LA 92

1. Do riots make effective statements? If so, what are the statements? Do Americans, as a whole, listen to these statements?
2. Some suggest the infusion of violence into African American protest sets the Civil Rights movement back, rather than having the intended outcome of social change. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. In terms of race relations, are things different today than they were in 1992? Regardless of what may be different, are we better off as a country today than we were at that point in history?
4. If you could have spoken to the L.A. rioters in 1992, what would you have said? What would you have said to Rodney King and the L.A. police?
5. A key factor in the 1992 L.A. riots was the existence of videotape of the Rodney King incident. Since that time, how has the wide availability of videotape changed police response? How has it changed public perceptions and assumptions? (Consider YouTube and countless “caught on video” incidents.)
6. Are police brutality and racial profiling issues in our communities? What responses do you recommend, either on the local or national levels?
7. Race riots have tended to occur in urban areas with high concentrations of poverty and racially based residential segregation. In this context, perceived police mistreatment has often been the “spark” that turned a long-smoldering fire into the uncontrollable blaze of a riot. What are some social-justice and Civil Rights-related action steps that could be taken to prevent future riots? Who would need to lead and participate in these steps?


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Accompanying primary source:

***Fires burn out of control on the second day of rioting in Los Angeles following announcement of the Rodney King verdicts.***

(Kirk Mckoy / *Los Angeles Times*)

By Paul Lieberman and Dean E. Murphy

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National Guard troops and police wrestled to gain control of riot-ravaged neighborhoods across Los Angeles on Friday amid indications that authorities were gaining the upper hand for the first time in three days of the worst urban unrest in Los Angeles history.

In a city that has long boasted about the richness of its Third World flavor, on Friday it had come to mirror the worst of some war-torn neighbors to the south. Military equipment rolled down boulevards, men with automatic weapons stood sentry and a dusk-to-dawn curfew kept residents indoors.

President Bush ordered 4,500 military troops into Los Angeles to help quell the violence. He also sent 1,000 riot-trained federal law officers to the city--including 200 members of the U.S. Marshal’s special operations group that was sent to Panama in 1990 to take dictator Manuel Noriega into custody. Federal and local officials said the muscle-flexing, decried as being long overdue by many in devastated areas of the city, was meant to “ensure the safety of the streets” before the weekend.

Throughout the day, law enforcement and city officials cautiously predicted that the tide had turned against the rioters, with fewer fires reported, more looters being jailed and many streets returning to relative calm in the hardest-hit areas of South Los Angeles. But some violence and looting continued in sporadic bursts across the greater Los Angeles area.

“I’m not going to relax and assume its over,” Mayor Tom Bradley said Friday night in a televised address. ‘I don’t believe it’s over. I want us to show by the massive . . . force we are putting on the streets here that we are determined to maintain control.”

In other major developments:

* Police reports placed the number of deaths at 40 with at least 11 killed by law enforcement officers. An additional 1,899 injuries have been reported, including three police officers, since the violence erupted after Wednesday’s not guilty verdicts in the case of four Los Angeles police officers charged with beating black motorist Rodney G. King.
* The death toll, combined with property damage estimates exceeding $500 million, added an inauspicious historic dimension to the three-day disturbance: The violence eclipsed the 1965 Watts riots as Los Angeles’ costliest and deadliest urban disorder. During the five days of the Watts riots, 34 died. The worst riots in U.S. history occurred in Detroit in 1967, leaving 43 dead and more than 2,000 injured.
* In a highly visible show of force, hundreds of armed guardsmen moved into trouble spots, maintaining calm at post offices and grocery stores as thousands of panicked residents rushed to pick up Social Security and welfare checks and prepared for an uncertain weekend.
* By late Friday afternoon, 5,200 people had been arrested countywide. In the rush to make room for those who had been arrested, officials moved about 1,200 inmates from county jails to state prisons, forgoing the normally cumbersome paperwork process.
* Officials in Washington indicated that the U.S. Justice Department is likely to seek criminal indictments of the four officers involved in the March 3, 1991, beating of King. In a highly unusual announcement, the officials said that the department has convened a federal grand jury in the case and that subpoenas had been issued Friday “in furtherance” of the grand jury probe.
* King, the Altadena motorist whose name has been the haunting rallying cry of rioters, appealed for calm and denounced the mayhem. “It’s just not right,” he said. “It’s not right, and it’s not gonna change anything.”
* Business leaders and economists predicted that the civil strife is likely to extend and worsen Southern California’s battered economy. With an estimated 4,536 fires raging throughout the Los Angeles area since Wednesday, thousands of businesses have closed and countless workers have been idled. Continuing disruptions will hurt tourism, retailing and service industries; put an added burden on banks and other financial institutions, and strain city, county and state budgets.
* Pope John Paul II, described as “deeply saddened” by the rioting, offered prayers for “the restoration of civil harmony and a renewed spirit for solidarity” in Los Angeles in a faxed message to Cardinal Roger M. Mahony.

The overnight curfew in Los Angeles and neighboring areas--extended by officials for a third day into this morning--left much of the smoldering city in a nervous calm. Freeways and surface streets were almost deserted, as were restaurants, theaters and sporting arenas. In some areas, only the homeless--with nowhere else to turn--remained outdoors.

Even so, daybreak on Friday was regarded in some neighborhoods only as an invitation to renew the looting, arson and shooting. A thick pall of smoke still hung over much of the Los Angeles Basin, fires burned from Hollywood to South Los Angeles, and new outbreaks of violence erupted in Long Beach, the Harbor and Mid-City areas, and in the San Fernando Valley community of Panorama City.

Three LAPD officers were fired on by a sniper about 7:30 a.m. near Vermont and Manchester, but escaped with superficial injuries.

The three officers were driving south on Vermont when a sniper armed with an AK-47 assault style rifle opened fire. Police in a second patrol car saw the shooting and returned the fire, hitting the assailant once in the head. The suspect, who was conscious and talking with officers as he was taken into custody, was taken to a hospital.

The three officers, Michael Strawberry--brother of Los Angeles Dodger Darryl Strawberry--Mark Ramirez and Charles Choe, were treated at Daniel Freeman Memorial Hospital and released with what LAPD spokesman called extremely minor injuries.

Later in the night, police reported that snipers fired at a plainclothes officer driving on the Harbor Freeway, missing him.

In Long Beach, battered Thursday night by widespread looting and scores of fires, residents awoke Friday to smoke-filled skies, charred buildings and streets littered with glass and abandoned loot.

In block after block, store owners busily hammered pieces of plywood over windows and many said they were spending Friday night in their shops, guns at their sides.

Long Beach officials were hoping that police reinforcements, including the arrival of National Guard troops in the city, would help them keep control. “We’ve come through a long, dark night and we believe we have a handle on it and we will be able to keep a handle on it,” City Manager James Hankla said at a midday news conference.

Hankla had declared a state of emergency Thursday, and imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew. At one point during the evening, fire reports were coming in every three minutes. By late afternoon Friday, 218 fires had been reported, 87 of which were serious. About 200 injuries had been reported, 51 of them serious, and 302 people had been arrested.

In the San Fernando Valley, a Times reporter was beaten and shot at by half a dozen looters outside a North Hills delicatessen Friday afternoon.

Jim Herron Zamora was interviewing shopkeepers along the 14600 block of Parthenia Avenue when the looting began. While taking notes in a parking lot, he was surrounded and told to surrender his notebook. A struggle followed.

“Somebody to my left said: ‘Get out of the way. Let me get a clear shot,’ ” Zamora said. “I vaguely saw the barrel of a gun. I heard it go off.”

The errant shot scared off the crowd, allowing Zamora to escape.

Vermont Avenue was one of the hardest-hit streets in Los Angeles. For a 10-mile stretch from Santa Monica Boulevard in Hollywood to Manchester Boulevard in South Los Angeles, the scene was one of devastation.

Entire blocks were burned out. Traffic signals no longer worked. Glass littered the streets.

Police in riot gear, joined by National Guard units, stood guard at two post offices while thousands waited in line to get their government benefit checks.

At least one fire was set Friday along the street--in an abandoned beauty supply store at 57th and Vermont. A volunteer federal firefighter, who normally spends his days working as a fire inspector, struggled to put out the blaze with a lone fire hose until reinforcements from the Los Angeles Fire Department arrived. By that time, the building was fully engulfed, as was the adjacent shop.

In all, 11 people were killed in encounters with police, four were burned, one beaten, one stabbed and the rest were slain by gunshots that rang out sporadically in neighborhoods from Lennox to Long Beach. Most of the victims were black, though at least nine were Latino, three Anglo and one Asian-American.

But for every horror story of fire and violence, there seemed to be a tale of neighborliness or heroism. Cleanup efforts were under way along the northern part of Vermont Avenue, in the Mid-City, Mid-Wilshire and Hollywood districts. There, volunteers from various churches, supplied with brooms, shovels and gloves, swept up glass and boarded broken windows.

On Vermont, there was an incredible reversal of fortunes. Thursday night’s looters were replaced by Friday morning’s cleaning crews. A woman pedaled her bicycle up Vermont with a broom and dustpan fastened to the handlebars.

Cars cruised Vermont and occupants waved, honked horns and gave the peace sign to those cleaning up. In a city rife with racial hostility, color and ethnicity seemed not to matter.

“I especially wanted to help the Koreans,” said volunteer Elmore Dingle, 31, who is black. “I don’t want them to think so negatively about blacks. The violence last night wasn’t real. This is real.”