



NEWS

April 2012

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Bunche Center Commentary

This month, Darnell Hunt, professor of sociology and Bunche Center director, discusses the impact of the 1992 Uprisings and their legacy today. Dr. Hunt's research interests include race, media, and cultural studies. As Director of UCLA's Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, he manages several research projects on the experiences of African Americans, as well as a major project focusing on the issue of diversity in the Hollywood entertainment industry. Dr. Hunt's publications include *Screening the Los Angeles "Riots": Race, Seeing, and Resistance* (Cambridge Press 1997) and *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities* (NYU Press 2010).

Making Sense of the Fires...Twenty Years Later

By Darnell M. Hunt



It's hard to believe, but it's been 20 years since verdicts in the Rodney King beating case sparked outrage, fires, and mayhem on the streets of Los Angeles. Soon, we can be sure, a barrage of retrospectives of various sorts will fill the airwaves. What will this programming say about the events that exploded on April 29, 1992? "Rebellion?" "Riot?" "Crime?" What sense will retrospectives endeavor to make of this pivotal moment in American history?

In the aftermath of the "civil unrest" that swept American cities in the mid-1960s, President Johnson commissioned a study aimed at shining light on the causes of what was happening on inner-city streets. The Kerner Commission issued its report forty-four years ago, in 1968, painting an enduring image of a divided America — "two nations," one black, one white, whose members continued to experience unequal access to resources, power, and prestige.

While the lengthy report had much to say about racial inequality in America, about how relatively miserable conditions in America's black ghettos had fueled the events, the report also explored other less-obvious factors that many believed contributed to them. One of these factors was the nation's news media.

The Kerner Commission report offered a relatively tame critique of the role U.S. news media played in the events. Although the report faulted mainstream media for generally failing to explore the causes and consequences of the violence — including the press' silence on the fundamental relationship of the events to 1960s' race relations — it effectively patted the press on the back for making a real effort to accurately and objectively report on what was happening on the streets of inner-city America.

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Bunche Center Commentary (continued)

The anecdotes of media sensationalism and the distortions that policymakers feared might have incited ghetto residents to participate in the events, the study found, were absent from the lion's share of news coverage. To be sure, the study found that television coverage featured a "dominant, positive emphasis on control of the riot and on activities in the aftermath of the riot."¹

Forty-four years after Kerner, we continue to confront a reality in which news stories, as the seminal report put it, are routinely told "from the standpoint of a white man's world"² — despite (or because of) the increasing diversity and complexity of American society. Just as this standpoint provided minimal insights in the mid-1960s about the relationship between American race relations and the violence erupting on inner-city streets, it has had little to offer more recently about the connections between racial politics in America and what happened in Los Angeles in 1992.

In fact, if we expand our gaze, we see a similar pattern emerge globally. This dominant standpoint — as Teun van Dijk documents in his extensive body of comparative work³ — is wedded to the surveillance function of corporate news media, which is rooted in an elite strategy of using racist discourse to blame the victims of austere fiscal policies for their own poverty and frustration. It is a gaze invested in focusing on symptoms and overlooking underlying causes, particularly those causes that might question the efficacy of neo-liberal, market-based logics.

The irony, of course, is that we have lost ideological ground since the era of the Kerner Commission's tacit acknowledgement of systemic racism and inequality. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant put it in their analysis of the Los Angeles 1992 uprisings:

"Poverty and discrimination, seen in the past as problems requiring state action, are now seen as the *results* of state activity...What was once the solution (activist social policies) has now become the problem (dependence), and what was once the problem (the lash of poverty) has now become the solution (market forces)."⁴

A central goal of elite discourse, as Teun van Dijk demonstrates, is positive self-presentation and maintenance of the status quo order at all cost. In service of this goal, "ethnic" events are typically "topicalized" by media, divorced from the larger social context. These events, he argues, "are covered in such a way that negative action of Them, e.g., violence, is topicalized; and possible social explanations of ethnic conflict that reflect negatively on Us, such as discrimination or causes of poverty, are de-topicalized in news reports."⁵

In other words, *denial* is a foundational strategy of corporate news coverage when it comes to matters of race and inequality. It is a routine semantic move that relies upon "truth," as the media see and define it, to vigorously dismiss the charges of anti-racists. Discursive tactics associated with this elite strategy of denial include: "reversal" ("We are not the racists, they are the true racists"), "justification" ("They are unemployed and discriminated against *because* they fail to get a good education and choose to engage in crime"), and "mitigation" (exceptional cases, contradiction, and euphemisms are used to tone down the significance of the inequality or injustice).

Of course, corporate news media might have portrayed Los Angeles 1992 as an unfortunate, but necessary wake-up call for the government, an important societal agent that had neglected inner-city needs for years. These media might even have gone further by framing the events in more systemic terms, as the multicultural explosion of struggles between haves and have-nots in a classist and racist society. Instead, corporate news media's routine focus on the mechanics of the fires, looting, and police efforts to restore order wrapped the 1992 events in a crime frame, effectively diverting attention away from the political dimensions of the activity.

Let's see if 20 years of reflection expands the frame. I'm not holding my breath.

Endnotes

¹U.S. Riot Commission, 1968, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, New York: Bantam, p. 369.

²Ibid, p. 366.

³For example, see van Dijk, Teun A., 1989, "Race, Riots and the Press: An Analysis of Editorials in the Press about the 1985 Disorders," *International Communication Gazette*.

⁴Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, 1993, "The Los Angeles 'Race Riot' and Contemporary U.S. Politics," in R. Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, New York: Routledge, p. 99.

⁵van Dijk, Teun A. 1993, *Elite Discourse and Racism*, Newbury Park: Sage, p. 249.

Announcements

20th Anniversary of Los Angeles Riots Observed



Loyola Marymount University Urban Lecture Series Explores the 20th Anniversary of the L.A. Riots

"20 Years After the Riots: Where Is L.A. Now?" is the theme of the 10th annual Urban Issues Lecture Series presented by the Thomas and Dorothy Leavey Center for the Study of Los Angeles at Loyola Marymount University.

The April 3rd lecture features L.A. City Council Member, Eric Garcetti. On April 10th, L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa (tentative) will speak. The series runs from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. All lectures are open to the public. For more information about the Leavey Center and the Urban Lecture Series, visit: www.lmu.edu/Page82336.aspx

University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Communications presents 20 Years On: "Riot?" "Rebellion?" or "Civil Unrest?"

Underwritten with a generous grant from the Ford Foundation, the USC Annenberg School presents, 20 Years On: "Riot?" "Rebellion?" or "Civil Unrest?" What is the Media Message? Dr. Mary Hill-Wagner, USC School of Journalism research assistant professor, with moderate a media retrospective on the 20th anniversary of the Los Angeles Riots.



Tentative panel members include Kevin Uhrich, editor, *Pasadena Weekly*; Cynthia Griffin, managing editor, *Our Weekly*; Kirk McKoy, senior photo editor, features, *Los Angeles Times*; Yussuf Simmonds, managing editor, *Los Angeles Sentinel*; and Kyung W. Lee, former editor, *Korea Times* (English language edition). The event will be held on April 19, 2012 in the Annenberg Auditorium, 6:30 p.m. Reception; 7:00 p.m.

The event is free and open to the public. To RSVP, click [here](#). For more information, contact Dr. Mary Hill Wagner at maryhill@usc.edu. To view the program visit: <http://annenberg.usc.edu/Events/2012/120419LARiots.aspx>



Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA presents "Making Sense of the Fires...20 Years Later"

The Bunche Center for African American Studies in partnership with UCLA'S Academic Advancement Program will present "Making Sense of the Fires...20 Years Later," on April 26th from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in the Bunche Library and Media Center, Haines Hall, 135.

Dr. Darnell Hunt, sociologist and Bunche Center director, will lead a discussion of media images of the 1992 disturbances. Dr. Hunt is author of the book, *Screening the Los Angeles Riots* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). This event is part of the Bunche Center Images in Blackness Film Series. It is free and open to the public.

For additional information, please visit www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu or contact Alex Tucker at atucker@bunche.ucla.edu.

Announcements (continued)

20th Anniversary of Los Angeles Riots Observed



From the Ashes:

The 1992 Civil Unrest and the Rise of Social Movement Organizing

This April marks the 20th anniversary of the 1992 civil unrest in Los Angeles – an event that has led to a strong and vibrant movement for social justice in the region. On Thursday, April 26th, 2012, “From the Ashes: The 1992 Civil Unrest and the Rise of Social Movement Organizing,” commemorates the progress we have made, come together to share strategies and opportunities for multi-racial organizing in Los Angeles, and look forward for the next 20 years. The event will feature a closing keynote by U.S. Congresswoman Karen Bass. It will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the USC Davidson Conference Center, in downtown Los Angeles.

For more information visit: https://usccollege.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3w7E5MMdlQb7xru

University of California, Riverside conference, “Confronting Sa-I-Gu: 20 Years After Koreatown Burned”

University of California, Riverside hosts the conference, “Confronting Sa-I-Gu: 20 Years After Koreatown Burned.” Sa-I-Gu means “4-29” and refers to the day that rioting began. Among the speakers are Connie Kang, a former Los Angeles Times reporter; Los Angeles Fire Department Chief Deputy Emile Mack, and Rev. Eric P. Lee, president/CEO of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Southern California, among others.



The conference will be on April 28th at 9 a.m. at the Garden Suites Hotel in Koreatown, 681 S. Western Ave., Los Angeles. Registration is \$20. Student registration is \$10. Contact Carol Park at carol.park@ucr.edu to register for the event. For more information visit: <http://ucrtoday.ucr.edu/3789>



Special issue of *Amerasia Journal* 38:1 -- "Los Angeles Since 1992: Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Uprisings."

The UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press and *Amerasia Journal* mark the twentieth anniversary of the Los Angeles Uprisings with a special issue, *Amerasia Journal* 38:1 -- "Los Angeles Since 1992: Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Uprisings." Twenty years after the events that unfolded on the streets of Los Angeles on April 29, 1992, academics, journalists, and artists continue to try to make sense of what occurred then and what kind of impact they have had to this day. The journal explores what issues and questions have emerged over the past two decades, with attention to the Asian American, African American, and Latino communities that inhabit the city together. Edited by UCLA Asian American Studies Center Director David K. Yoo and UCLA Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies Director Darnell Hunt, the special issue revisits how *Sa-I-Gu* (4-2-9 in Korean) was experienced from a diverse set of perspectives, as well as how its aftereffects are felt even now.

"Los Angeles Since 1992" presents new reflections and research by scholars known for their work on the Uprisings, in addition to journalists and writers who covered them as they happened. The issue includes a roundtable featuring members of the influential Critical Race Studies Program at the UCLA School of Law: Devon Carbado, Cheryl Harris, Jerry Kang, and Saúl Sarabia; commentaries from leading academic, community, and cultural voices: Edward Chang, Mary Yu Danico, Erin Aubry Kaplan, Taeku Lee, Russell Leong, Edward Park, and Jervey Tervalon; journalistic accounts that cast a critical eye on mass media accounts by the dean of Korean American journalism K.W. Lee, one-time *Los Angeles Times* reporter Rose Kim, and photojournalist Ben Higa; new research that uncovers lesser known points of view on the Uprisings and Koreatown by Kyeyoung Park and Victor Viesca; and a review of literature and cultural works on the L.A. Uprisings by Jean-Paul deGuzman, and book reviews by Gary Pak and Richard Kim.

Copies of the journal can be obtained by ordering via phone, email or mail. Please call or email the UCLA AASC Press for ordering information at 310-825-2968 or aascpress@aasc.ucla.edu

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Announcements (continued)

20th Anniversary of Los Angeles Riots Observed



The Riots and Hip Hop Explored in the Documentary "Uprising"

Twenty years after riots ripped through Los Angeles, the documentary, "Uprising," demonstrates how hip hop forecasted -- and some say ignited -- the worst civil unrest of the 20th century. The film revisits the riots in gripping detail and draws from a diverse collection of voices -- the rappers, rioters, victims, police officers, journalists and everyday citizens of South Central Los Angeles. Narrated by Snoop Dogg, the documentary traces the rise of dissent in Los Angeles in the 80's and 90's and explores why citizens chose to rise up violently against police abuse and perceived injustices. For more information visit:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fVsAGm0No&feature=youtu.be

Programs & Events



The 2012 Thurgood Marshall Lecture

"Dr. King, Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle"
Presented by Dr. Clayborne Carson

Wednesday, April 4, 2012

5:30 pm Reception

7:00 pm Lecture

Grand Horizon Room, Covel Commons, UCLA



Since receiving his doctorate from UCLA in 1975, Dr. Clayborne Carson has taught at Stanford University, where he is Professor of History and founding director of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute. Dr. Carson's publications focus on African-American protest movements and political thought in the period after World War II. Under Dr. Carson's direction, the King Papers Project has produced six volumes of *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* -- a projected fourteen-volume comprehensive edition of King's most significant speeches, sermons, correspondence, publications, and unpublished writings.

Dr. Carson has also served as senior advisor for the award-winning, public television series, "Eyes on the Prize." He has lectured throughout the United States, and appeared on many national radio and television shows, including *Good Morning America*, *NBC Nightly News*, *CBS Evening News*, *Fresh Air*, *Charlie Rose*, *Tavis Smiley*, and *Marketplace*.

Limited seating is still available. RSVP immediately to atucker@bunche.ucla.edu or (310) 825-4023. The event is free and open to the public, parking is \$11 at Sunset Village (enter at Sunset Blvd. & Bellagio Drive). For more information, please visit www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu.



"Mass Incarceration and the Unmaking of the Postwar United States."

Co-sponsored by the UCLA Department of History and the Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA, Temple University Professor Heather Thompson will present her talk, "Mass Incarceration and the Unmaking of the Postwar United States."

The event will be held in the UCLA History Department Conference Room (Bunche Hall 6275) on Thursday, April 5th at 4:00 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.

UCLA Bruin Day Saturday, April 14, 2012

Bruin Day gives admitted freshmen and their guests an opportunity to discover world-class academic programs, take student-guided housing tours, check out student clubs and organizations, explore the campus, hear from campus leaders, and experience the pride of being a Bruin. Parents and families are welcome. Admission is free. For more information, visit <http://bruinday.ucla.edu/>

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Faculty News

Dr. Harryette Mullen will present the 2011 Los Angeles Times Book Prize for poetry at the 17th Annual *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books on April 21-22, 2012 at the University of Southern California.



Bunche Center affiliated faculty member and UCLA Professor of Sociology and Education Walter R. Allen visited Tel Aviv in December, 2011, as a Fulbright Specialist.

To read more, visit: www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu/index.php/faculty-awards-accolades/

Support the Bunche Center



Gifts to the Bunche Center support our commitment to teaching, research, and service, ensuring that a UCLA education remains accessible and that the caliber of its scholarship and research is peer to none. Your individual gift helps support vital research, programs and services.

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Library & Media



The Bunche Center Library and Media Center is open during regular hours to students, researchers, and the general public. Research and reference questions by phone and email are always welcome. The Librarian can be reached at 310-825-6060 or by email at dhunter@bunche.ucla.edu. The LMC is located in 135 Haines Hall.

For more about the library, visit: www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu, click on Library and Media Center.

Interdepartmental Program Afro-American Studies



SAVE THE DATE***

Afro-Am Graduation, Saturday, June 16, 11:30am

The UCLA AFRO-Am Graduation for Afro-Am majors, double-majors, minors, MA and MA/JD students will be held on Saturday, June 16.^{***} The Ceremony will be from 11:30a.m. to 1:30p.m. in the Fowler Museum, Lenart Auditorium. A reception will follow. A limited number of free tickets for the event are available and information on obtaining tickets is forthcoming.

***Please note – this event is NOT the same as the *Afrikan Graduation* on Sunday, June 17. For additional information, please contact: 301 825-9821 or visit www.afro-am.ucla.edu

Research

IAC Research Grant Program Applications — Due April 20, 2012

The Institute of American Cultures invites applications for support of research on African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Chicanas/os for 2012-2013. UCLA faculty, staff, and graduate students are all eligible to apply.

Ordinarily, faculty and staff projects are funded for no more than \$10,000 and graduate student projects for no more than \$7,000. However, due to the budget crisis, research grants for the maximum amount will likely not be awarded. Funding is on a reimbursement basis only. Funds for the purchase of permanent equipment will be provided only under exceptional circumstances. Such equipment must be returned to the appropriate Ethnic Studies Center upon completion of the project. Also, participant payments or participant incentives of any kind will NOT be funded by the Bunche Center. Applications can be downloaded at www.gdnet.ucla.edu/iacweb/applic.htm

GRANT PERIOD: July 1, 2012 through May 31, 2013

DEADLINE: Applications for 2012 – 2013 IAC research grants must be received no later than 4 p.m., April 20, 2012

External Opportunities

The African Activists Association

The African Activist Association at UCLA Invites abstracts for the 7th Annual African Studies Graduate Student Symposium, "The Business of Africa," May 18-19, 2012. Undergraduates, graduate students, professionals, post-doctoral students, lecturers, professors, activists and practitioners are urged to make submissions. Papers and presentations on topics related to Africa and the African Diaspora in all disciplines and from all institutions, programs and organizations will be considered. Deadline for abstract submissions: April 15, 2012. For more information visit the Bunche Center website: www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu/index.php/2012/01/fellowships-research-grants-and-external-opportunities/

UCGHI Women's Health & Empowerment Center of Expertise Graduate/Professional Student 2012 Fellowships

Student Grant: The Women's Health and Empowerment Center of Expertise (COE), one of three COEs in the University of California Global Health Institute, is calling for fellowship proposals to fund 4-5 student scholarships totaling \$20,000. Awards will be granted to successful proposals submitted by UC graduate and professional level students across different disciplines for completing fellowships or conducting research related to women's health and empowerment in the United States or abroad during summer or fall of 2012. For more information visit the Bunche Center website: www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu/index.php/2012/01/fellowships-research-grants-and-external-opportunities/

NASA/Jet Propulsion Laboratory Summer Faculty Research Program

The JPL Summer Faculty Research Program provides opportunities for science, technology, mathematics and engineering (STEM) faculty to engage in research of mutual interest to the faculty member and a JPL researcher. JSFRP awards \$13,500 fellowships for the 10-week session. A housing allowance for awardees who live beyond a 50-mile radius of JPL will be offered. Application Deadline: April 27, 2012. For more information visit the Bunche Center website: www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu/index.php/2012/01/fellowships-research-grants-and-external-opportunities/

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