

# Covert Action

## INFORMATION BULLETIN

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*What happens to a  
dream deferred?*

*Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun  
Or fester like a sore –  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten  
meat?  
Or crust and sugar over –*

*Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.*

*Or does it explode?*

– Langston Hughes

## LA: The Fire This Time

Mike Davis

**CovertAction:** What happened in Los Angeles? Was it a riot, an uprising, a rebellion, an insurrection, and why would you term it one or the other?

**Mike Davis:** I think the majority of the participants, particularly the youths who started it, see the events that began on April 29th as a rebellion. When I was at a meeting of the Crips and Bloods in Inglewood in mid-May, it was referred to as a slave rebellion. Although the term “riot” doesn’t have negative connotations for me as a labor historian, I think the wishes of the people who were the motive force should be honored.

In any case, you can’t reduce the events to a single essence—one major characteristic or identity. LA was a hybrid social revolt with three major dimensions. It was a revolutionary democratic protest characteristic of African-American history when demands for equal rights have been thwarted by the major institutions. It was also a major post-modern bread riot—an uprising of not just poor people but particularly of those strata of poor in southern

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Mike Davis is a labor historian and author of *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage, 1991). The interview took place in late May 1992. Photo: Ted Soqui/Impact Visuals, Los Angeles uprising.

California who’ve been most savagely affected by the recession. Thirdly, it was an inter-ethnic conflict—particularly the systematic destroying and uprooting of Korean stores in the Black community.

So it was all of those things at once and issues of rage, class, and race cannot be separated out. Sometimes they coalesced, sometimes they were parallel in time and space.

**CAIB:** Is it ironic that a revolt against racism manifested itself in one of its aspects as interracial violence?

**MD:** No, it has, of course, happened before in the riots of the ’60s. When Martin Luther King came to LA in August 1965, right at the end of the first Watts rebellion, he was initially confused about the causes. But after talking to people on the street and having some some pretty straightforward confrontations, he decided that it was a class rebellion: “a rebellion of the underprivileged against the privileged.” Those were exactly his words. And he acknowledged that the two targets of it were first of all the police and White institutions and secondly, White-owned stores. So in August 1965, by and large, White people themselves were scarcely attacked.

In those days the grievances that really fueled the attack on the White-owned stores were a little different than now.

For instance, many of the White-owned stores then were owned by Jewish-Americans—some of whom had good relations with the community.

The real target of peoples' wrath in the '60s was the credit stores, the kind of place where you'd buy a bed on time and end up paying the price of a new car. Because they lacked access to major retail centers, ghetto residents were forced into a form of debt peonage.

This time the contradictions are different. The issue centers not just on high prices (although you'll hear that), but above all on abusive treatment of Black customers. Of course, the grievance which I think lay heavier than Rodney King's beating on the hearts of many Black youths was the murder of Latasha Harlins by a Korean shopkeeper in LA. I say murder because I can see no other word for the act of shooting her in the back of the head.

**CAIB:** In addition to the differences in targets, what other differences and similarities are there between '65 and '92? What about the racial composition, the issues, and the numbers of people involved?

**MD:** What the district attorney's office, and probably the city attorney as well, have been doing is trying to paint this as the action of a criminal fringe. They are both law-and-order Democrats who have their eyes on the attorney

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**This is the biggest domestic repression since the Nixon era. Federalized within 48 hours of the first explosion of anger, it represents a new model of urban counterinsurgency.**

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general's office in Sacramento. But they, along with all the Republican candidates in this state, as well as other born again law-and-order Democrats like Mel Levine, are echoing the 1965 McCone Commission on Watts in claiming that there are no valid reasons for taking to the streets.



Ted Soqui/Impact Visuals, from George Holliday video

From the video of the LAPD beating of motorist Rodney King.

Yet, after the McCone Commission came out, UCLA researchers spent a long time doing detailed surveys in the community, and what they discovered is that far from it being the action of a criminal fringe, the 1965 rebellion was extremely popular. At least 22,000 people, they found, took an active part in looting, burning, fighting the police. Another 50,000 to 60,000 people were passive bystanders in the streets cheering them on. So you had maybe 75,000 people involved. I would say that at least twice that number took part in the recent rebellion—probably with the same ratio of active participants to passive supporters.

Of the first 5,000 people arrested, 52 percent were Latino and only 39 percent Black. So it's clear, at least to the extent of the looting and some of the arson, that this was as much a Latino as a Black rebellion. And in order to understand that, you have to comprehend the severity of the current economic crisis in Los Angeles. It is an obvious linkage that the media have almost never made. Although they talk about gaps between haves and have-nots, what actually fueled this outbreak is not a general structural trend, but a specific economic condition: we are in the worst recession southern California has seen since the '30s. And the only account of it that you tend to get in the papers concerns unemployed aerospace engineers.



Ted Soqui/Impact Visuals

National Guard in action on LA streets after King verdict.

It's been a vicious, disastrous recession for the newest strata of immigrants from Mexico and Central America, which is why the worst looting outside the Black areas occurred in the largely Mexican eastern half of South Central LA, and in Central American immigrant areas like Hollywood and the MacArthur Park area.

Of course, another thing that's different from '65 is that geographically, the affected region is at least twice the area of the 1965 riot and curfew area, even extending tentacles into White middle-class areas. Undoubtedly, although you did have some opportunistic looting—yuppies in BMWs and a whole variety of people—the main force driving it was a need for consumer goods and necessities. A lot of

people couldn't buy things like milk, diapers or bread for three or four days. There was a huge power shortage and everybody's food spoiled. People who didn't want to were absolutely forced to loot.

**CAIB:** Many Central Americans who've lived with war know that when there's a chance to get food in a situation that chaotic, you need to grab it, because there's no telling how long the breakdown will continue, and in the meantime you and your family could starve.

**MD:** Absolutely. I observed the looting in several areas very carefully, and I spent hours among the looters. There was tremendous enthusiasm for athletic shoes, obviously, but particularly in the MacArthur Park area, people went for basic necessities. I saw people who looted and then watched them take a carload of food and diapers and distribute it among their neighbors in the tenement apartments of the Central American area west of downtown LA.

**CAIB:** What have been the repercussions of the uprising for Central Americans? Have there been large INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] incursions into the neighborhoods, deportations, or any other evidence that the INS has taken advantage of the situation?

**MD:** Definitely. What's happened is absolutely terrifying. First of all, from a very early point, the repression itself was federalized and federally driven.

Mike Hernandez, the progressive Chicano councilperson representing MacArthur Park, asked very early on for police protection for Latino store owners. The response: his area was the last to get any kind of police protection. Instead, by Friday (the rebellion started on Wednesday) 1,000 INS and Border Patrol (the latter drafted from as far away as Texas) poured into the area and set up command posts at 3rd and Vermont and MacArthur Park. They've already deported nearly 700 people.

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In my *Nation* piece [June 1, 1992, pp. 734-46], I mistakenly said that these people were accused of looting, but it now turns out that large numbers of the deportees were never charged at all. (Those against whom charges were lodged are still in custody at the INS detention center on Terminal Island and County Jail.) The roundup has broken

up families and sent terror through the Central American community. Many of those arrested were simply day laborers standing on the same corners they always stand on, people just caught on the street, even a 14-year-old mentally retarded girl who was deported to Mexico. In direct violation of Los Angeles city policy, the LAPD assisted the INS and the Border Patrol. INS agents were being taken around by the LAPD in police cars, supposedly as translators.

Very clearly, the INS and Border Patrol have used the uprising to vacuum up people in the community. More than just taking the opportunity to deport large numbers of people, they have used the situation to instill fear. It's been a reign of terror followed by political attacks not only on the Black community, but to a surprising degree on Central Americans.

If it's true that the Bush administration is divided between "softs" and "hards" on urban issues, the "hards" are really hitting on the immigration question. In LA, a number of right-wing Republicans campaigning for office have singled out the immigrants. Very early on, the Justice Department claimed that a third of those arrested were illegal immigrants. Although the figure is simply not true, it was bandied around by every right-wing political figure. Even some of the supposedly liberal Chicano leaders tried to distance themselves from the Latino looting. Despite the fact that thousands and thousands of Mexican immigrants participated, some of these leaders blamed it on Salvadorans who are "refugees" and not "real immigrants" like Mexicans.

But now, as a direct result of the backlash, the struggle of the Guatemalans (the second largest Central American



Police brutality cases have been endemic in Los Angeles for decades. In 1982, after he accidentally hit a police car, three deputies beat this man in front of his wife, children and grandparents; his head required 53 stitches.

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group in the community) to gain temporary protected status [TPS] is totally defeated. The Salvadorans, the largest group, have been given an informal one-year extension of their temporary protected status by the Bush administration. Bush sent a letter to Salvadoran President Cristiani saying: Congratulations, they can stay here for

another year and then we'll see what happens. Because the agreement is not legally binding, the 75,000 Salvadorans in the neighborhood across the street from me are now totally hostage to how the backlash develops.

Because they sense that they've become the most vulnerable scapegoats, the Central American community is rushing to register voters, to encourage people to become active in local politics and to make alliances. That is the silver lining in this huge shock to the Central American community.

**CAIB:** That leads us to ask who benefits and who loses in an uprising like LA? In '65, the Black Panther Party was formed in the wake of Watts, but it in turn was crushed by the massive government repression of COINTELPRO and other operations. Do you see patterns like that emerging?

**MD:** Of course. In a period when the majority of the Democratic Party is no longer available as a reformist instrument and New Deal liberalism is virtually dead, non-violent social disorder is about the only way that you can put the survival issues of the community on the agenda to address the continuing daily economic and literal violence.

This rebellion is going to produce very mixed results: On the good side, it has further politicized the gangs. Political consciousness always existed in the sense that members, many of whom were sympathetic to Black

OPEN SEASON ON LAPD  
 TO ALL CRIPS AND BLOODS  
 LETS UNITE AND DONT GANGBANG AND LET IT  
 BE A BLACK THING FOR THE LITTLE BLACK  
 GIRL AND THE HOMIE RODNEY KING"  
 AND EYE FOR AN EYE A TOOTH FOR A  
 TOOTH IF LAPD HURT A BLACK WILL  
 KILL TWO POW" POW" POW"

**CRIPS** TOGETHER  
 WE  
**BLOODS** TAKE A STAND  
 DCH  
 A GANG  
 MEMBER

ISJ"RSC"NH8"ETG"HC8"FTB"ECC  
 -B"SYL"8PS AGC BNB FIRU NHC  
 FE"CAE"RFC"VNG"PTW"CC RIDER  
 P3"NSG"

AND THE REST  
 OF THE LOCS AND BEE DOGS

BLACK POWER

75-08-92 5-12-72

TO: STATION PATROL UNITS FROM: FIRESTONE O.S.S.

SUBJECT: OFFICER SAFETY INFORMATION

DURING THE PAST WEEK, MEMBERS OF THE FPK OSS TEAM HAVE RECEIVED INFORMATION FROM 3 SEPARATE RELIABLE INFORMANT GANG BANGERS ON THREE SEPARATE OCCASIONS. ALL THREE ARE FROM DIFFERENT GANGS (2 CRIPS AND 1 BLOOD). ALL THREE RELATE BASICALLY THE SAME INFORMATION.

THEY SAY THAT THE CRIPS AND BLOODS FROM THE HOUSING PROJECTS HAVE UNITED UNDER THE DIRECTION AND LEADERSHIP OF MUSLIMS. THERE HAVE BEEN THREE SEPARATE MEETINGS WHERE BOTH BANGS WERE IN ATTENDANCE; 8/8/92 IN THE JORDAN DOWNS, 8/6/92 IN THE IMPERIAL COURTS AND ON 8/7/92 IN THE NICKERSON GARDENS.

THIS INFO WAS CONFIRMED BY S.P.S. DEPUTIES WHO SURVEILLED ALL THREE MEETINGS. THEY SAW BLOODS AND CRIPS DRESSED IN THEIR GANG'S COLORS HANGING OUT TOGETHER. THEY NUMBERED ANYWHERE FROM 300-500. ADDITIONALLY, ON 8/8/92, AN FPK OSS UNIT STOPPED A CAR FILLED WITH 3 GRAPE STREET CRIPS DRESSED DOWN IN THEIR PURPLE GANG COLORS DRIVING OUT OF THE NICKERSON GARDENS WHICH IS A BLOOD NEIGHBORHOOD. THE GANG MEMBERS TOLD THE OSS DEPUTIES THAT THEY (CRIPS) CAN GO INTO ANY HOUSING PROJECT NOW AS THEY HAVE CALLED A TRUCE. THEY SAID THAT THEY DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT OTHER GANGS BUT ALL OF THE HOUSING PROJECT GANGS HAVE UNITED.

THE INFORMANTS STATED THAT THE PURPOSE OF THESE MEETINGS HAS BEEN TO DEVELOP STRATEGY AND TACTICS FOR KILLING COPS. THEY SAID THAT THE MUSLIMS WANT TO TARGET COPS WHEN THEY ARE MOST VULNERABLE, WHICH IS WHEN THEY ARE LEAVING THE STATION HEADS HOME. THEY PLAN TO FOLLOW A COP FROM THE STATION AND DO THEM AWAY FROM THE STATION. THE GANG'S LEADERS HOWEVER, WANT TO DO RANDOM AND SPORADIC SHIPING OF COPS IN THE FIELD. THEN, WHEN HELP ARRIVES, THEY WILL SET UP AN AMBUSH FOR THEM. STJ.L, OTHER GANG MEMBERS WANT TO MAKE A BIGGER STATEMENT BY OVERTAKING AND SEIZING A POLICE STATION. THEY SAY THAT THEY HAVE MORE GUNS AND MORE PEOPLE AT ANY GIVEN TIME THAN THE STATIONS HAVE INSIDE THE STATION DURING NORMAL BUSINESS HOURS.

THEY SAID THAT THE GANGS WANT TO WAIT FOR THE MILITARY TO PULL OUT AND FOR THE POLICE TO RETURN TO NORMAL OPERATIONS (IE: A CAR RESPONDING TO CALLS WITH ONLY 1 OR 2 COPS IN THE CAR) BEFORE THEY START THE "WAR". THEY SAID THAT THE MEETING SET FOR 8/12/92 AT 8:00 PM WAS CANCELLED.

According to the LA Coalition Against Police Abuse, this document, circulated within the LAPD, was disinformation reminiscent of the FBI's COINTELPRO and was designed to undermine African-American organization and justify extreme police tactics.

nationalist ideology, understood the relentless logic of how destructive gang warfare was becoming. But until the rebellion, there was never an opportunity for the first person to take the step toward stopping the cycle.

The rebellion offered that possibility, and what we've seen since has just been astonishing. We're talking about meetings and gatherings of hundreds and hundreds of Crips and Bloods, five, six, seven hundred at a time. Recently, these have been violently broken up by the police. But, even if the truce breaks down, for most of them, being a gangbanger is no longer the thing to be. Now the thing to be is, in some sense, a liberation fighter.

Various internal groups have influenced this process of politicization. There are original veteran gang members who were politicized in prison and elsewhere and who represent a kind of post-Panther revolutionary Black politics. The Nation of Islam has also been very important (Louis Farrakhan is probably the only national figure most youths pay any attention to). It played a very constructive role in promoting gang peace. But they all know they're under attack, and they all know that provocations are being made.

CAIB: Have there been instances of infiltration of the gangs or of *agents provocateurs* fomenting trouble?

MD: One of the major establishment critiques of police conduct has been the failure of LAPD intelligence to foresee the magnitude of the rebellion or the coalescence of the gangs. Both Willie Williams, the new police chief, and

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ex-FBI, ex-CIA director William Webster, head of the commission investigating LAPD conduct during the rebellion, have emphasized beefing up police intelligence. In practical terms, this strategy is not so much a matter of a romanticized policy of deep cover infiltration of the gangs, as simply a ruthless escalation of police pressure on pathetic drug users who are friends or kin of gang members.

One of the most cost-effective tactics for mass-producing snitches is the so-called "reverse buy," where police act as drug dealers in order to entrap customers, who are then offered the choice of serving hard time or becoming informants. Indeed, the "reverse buy" is a cornerstone of the attorney general's "Weed and Seed" program now being implemented in 16 different metropolitan areas, including Los Angeles, Atlanta, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. It is also, of course, morally obnoxious and indicative of a full-blown police state.

In the meantime, the LAPD and the sheriffs are doing everything possible to disrupt the gang unity process.

Under various pretexts, they have attacked every mass gathering, arresting scores of youths, usually for trivial offenses. The gangs, however, have refused to be suckered into violent confrontations with the police. They are acting smart, keeping their focus on unification and peacemaking. This response, of course, only further infuriates the police, who seem to fear gang unity above all else.

An incredible amount of obvious police disinformation — much of it reminiscent of COINTELPRO — is currently

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in circulation. The sheriffs, in particular, have leaked an "intelligence report" that claims, on the authority of anonymous informants, that the Crips and Bloods are planning an assault on a police station as well as ambushes of individual cops on their way home from work. Appended to the report is a crudely drawn leaflet proclaiming: "Eye for an Eye — Let's Kill Two Cops."



courtesy of Michael Zinzun

By spraying one gang's color over another's, members of the LAPD instigate friction and possible violence among rival gangs.

The sheriffs' document also categorically states that the Crips and Bloods are acting under "the direction and leadership of Muslims" (presumably Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam). This conclusion suggests that local, and perhaps federal, law enforcement agencies are exploring an all-embracing conspiracy scenario that links gangs, urban unrest, Farrakhan, and perhaps even certain Colombians and Iraqis.

**CAIB:** In LA, we saw the police and government use a high level of technology in intelligence gathering and repression techniques. What was the role of this increased sophistication, and what can we expect in the future?

**MD:** The mass arrests following the rebellion have depended upon the combined information processing capacities of the FBI and local law enforcement. In particular, the comprehensive databases on Black and Latino youth which the LAPD and sheriffs have been constructing over the past decade have been augmented by the FBI's expertise in analyzing video and photographic evidence.

It is now clear that one of the main functions of the 'anti-gang' dragnets such as the LAPD's Operation Hammer has been to create a rap sheet on virtually every young Black male in the city. Data are not simply being kept on people arrested, but rather people are being detained solely in order to generate new data.



Ted Soqui/Impact Visuals

Police Chief Daryl Gates, who will be retiring soon under pressure, has been challenged for his handling of charges of systematic police brutality and riots.

Thanks to massive street sweeps, the gang roster maintained by the LAPD and sheriffs has grown from 14,000 to 150,000 files over the last five years. This accumulation has allowed the District Attorney, Ira Reiner, to make the hyperbolic claim that 47 percent of all young Black males in LA County are active gang members. Needless to say, these files are not only employed in identifying suspects, but have also become a virtual blacklist. Under California's recent "Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act" (STEP), for instance, membership in a gang, presumably as proven by inclusion in one of these databases, can become a separate felony charge.

The large-scale nocturnal operations mounted after midnight by the police and National Guard have been based on two sources: the "We Tip" public hot lines which have supposedly generated a thousand fruitful tips on looters and arsonists, and, of course, the police information banks on gang members. In the guise of searching for stolen property, the feds have been looking for the thousands of stolen guns. They haven't been very successful in that or in finding the 400 stolen police uniforms.

In my area, at the edge of the MacArthur Park Central American community, they were sweeping through the neighborhood, knocking on doors and walking right in. They have arrested people for sitting in their living rooms and not being able to produce a sales slip for their TV or couch.

In addition, the FBI has joined with the police in making unprecedented demands that the media and private individuals surrender every single negative and every inch of video tape taken during the rebellion.

The cops, of course, have tried to impress everyone with their speedy identification of the youths supposedly responsible for the beating of the White truck driver. But the real threat of these massive new databases and information technologies is not their role in a few sensationalized instances, but their application on a macro scale in the management of criminalized populations.

In Los Angeles I think we are beginning to see a repressive context that is literally comparable to Belfast or the West Bank, where policing has been transformed into full-scale counterinsurgency (or "low-intensity warfare," as the military likes to call it), against an entire social stratum or ethnic group. This means that virtually every member of the "terrorist" population is "managed" by the police in some fashion,

whether through literal imprisonment or through new restrictions on freedom of movement and association. The effect is as if a permanent state of martial law were imposed on specific neighborhoods or sections of the city.

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The implications reach further than LA—emerging technologies may be used to surveil and control entire quarters of urban areas. As someone involved in land-use issues, I've been going to meetings about Geographical Information Systems or GIS. Now geographers and urban planners, as well as traffic engineers and developers, are enthralled by the imminent prospect of basing the management of complex urban systems—traffic flows, zoning, and so on—on LANDSAT satellites linked to GIS software. Since the image resolution capabilities of commercial satellite systems are now approaching the threshold of distinguishing individual automobiles, and perhaps even people and their pets, it will be possible to monitor the movements of entire populations. As one GIS expert at UCLA pointed out to me, this will quickly revolutionize the policing of inner city areas.

**CAIB:** Not long ago, the National Security Agency conducted a secret test using one of its signals intelligence satellites to track one automobile traveling all the way across the country from the East to the West Coast, day and night, through storms and all kinds of conditions.

**MD:** That's phenomenal. Of course, satellite surveillance and GIS mapping will be augmented by the increasingly common use of automatic vehicle location systems like *Lojak*, or its more sophisticated cousin *Teletrac*. In Los Angeles, and I suspect in most large cities, especially those participating in the federal "Weed and Seed" program, the courts have been utterly promiscuous in allowing the police to clandestinely tag suspects' cars with these devices. It is not far-fetched to imagine a situation in a few years where everyone on probation, or entered in one of the criminal databases, will have to submit to some form of 24-hour electronic surveillance. We shall soon see police departments with the technology to put the equivalent of an electronic bracelet on entire social groups.

As Charles Murray and other reactionary ideologues have predicted, this will abet the trend toward certain neighborhoods becoming virtual outdoor prisons.

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**CAIB:** How have the local and federal levels worked together and what have been the roles of the FBI and the Justice Department?

**MD:** This is the biggest domestic repression since the Nixon era and it was federalized within 48 hours of the first explosion of anger. Although the feds were called in by Mayor Tom Bradley and Governor Pete Wilson, over the head of Chief Daryl Gates, President Bush was delighted to oblige for obvious electioneering reasons. Moreover, the White House and the Justice Department have taken the initiative in making Los Angeles the exemplar of their militarized New Urban Order. Some features of the repression in LA recall the worst "assembly-line justice" that accompanied the uprisings of the 1960s, but other aspects,

particularly the enlarged federal role, represent a new model of urban counterinsurgency.

Let me deal with the more familiar features first. This response of local law enforcement has been more draconian than in 1965, both in the magnitude of arrests and in the consistency of overcharging. LA-1992, in fact, more closely resembles the aftermath of the great Detroit uprising of 1969, when local authorities threw the book, and more, at alleged rioters. As in Detroit, the city attorney and D.A. in LA have suspended plea-bargaining and gone for the maximum possible indictments, bail amounts, and sentences.

Normally, most looters, for instance, would have been charged with petty theft or misdemeanor burglary. Since the riot, however, they have been indicted for felony burglary. They now face two or three year prison sentences rather than a simple fine. (The D.A. has indicated they won't accept anything less than one year for guilty pleas). At the same time, curfew violators, many of whom are homeless people or Spanish-speaking immigrants ignorant of the curfew, have all been held on \$8,000 bail — an astronomical amount for such a petty charge. What makes this even more hypocritical is that the nominally city-wide curfew seems only to have been enforced in communities of color. I've verified that a group of city attorneys threw a wild party on the fourth night that lasted far beyond curfew. Then on Monday morning, they came into court and sanctimoniously asked the judge for 30-day sentences for hapless curfew arrestees.

However repulsive, these practices are not unfamiliar. But the federal role has added at least three new and ominous elements. First of all, we have seen the unveiling of the domestic version of the Rapid Deployment Force. We can assume, henceforth, that elite elements of the Army and Marines will be quickly moved into any large-scale urban disorder at an early stage, and not as a reluctant last-ditch measure, as when paratroopers were finally sent into Detroit in 1967.

Secondly, military deployment was accompanied by an unprecedentedly massive introduction of a thousand personnel from every branch of federal law enforcement, including marshals, FBI, DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration], Border Patrol, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. On the one hand, INS and Border Patrol agents, assisted by the LAPD, swept through the streets of MacArthur Park and other immigrant Latino neighborhoods like a giant vacuum cleaner, deporting every undocumented person they could lay their hands on. Most of the six hundred to seven hundred people deported in this way were not involved and were never charged with any riot-related offense. They were simply walking the

streets or waiting at street corner day-labor markets. On the other hand, a 100-person task force of FBI and DEA agents, together with local police and sheriffs, have taken the lead in tracking down the alleged gang "ringleaders" of the uprising.

Thirdly, prosecutors from the U.S. Attorney's office, working in a special task force with the D.A., are superimposing layers of additional federal offenses on key defendants. The legal lynching of the four youths accused of attacking the truck driver and other motorists is the most vivid example so far of how the Bush administration's "weeding" of the cities will work. In this case, "interference with interstate commerce," a felony that carries a possible 20-year sentence, has been charged on the surreal grounds that the truck driver's cargo (local gravel) was being hauled to a destination where it might be mixed with out-of-state ingredients.

Moreover, at the time of this interview, we do not yet know how many RICO [Racketeering Influence and Corrupt Organizations Act] indictments may yet be returned against leading gang members. (The D.A. and U.S. Attorney's offices have indicated that there will be "many.") RICO, of course, is a contemporary version of the Criminal Syndicalism Laws of the First World War or the Alien and Sedition Acts of the early Republic: an all-embracing conspiracy statute that circumvents traditional canons of evidence and due process. As I indicated earlier, this RICO net may ultimately be cast very far and wide, as the feds try to implicate Farrakhan and others in the supposed "conspiracy."

**CAIB:** Will the recent appointment of Willie Williams to succeed Gates make a difference to LA?

**MD:** The kinder and gentler LAPD, led by Williams, will be a real rebuilding with increased emphasis on intelligence and the development of a coordinated riot and disturbance control strategy that probably will continue to be closely coordinated with the feds. Unlike in the '60s, when the National Guard marched back home, this time a staff element remains in the city. The Marines at Camp Pendleton will also remain on alert. I think that we are going to see an institutionalization of that kind of federal presence.

While the major internal contradictions about race in the LAPD will remain, I believe that Williams will be fairly effective in cleaning up the surface. The LAPD is, in a sense, in transition to being a multiracial police department. It's ironic, but you can have a kinder, gentler LAPD that includes more people of color, with fairly effective systems for dealing with the more egregious abuses, and at the same time have a rapidly rising level of repression.

**CAIB:** As FBI Director from 1978 to 1985, William Webster was involved in the COINTELPRO operations. As Director of Central Intelligence from 1985 to 1991, he ran covert operations for the CIA. What are the implications of his appointment to the investigatory committee?

**MD:** In a nutshell, I would say that Webster's been brought in to focus only on why the police weren't more effective in putting down the disturbance, not on any misconduct on their part. Furthermore, he will develop far-ranging suggestions about crowd control and political intelligence, and probably set in place some system of coordination on a county-wide and state-wide level that can be copied across the country.

Webster's brief seems to center almost entirely on all the mistakes in the so-called initial deployment planning and intelligence for the riot. There are liberals in this city who were appalled by the Rodney King decision, but equally appalled that the police didn't wade in immediately and, I don't know what, shoot looters or crush demonstrations? It's become a totally hypocritical kind of discourse.

**CAIB:** Will Officer Steven Powell and his overtly racist ilk survive the new order?

**MD:** Williams has signaled his intention to purge the department. In 1991, the Christopher Commission produced its analysis of what was wrong with the LAPD. It precisely parallels the apologies of the McCone Com-

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mission and concludes that if you get rid of a "criminal fringe" of 60 or 70 out-of-control, ultra-violent officers, everything will be hunky-dory. Williams, who has indicated that he's going to find ways to purge the "Powells," will get an extraordinary mandate and honeymoon period, during which time it will be much more difficult to mount any criticisms of the police.

Even now, the only criticism you hear from the White liberals in LA is that the LAPD wasn't more "competent" and overwhelming in its immediate response. It's come into

their neighborhoods and middle-class people are really scared for the first time. They don't make any distinction between poor Latinos in Hollywood looting a market and the top leadership of the Crips or Bloods.

Their exaggerated fears will ultimately override principles and considerations of justice in West Los Angeles, as it has in Simi Valley. The actuality of and potential for repression are hardly mentioned. People just don't realize the number of homes that have been illegally entered by the police at 2:00 a.m. in South Central LA. Nor do they realize that the Webster Commission and the increasing intelligence-gathering powers and repressive strategy of the police are no more likely to know boundaries in the 1990s than they were back in the 1920s or 1960s.

**CAIB:** The LAPD has a certain amount of autonomy that's fairly unusual for cities. What about the Sheriff's Department? Under whom do they operate?

**MD:** They have more autonomy. Perversely, it's partially because the sheriff is elected. Sherman Block is a liberal Jewish Republican; he's extremely smooth and politically invulnerable. Those people who live in unincorporated areas don't have access to anything like a city council person or alder. There are big sections such as East LA, Firestone, and the Willowbrook areas which look just like ordinary parts of the inner city except they're unincorporated. They're controlled by the sheriffs who have untrammelled authority over their lives.

So, the real question of police abuse and community control in LA County has been a question of the sheriffs as

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## **George Bush is going to run as the president who put the troops in LA and sent the federal prosecutors in behind them.**

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well as the LAPD, particularly if you're Latino. More of the Latino working class is actually affected by the sheriffs than they are by the LAPD.

So, it's important to remember that it is not only the police who are a problem, but the Sheriff's Department which has been even worse. It's truly more out of control and has even higher levels of brutality against people of color. Over the last two years, the sheriffs have been responsible for more than a dozen unlawful killings, several of which were virtually coldblooded assassinations.

And although the Sheriff's Department is probably more racially integrated than the LAPD, this has had

absolutely no effect in preventing avowedly White-supremacist groups from operating inside the department. Last year, for example, a judge corroborated longstanding rumors that a White racist "gang" known as the Vikings had been organized inside the Lynwood Station in a majority Black and Latino suburb. This notorious station is under lawsuit for literally scores of major abuses, ranging from murder and torture to unlawful detention and beatings.

But somehow all this blood just seems to wash off Sheriff Sherman Block's manicured hands. Unlike Chief Gates, he keeps his foot out of his mouth and cultivates a cordial relationship with the press.

Recently, Block announced his interest in next year's mayoral election. It would be the ultimate irony for Los Angeles to finally get rid of Gates as police chief only to have Sheriff Block as the next mayor.

**CAIB:** Given the potential for backlash and the current level of fear, will the events in LA have an important impact on the upcoming presidential election?

**MD:** Absolutely. George Bush is going to run as the president who put the troops in LA and sent the federal prosecutors in behind them. He's going to tell the country that only a Republican president is capable of protecting the suburbs and maintaining law and order.

"Operation Weed and Seed" (one of the scariest, most invidious slogans and programs I've ever heard of) is the new Bush urban program for the '90s. On the "seed" side, this upward distribution of wealth is just another way to implement the capital gains tax break Bush been unsuccessful in getting through Congress and to universalize enterprise zones in the inner city.

But actually, he's quietly gone further already. He's told the cities: "If you're short of money, if you want aid, sell your airport, privatize your public sector." So he's advocating for U.S. cities the same kinds of "structural adjustment" that the World Bank and the IMF are imposing in the Third World.

The "weed" part, on the other hand, includes this whole conjugation of repressive tactics that we had a taste of in the LA uprising: cultivating the use of RICO and other super-draconian federal penalties, ostensibly to remove the so-called gang leadership.

**CAIB:** Thank you.





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