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### Burnt Offerings: How the City of Angels Engulfed Any and All Involved in the Rodney King Affair and Los Angeles Riots

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Burnt Offerings:

How the “City of Angels” Engulfed Any and All Involved in the Rodney King Affair and Los Angeles Riots

Michael McNamara

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“The nation sat riveted and horrified as a major American city burned. People angry about injustice took justice into their own hands. Property was burned and looted. People were injured. Trust was shattered.”<sup>1</sup> Sadly, this can describe more than one major American city in recent history. Baltimore in 2015 and Los Angeles in 1992 have been through riots and schisms between their police forces and residents, for example. Less than a quarter-century before the riots in Baltimore occurred, the City of Angels was in flames. The two share many similar traits of inception and proceeding actions, including the capture of the arrest of both victims on private home video, rioting that resulted in millions of dollars in property damage, protests, and endless swarms of media coverage. The one similarity between almost all police brutality cases and riots is that the most useful, telling, and important information in rectifying these crises is understanding the history of the cities, but this is often thrown to the wayside in coverage and remembrance of these events. Los Angeles and the Rodney King beating was the first incident that ushered in the modern era regarding police brutality and race relations. The King case revealed to the nation that Los Angeles was not a thriving melting pot, but a troubled, bitterly divided city. With each passing day, the King case became increasingly complex, and it soon became evident to all that the issues ravaging the City of Angels were not simply black and white issues - literally and figuratively. As the case dragged on and culminated in devastating riots, it would also destroy the careers of the city's two most important leaders: Tom Bradley, its African-American mayor, and Daryl Gates, its white police chief.

Before Rodney King became a household name, the world was in a very different state. It was quite recent, but many don't remember what the shape of the world was at that time. In

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Capehart, "Two Riots, 23 Years Apart: From Rodney King to Freddie Gray," *Washington Post*, April 29, 2015.

1991, George H. W. Bush declared Operation Desert Storm had ended on February 28. The Soviet Union was still in existence under Mikhail Gorbachev. West Germany had just won the FIFA world cup less than a year prior. The internet was just starting to be used commercially, unrestricted in homes. Jeffrey Dahmer would be arrested in July for dismemberment, murder, and rape. Curt Cobain was still the front man of Nirvana, and Vanilla Ice had released “Ice Ice Baby” less than a year prior. This was the world that Rodney King was living in when his incident became tattooed on the history of this country forever.

Just after midnight on the morning of March 3, 1991, King had been out celebrating with two friends and was driving his old Hyundai westward down Interstate 210 in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. King had recently gotten a call from a construction company where he had previously worked asking him to come back that following Monday. Prior to the call, the three men had spent the night drinking relatively heavily at a friend's house and watching a basketball game in Los Angeles. King's blood-alcohol level was tested and found to be slightly below the legal limit of .08% in California five hours after the ensuing altercation which implied that his blood alcohol level most likely had fallen from 0.18% - 0.19% while he was driving.<sup>2</sup> On his way back, King was clocked at 110 miles per hour by the California Highway Patrol (CHP) which then pursued him. King had denied that he was speeding until an interview in 2012 where he said he was going 100/mph at the very least.<sup>3</sup> King, who was violating his parole for a prior robbery conviction by driving under the influence, led police on a nearly eight-mile chase at high speeds through Los Angeles neighborhoods before pulling over.

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<sup>2</sup> Rodney King and Lawrence J. Spagnola, *The Riot Within: My Journey from Rebellion to Redemption* (New York: Harper One, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Don Lemon, "CNN Presents: Race Rage, The Beating of Rodney King," *CNN Presents*, April 29, 2012.

By this time, five police officers were at the scene on foot while a police helicopter circled above with a spotlight on the car. The officers ordered the men out of the car. King's friends followed orders directly and were subdued immediately. King remained in the car the longest, but he finally emerged from the vehicle. King was then documented as acting intoxicated by giggling, patting the ground, waving to the helicopter overhead, and taunting the CHP officer by grabbing his buttocks.<sup>4</sup> The officer drew her weapon believing that King's taunt was him reaching for a weapon. As a result, he was ordered to step away from the car and lay on the ground. Sergeant Stacey Koon then came onto the scene, and he informed the officer that the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) was taking command of the situation since he was the top ranking officer present. Koon ordered all officers to put away their weapons and subdue King using the "swarm" technique – a tactic where multiple officers grab a suspect with empty hands in order to quickly overcome any potential resistance from the suspect.<sup>5</sup> King resisted and was deemed to be intoxicated and dangerous by the officers. They attempted to decrease resistance and execute the "swarm" technique by a series of blows with their batons and use of their Tasers.

At approximately this time, George Holliday, a resident of the apartment complex across the street, retrieved his newly purchased videorecorder and began to document what he was seeing. The recording began with King face down on the ground while officers were surrounding him. At this time, King got up and ran with his hands in the air towards the officers "to show no threat" in the opposite direction.<sup>6</sup> He was beaten with batons by multiple officers and kicked several times. In the video, Taser wires can be seen on King's body from

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<sup>4</sup> Stacey C. Koon and Robert Deitz, *Presumed Guilty: The Tragedy of the Rodney King Affair*, (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1992) 25-54.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "CNN Presents: Race Rage, The Beating of Rodney King"

the officers. At this point, Koon orders his men to stop, but King rose to his knees. Officer Laurence Powell is seen proceeding to beat King along with another officer. The officers on the scene were ordered by Koon to "hit his joints, hit the wrists, hit his elbows, hit his knees, hit his ankles" in order to immobilize him. Eight officers try the "swarm" technique once more, and they were finally successful. King was dragged to the side of the road to await medical attention and transportation from the incident.

King was absolutely at fault and was clearly culpable for everything that transpired until the beating. This is when the clear-cut ideas of guilt and innocence dissolve completely. On one hand, regardless of what one does, there is no logical case in which that amount of force is warranted on a human being who is on the ground in a surrendering, submissive position. On the other hand, King was very intoxicated and acting erratically while resisting arrest. There was a great disconnect between the officers and King if both of their stories and views are presumed to be true. The problem was that King never seemed as if he was in a submissive, nonthreatening position because of many predispositions of some of the officers. This miscommunication is partially based on the strained race relations in Los Angeles between the LAPD and the community. The LAPD had a very shaky history with a long record of police brutality, regardless of race. In this case, race was not the sole reason for the beating, but instead, it became an intensifier and escalator of the severity of the situation.

The tension between the people of Los Angeles and their police department became so great after the Rodney King Incident that the inevitability of a massive confrontation became a matter of "when" rather than "if". This is not a commendation of the violence nor is it a condemnation of it; it is simply an effort to decipher a series of events. Knowing this history

helps explain the fuel behind the riots and protests that followed these events and gives the riots context.

The problem is that the media of the time tended to overlook the underlying history and make the connections to why things were happening. It seems as if it often takes years removed from the initial incident combined with large amounts of hindsight to understand where the media went wrong. Too often, major events such as these are treated as totally disconnected and separate from the rest of history unless a massive repetition occurs in roughly a year's time. Unfortunately, no significant amount of attention is put on the follow up to the event and response towards rebuilding but rather just the event itself gains attention. Many other cities were worse off than Los Angeles, but the situation was still far from pleasant. It is and has been a dilapidated city for quite some time. It suffers from a condition that is commonly known as "urban decay" – "whereby, a previously functioning city, or part of a city, falls into disrepair and decrepitude."<sup>7</sup> Some cities are like this because they were segregated to systematically support "white flight" and the property value of the predominantly white neighborhoods in the city. This is just one complex part of American history that affects all aspects of the nation, but it is not one that is reported about by large media outlets. The most obvious historical connection to examine is the Los Angeles leadership itself to see if any reoccurring events can be highlighted and connected between the leadership and the event. A single event does not spur a reaction of this magnitude. Riots are a byproduct of a protracted struggle and conflict that has been ignored. King's beating on video and the acquittal of the officers was not the core issue. It was, however, equivalent to dropping a lit match into a lake of kerosene.

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<sup>7</sup> Scott Timberg, "In Baltimore News Coverage, Echoes of Rodney King: "You See a Lot of Editorials Masquerading as News", Salon.com, May 1, 2015, accessed October 10, 2015.

Los Angeles was emerging as a picturesque city in the United States that was as diverse and spectacular as the rest of the nation's population by the early 1990's. "Los Angeles was home to over a 100 ethnicities from all points of the globe; it was perceived to be the international city that was going to lead America into the 21st century."<sup>8</sup> The city's beauty and growing prosperity did, however, mask the key social and racial schism of the citizens of the city with both the Los Angeles government and each other. Soon, the tension boiled over, and the two key political figures in Los Angeles, Tom Bradley, mayor of Los Angeles, and Daryl Gates, chief of LAPD, would clash over what was the right way to handle and rectify the situation after King's beating. They never had a smooth relationship. Both men recognized that there were many big problems with the city, but their counterpart began to be the manifestation of these problems and led to the demise of Bradley and Gates.

Bradley was born in 1917 in Texas to poor sharecroppers. He loved his schooling and was formed by his interactions with race throughout his life. He was faced with incidents where a white friend was no longer allowed to play with him because he was black; this happened at age five. He also had an unsupportive guidance counselor in high school who told him to take machinery classes instead of academic courses because a factory job was realistically all he could expect to have.<sup>9</sup> Coming from a very impoverished home, Bradley sought other means to be able to go to college, so he worked until he received a sports scholarship for track to the University of California, Los Angeles [UCLA]. At UCLA, Bradley decided to take an exam to become a police officer simply because all of his friends were taking it, and he received extremely high marks. Because of this, Bradley then pursued

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<sup>8</sup> David Kim, "Clash of Colors: LA Riots of 1992," (Los Angeles: DDK Productions, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Tom Bradley interview, by Bernard Galm et. al., 18 July 1978, transcript, UCLA Library, Center for Oral History Research, accessed 31 October 2012, <http://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz0008zd9n&title=Bradley>.



this profession and made a 21 year career out of it before retiring from the LAPD in the 1960s.

During his time as a police officer, Bradley faced many racial hurdles. Regulations were in place that segregated white and black officers from riding in the same radio car. This left the very few black officers with limited opportunities, so Bradley then convinced his chief to do a trial run and desegregate the radio cars in 1963. Once the schedules were announced, many white officers were teased and harassed if they were to ride with a black officer, so many called for reassignment.<sup>10</sup> It was at this point that the first nondiscrimination rule was ever brought up in the LAPD.

Bradley's political career began after his retirement from the police force. He ran for and was elected to the city council of Los Angeles in 1963 and became the first African-American councilman. He then ran for mayor for the first time six years later against the incumbent, Sam Yorty. Bradley looked as if he would unseat Yorty, but Yorty's campaign stressed that many officers would quit if he was elected because of the uproar he caused with the desegregation of the police cars less than a decade earlier.<sup>11</sup> Yorty won the election, but in 1973, Bradley ran again against Yorty, having learned from his mistakes, and became the first African-American mayor of Los Angeles. As mayor, his goals became apparent to him quite quickly. He wished to continue to be the consensus figure he had been since his school years unlike the previous mayor, but he also intimately understood the challenges facing African-Americans through personal experience and was not afraid to tackle these perceived injustices regardless of popularity.

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<sup>10</sup> Our L.A., "Tom Bradley Biography." Bridging the Divide: Tom Bradley and the Politics of Race, accessed November 25, 2012, <http://mayortombradley.com/biography>.

<sup>11</sup> Bradley interview.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of Bradley's political career was going toe-to-toe with Police Chief Daryl Gates. Gates was born in Glendale, California. His family was not rich by any means, but they had enough to live comfortably. Like Bradley's family, the Gates family was greatly affected by the Depression, and they had to sufficiently downsize their already modest lifestyle. Gates endured many sacrifices during his childhood such as having to share not only a room but a bed with his brother. His mother was forced to find work to support the family. Despite these conditions, "[Gates] always felt a little embarrassed, thinking it wasn't right, people giving [his family handouts and aid that they did not work for]"; this practice was contrary to his entire upbringing.<sup>12</sup> His very conservative character began to be formed as early of an age as nine.

During this time, Gates' father was an alcoholic, and this left a huge mark on his life. He often was faced with police coming to his home to deal with his father's drunkenness, and he formed a very negative view of them. As a teenager, Gates took his resentment to the point of punching an officer in the face over a dispute about a parking ticket. Gates believe that "there was no bigger bully than a cop."<sup>13</sup> After serving in the military after high school, Gates met his future wife at college, and had an unplanned pregnancy with her. To support his wife and child, Gates dropped out and searched for a sustainable income. A friend suggested that he take the exam needed to become a police officer. Still filled with resentment from earlier in his life, Gates initially scoffed at the idea, but after looking at the fairly decent pay, he took the test. In September, 1949, Gates was commissioned as a Los Angeles police officer.<sup>14</sup>

After working in the department, Gates began to see "firsthand what terrible damage motorist [sic] did to themselves, and to others, [he] began to understand why, as a motorist,

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<sup>12</sup> Daryl F. Gates and Diane K. Shah, *Chief: My Life in the L.A.P.D.* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

[he] had been given no breaks.”<sup>15</sup> Gates’ resentment changed to more of a personal frustration with understanding. Gates became a personal driver for LAPD Chief of Police William Parker. He spent lots of time with Parker and became a close acquaintance which helped him quickly ascend the ranks of the LAPD. By 1963, he had risen from officer to sergeant to lieutenant and then to captain of the same patrol served by the officer he assaulted when he was a teenager.

The job of police chief became available in 1978. Bradley would have a hand in the appointment because the police commission chooses the next chief, but the mayor selects all of the members on this commission. Indirectly, Bradley could choose the type of person he wanted by who he appointed. With his past experiences in the LAPD, Bradley sent out letters to other police chiefs across the United States begging them to apply. When the various LAPD officers such as Gates found out about this, they saw it as a massive sign of disrespect and a huge slap in their faces. A test was administered to all applicants for the position, and Gates scored the highest. This nearly locked him in for the position, and after two months of deliberating, Captain Gates became Chief Gates of the LAPD.<sup>16</sup>

Gates already had an opinion formed about Bradley before this all began from Chief Parker. During Bradley’s time as an officer in Los Angeles, Parker viewed Bradley as a traitor to the LAPD because of reports that Bradley had talked quite ill of Parker and the LAPD as a whole. Parker viewed Bradley as a thorn in his side, and this message of distrust and disapproval for Bradley to Gates, his mentee, was communicated clearly. Although he ultimately became the Chief of Police, Gates never forgot the disrespect.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

The relationship would never be as operable going forward, and more variables continued to be added to the equation. In the 1970s, accusations against the LAPD by African-Americans began to increase in frequency. The most common complaints by black activists were the excessive, unwarranted use of firearms by the officers. One of the most infamous cases was the shooting of an African-American woman, Eulia Love, in 1979. Two policemen approached Ms. Love about an unpaid gas bill of \$22.09. Then, the officers said Love began acting irrationally and waving an 11-inch boning knife; she was dead a few minutes later.<sup>18</sup> This event was one of the first incidents where Bradley and Gates were publicly at odds. Gates refuted any claims that there was an unlawful or unwarranted use of guns. Bradley was strongly in opposition to the chief. Bradley often noted how he disagreed in the past with Parker who had rarely acknowledged the LAPD's problems with race relations in the early 1960s, and in 1965, the most destructive urban rebellion in American history at the time, the Watts Riots, ravaged the streets of Los Angeles.<sup>19</sup> Gates began to experience everything his mentor had told and warned him about the mayor's level of respect for the police department.

The following years only made the tricky relationship between the two men increasingly troublesome. Budget cuts are always a touchy issue and typically cause arguments, but when Gates received a memo from Bradley's office informing him that his budget would be cut by \$39 million, the rocky start to their relation became an all-out sprint in the wrong direction.<sup>20</sup> Bradley was trying to eliminate the city's \$183 million deficit, and the cut in the LAPD

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<sup>18</sup> Joe Domanick, "A Shooting Reminiscent of the LAPD's Worst Day." *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Bradley interview.

<sup>20</sup> Gates, 181-182.

budget would be so large that it would eliminate 21% of the city's debt.<sup>21</sup> The suggestion by Bradley to handle the budget reduction was to lay officers off, but this was also at a time when Gates was requesting more officers to be hired. Gates would have to have 250 less officers than what he deemed appropriate by this plan.<sup>22</sup> The cuts were enough to make the head of any office angry, but the follow-up was what sums up Bradley's and Gates' relationship with each other. At one of the following Los Angeles City Council meetings, Gates brought up Bradley's memo and suggestions for discussion and reevaluation. According to him, Bradley "blew his stack" and blamed the idea of laying officers off on the chief directly in front of him.<sup>23</sup> Gates was shocked and felt like Bradley left him as a scapegoat for the unpopular decision. This issue over the budget continued over the entire length of their tenures, and Gates was often only granted an increase in funds and officers during election years.

The latter half of the 20th century was increasingly difficult in regards to race relations for "the City of Angels." The plot had been thickening throughout the entirety of the 1900s because of the vast number of minorities that had flocked to the city in waves. Following the Great Depression and the outbreak of World War II, a massive influx of African-Americans to California occurred because of the availability of work it provided; the Bradley family was a part of this first great migration. The next migrant group to call Los Angeles their home were the Koreans. By 1950, Los Angeles was the "second or third largest Korean city on the planet."<sup>24</sup> With the change to the immigration policy in 1965, Asians, specifically those from

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<sup>21</sup> James Rainey, "Gates Blasts Plan to Cut Officers: Budget: Police Chief Says Proposal Would Increase Emergency Response Time and Impede Efforts to Catch Violent Criminals," *Los Angeles Times*, April 24, 1992.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Gates, 183.

<sup>24</sup> Kevin Starr, *California* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 307.

southeastern Asia, used this chance to immigrate to the United States and many settled in Los Angeles.<sup>25</sup>

In Los Angeles in the late 1980s, a population increase of 1.4 million occurred, and 1.3 million of this increase came from Latin American countries.<sup>26</sup> The city was so diverse that “eighty-plus languages in addition to English were spoken by children in the Los Angeles Unified School District” by the end of the 1990s.<sup>27</sup> This saw an increase in the infamous racial divide between the citizens of Los Angeles. The most prevalent area of tension in the city was in South-Central Los Angeles. This district was historically a predominantly black neighborhood, but the largest new racial groups to the city, the Latinos and Koreans, settled in this district due to its cheap housing. The African-Americans no longer held a clear majority of the district they have called home to for so long. In addition, many Koreans opened shops in the district because of the affordability of rent, but this caused a notable hatred for this specific group by the African-American community.<sup>28</sup> The resentment of the Koreans came out of their seemingly instantaneous success. To many in the African-American community, this group came to America, had no trouble finding the funds to start a business, and met no other real resistance.<sup>29</sup>

The tension between the two communities did not let up and actually increased from the 1980s to the 1990s. These strains between the Korean and African-American communities culminated in the shooting of Latasha Hardin, a 15-year-old black teen, by Korean storeowner Soon Ja Du during a physical altercation after Du wrongfully accused Hardin of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 328.

<sup>26</sup> Staff of the Los Angeles Times, *Understanding the Riots: Los Angeles Before and After the Rodney King Case* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times, 1992), 26-27.

<sup>27</sup> Starr, 307-308.

<sup>28</sup> Staff of the Los Angeles Times, 26-27.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

attempting to steal a carton of orange juice just thirteen days after the release of the video of Rodney King's beating.<sup>30</sup> This is a more true representation of what type of city that Bradley and Gates were dealing with and the gravity of the troubles they both faced. The problems they faced and were constantly battling over were not just personal issues between the two men. The divides in the city ran much deeper than that, and the problems running rampant throughout the city were not simply black and white issues – literally and figuratively.

The growing intensity and ferocity of the residents' relation of Los Angeles with each other mirrored that of the political relationship between the police chief and mayor. Immediately following the Rodney King beating, the public finally started to see the resentment each man held for each other. Less than a month after the Holliday tape began to surface, Bradley publicly denounced Gates and claimed he was part of a bigger problem that could not be solved until he departed. He then pledged to “not stand by as our city is being torn apart,” and his solution was for Gates to step down because “the LAPD's reputation cannot be restored as long as Daryl Gates is at the center of the storm of protest.”<sup>31</sup> Gates took this as yet another slap in the face from Bradley. This was exactly what Chief Parker had warned him of, and Gates saw the call to step down as detrimental. To him, “It's unnecessary, totally unnecessary. The men and women of this department [were] expecting [him] to stay and provide some leadership,” and this would be abandoning his post in the city's darkest hour.<sup>32</sup>

On April 4, 1991, the Police Commission informed Gates that he was to be put on administrative leave for 60 days effective immediately “because of ‘serious allegations of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>31</sup> Jorge Casuso. "L.A. Mayor Ask Gates to Resign; Chief Refuses." *Chicago Tribune*, April 3, 1991.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

mismanagement' against him over the beating of Rodney King by LAPD officers."<sup>33</sup> It was at this point that any semblance of a civil relationship vanished. The following day Gates filed for a lawsuit against the city of Los Angeles for "violating [his] civil rights, [his] due process and for causing embarrassment, humiliation, et cetera."<sup>34</sup> The commission immediately agreed to withdraw the order if Gates dropped the lawsuit, and he did. The Police Commission, created and essentially headed by Bradley, had just tried to remove Gates but only retracted its order because of the fear of a lawsuit in an already tumultuous period. A mediation was then scheduled to be held in order to salvage what was left of their relationship at that point.

The mediation was essentially useless and ended with no outcome except a further divided mayor and police chief. In the meeting, Gates expressed how he felt Bradley showed no support for the LAPD and remarked that the officers knew this and that the feelings were mutual. He then asked him to let him enact his ten-point plan aimed at uncovering the motives of the four officers involved in the Rodney King beating and reviewing and revamping the policies of use of force by outside examiners that have knowledge of policing and safety. Bradley said he would allow the chief to do so as long as he resigned after he got a chance to clear his name. Gates fired back and told him that he will resign only if the mayor does as well. In the end, neither one of the men retired. The mayor and the police chief would not speak to each other until April 1992 when the riots ensue.<sup>35</sup>

The outbreak of the violence in Los Angeles came after a string of events concerning the handling of the trial that exponentially increased the emotion and division in the community.

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<sup>33</sup> Patrick McGreevy, "Gates put on leave - Chief says he will challenge order," *Los Angeles Daily News*, April 5, 1991.

<sup>34</sup> Gates, 333-334.

<sup>35</sup> Jane Fritsch. "Riots in Los Angeles: the Mayor; Los Angeles Mayor Criticizes Chief for Slow Action on Riot." *New York Times*, May 4, 1992.



In November of 1992, Judge Stanley Weisberg moved the location of the initial trial from Los Angeles to Simi Valley, a small city just outside of Los Angeles, after an appeals court granted the officers a change of venue on the grounds of the electric political scene in the city due to the beating. Weisberg opened up a can of worms greater than he could ever predict. The trial was moved from Los Angeles to Simi Valley to give the officers a fair, unbiased trial, but by eliminating one bias, a new one was created. Simi Valley was “long known as a bedroom community for retired police and firefighters,” and the percentage of African-Americans in the town was only 1.5% of the total population.<sup>3637</sup> The idea of changing the venue was not what started the riots. This is not to say that this processed was welcomed, but rather, the thought of moving the trial to a location where the police officers would “face a sympathetic jury [skyrocketed] the likelihood of violent protests occurring if the men were found not guilty, as indeed they were.”<sup>38</sup> Statistically, the jury would be white and would likely have friends and family connected to the police force. This would prove to be true when the jury was announced. It consisted of ten white jurors, one juror of Hispanic descent, and one Filipino juror. Once again, it felt as if the system stacked the cards against the prosecution and those that aligned themselves with King because of personal experiences with similar injustices.

The beating of King and the stagnant political action due to the catastrophic relationship between the mayor and the police chief was not enough to cause uproar from Los Angeleans, but the handling and verdict of the court proceedings sent them into an absolute frenzy because nothing seemed to make any sense. After centuries of systematic oppression and

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<sup>36</sup> Lou Cannon, "National Guard Called to Stem Violence After L.A. Officers' Acquittal in Beating," *Washington Post*, April 30, 1992.

<sup>37</sup> Lou Cannon, *Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 178.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

police brutality, many believed that this police case would finally shine a light on the excessive use of force by officers and remove the stigma of their infallibility. Although the prosecution did not have King testify, there was no doubt that the jury would find all officers guilty because it was captured so vividly on the video camera that showed the falsification of the reports by Koon and Powell. The evidence was so explicit and compelling that none could imagine the verdict when it was announced.

On April 29, 1992, the jury announced a not-guilty ruling on ten of the eleven charges against the officers. To make matters worse, the jurors only deliberated for one day. The last charge, use of excessive force against Powell, who struck the most blows, was still in a stalemate. Six days later they were still undecided on the last charge against Powell. Ultimately, not a single officer was found guilty of the use of excessive force, or any other crime despite the graphic recording of the video.

The reaction to the verdict was so shocking that even Bradley, who was typically very mild-mannered, was visibly enraged and publicly condemned the verdict: "Today, the system failed us. Today, this jury told the world that what we all saw with our own eyes was not a crime. Today, that jury asked us to accept the senseless and brutal beating of a helpless man."<sup>3940</sup> Many criticize Bradley for this statement. He is often accredited with having a hand in inducing the outbreak of the Los Angeles Riots. Bradley's share of the guilt for the riots was not for his acute awareness for the possibility of rioting. It was because he 'feared the "L.A.P.D. more than he feared the prospect of mob violence' and didn't develop emergency plans for handling the impending civil uprising.<sup>41</sup> When the violence irrupted, the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>40</sup> Seth Mydans, "Los Angeles Policemen Acquitted In Taped Beating," *New York Times*, April 29, 1992.

<sup>41</sup> *Official Negligence*, 282.

Bradley administration and LAPD scrambled to form a plan to deal with the neglected problems which finally boiled over.

Even Gates admitted that the city did a terrible, lethargic job in handling the violent outbreak. The LAPD had an acclaimed reputation for its ability to handle civil unrest because of its past history, but after the first day of rioting, the LAPD could no longer control the situation in front of them. They “retreated... and did nothing because of Gates' and Bradley's ineptitude and unwillingness to lead.”<sup>42</sup> In an interview fifteen years removed from the event, Gates recalled the city’s experience with the Watts riots and their ineffectiveness in 1992. He honestly believed that Los Angeles had enough level-headed leaders to effectively mitigate the damage like they had in 1965, but according to him, they “didn't have that kind of cool head existing. We had no cool heads providing leadership. There wasn't a cool head in the group, including Mayor Bradley.”<sup>43</sup>

The destruction due to the Los Angeles Riots obliterated the city and the job security of Gates and Bradley. Each day the city burned, both men’s seats got exponentially hotter. The riots spanned five days. It left more than fifty people dead and another 2,000 injured.<sup>44</sup> 1,000 buildings were either damaged or destroyed, and it costed an estimated \$1 billion.<sup>45</sup> Nearly 10,000 California National Guard troops were needed to quell the uprising, yet the losses were still crippling.<sup>46</sup> Clearly, the circumstances of the Bradley and Gates era were no walk in the park, but both men were often detrimental to their own causes throughout their tenure because of their constant battles with each other. The non-existent relationship between Gates and Bradley made things terribly difficult for anything to get accomplished in Los

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 354.

<sup>43</sup> Madison Gray, "The L.A. Riots: 15 Years After Rodney King," *TIME*, April 29, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Angeles. Once more, both of men have to share the guilt for what happened to the city. Many of Los Angeles' problems had traces of both Bradley and Gates intertwined in it one way or another. In terms of the riots, the lack of communication with the police force made it harder for Bradley to manage the fast escalating crisis and for Gates to get the support he needed.

Gates described the use of force in the Rodney King altercation as "very, very extreme," but to him, it was an "aberration in an otherwise model department."<sup>47</sup> Many did not necessarily believe him in this regard. In fact, many disagreed with his positions and with him being in the position he was in as well. Gates' leadership was often linked with creating the culture that gave birth to many incidents such as the situation involving King. A civil rights lawyer that was appointed by Bradley to the Police Commission, Melanie Lomax, found in her investigation of the LAPD in the latter half of 1992 that "[the] intemperate and inflammatory statements regularly made by our chief of police tend to inflame Gestapo-type tactics by officers who are marginal. I do not believe that he condones it, but he has blinders on."<sup>48</sup> Although Gates was not believed to have encouraged hate crimes and excessive use of force, he was still seen as culpable and rightfully so.

The call for resignation was not limited to Gates. "I'm for [Daryl F. Gates]'s removal, but I'm also for [Tom Bradley]'s removal."<sup>49</sup> This message came from Booker Griffin, who has a talk show on a local radio station geared towards mainly black audiences in the Los Angeles area. This comment was made in response to the vast amount of callers who wanted Gates to resign. Many also denounced Mayor Bradley for not publicly demanding Chief Gates's resignation. The public perception seemed to be that Bradley was turning his back on the

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<sup>47</sup>Robert Reinhold, "Fate of Police Chief in Los Angeles is Vigorously Debated after Beating," *New York Times*, March 14, 1991.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Robert Reinhold, "Cool Outrage for Los Angeles Mayor," *New York Times*, March 31, 1991.

disenfranchised that he claimed to serve when he became the city's first African-American mayor. Bradley often denied that it was his fault that Gates was still in office. The mayoral system of power was blamed more often than not because he did not have the power to remove Gates nor did he have the power to appoint department heads to or from office. Bradley believed he had "[run] the string on what any elected or appointed official can do, other than join in calling for his resignation."<sup>50</sup> Bradley never publicly called for Gates to stepdown, and many people saw this as weakness; this is reflected in his approval ratings of only 38% by the last year of his final term. At most, the mayor said that "the Chief's 'retirement' would help the community recover".<sup>51</sup> His support was never clearly voiced towards his later terms. In fact, he narrowly won his last election because he never had total support of the city just like Gates.

The personal and political tension between the two men became increasingly more evident throughout their tenures in office. In June 1992, Daryl Gates would eventually retire from the LAPD by his own free will. Tom Bradley would exit the political sphere one year later by choosing not to run for a sixth term. The chief and mayor were with Los Angeles during its most turbulent and arduous times. They survived the both the Watts and 1992 Riots, the murder of Latasha Hardin and Eulia Love, and the Rodney King Beating captured on home video which played on a seemingly endless loop in 1992.

Both men never were fond of each other from the start, and every little conflict seemed to escalate their relationship further which slowly carried over into their political interactions. Each man always seemed like they were trying to get the last laugh. Towards the end of their careers, both men seemed to become increasingly resentful of each other. Bradley would get

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> James Rainey, "History May Take a Kinder View of the Bradley Era," *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1993.

one last jab at the police chief on his retirement day from the LAPD: “[Gates] brought Los Angeles to the brink of disaster just to satisfy his own ego' and is leaving a 'sad and bitter legacy.’”<sup>52</sup>

Long-standing buildings and political figures no longer stood after 1992. The flame of their hatred for each other clouded their judgement and distorted their priorities as time passed. Their flames of hatred for their counterpart engulfed their own political careers. Their demise, however, allowed the City of Angeles to rise from the ashes like a phoenix and usher in a new era. During their time in office, Gates and Bradley were groundbreaking in their respective leadership roles. Gates pioneered the formation of the SWAT team and the D.A.R.E. program across the nation.<sup>53</sup> Bradley hosted the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles and turned it into the first profitable Olympics ever.<sup>54</sup> He also passed the city's first homosexual rights bill and transcended color barriers as the first African-American mayor and city councilman in Los Angeles. Their ineptitude to work with each other does not erase what they had done, but it does not excuse the magnitude of trouble they allowed to occur either. Many saw these men as having great skill in their respective roles, but their inability to function civilly doomed the city. They easily could have mitigated the damage of the Los Angeles Riots if they worked together to create a sturdy plan.

At the end of the day, neither Gates nor Bradley is free from scrutiny for what happened from 1991-1992. Both men made terrible blunders politically, and their relationship as public officials eventually became solely a sick, petty joke. They became lambs at the slaughter once the Rodney King beating happened and were helpless because of their mutual deep-

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<sup>52</sup> Sheryl Stolberg, "Once Synonymous, Gates, LAPD go Separate Ways," *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1992.

<sup>53</sup> Gray, "The L.A. Riots: 15 Years After Rodney King."

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

rooted hatred and unwillingness to cooperate with each other. The Los Angeles Riots of 1992 became a physical manifestation of the toll that their stagnant bickering had on the city they both swore to protect and serve. The road to hell is paved with good intention, and Bradley and Gates seemed to pave a new trail with each day they were both in office.

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