

The Storm Front

Special Editorial Edition

Eric Storm -- May 12, 1992

In some strange way, we were all involved in the recent riots. Just as striking a piano string will cause other un-struck strings to vibrate, each of us had some part of our life shaken by the Rodney King verdict and the disturbances that resulted. Whether we felt fear for our safety, for the safety of a loved one, or for the safety of our society, there was something utterly disturbing in the sights and sounds brought into our living rooms from L.A. and other places.

I watched the news and asked myself how our society could be at the point where people felt they had no option but to take to the streets with destruction their only goal. Not only does this show how distant our leaders have become, but it pointed out terrible dangers lurking in our system of justice.

The biggest news from Washington this year involved mismanaged checking accounts. A significant number of our representatives are choosing not to run for re-election because of this "scandal." But in the words of a female representative (who's name I have unfortunately forgotten), what they did was "not criminal, just stupid." That is the underlying truth. The House Bank is funded from the deposits of its members, just like any other bank. Ok, so it made the equivalent of interest free, penalty free loans to its members. But, in the end, every penny was repaid. It didn't cost the taxpayers anything. There wasn't even a failed S&L to bailout. But, while we were getting all hot and bothered about checks, George Bush forced out the head of The National Endowment for the Arts so he could appease the ultra-conservative right and replace the director with a new, more conservative, appointment who has already suggested that maybe we don't need a national arts program at all. Get real, even Russia with it's almost ruined economy still recognized the importance of federally funded art. Imagine, all of this ruckus for sixty-eight cents of each person's total annual taxes. Meanwhile, something like a thousand dollars of my money went to build bombers. We are really looking at the wrong problems folks.

But while we complain about stupid

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Roger Hanna -- May 2, 1992

About set design:
When you have a play where the characters are all waiting for someone to arrive, and the entrance is supposed to be a grand one, there are certain things you can do to build that entrance or lack thereof up. You can put a door in the strongest position, upstage center. There it is, a potential change waiting to happen.

If the door isn't enough buildup in itself, there are ways to make it even more noticeable. All of the furniture in the room could face it. It could be larger than the type of door you'd expect. It could be bright red. I imagine you've figured out why I'm presenting a little essay about set design. Seems to me that the poverty and stupidity and despair in America is about to make a grand entrance. The door is up center, ten feet tall, bright red. The Rodney King videotape was like a spotlight suddenly aimed at the door.

Watching t.v. last night (instead of going with Elissa's family to see The Birds, as NYU cancelled all activity fearing riots), I was disgusted with the stupidity which tore apart a small Los Angeles grocery stores. Waste everywhere. Those looters broke in to exercise their rage, not out of hunger. As I mentally condemned all of the looters, the image switched to a woman leaving a supermarket through the front window, arms full of toilet paper. How can I be mad at someone who is simultaneously so stupid as to loot something with such a low value/volume ratio and so practical as to take advantage of a situation by stealing the thing she really needed? There were no riots here. Instead, the police outnumbered demonstrators, who were relatively peaceful. You'd think the Los Angeles police would have anticipated a reaction, once the system blatantly confirmed its racism. But Americans are just sheep, right? I heard one of the jurors call in to Donahue, tearfully explaining that she and three others held out "as long as they could," but after all, she was missing work! The Reverend Al Sharpton was on that show, and for once he seemed the voice of reason when he responded to an accusation that by explaining the violence he was condoning it. He said, "I am not condoning this violence. No one here is condoning violence. The only people who have so far condoned any violence are those twelve people on that jury." The reaction was not to Rodney King. It is to a

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Will Lewis -- May 1, 1992

Subject: Pain

I had an appointment in San Francisco this morning, at Market and California. The meeting went well, but having this afternoon free has given me much time to think.

I watched the news last night, and was frightened about going into the City this morning. After all, where I was going was right on Market Street, near where much of the rioting and looting was occurring. What is going on? Have the built-up tensions and despair of so many exploded all at once? These things can't be happening just because of Rodney King.

I feel somewhat guilty, too, that my first reaction was of fear. It is an understandable reaction, because of my need for personal safety. But why was I fearful? Because I am white, and I perceived that most of the looting and brutality was conducted by minorities against white people, whom they see as their oppressors. I realize I'm treading on PC here, but these things must be said, and we must stop hiding behind PC. It only circumvents and suppresses the truth.

After watching the news, hearing Rodney King's speech, hearing about the movement of federal troops into the LA Basin, hearing of the pain and suffering of the thousands of people affected by these tensions, I realize how suppressed my own feelings and knowledge about this situation are. My guilt flows from this. These people, for the most part, who are reacting in violence, who are looting, who are burning, who are stealing food, shoes, tires, gasoline, are desperate people. These people are reacting violently because there is absolutely no other way they can react! They have been marginalized and suppressed. The so-called revolution of the 1980's, that supposedly brought prosperity to so many, was nothing but a sham. Why do we have an S&L crisis now? Why are there more people starving and without housing in the United States than any other time in our history? Why are we experiencing the worst riots in American history? Why did the salaries of Americas richest people increase 2184 percent from 1980 to 1990 and those of the middle class increase only by 40 percent? Why? Why? WHY?!? Because we covered our eyes from the truth in search of our own prosperity. Because we sought the path of selfishness and self-improvement with the absence of judgement to recognize that this should only be done in conjunction with--rather than to the neglect of--the betterment of our society as a whole. We possess the skills and the knowledge, all of us here, to better the lives of others in profound ways.

Even if the life we touch is one other person. Even if we do nothing but volunteer or contribute monetarily or counsel or fund or teach. We cannot afford to abdicate our responsibility to our society for the sake of ourselves again. We are important, don't let me discount that. But so are the lives of others. We should do whatever is within our power to touch the lives of others, without prejudice.

Life is too precious to be wasted in these riots and lawlessness. It is also too precious to be wasted in the slums of Watts, where the only way out is luck, prison, or death.

Life is precious.

I realize that what I have written here may arouse anger in some of you, because it appears that I am ignoring the tragedy, inconvenience, and fear that has resulted from these riots. Hardly. You should know that I understand and feel your pain and suffering. I am only attempting to discover why these events happened. Things of this magnitude do not happen in a vacuum. In this time of pain and suffering, we should do all we can to help each other and others who were hurt or who are suffering. And, not only should we hope that this does not happen again, but we should try to somehow prevent it from happening again.

Chris Von Sonn - May 4, 1992

Hello Guds,

I just got back from Sacramento, back to LA. I have received all you guds interesting and thought provoking letters regarding the LA riots. Here is an interesting look at the situation from within the "war zone."

Firstly, if you have the fires and looting on video, rewind it and turn off the sound and play The Doors' THE END. Very cool and surreal. I did that Thursday night and was blown away by the poignant way that the song fit the pictures. A second media reference happened as it was getting dark that same Thursday night. I was with one of my roommates and a friend of his and we were watching the riots live. It seemed to me that it reminded me of the scene from NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, where they're sitting around watching zombies on tv fearing the dark that is coming. Then it struck me (and I should say it struck Will also), why was I afraid? I, somewhat different with Will, was here. Maybe I had more cause to be fearful, but I really wasn't. Really, I wasn't afraid, the only reason I left was because my mom was leaving and she didn't want me in town alone. Anyway, I left and was glad I did because I really got out of a city when I went to the wineries with Eric. Very pretty and very nice.

As to Bush's speech. FUCK HIM. Just because he finally gets a domestic policy he THINKS he understands. Send in the troops! FUCK HIM. And then he had the audacity to say he understood what was going on. If he did, he didn't care for the last twelve years and if he doesn't, he is a bold faced liar. Either way we loose. The country loses. And we have four more years of neglect waiting in the wings. Fuck him. Watch for the neglect to continue and the work that is promised to be berried like it was in 65. As always, the turn of a century will mean hard and fearful times ahead. It won't get better until there is a fundamental change at the top.

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things, and people riot in the streets, other people are working to further limit our freedoms. I agree that the Rodney King verdict was terrible. But our system of justice is designed to error on the side of the defendant. People have been complaining that there were not enough minorities on the jury; that it didn't reflect Rodney King's peers. It's not supposed to. It's supposed to be a jury of the defendant's peers. Purposefully filling it full of minorities because the accuser is a minority prejudices the outcome against the defendant. In this case, justice was probably not served. But nobody ever said that juries would always hand down the correct decision. It is unfortunate that this one was in the national spotlight.

But that's not really the justice issue that frightens me the most. It is the blatant trampling of personal liberty that came out of other people's efforts to "protect the peace." In the May 18th issue of "Business Week," their San Francisco bureau manager recounts how he was rounded up, along with 400 other people and held for 33 hours. Not because he participated in a riot, but because he stopped on his way home to watch a PEACEFUL rally. The San Francisco police were trying to stop a repeat of a destructive assembly that occurred the night before. But rows of riot-gearred police sweeping the streets and arresting EVERYONE in sight is reminiscent of the third world, not America.

The ideas exhibited by these policemen are the ones that we should really be frightened of. Sure, the thought that five officers can brutally beat an individual in the dead of night and be found not guilty is atrocious, but even more terrifying is the belief that other officers can round-up 400 citizens in broad daylight, in the center of one of our largest cities, hold them for over a day, and do all this in the name of "public safety" is absolutely insane. All those San Franciscans were effectively found guilty and sentenced to prison for a day without a trial simply because they exhibited the all to human trait of wanting to know what was going on. If we can't even watch an assembly, where have our liberties gone?

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system which has significantly backslid since the 1980s, which has watered down or not followed through with human rights legislation and enforcement. Multinational corporations run America. The people who run those corporations have dictated the economy, unchecked by our government, since after all, they have a right to earn as much as they possibly can. So George and Barbara and Millie have smiled and nodded and spewed empty promises ("Read my lips. No new taxes.") and rhetoric ("One thousand points of light."), as our army grows while our schools crumble. Skilled labor comes from countries with better educational system. Semi- and unskilled labor from third world nations, where environmental and labor laws are even more lax than our own. General Motors right to free trade and uzi-owning mobster's right to bear arms are vigorously protected by lobbyists; the police apparently have the right to beat anyone as much as they please; no one has a right to receive reasonably priced health care.

You know all this. What can you do? Who's going to get us out of this mess? Bush, the "Environmental/Education President"? Perot, a billionaire presenting himself as a protest vote? The laughable Bill Clinton? One thing you CAN do is vote for Brown in California. He wants to replace the insurance industry with a single-carrier system. To upgrade factories to reasonable environmental standards. To only trade with countries whose labor and environmental laws at least equal our own. To tax everyone at the same rate. To allow women the right to their bodies. Can you imagine Clinton going up against the NRA? The man would simply be a dishonest and ineffective George Bush. They both are very interested in maintaining the status quo.

America is doused in Exxon gasoline and about to light a match.

I suppose this is all rather melodramatic. Perhaps Americans are too stupid and frightened to demand change, and the classes will continue to divide and we are all doomed.

I just hope all hell doesn't break loose before the new Batman movie comes out!

*"America is doused in
Exxon gasoline and about
to light a match."*

Roger Hanna