking through the neighborhood park screaming in angry pain that, "It's fucked up!" A brother in Nickerson Gardens described to me how some of the hardest people in the projects were standing out on the sports field with tears of rage coming down their faces and how everyone just automatically began to make plans for what to do when darkness fell. On 55th and Normandie, just about 20 blocks away from Florence and Normandie, a 31-year-old Black woman stood on the corner yelling out, "It was wrong. Suspended without pay, that's no justice. They beat that Black man! It's time for us Black folks...to reunite. We're tired of being slaves!"

A veteran of the Watts Rebellion described what he saw as he drove through the city heading up towards Florence and Normandie. He described passing through whole neighborhoods that were "on the verge." He told of youth gesturing angrily on the sidewalks and of motorists blowing their horns and screaming out their car windows. He said that young women were yelling out to one another while many people seemed to be tinkering with grates on storefronts. The brother also described a young sister carrying a peace sign who was arguing with and scorned by the crowd which was shouting "No Justice, No Peace!" and "Fuck tha Police!"

Another young brother described the scene he found down on 83rd and Vermont. He said he was standing on Vermont Avenue, just across from the supermarket and Sunny Swap Meet "People were home watching TV when the verdict was announced. They poured into the streets. I heard young brothers screaming 'We're not gonna take this.' Before long everybody was outside. Babies, mothers – it was like some kind of revolution."

Florence and Normandie

Like people all over the city, the sisters and brothers in the Florence and Normandie neighborhood were burning with rage and hatred for the powers after hearing the verdict in the King case. The powers don't want people to know this. They say that this is the corner where it all began.

The rulers want to say that some of what went on in the early hours of the uprising at this corner – the beating of the white ruck driver Reginald Denny and other non-Black motorists – is what characterized the Rebellion as a whole. They want to say that it was these kinds of attacks that gave rise to one of the largest slave uprisings in U.S. history so far and that the sisters and brothers who rose up were supposedly just gangsters.

If you want to know what really happened in the neighborhood around Florence and Normandie on the afternoon of April 29, you have to do a little more digging. Snippets of information have come out in the *LA. Times* and the Webster Commission report on the Rebellion. A more in-depth piece also appeared in *The Wave*, a South Central neighborhood newspaper, a couple of weeks after the Rebellion ended. Based on all of this and talking to the people in the area – a picture begins to emerge that is dramatically different than the scene that has become internationally infamous as the symbol of what was going on here and of the Rebellion itself.

From the moment the Simi Valley jurors announced the acquittal of the cops in the Rodney King beating case, the LAPD began reporting that they were being met with hostile looks and shouts in the Florence and Normandie area. Soon they also began to report that they were being stoned by youths in the neighborhood. At around the same time a group of very angry youth had gathered in the neighborhood to talk about what they should do in response to the verdict. As these youth talked and struggled among themselves, the police chased a group of their friends up the street. The youth ran down to check out what was going on.

Twenty to thirty cops were in the neighborhood. The cops picked a 16-year-old youth out of the crowd and jumped on him – they claimed he had thrown rocks at them earlier. Three cops were on top of him, twisting his arms and legs. Another youth yelled out "What y'all gonna do, beat him?" The cops jumped on this youth and slammed him down against the car. They were using the swarm technique against the people. They busted at least one other youth. (There were three arrested altogether including the brother of LA4+ defendant Damian Williams.) The police also roughed up a few women, including a relative of one of those arrested. A local businessman who witnessed the whole scene told *The Wave*, "It looked like Rodney King all over again. They [the crowd] weren't gonna let that happen. Whoever spoke, they [the cops] arrested them. Somebody hollered real loud and all of them [the crowd] came out."

By that time the crowd had grown to one hundred or more people. The police were outnumbered and very scared. They drew their clubs and reported that people in the crowd began shouting that they had no respect for the police. People were demanding that the cops take off their badges and guns.

Some police reports say that people in the crowd began throwing rocks, bricks, bottles and chunks of asphalt and concrete at them. Within minutes the police broke ranks, scrambled for their cars and ran for their lives. The cop in charge on the scene later described

the situation like this, "There was a tremendous amount of people that were very very very hostile and it was absolute anarchy. Anarchy was occurring before our eyes."

After the cops had been run out of the neighborhood the people took their protest down to the main intersection. With the cops no longer serving as visible targets and with the whole scene around the verdict dripping with racism, the people began lashing out at white, Latino and Asian people who drove through the intersection. At this point, the people at Florence and Normandie made a mistake about who the real enemy is. But a few things need to be said here. First, as the RW has repeatedly said, this was a mistake in the context of an overall righteous rebellion against oppression. Secondly, even this mistake wasn't just unanimously carried out by all of the people on the scene. In fact, if you listen to the audio part of the videotape of some of the attacks on motorists you can actually hear people arguing against attacks on Latinos. And finally, the kind of scene that erupted at Florence and Normandie after the police retreated was very short-lived – even in that neighborhood – and within hours it was clear to everyone that the Rebellion was an uprising of the oppressed, of all nationalities.

Whenever I think about all this I remember the young sister who lived just up the street and who came home from work on April 29 angrier than she had ever been in her life. I remember how she talked about rushing right out to the streets of her neighborhood to be with her people. She talked about this experience as being the first time in her life that she was proud to be Black.

Taking the Temperature of the Rebellion

The *L.A. Times* once described the 1965 Watts Rebellion as having been fought out in a "hard and mean" way. The forces of the state took a lot of casualties in 1965. Ninety cops and ten National Guard soldiers were injured during the six days of the uprising. And, according to some reports the figures may have been even higher.

In the days after the L.A. Rebellion 1992, it seemed as though this Rebellion was not as ferocious against the enforcers as Watts 1965. The official injury list for the state forces indicates that only 66 of their people were injured, a figure which includes cops, National Guard troops and members of an unidentified category listed simply as "others." But the smaller figures hide some significant factors.

For one thing, the ruling class fought the Watts uprising differently than they fought the people in 1992. In 1965 the police went head to head with the rebels from the very beginning as they strained to contain the rebellion in Watts and the neighboring community. This time out the authorities withdrew many of their police from the city streets for the first two days of the Rebellion and it was only after the National Guard troops were deployed to back up the cops that the authorities actually began to reclaim the streets. Another very important possibility that should not be discounted is that the powers are lying and covering the actual extent of the beating they took. One thing is very clear, however: from the very earliest moments of April 29 and continuing on into the middle of the next week the rebels of Los Angeles hit hard at the state and its armed enforcers.

There were many instances of ferocious confrontations between the people and the police throughout the Rebellion. And when these occurred the police generally took a beating. The *L.A. Times* described one cop as "speaking in disjointed phrases," when she described

one of these confrontations early on in the Rebellion. This cop talked about four cops coming up on "100 to 200 people throwing bottles after you, saying 'Kill the Police,' glass breaking, fires burning, smoke thick, with that horrible smell of burning plastic, you know? Horrible headache. Eyes burning." This cop went on to say that she was still troubled by a small child coming up, slapping her and saying "Bad Police!"

Another cop described the scene at Manchester Boulevard and Vermont Avenue shortly after the verdicts were announced. In this story eight cops found themselves faced off against a crowd of 100 people: "We were trying to get them dispersed. Some guy started shooting at us! We all got in our cars and left and went around the block and came back. Now they were looting. I had to fight several of them who were hitting me and the other officers."

The Webster Commission cited the high number of cop cars returning to their base laced with bullet holes as proof that the police were coming under frequent gunfire attacks: "Conditions at large in the city required reasonable force to restore order. That officers often were subjected to gunfire as they responded to calls for help is demonstrated beyond doubt by numerous patrol cars laced with bullet holes."

In one project, people recounted stories of folks deliberately making calls for help in order to draw police into the area – then, when the police arrived, they were met with hostilities. Throughout the Rebellion the *LA. Times* buried one-sentence reports about the police getting ambushed by snipers. The ACLU report on the State of Emergency says that a police helicopter was fired on in Pasadena and forced to land. During that incident the ACLU says that at least 70 rounds were fired by the police.

Police stations and other government buildings were targeted. The most widely reported example was the attack on police headquarters at Parker Center on April 29. A demonstration at Parker Center escalated when people attempted to storm the police headquarters. Windows and doors were smashed, American flags were burned, and cars parked in the area – including at least one cop car – were set on fire. From Parker Center, the crowd, mostly youth of all different nationalities, charged through the downtown Civic Center area, where most of the official buildings are concentrated. Among the buildings attacked were the City Hall, the courthouses, the Immigration and Naturalization Services building and the home of the *L.A. Times*.

One casualty was the 30,000-square-foot Military Induction Center near the Crenshaw district of the city. This center was the headquarters for the screening and induction of all military recruits in nine California counties. At least one military recruiting center was also attacked and reduced to ashes. On April 30, the State Department of Corrections Probation Office in Compton was destroyed by a firebomb. The Department of Motor Vehicles lost a building in Long Beach on May 1. As late as May 7 two attempted firebombings of a Probation Office in L.A. were reported.

The *L.A. Times* mentioned that the Foothill Division police station, the home of the cops who beat Rodney King, received bomb threats at least twice during the Rebellion. The May 1 bomb threat literally emptied the station out and the National Guard was brought in to protect it. On May 2 the 77th Street cop station was cordoned off for two blocks all around it and was patrolled by police armed with automatic rifles. And in Long Beach there were reports of gunfights between the police and the residents of the Carmelitos Housing Projects,

described as the scene of battles from April 29 on. Also in Long Beach, on April 30 the Police Union building was firebombed.

Under Fire at Nickerson Gardens

One of the most intense gunfights between the people and the police broke out at the Nickerson Gardens Housing Project in Watts. The police claim that 30 cops from the Metro Division – which includes Swat Teams – arrived in Nickerson around 11 pm. supposedly to protect firefighters. The police say that they immediately came under intense gunfire from snipers. A cop from the Metro Division described the scene: "It was anarchy, total anarchy! You had people running in the streets, looting, shooting at firefighters, shooting at police. Total chaos."

In early May a resident of Nickerson told me about the scene he heard described: "Look here, when this riot first started the cops could not come in here. The projects would not let the police come in here The cops, they lined up on the perimeter and they shot two homeboys that died right there on the scene and they shot another one that died later on that day. But the people would not let the cops in the project. They set up their own perimeter and would not let the cops past. The cops was even going backwards trying to get out of these projects when they saw how the people were. The people would not let them in, people were saying let's take our freedom, let's take our justice, let's take our equality. We saw the enemy – we saw that we are not enemies among ourselves. The enemy is the one who is keeping us down. When we saw the cops that night we were looking at them like they had on KKK helmets and they were the enemy. We would not submit to anything anymore." The cops were completely pinned down at Nickerson. In the end they were only able to escape after being rescued by an armored car.

End of Part 1

The Fire This Time: Anatomy of the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion

Part 2: Rebellion of the Have-Nots

Who Is Destroying the Community? One of the charges that is always raised to put down the significance of the actions of the oppressed people in all urban rebellions is that they "are only hurting themselves by destroying their own communities." This is generally accompanied by a lot of whining interviews with "members of the community" about having to travel great distances to go to the grocery store or shop for clothes. This tired and petty sniping was also leveled against the L.A. Rebellion. When I raised this to one of the first people I spoke with shortly after arriving in Los Angeles back in May, the brother replied "They all talking about how could we just go and destroy the communities we live in. Well, to me it's more like these are the communities rye are dying in and that's why we have to destroy them."

In reality it is the normal workings of capitalism that have turned these communities into hellholes for the people who live in them. A brief look at what was actually going on in these communities before the Rebellion should be more than enough to put it to rest.

The *L.A. Times* and the California State Assembly study of the Rebellion and South Central L.A. reported that in the 40-square-mile heart of South Central there were only 20 banks and thrifts to serve more than a quarter of a million people. By comparison, the city of Gardena has 21 banks to serve less than 50,000 people. In fact, there are so few banks in South Central that residents often stand in line for hours just to cash a check or make a deposit. In some parts of South Central there are so few banks that armored trucks go directly out to job sites to cash paychecks.

Before the Rebellion there were fewer than 35 major supermarkets in South Central. In some areas the nearest full-service supermarket was at least two bus rides away. South Central L.A. had one retail store for every 415 residents while L.A. County has one for every 203 residents. And, according to an article in the *L.A. Times*, among the retail stores in the community the number of liquor stores was staggering: there was at least one liquor store on every major intersection in South Central. South Central has one service business for every 290 people while L.A. county has one for every 103 people.

While the authorities and their media hypocritically wring their hands over job losses caused by the Rebellion, the jobs lost to the daily workings of capitalism completely dwarf whatever jobs were lost to the flames of the L.A. Rebellion. The latest figures on rebellion-related job losses in the *L.A. Times* show about 5,000 jobs permanently lost. The Webster Commission states that permanent job loss due to the Rebellion is only in the hundreds. However, according to the California State Assembly report, Los Angeles lost 300,000 jobs between June 1990 and February 1992. This was 60 percent of the statewide job loss.

In the last year alone L.A. has lost 200,000 jobs. As far as industry is concerned South Central is a desert. By the 1980s most of the major factories, including GM, Goodyear, Firestone and Bethlehem Steel, were gone. At least one of these factories actually moved its operations to South Africa in order to make a greater profit off of the superexploitation of the

Azarian people. A UCLA study of the Rebellion states that 131 industrial plants closed down in L.A. between 1982 and 1989 and threw 124,000 people out of work.

Rebellion of the Have-Nots

The powers call them "criminals" and "opportunist thugs." *Newsweek* magazine referred to them as "part of a relatively small urban underclass" about which hard facts are "maddeningly elusive." The Webster Commission Report, the official ruling class report on the Rebellion, stated that the rebels were not confined to any single race or ethnic classification and that, while the initial incidents were carried out mostly by Black men, the Rebellion spread to everybody very quickly. Immigrant proletarians played an especially significant role in the uprising, as did women of all ages and nationalities. Even the Webster Commission reported that "looters" throughout the city were all races, ages and genders.

More than anything else the L.A. Rebellion was a class rebellion, an uprising of the proletariat, of the have-nots against the haves. Both the haves and the have-nots were clear about this. The *Beverly Hills Post* reported that the Beverly Hills Police Department cordoned off the entire city at the beginning of the uprising and arrested any "suspicious" people who came close to the city borders. Actually, the Beverly Hills police force went on Tactical Alert two hours before the verdicts were announced and then immediately went into full mobilization once they were announced. One story reported in the *LA Reader*, claims that once the owner of the Beverly Hills Rolls Royce dealership saw the fires a few blocks east of the city limit he ordered all of the luxury cars removed from the showroom and lot of the dealership. In other wealthy neighborhoods there were reports of residents forming armed vigilante patrols and barricading off their streets for protection from the Rebellion. The *LA Reader* also reported that armored cars and heavily armed guards were stationed to protect shopping malls and economic centers in wealthy suburbs at least 45 miles away from South Central L.A.

So, who were the rebels of L.A.? That's a question I asked Max, a 40-year-old meat-cutter and the first person I spoke with in the Nickerson Gardens projects shortly after I arrived in L.A. His face lit up as he told me, "The rebels of L.A. are the oppressed people living in the ghettos of the city. We came out on the street to show how frustrated we are and how we hate the kind of suppression that comes out of the upper class and the people who just don't give a fuck about the oppressed people."

One way to get an idea of the rebels in L.A. is to paint a picture of the conditions they live under, the grit that makes up their day-to-day life. The latest figures show that the population of Los Angeles is 40 percent Latino, 37 percent white, 13 percent Black, 9 percent Asian and 1 percent Native American.

The California State Assembly Report issued soon after the Rebellion stated that Los Angeles was one of ten "hypersegregated" areas in the country with regard to Black people. According to this report almost 60 percent of the census tracts in L.A. have almost no Black residents. The report also states that Latinos and Asians are also concentrated in segregated areas but not as extremely as with Black people.

Ninety of the 149 census tracts in Los Angeles with the lowest incomes have the highest concentrations of Blacks, Latinos and Asians. Only four of these low-income census

areas are majority white. But 91 percent of the 148 census tracts with the *highest* incomes also have the highest concentrations of white people living in them.

Sixty percent of all L.A. residents cannot afford to own their own home. And to put this in a sharp class perspective, only 20 percent of the people in the city can afford to own a median-priced home – that is, a home costing \$210,000. The waiting list for public housing in Los Angeles is at least 20,000 families long.

The vast majority of poor Black, Latino and Asian communities are in South and South Central L.A. – the area that was the heart of the Rebellion. In 1965 this area was 81 percent Black. By 1990 the population of the area had doubled in size to 672,416 people.

The biggest change was that the area is now almost 50 percent Latino and 44.8 percent Black. By 1990 more than one person in three in South Central L.A. were foreign-born and 60 percent of them had arrived in the U.S. between 1980 and 1990.

One other significant change in this area of L.A. is that economic conditions, the poverty of the masses of people, is even worse than it was almost thirty years ago.

Similar – and perhaps even worse – conditions exist in the Latino immigrant barrio of Pico Union where the Rebellion was extremely intense. Pico Union is the largest Central American barrio in the country. It is said to have the highest population density in the United States. Large, crowded and rundown tenement buildings and huge old houses converted into many small apartment units are home to hundreds of thousands of proletarian immigrants. Oftentimes people live ten to a room. But the census figures for this area are very skewed because the people don't respond to census takers.

In this neighborhood people work in places like Burger King, garment sweatshops or as janitors. A "good job" often means steady work in a minimum wage factory. In Pico Union you find landless peasants from Mexico or Guatemala desperately trying to survive on the \$15 a day they might make selling frozen popsicles from a hand cart. The Latino males with the highest unemployment rate are generally the most recent immigrants.

People are desperate for work. Last year a truly hideous scam was uncovered in L.A. that involved small cars slamming on their brakes in front of large trucks in order to stage accidents on the freeways. The organizers of the scam were collecting major insurance settlements on these accidents. The immigrants recruited for the extremely dangerous job of riding in and driving the small cars were paid \$100 per accident.

Two years ago the poverty rate for families in South Los Angeles was at least twice the rate for the city overall and three times the national poverty rate. The poverty rate in South L.A. is 30.3 percent. More than 41,500 families in this area live in poverty. The per capita income has increased somewhat over the years but only half as much as it has in Los Angeles overall. Forty percent of the households in South L.A. get by on less than \$15,000 per year and 10 percent survive on less than \$5,000 per year. These figures are double what they are for L.A. County overall.

According to figures compiled by the *L.A. Times*, in 1980 more than 19 percent of the households in this area received public assistance. In 1990 that figure rose to 25 percent. In

the Watts section of South Central the median household income is only slightly more than \$12,000. Almost 50 percent of the households in Watts get public assistance. And between 1980 and 1990 the size of the annual public assistance grant adjusted for inflation, had shrunk by \$35 to \$5,988. The Webster Commission report states that the official unemployment rate in Watts is at least 26 percent. And the jobs that are available are generally minimum wage, no benefits, wage-slave positions.

Youth with Nothing to Lose

One fact that no one disputes concerning the Rebellion is that youth, proletarian youth – mainly from the oppressed nationalities but including white youth and stunts as well – were an extremely significant part of the Rebellion.

Youth of all nationalities were out in the streets – enjoying a new sense of solidarity against the downpressing system. The *L.A. Times* very quietly reported on this aspect of the story. In the mainly Latino immigrant neighborhood of Pico Union there were reports of Black youth coming into the neighborhood during the height of the Rebellion, opening up storefronts and then standing back and calling on the Latino people to take what they needed. On the East side of the city there were also reports of Salvadoran, Cuban and Black youth traveling together and describing themselves as a "cooperative" that was very angry about the verdict and in one of the most under-reported happenings during the Rebellion, the ACLU report on the Rebellion told how on May 8 there was a demonstration of 300 to 400 Korean- American students scheduled to take place outside of City Hall. While the press had gone wild reporting on demonstrations by Korean businesses demanding police protection against the Rebellion and compensation for damages suffered during the uprising, the news of this demonstration was squashed. The Korean-American students were demanding the resignation of then Police Chief Daryl Gates and the federal prosecution of the cops who beat Rodney King.

Another way to begin to get an idea of who these youth are is to look at the economic situation they come from. According to a report by the California State Assembly 34.8 percent of Latino youth, 38.2 percent of Black youth and 19.8 percent of white youth in L.A. live in poverty.

There are 600,000 students in 700 schools in L.A. According to the Webster Report there were 217 "minority elementary schools" – schools where the majority of students are from the oppressed nationalities – in 1979. By 1992, there were 400 of these schools in the L.A. system. The former Superintendent of the L.A. school district told the California State Assembly that he "was ashamed to admit" that some elementary schools in the inner-city L.A. area had as many as 3,000 students.

The California State Assembly report found that 40 percent of Black and Latino students in Los Angeles drop out of school before finishing. There are at least 40,000 teenagers throughout L.A. who have quit school and are currently unemployed. In fact, the *L.A. Times* reported that more than 50 percent of the people 16 and older in South L.A. are either unemployed or have drop out of the labor force.

The Webster Report states that more than 50 percent of all students in L.A. schools come from families whose incomes are low enough to qualify for free lunches. Thirty-three percent of the students come from families without any health insurance and many of them

never see a doctor until they begin school. This situation was dry tinder for the fire this time.

End of Part 2

The Fire This Time: Anatomy of the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion

Part 3: Occupation and Resistance

The ruling class and their armed enforcers were only able to stop the L.A. Rebellion by deploying a massive military invasion and occupying force in the city. It was one of the largest – if not *the* largest – military force the U.S. has ever marshaled against a domestic uprising. More than 20,000 armed enforcers were put on duty in Los Angeles between April 29 and May 5 – including 5,000 L.A. cops, 9,975 National Guard troops, 3,313 federal military troops, 2,323 cops from the California Highway Patrol and 1,950 agents from other federal agencies. The National Guard and Marine units included combat troops who had participated in the invasion of Panama and in the Persian Gulf War.

It was only after the National Guard troops hit the streets on May 1, that the authorities were able to begin to hammer down and restore a semblance of order. According to the *LA Times*, the National Guard was used to secure areas from "angry, milling crowds who had battled over turf with the police all day."

In part, the mobilization of the National Guard and other troops was used to free up and unleash the police for a reign of terror against the rebels. Many thousands were arrested in the days after the National Guard hit the streets.

At the same time, the troops participated in the direct suppression of the uprising. From the first afternoon they were deployed, armored cars and other vehicles carrying heavily armed troops rolled through the oppressed communities to terrorize the people and force them off the streets. National Guard, Army and Marine units were sent out to hold strategic points in the city and to enforce a dusk-to-dawn curfew. Military checkpoints were set up to cut off the rebellious communities from the rest of the city and people passing through them had to show their ID. Important business areas, like major shopping malls, were turned into armed camps and used as base areas for the invading troops.

As is always the case when the U.S. military is called out against an oppressed people, the media attempted to portray the people as welcoming the military with open arms. In L.A. the press even ran out human interest photos of GIs giving chocolate to young Black girls in the ghetto. However, the truth is a whole different scene.

Although the Rebellion went into an ebb after the troops were mobilized, there were sporadic and low-key incidents of resistance against the occupying forces. Political graffiti exploded across the walls of the oppressed communities, expressing a new-found unity among the people and hatred for the authorities – Black Power!, Black and Brown is One!, Fuck the Placa – Mi raza local!, Crips, Bloods & Mexicans!, Basta Police Brutality!, Yankee Go Home!, Fuck Pigs, Fuck the Police! In areas like the Central American neighborhood of Pico-Union – where revolutionary politics is a strong trend – and sections of Watts and South Central, revolutionary slogans bloomed on burned-out buildings – Revolución Si!, Revolución Es la Solución!, Revolution is the Hope of the Hopeless! A banner strung across Sunset Boulevard demanded "U.S. Out of Echo Park." Stickers with slogans against the military occupation appeared in some areas, including on some military vehicles themselves.

A Guatemalan immigrant told me this story: "Five or six days after the Rebellion, I had an experience with these stickers and the Army in Compton. The stickers said 'Army Out of L.A.' I took the opportunity of being in Compton when the army was there to use the stickers to show that there are some people who know what is going on. The army likes to think they are so heavy, so hot. So I thought I just have to be a lot cooler. A revolutionary has to have a lot more ideas. I made it seem like I was just kind of drunk and that I was throwing up. Then I would just stumble up and lean on their vehicles and put the sticker on it."

One soldier told the *L.A. Times* that he was beginning to feel that the people viewed the troops as occupiers and not as saviors. Federal troops complained that the waves and victory signs they had received when they left their base in Orange County had turned to one-finger salutes by the time they rolled into Compton, Watts and other oppressed areas. Some troops told of people in Watts driving past them, honking their horns and shouting obscenities at them.

National Guard troops told the *L.A. Times* that they were heckled and taunted from the moment they arrived in L.A. One soldier said that as late as May 5, a Black man walked up to a barricade and denounced the Black National Guard troops for standing with "them" and broke into a taunting song – "What you gonna do when the sun goes down?" There were also scattered reports in the *L.A. Times* about the National Guard and other federal troops periodically coming under gunfire attacks. The Marines reported that they were fired on as soon as they reached Compton. And on May 5 the National Guard stationed at 59th and Vermont reported that four youth had opened fire on them at two o'clock in the morning.

Casualties of War

Fifty-one people were killed and 2,314 were injured over the course of the rebellion. Because of all the publicity given to Reginald Denny – the white truck driver, beaten at the intersection of Florence and Normandie – many people have the impression that most of the people killed and injured were white people, killed by hostile Black youth. But the reality is that most of the people killed and injured were Black and Latino.

As Clark Kissinger wrote in "The Case of the LA4", RW August 16, 1992: "The president did not tell us about 15-year-old Mark Garcia who was shot in the back by Los Angeles cops as he tried to climb over a fence. We would not see Cesar Aguilar, who was told to lie face down with others held in a mass arrest on the sheets and then shot in the back and chest by Los Angeles cops because he refused to lower his head. Nor would we see the body of Dennis Jackson, slumped inside his door way in the Nickerson Gardens housing project." Jackson was shot by police at Nickerson Gardens along with De Andre Harrison and Anthony J. Taylor.

While the media went wild with footage of Reginald Denny, Louis Watson, an 18-year-old Black graffiti artist, was shot by an "unknown gunman" as he stood in the window of a store passing out food to people in the street.

One young white man was killed in the streets – riding his motorcycle to assist a Black friend in the area – but his family told the press that if there had been a "draft" during the L.A. Rebellion, their son would have joined the army of the people to fight against the police. Another white man was killed by "unknown gunmen" in Watts while standing in the front yard

at the home of a Black friend – who had offered the white guy a place to stay last yer when he was homeless.

The police and military admit killing at least 11 people. But, there is really no way to tell how many people the state's armed enforcers really killed and wounded throughout the uprising. Many accounts of people wounded are reported as "unknown gunmen." And the ACLU report states that there are many inconsistencies in the coroner's report on the people that the police admit to killing. In one case the coroner's report described a man killed by the police as having a chest wound, but the man had actually been shot in the back. So it is certainly not unreasonable to raise the question of how many others the police – or vigilantes and others allied with the police – may have killed or wounded without admitting it.

Pigs on Parade

The police and military troops were assisted in their assault against the people by all of the other various federal agents sent into the city. These agents came from a whole roster of federal forces. They ranged from the special team of prosecutors and "video enhancers" dispatched from Washington to help prepare a legal assault against the rebellion to the FBI, from Border Patrol SWAT teams to the Special Operations Group of the federal marshals who arrested Manuel Noriega during the invasion of Panama.

A brief listing of these agents and what they did in L.A. helps to paint a picture of how intense the military assault on the people actually was. The 1,950 federal agents included:

- FBI – which the Webster Commission described as the most important non-military federal agency mobilized based on their past good relations and cooperation with the LAPD. The FBI actually began working with the LAPD on April 29.
- The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF), which also cited its long history of good relations with the LAPD, began working with them as early as April 30. The BATF agents rode on patrol with the LAPD and escorted firefighters. But one of the most important services they offered to the LAPD was the preparation and dissemination of a current and updated list of all firearms licenses in the L.A. area.
- The Bureau of Prisons forces assisted the LAPD in patrolling and making arrests. They also were used to respond to sniper fire.
- The U.S. Customs Service provided 200 agents drawn from Dallas, El Paso, Houston, San Francisco and Tucson.
- The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) reinforced the agents they had stationed in the L.A. County jail. INS agents basically worked the "release line" where they interviewed individuals who were about to be released to determine if they were "undocumented" and detained them if they had no papers. INS agents also worked directly with the LAPD to interview "suspected illegal" immigrants and assisted the LAPD in executing house raids throughout the immigrant communities with a heavy emphasis on the huge Latino immigrant barrio of Pico Union and other communities where immigrants are concentrated.

- The Border Patrol sent in approximately 400 agents to assist in police duties in Pico Union. They carried out curfew enforcement, site security, crowd control and also aided in the house raids conducted throughout the barrio.

The Enemy's Weakness

The deployment of such massive military and police force against the L.A. Rebellion was not only a display of the armed strength of the power structure against the people. In fact, quite a bit of their weakness in the face of the rebellion was exposed to the world.

The Webster Commission complained that the big problem in bringing the Rebellion under control was the "lack of a plan" on the part of the LAPD and the city government. Actually the LAPD and the City did have a plan for dealing with some sort of uprising in the wake of the verdicts. Webster even admits that there was some planning and training that did go on. In fact, the authorities were very worried about the possibility of news about this planning leaking out and possibly contributing to civil disorder once the verdicts were announced. For instance, Webster reports that on April 10 Daryl Gates presided over one training meeting of police captains where he ordered that no printed material get distributed for fear of news leaks.

What is clear is that they never expected a rebellion of the intensity and scope as the one that broke out. They were taken by surprise. For all its talk about the lack of a plan, the Webster Commission summed up that, "We must emphasize here that even with proper preparation and C3I (Command, Control, Communication and Information), these field activities in our view could not have brought the disorder to an immediate stop. Tensions and other causes of the outbursts appear to have reached too deep a level and spread too far across the City's fabric to have achieved such a result." The Commission then goes on to state that the only course would have been to try to "lessen the outburst and regain control significantly faster."

As *Newsweek* put it, "The blue line was stretched so thin it frightened no one." The police were not prepared to deal with the scope of the Rebellion so the plan they implemented was to temporarily concede the streets to the Rebellion and pull back to protect their most important political and economic fortresses. Beverly Hills, for instance, was saturated with police and cut off from Los Angeles by police barricades from the moment the verdicts were announced.

Because they were not expecting something like the L.A. Rebellion, there was actually quite a bit of disarray among their forces for awhile. For instance, according to both the Webster Commission and the *L.A. Times* the police command center had no phones and no computers set up when it was called into action. Transportation for cops being dispatched from the command center was also hard to find. The police were hampered from using tear gas against the Rebellion in its early stages because they didn't have any gas masks available for their own forces.

The internal communications network was overloaded pretty rapidly as were the 911 lines. The State National Guard had similar problems. One of the big problems they faced was a very difficult time getting ammunition and equipment for their troops. According to the

L.A. Times some National Guard units only got hold of ammunition in the early stages of deployment by borrowing from local police and an "anti-drug unit" that was operating in Southern California. National Guard troops had to wait to get a plate that would convert their weapons into semi-automatic weapons before they could go out on the streets. It took so long to get these plates that the Governor decided to deal with the problem by ordering the troops to hit the streets with one or two bullets each so they wouldn't have to worry about the rate of fire of the weapons.

The scope and intensity of the uprising and the fact that it exploded so fast meant that the police had problems marshaling and deploying their forces. The Webster Commission wrote that a tremendous number of cops were shunted into the 77th Police Division, the area around Florence and Normandie, in the early hours of the Rebellion. This basically meant that there were very few cops available to deal with outbreaks in other sections of the city. This not only gave the Rebellion a little breathing room but it also resulted in a situation where, according to the Webster Commission, there were only six to eight cops available to patrol all of West L.A., and the LAPD had to call in the campus cops from UCLA to help man the area.

The Webster Commission also revealed that L.A. cops in the areas where the Rebellion was heaviest were forced to call friends who were cops in other areas and in federal and state agencies to beg them for assistance. Police as far away as Mono County were called for assistance this way. There were also many reports from immigrants that moving so many Border Patrol agents up from the border to L.A. basically left the border wide open, and many immigrants told of a situation where people were just strolling across the border and making their way to L.A.

The response of the ruling class and their enforcers to the Rebellion was also influenced by the bickering and infighting that was going on in their ranks at the time. The mayor and the police chief hadn't spoken to each other directly for 13 months. A number of other police commanders were also feuding with each other at that time. According to the Webster Commission, Daryl Gates, the mayor, the sheriff and other local officials were really at odds over how to respond and who was going to be in control. This situation even gave rise to open speculation about whether Gates actually pulled back the police on the afternoon of April 29 in order to get even with the other city officials who had given him so much trouble over the previous year. Gates, of course, denied this. This situation was only resolved when the federal government stepped in full force after Bush signed the Executive Order federalizing the military response to the uprising. On May 1 Bush federalized the National Guard and put them – and all other federal troops and agents in L.A. – under the on-site command of the FBI and overall under the command of the Attorney General and the Secretary of Defense.

Mass Roundups

The military assault was partnered with a major legal assault on the oppressed people of L.A. In the course of the rebellion 12,545 people were arrested, making it the largest mass arrest in U.S. history. More than 2,700 felony charges were filed in the courts. A curfew was laid down across the entire city and in selected areas of the county. This curfew was very selectively and viciously enforced against mainly Black and Latino people, especially immigrants, and against the homeless throughout the city. Arrest statistics show that 45 percent of those arrested were Latino, 41 percent were Black and 12 percent were white. At

least 1,542 immigrants were turned into the INS by the LAPD and the sheriff's department and 856 of them had been deported by May 20.

Mass arrests were also made on looting charges. According to the ACLU, people were often arrested for looting and charged with second degree commercial burglary, a felony, for just being in a burned-out building or simply being in the vicinity of a building that had been looted. In some instances the police sealed off commercial areas that had been looted and arrested everyone in the area.

By May 2 the court system was running around the clock and all weekend. The county jail was full almost to its legal limit with a record 25,000 prisoners.

This legal assault really ripped away the veneer of guaranteed constitutional rights in this country. The police became both the enforcers and the makers of law. Demonstrations, except for those that served the interests of the power structure like the huge Korean demonstration on May 2, were completely outlawed. In one instance the ACLU reports that a May 9 demonstration against Governor Wilson's proposed cuts in health and social welfare programs – that had actually been given a permit by the city weeks earlier and reassured by the mayor that it would be allowed to happen four days earlier – was broken up by the police and 11 of the demonstrators were arrested. When they tried to explain that they had a permit and constitutional rights, the LAPD responded that they didn't care what the mayor said because "LAPD runs the city" and that, "You don't have any constitutional rights. We're in a State of Emergency."

A similar scene was carried out inside the courtrooms. Mass arraignments were commonplace, sometimes with as many as 10 to 50 people being charged on the same complaint. Bail was used to bolster martial law in the city. The city attorney and the DA demanded \$15,000 bail for all misdemeanor charges. Judges did their part by routinely denying this bail and instead setting it at \$8,000 if there was no record of prior "police contact" or prior convictions. Bail bondsmen conveniently stopped showing up for work throughout the Rebellion and most of those arrested ended up spending a week or more in jail. The California Legislature played their part by rushing through a bill that extended the amount of time a person could be held in custody without seeing a judge from two working days to seven working days. The California judicial system also invoked emergency regulations in order to double the length of time a prisoner can be held in custody before going to trial.

The end result of all this was that thousands of people spent long periods of time in jail and then were hauled before the courts in large groups. People charged with misdemeanors were offered a deal by the judge. They could either plead guilty and waive their right to see an attorney in exchange for a sentence of time served and one to two years of summary probation or they could refuse and end up waiting to see a Public Defender and then spending at least another month in jail waiting for a trial date and then face a sentence of three to four months in jail.

One final tactic that the ruling class employed against the Rebellion reminded me so much of the tactics the apartheid regime uses against the Azanian people in the rebellious townships of South Africa. The people were subjected to "collective punishment" – whole communities were made to suffer to "teach a lesson" to the rebels and to create public opinion against the Rebellion. While the media cried crocodile tears over "people burning

down their own communities," the local rulers basically set up a blockade or an embargo against the oppressed nationality communities. The electricity in many neighborhoods was allowed to remain turned off for days. All bus service into and out of South Central was suspended. Local refineries cut off all gas supplies to these neighborhoods. Hospitals in these neighborhoods were allowed to run low on medical supplies. Mail delivery was cut off and trash collection was stopped. This was all an effort to demoralize the oppressed people in Los Angeles and starve them into submission. Although this did have some immediate effect on the Rebellion, developments in L.A. since then have shown that the effort to demoralize and intimidate the people has failed.

End of Part 3

The Fire This Time: Anatomy of the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion

Part 4

When we write the history of the Revolution in this country, the Los Angeles Rebellion of 1992 could turn out to be a significant chapter.

On April 29, the Simi Valley verdict on the beating of Rodney King came down and the Los Angeles Rebellion jumped off. For two days upwards of one million proletarians of all nationalities – and their allies – took the streets of the second largest city in the country. Their actions expressed outrage at the Rodney King verdict – and the injustice and racial oppression that the verdict exemplified. And in many different ways, the masses demonstrated disdain for the social system and social order that produced such a verdict. They sent a message that was heard around the world.

The old order was stunned. In the face of the first ferocious hours of the Rebellion, the police pulled back and left the streets to the people while they concentrated on protecting their most important centers of wealth and power. By the third day of the rebellion the oppressors began more intense efforts to take back the streets, but this was on the basis of the largest domestic military mobilization since the 1960s. A week after the troops arrived, the L.A. Times reported that city and federal officials were still fretting about “jittery rumbling” and potential outbreaks. Even after the Rebellion had subsided Mayor Bradley refused to talk about a deadline for the troops and National Guard to leave the city.

The L. A. Rebellion made profound changes on the political and social map of Amerikkka. Suddenly, the masses of poor people – degraded and abused by the system – were center stage. Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, sent a joyful and deep message of greetings to the rebel sisters and brothers of Los Angeles: “This rebellion was the most beautiful, the most heroic and the most powerful action by masses of people in the U.S. for years and years. It sent shockwaves throughout the U.S. and around the world, striking fear and panic into the oppressors and causing the hearts of oppressed people everywhere to beat faster with joy and hope.”

In the first three parts of this series, the *RW* presented three articles by correspondent Michael Slate Part 1 looked at the scope of the Rebellion and the actions of the masses against the power structure and their enforcers; Part 2 looked at the economic conditions of a section of people who took part in the Rebellion; and Part 3 examined the response of the police and the occupation of L.A. by federal troops.

In Part 4, the *RW* looks at how the sparks the Rebellion spread from LA across the country.

"This rebellion showed the tremendous strength of the oppressed people when they rise up against their oppression It showed that the masses of Black people won't take this racist oppression and brutality any more, and that when they strike back against it, there will be people of all different races and nationalities who will join with them. It showed that the way the oppressed people can get out of the trap of fighting and killing each other is to rise up

and fight the system."

– Message from Bob Avakian, Chairman of the RCP on the Los Angeles Rebellion

In the days and weeks following the King verdict a wave of upheaval and civil disorder swept across the land. It recalled the outbreaks of rage and rebellion that scorched the country after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968. Outbreaks were reported in over 79 cities in the U.S. And we know that even these reports are incomplete. Days-long pitched battles with police were fought in several major urban areas. There were upheavals in small cities in rural areas. College campuses responded on a scale that has not been seen since the murder of four students by National Guard Troops at Kent State in Ohio and the murder of two students by state and local police at Jackson State in Mississippi in May 1970 during the Vietnam War. And high school students came forward from more schools and in greater numbers than in any previous period of upheaval. Actions targeting government buildings and the blocking of bridges and highways recalled the massive protests on the eve of the Gulf War.

"This rebellion . . . sent shockwaves throughout the U.S. and around the world, striking fear and panic into the oppressors"

– Bob Avakian

The following reports, drawn from the *RW* and other news sources, give a sense of the scope of the upsurge across the country, but there are still some missing pieces. We know for instance, that there were many high school walkouts in urban and suburban areas, including many small towns, which we were not able to find reports on. And we suspect that there were clashes between the masses of people and the police that went unreported. We hope that readers with information about any unrecorded protests will send their information to the *RW* so that we can have a more complete picture.

San Francisco Bay Area: A few hours after the verdict was announced on Wednesday afternoon, April 29, people took to the streets throughout the Bay Area. The upheavals lasted for three days, and in the city of San Francisco itself the mayor declared a state of emergency and tried to impose martial law.

Oakland : Hundreds of Black youth took to the streets throughout the night of April 29. Three subway stations were closed, 100 people were arrested.

San Jose and Santa Cruz: Within hours of the verdict and the first outbreaks in L.A., actions began as students and proletarians of many nationalities poured into the streets. By midnight 200 students at San Jose State University rallied at the campus and took off for the downtown area where store windows were smashed. At the University of California campus in Santa Cruz, south of the Bay Area, a midnight protest of 400 students surged through campus. Graffiti, broken street lights and a dumpster fire were left behind. In the town of Santa Cruz, windows were broken at the county government center, the police station and other buildings.

Bay Area High Schools and Colleges: By the morning of April 30, students all over the area stopped school. Two hundred walked out of El Cerrito High and marched on police

stations. One hundred Oakland Tech students marched to downtown Oakland chanting "Seize the Power, Fight the Power." Students rallied at San Francisco State College and many classes were shut down.

At least half the students at Berkeley High School staged a walkout and demonstrated at the police station, where they were joined by several hundred seventh and eighth graders from Martin Luther King Jr. High. These students, many of them proletarians from oppressed racialities, marched to the campus of UC Berkeley and became part of a huge rally. From there thousands marched across town and onto one of the main freeways, shutting down several lanes. Then they blocked the bridge that runs between Oakland Berkeley and San Francisco until they were driven off by riot-gearied California Highway Patrol.

A noon rally at Pinole Valley High School in the East Bay turned into a ten-mile march by 250 students who blocked part of the freeway. They were joined by students from Kennedy High and Contra Costa Junior College. In Marin County, north of San Francisco, 500 Marin County high school students tried to close down the Golden Gate Bridge.

Berkeley: As the Bay Bridge was being blocked 2,000 more people marched down University Ave. in Berkeley. That night an angry militant crowd of mainly Black youth stormed down Berkeley's Telegraph Ave. leading to the university, smashing store windows and burning a cop car.

San Francisco: Meanwhile, on the other side of the Bay, protests in San Francisco became so ferocious on April 30 that a state of emergency was declared. As the Bay Bridge was blocked and demonstrators marched in Berkeley and Oakland, 2,000 marched through the Latino neighborhoods of San Francisco to the State buildings. Hundreds of youth raged on the main downtown street and into the financial district. All the downtown subway stops were closed and buses re-routed. The downtown shopping area lost its glitter and most of its glass. The city instituted a curfew. People defied the curfew and marched anyway. 400 were arrested at one demo. By the evening of May 1st, hundreds of cops occupied the mainly Latino Mission District in San Francisco. When people tried to march, the police carried out mass arrests. The protests continued in the courtrooms and jails. And into the next week. On May 8 cops attacked a march from Dolores Park in the Mission, arresting almost 600 people.

Atlanta, GA: Over a thousand people were involved in militant protests. 400 people, Black and white, held a vigil at the crypt of Martin Luther King Jr. Hundreds of angry Black youth from Atlanta University Center (the site of five black colleges) poured into downtown. Bus service was suspended. The windows in hundreds of businesses were smashed – including the offices of CNN. Cops closed off the area around the university, closed down the Capitol, and imposed a curfew. Fighting with cops continued on campus and downtown throughout the next day. Rocks and bottles were hurled at the cops. 370 people were arrested and 73 were reported injured.

Washington, DC: On May 4 several hundred people blocked the street in front of the Justice Department. 500 students from Howard University led a militant march that drew in proletarian youth and students from other schools. By the time the march got to the White House there were 1,000 angry Black youth and students. They went nose to nose with riot cops guarding the White House. The 14th Street Bridge, a main artery into the city, was blocked for several hours. Then on May 10 the mainly Latino Mount Pleasant neighborhood in

Washington, DC was again shaken by rebellion. (One year earlier on May 5, 1991, the neighborhood had erupted after cops shot a handcuffed man at close range. Massive police presence only fueled the fires of people's rage. Street barricades had gone up. Twenty police vehicles were destroyed.) This time the fighting with police went on for two nights. There were reports of cops being showered with rocks and bottles from rooftops as they tried to chase people.

Las Vegas, Nevada: The rebellion in the Westside ghetto (95 percent Black and cut off from the rest of the city by freeways and viaducts) lasted for two weeks and was characterized by intense fighting between the Black proletarian masses and the cops. On many occasions it broke into armed conflict. The rebellion broke out when police began harassing a crowd gathered on April 30 to protest the King verdict. When cops arrested and roughed up two Black youths, the people's rage boiled over. For several days and nights the area was seriously out of the authorities' control. Over 90 fires broke out. A state parole and probation office and a police substation were burned down. Masses, armed but unseen, fired on cops. One cop and many cop cars were hit. A curfew was declared and the National Guard was called in to surround the area. Cops blockaded roads to prevent militants from getting into the hotel/casino part of town. Clashes with police continued for almost three weeks. So much gunfire was directed at cops that they had to patrol in armored vehicles borrowed from a U.S. atomic test site. When cops tried to break up a unity barbecue between rival gang members in a local park on May 10, they were met with rocks, bottles and gunfire. May 15 there was another clash as an angry crowd of 1,000 confronted three armored cop vehicles, which were hit with more than 50 rounds of ammunition.

Seattle, Washington: For two nights after the King verdict and the beginning of the L.A. Rebellion, hundreds of youth of many nationalities "rampaged" and fought the cops through the downtown area. There were many fires and much property damage. Cops reported over 100 arrests. Youth from the city joined students from the campuses. Students from a mainly white suburban high school walked out and blocked streets. 300 students from U of Washington occupied the main freeway through Seattle.

New York City:

Manhattan: Thousands demonstrated through the downtown streets, 1,000 at Times Square. There was a mix of people: Black proletarian and middle class youth, white college students, movement activists of all nationalities, and a few downtown workers still in business suits. Cops had ordered most of the businesses in the area shut down early and tried to encircle the crowd. At Madison Square Garden, several hundred marchers forced their way past cops, causing a big disruption; as the march headed downtown to Greenwich Village, police attacks were met with rocks, bottles and garbage.

Harlem: A Black nationalist group led a march to the Harlem State Office Building, joined by 200 mostly white students from Columbia University and some workers from Harlem Hospital. Marchers blocked traffic and Black youth from the neighborhood taunted cops.

New York Area schools: 700 students at Erasmus High in the heart of the Caribbean immigrant community in Brooklyn walked out in protest, joining with students from other Brooklyn high schools and Long Island University in a protest march across Manhattan Bridge to City Hall. One thousand students walked out at St .John's Prep in Astoria, Queens.

Walkouts also at City College in Harlem, Harry S. Truman High in the Bronx, Franklin Lane High in Brooklyn, Manhattan Center for Mathematics and Science, and at high schools in Maplewood, Newark and East Orange in New Jersey. Students at three high schools in the Bronx and Jamaica – Roosevelt, Clinton and Morris – walked out and fought with police at Fordham Road, a major shopping center. In Jamaica, Queens 100 youth marched through the streets.

Washington Heights: The spirit of L.A. surfaced again in this mainly Latino area of Manhattan in July, just before the Democratic National Convention. Thousands of Latinos rose up in response to the vicious police killings of two Dominicans. For over four days, youth fought running battles with police over an 85-block area of upper Manhattan. Garbage bags and dumpsters were set on fire and thrown into the street. Banks were among favorite targets of rocks and bottles. Burning cars formed barricades.

Toronto, Canada: The rebellion spilled across the U.S. border. In Canada's second largest city, hundreds of Blacks and whites and Asians gathered in front of the U.S. Consulate to protest the Rodney King verdict. They tried to smash the windows and doors of the building. When Metro police, well known and hated for their history of flagrant and unrestrained brutality against Jamaicans and other blacks, Indians and poor whites, intervened, a two-day battle erupted in the streets. Molotov cocktails were thrown as demonstrators fought with police along a 15-block stretch of a main city street. Over 1,000 were involved. White students and other youth joined in the rampage and fought the cops to the sound of the shattering glass.

San Diego, California: 500 students blocked the main freeway north of downtown for two hours. Effigies of police were burned during a day-long protest. There were incidents of police being fired on. In some cases, people – called "bandits" by the press – stopped cars,, breaking windows and in a few cases beating motorists.

Minneapolis, Minnesota: Hundreds of high school students – mostly white kids – walked out of classes on May 1st. On May 2 a march of 6,000 people of many different nationalities – Black and white youth, people from the American Indian Movement, civil rights forces – stretched out for three miles, from the Northside Black neighborhood to downtown. On May 4, activists from ACT UP and other groups took over the armory in downtown Minneapolis to protest the verdict.

Toledo, Ohio: in this Midwestern steel town, two squad cars were burned. Vacant houses were burned and anger boiled over from the more than 100 mourners at the funeral of a Black youth killed by cops. Civil rights leaders led a march of 400 for two miles through the city's inner-city neighborhood to a City Council meeting to protest the King verdict and the Toledo cops' murder of two black youth.

Birmingham, Alabama: Hundreds take the streets. Protesters set fires, attack news crews. Shots were fired at the cops.

Tampa, Florida: Hundreds of Black youth rebel. Rocks and bottles are thrown at the cops and arrests are made after shots are fired at cop cars. Two reporters were injured. Five houses were set ablaze. Reports were that some of the youth were as young as 11 to 12 years old.

Boulder, Colorado: Over 300 marched through the downtown area, including students, Black youth, and older people, black and white. When cops attempted to divert the march, rocks and bottles were thrown at them.

Bridgeport, Connecticut Protesters smashed windows in the business district.

Jersey City, NJ: Store windows smashed by demonstrating Black youth.

New Rochelle, New York Black youth ran through shopping areas, looting stores at a mall. Fought police who fired tear gas.

Gary, Indiana: Tires were set ablaze in the streets to stop cars. Angry youth pelted passing motorists with rocks.

In addition to the cities listed above, there were reports of actions and upheavals in Hartford CT, Boston MA, Baltimore MD, Jersey City NJ, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh PA, Fort Wayne IN, Topeka KS, Detroit MI, Saginaw MI, Kansas City MO, St. Louis MO, Omaha NE, Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus OH, Milwaukee WI, Fort Lauderdale FL, Charlotte NC, Houston TX, Sacramento CA, Portland OR and Olympia WA.

Small Towns and Rural Areas

Response to the King verdict and the L.A. Rebellion was not just seen in large and medium size cities. The people also responded in many small towns and rural areas. Some we have reports on:

Bemidji, Minnesota: In this small town near the Canadian border Native Americans marched to the Sheriff's station and held a rally denouncing police brutality and the cops' racist acts in that town. Speakers threatened that "this could escalate into a Los Angeles."

Peoria, Illinois: Black youth attack police with rocks and bottles.

Beloit, Wisconsin: In a brief but violent rampage, Black youth attacked stores and cars. Windows in several homes were smashed.

College Campuses

Tens of thousands of college students demonstrated on campuses all over the country. They held marches, silent vigils, and demonstrations that erupted in violent clashes with police, as in Atlanta. Upheavals of one sort or another were reported on more than 50 colleges and universities across the country. In addition to those in the San Francisco Bay Area, Atlanta, and New York listed above:

Madison, Wisconsin: At the University of Wisconsin campus in Madison 2,000 demonstrated, burned effigies of Bush, L.A. police chief Daryl Gates and the four acquitted cops at the city-county building. Protesters included students of many nationalities, joined by youth from the neighborhoods and people from the downtown area. Windshields were smashed on 34 police cars in a police parking lot.

Boston Area: Actions were reported at Wheelock College, the U of Massachusetts at Amherst, Emerson College, Emmanuel College, Wellesley College, Boston College, Simmons College, Northeastern University, Boston U, Roxbury Community College, Harvard, MIT, Berkeley Music School, Tufts University, Dartmouth College.

At Amherst, students took over the administration offices. Two American flags were burned.

Baltimore area: At Johns Hopkins, the Black Student Union led a march to downtown with the call "Police brutality is what happens every day." At the U of Maryland law students marched to the court building. A peaceful demo was held at Tower State U. Actions were also reported at Morgan State University, Coppin State College, and Loyola College.

Athens, GA: A college town in the middle of KKK country. Seventy-five people rallied at the federal building the day after the verdict the protest – which included Black students, activists and RCYB members – grew to over 200 people as they marched through downtown, the campus and through the projects.

Warrensburg, Missouri: One thousand students at Central Missouri U and youth from the community, Black and white, marched and demonstrated. Windows were broken and several cars overturned.

There were also actions involving dozens, hundreds and sometimes thousands of people at each of the following colleges and universities:

Glassboro State College, Glassboro, NJ; Buffalo State College, Buffalo, NY; Columbia University, NYC; U of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Illinois State University, Normal, IL; Bradley University, Peoria, IL; Indiana University, Bloomington, IN; University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; University of Nebraska, Omaha, NE; University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE; Kent State University, Akron, OH; University of Akron, Akron, OH; Ohio State, Columbus, OH; Central State U, Dayton, OH; Central State U, Wilberforce, OH; University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, WI; Southern University, Baton Rouge, LA; Xavier U, New Orleans, LA; Johnson C Smith U, Charlotte, NC; Texas Southern U, Houston, TX; Virginia State U, Ettrick, VA; Virginia State U, Richmond, VA; William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA; University of California San Diego; University of Washington, Seattle; Central Community College, Seattle; University of Colorado Boulder, CO; Harris-Stowe Sate College, St. Louis, MO.

High Schools

There are incomplete reports of actions by students at over 40 high schools. And certainly many of the reports and attempted actions were suppressed by school officials. There are also numerous places where grade school and middle school youth marched out of school or joined other actions. In addition to the schools mentioned in the Bay Area New York and other cities earlier in the article:

Denver, Colorado: Students from Thomas Jefferson High School marched up a main highway to another local high school. Car and store windows were smashed.

Boston, MA: Led by the group Free My People, students from Madison Park High

School disrupt a press conference by authorities.

Baltimore, MD: At Meade Senior High School and Randallstown High School students refused to go to classes, held discussions and confronted police.

Pittsburgh, PA: At Perry Traditional Academy, Peabody High School and Alderdice High School, Black and white students walked out of class. At Peabody 200 left despite threats from school officials. Half the school left at Alderdice.

Indianapolis, IN: Students at Lawrence North, North Central and Broad Ripple High Schools had actions of various kinds.

There were also actions at the following high schools:

Huron in Ann Arbor MI; City High in Muskegon MI; Memorial High in Beloit WI; La Crosse High in La Crosse WI; Riverside in Milwaukee WI; North Miami Beach High in Miami FL; Palm Harbor Middle School in Orlando FL; Stuart Middle School in Stuart FL; North Atlanta High in Atlanta GA; Terry Sanford High in Fayetteville NC; Trevor Brown High in Phoenix, AZ.

End of Part 4