

The South Central Los Angeles Eruption: **A Latino Perspective**

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On April 29, 1992, the city of Los Angeles erupted like an angry volcano with all the fury of a lava stream of frustration and anger. The unprecedented convulsion of violence, destruction, and death has been described by writers as a riot, rebellion, disorder, disturbance, and uprising. However described, it awoke the nation to the painful reality of the precarious deteriorating condition of race relations in most American cities. The eruption was precipitated by the "not guilty" verdict rendered in the trial of the four Los Angeles police officers charged with unlawfully beating African American Rodney King. The verdict created a contagion of disorder, looting, and killing that continued from April 29 to May 2 and was unmatched in its destructiveness in American history.

Though the media initially portrayed the "eruption of discontent" as one involving primarily African Americans and Koreans, the reality was that it was the first multiethnic eruption in the nation's history. In particular, Latinos became both protagonists and victims of the explosion consequently becoming major participants in what this author describes as the explosion of discontent. This article provides an analysis of the changing demographics of South Central Los Angeles; the Latino role in the eruption; the etiology of the eruption; the rift the eruption created among the various ethnic and racial groups; and analysis of the eruption from a policy perspective.

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**South Central Los Angeles:
Latinos, the New Ethnic Majority**

In order to understand the Latino role in the eruption and its aftermath, we must examine the changing demographics of South Central Los Angeles (SCLA).¹ In the past decade, Latino immigrants from Mexico and Central America, particularly from El Salvador and Guatemala,

Table 1

1980 Census: Racial and Ethnic Changes in Los Angeles

	Study Area	Los Angeles City	Los Angeles County
Total Population	2,481,583	2,968,036	7,477,503
White	788,078 31.8%	1,420,476 47.9%	3,953,603 52.9%
African American	729,449 29.4%	505,199 17.0%	943,968 12.6%
Latino	772,160 31.1%	816,170 27.5%	2,066,103 27.6%
Blacks of Hispanic Origin	12,352 1.6%	9,487 1.2%	17,608 0.9%
Asian & Pacific Islander	172,741 7.0%	196,044 6.6%	434,850 5.8%
Chinese	35,389 1.4%	44,362 1.5%	93,747 1.3%
Japanese	51,690 2.1%	49,345 1.7%	116,543 1.6%
Korean	28,011 1.1%	33,066 1.1%	60,618 0.8%
Filipino	34,606 1.4%	43,718 1.5%	99,043 1.3%

have moved into the area formerly perceived as dominated by African Americans. In 1990, approximately 46 percent of the residents of SCLA were Latinos, making them the largest ethnic group.² This demographic transformation can be understood by making a comparative analysis of the 1980 and 1990 census.

In the 1980 census, Latinos in the SCLA comprised approximately only 31 percent of the population. At that time, Latinos, Whites, and African Americans were almost identical in population numbers. The following table illustrates this point³:

Table 2

1990 Census: Racial and Ethnic Changes in Los Angeles

	Study Area	Los Angeles City	Los Angeles County
Total	2,784,125	3,485,398	8,863,164
White	609,349 21.9%	1,302,023 37.4%	3,618,850 40.8%
African American	682,331 24.5%	487,674 13.9%	1,941,552 21.9%
Latino	1,280,220 46.0%	1,391,411 39.9%	3,351,242 37.8%
Blacks of Hispanic Origin	39,969 9.1%	33,385 1.0%	58,198 0.7%
Chinese	46,460 1.7%	67,196 1.9%	245,033 2.8%
Japanese	44,165 1.6%	45,370 1.3%	129,736 1.5%
Korean	57,644 2.1%	72,970 2.1%	145,431 1.6%
Filipino	56,001 2.0%	87,625 2.5%	219,653 2.5%

By 1990, the Latino population had increased substantially while the African American and white populations had declined, with a slight increase for Asian Americans. Table 2 illustrates these changes.⁴

The demographic statistics of SCLA suggest that what was once perceived as primarily an African American area is becoming an ocean of Latino humanity. This transformation is a product of an influx of hundreds of thousands of economic and political refugees from both Central America and Mexico. During the 1980s, these refugees, fleeing from the horrors of political upheaval and revolution in Central America and a concomitant economic crisis in Mexico, found a haven in the midst of the SCLA. Consequently, by the year 2000 Latinos will compose the indisputable majority ethnic group of SCLA. By way of illustration, Latinos in 1990 outnumbered African Americans in Watts and constituted 46 percent of the Watts population. Even in Koreatown, Latinos outnumbered Koreans. They comprised 48 percent of the population to the Koreans' 3 percent.⁵ Thus SCLA's changing demographics was a critical factor in analyzing the Latino role both during and after the eruption.

Latinos and the SCLA Eruption

When the "not guilty" verdicts were rendered that afternoon on April 29, what began as a political protest at Parker Center, the headquarters of the Los Angeles Police Department, spread like a wildfire of anger and engulfed entire sections of SCLA. This eruption soon became socially targeted and other violence took the form of arson and looting. A summary report produced by the Tomas Rivera Center entitled "Latinos and the Uprising: The Economic Context," stated that "both the verdict and the subsequent social disorder dismayed and challenged a city that had long boasted of its multicultural and internationalist future."⁶

Because the mass media giants portrayed the eruption as primarily one of African American and Asian American violence, and because of a relative absence of disorder in the East Los Angeles Latino community, the general impression was that Latinos were only involved peripherally in the events of April 29-May 2. *Los Angeles Times* staff writers George Ramos and Tracy Wilkinson wrote:

Though largely portrayed in the national media as a Black uprising, the riots in fact involved many Latinos, both as victims and vandals. One third of those killed and at least as many arrested for looting and other crimes were Latino; Latino-owned businesses were destroyed and many Latinos were left homeless by arson.⁷

The slant of the media was obvious. The front page of *Newsweek* pictured a young African American in front of a burning building.⁸ *Time*

magazine did likewise.⁹ However, as the eruption progressed, the media began to acknowledge the ethnic diversity of those participating in the melee.

Looting and arson occurred in Latino and Asian American as well as African American neighborhoods and even reached into white districts in Venice, Beverly Hills, and the San Fernando Valley. The original three flash points of the eruption occurred in Hyde Park, where Latinos constituted 26 percent of the population, at the intersection of Florence and Normandie where Latinos comprised 28 percent, and at the intersection of Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Normandie, where Latinos made up 54 percent of the population.¹⁰ Joan Petersilia, the RAND Corporation criminologist who conducted a study on the eruption acknowledged that "this was clearly not a Black riot. It was a minority riot."¹¹

Furthermore, according to Rose Institute's SCLA Atlas, "of the first 23 acts of violence reported by emergency calls to the Los Angeles Police Department between 3:00 P.M. and 7:00 P.M. on April 29, eight occurred in neighborhoods where Latinos constituted a majority of the population.¹² Moreover, 51 percent of those arrested were Latino; 30 percent of those who died were Latino; and up to 40 percent of the damaged businesses were Latino-owned."¹³ The Los Angeles Police Department reported that of the 5,438 arrested from April 30 to Monday morning of May 4, 1993, 2,764 were Latino, 2,022 African American, 568 white, and 84 classified as other. In addition, 19 of the 58 people killed in the eruption were Latino and the most damaged neighborhoods were Latino.¹⁴

Adding to the unprecedented nature of the eruption was the direct participation of Latino immigrants. According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) officials, undocumented immigrants accounted for more than 1,200 of the 15,000 people arrested. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that on one occasion of 477 undocumented immigrants picked up and handed over to the INS, 360 were from Mexico, 62 from El Salvador, 35 from Guatemala, 14 from Honduras, 2 from Jamaica, and the rest from other countries.¹⁵ During the three days of looting, arson and violence, the Los Angeles Police Department conducted sweeps throughout the various barrios of SCLA. The Los Angeles police officers disregarded the long-standing policy of not being pro-active in apprehending undocumented immigrants and turning them over to the INS for probable deportation. The Mexican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran Consulates asked Mayor Tom Bradley to "respect immigrants' human rights" regardless of their migrant status.¹⁶ Thus, Latinos from such sub-groups joined in the violence giving the riot a multiethnic coloring.

The Etiology of the Eruption

An abundance of literature in the social sciences exists on the etiology of violence. Scholars have propounded numerous theories, paradigms, and ideas, all seeking to shed some light on the causation of violence. Using a Marxist framework, some economists and sociologists accentuate the inevitability of class struggle, meaning that the antagonisms and contradictions of a capitalist society produce increasing misery and ultimately a convulsion of violence directed by the proletariat against the ruling bourgeoisie. Political scientists and psychologists such as Ted Gurr, James Davies, and others stress some form of relative deprivation.¹⁷ Other social scientists contend that violent eruptions such as that in SCLA stem from structural deficiencies within the system.¹⁸

The SCLA explosion, in my view, can be better understood etiologically within the context of relative deprivation (RD). Essentially, RD is predicated on frustration-aggression theory. In its most basic sense, RD refers to the gap between what people have and what they think they should have. As Gurr wrote about RD, it is a "perceived discrepancy between people's value expectations and their value capabilities." Specifically, value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled, whereas value capabilities are the goods and conditions that they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining. Frustration, discontent, and ultimately aggressive are the by-products of discrepancy between expectations and capabilities and determine the scope and intensity of RD.¹⁹ In essence, RD fosters popular discontent and frustration which in turn intensifies to the point of engendering a climate of discontent.

Yet the pervasiveness of dissatisfaction is not alone sufficient to foster violence. As social scientists Chalmers Johnson, Harry Eckstein and others have written, it takes some event, person, incident, etc. to precipitate the violence. To Johnson it was an "accelerator" and to Eckstein it was a "precipitant." The "accelerators" or "precipitant" are the final or immediate causes of revolutionary violence. They are discrete events such as military defeat, economic crisis, governmental violence, reforms, and so forth, that occur at a specific point in time.²⁰ A precipitant, according to Eckstein, is an event which actually starts the revolutionary violence, "much as turning the flintwheel of a cigarette lighter ignites the flame."²¹ Thus, RD coupled with an accelerator or precipitant provides this analysis with a conceptual framework that is useful in explaining the etiology of the SCLA eruption.

This climate of discontent was the product of a major discrepancy between the people's value expectations and value capabilities. This applied to all of the diverse ethnic groups that participated in the

mayhem. For Latinos, their value expectations exceeded their value capabilities. Many Latinos of SCLA are immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and other parts of Latin America. They came to the United States motivated by rising expectations for a better quality of life. Spurred by determination, courage, and hope, they overcame much suffering in their precarious journeys to the United States—only to find themselves once again impacted by the omnipresence of a hostile and impoverished environment. Once settled, they became immersed and consumed by American society's materialist and consumer-oriented values and beliefs. But their impoverished status precluded them from realizing their expectations which in turn produced a growing frustration.

Based on content analysis of numerous reports, newspaper, and magazine articles, coupled with radio and television commentaries, I argue that the SCLA eruption was predictable and even inevitable considering the impoverished socioeconomic components and deteriorating race relations of the area. The SCLA is comprised of economically impoverished enclaves that are plagued by high unemployment and underemployment, crime, gang violence, drug and alcohol abuse, dilapidated housing, high educational dropout rates, etc. In other words, SCLA was an extremely fertile ground for an urban upheaval. It had a whirlwind climate of discontent that was breeding popular frustration and anger.

The pervasiveness of poverty therefore was a precondition to the eruption. The Tomas Rivera Study purports that the difficult economic conditions affecting SCLA led to the eruption. Particularly for Latinos, poverty in SCLA has been increasing. In Los Angeles, the percentage of Latino families falling below the poverty line was three times higher than that of non-Latino families. The study further stated that in 1989 Latino per capita income in Los Angeles was \$7,111, less than half the city's average. Of Latinos living in SCLA, it was much lower, \$4,461, which translates to 63 percent of the area's already low level.²² Eden Porter, author of the Tomas Rivera report, corroborates this author's contention when he said, "This was a bread riot. . . . This uprising was a response to economic frustration."²³ The precipitant, or accelerator, that ignited the fire was the "not guilty" verdict.

The foregoing income indicators speak for the omnipresence of poverty and the underclass status of many Latino residents of SCLA. Both the Tomas Rivera and Rose Institute research concluded that SCLA is characterized by high unemployment and higher rates of female heads of household. Economic deprivation is further exacerbated by the lack of affordable and decent housing; the pervasiveness of gang

violence; drug and alcohol abuse; high crime rates; and lack of political representation, participation and alienation—all of which have added to the status of the Latino underclass. While Latinos encompass over 46 percent of SCLA population, they make up only 5 percent of the registered voters.²⁴

Latinos of SCLA perceived themselves as isolated and powerless to do anything about their plight. A survey conducted by Bendixen and Associates and commissioned by KVEA-TV, channel 52, and *La Opinión* newspaper in April 1993, concluded that most Latinos and African Americans in SCLA think that the Los Angeles political leadership cares little about neighborhood problems and has done little to ease racial conflict. When asked, "How much do you feel Los Angeles government and political leaders care about the problems of your neighborhood?" 82 percent responded, "only a little" or "not at all." The response, "a great deal" received a mere 11 percent.²⁵ Morrie Goldman, spokesperson for Councilman Mike Hernandez, said about the survey, "the problems were created before we came there. We're going in and fixing what City Hall had created over the years."²⁶

It is not difficult to understand the results of the preceding survey if one examines the weak and mixed response of Latino elected officials toward the L.A. riots. Most Latino officials from the Los Angeles area were quick to congratulate their Eastside constituency for restraint shown during the eruption. After all, very little looting occurred east of the Los Angeles River. On May 8, 1992, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Latino elected officials, with the exception of Councilman Mike Hernandez, distanced themselves from the violence. "They appeared...eager to distance themselves from what some officials called the less stable Latino enclaves of Pico-Union and South Los Angeles, which are populated by more recent immigrants and which were caught in the eye of the fire storm."²⁷ Councilman Richard Alatorre said, "I try my best to be an advocate for immigrant concerns. But I didn't get elected to represent them. I have a responsibility to the people I happen to represent."²⁸

The frustration of Latino residents of SCLA toward Latino elected officials was evident in numerous comments made by Latino immigrant organizational spokespersons. Carlos Vaquerano, an official with the Central American Refugee Center, said, "there are many Latino leaders who say they represent Latinos, but they do not represent all Latinos."²⁹ Madeline Janis, Executive Director of the Center, in imploring Latinos to unite, commented, "There's going to be a big backlash now because immigrants are an easy target, and if we don't have the established Latino leadership defending the rights of the newer immigrants, then we are going to be in an even more desperate situation that we are in."³⁰

However, this climate of discontent was also a product of race and ethnic degradation, meaning the existence of racism and prejudice towards people of color by certain segments of white society. This form of degradation has increased and impeded the realization of an improvement in the overall quality of life. In spite of such legislation as the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965), the struggle for civil rights and economic justice is far from over. The Rodney King incident coupled with the "not guilty" verdict of the four police officers illustrate the deterioration of race relations. The Kerner Commission Report of 1968 concluded that the United States was moving in the direction of a dual society, one Black and the other White. In the context of 1992, this conclusion is incorrect. The truth is that America is drifting towards a society divided four-fold by color, meaning Whites, Latinos, African Americans, and Asians. *Time* magazine, in its cover story of April 9, 1990 entitled "America's Changing Colors" stated that by the year 2056 people of color will comprise the new majority population—the "browning of America." Much of this phenomenon is attributable to immigration and high fertility rates. This situation has fostered a resurgence of "racism" and "nativism," particularly against Latino immigrants, leading to Latino "immigrant-bashing" by other ethnic and racial groups as well as by the dominant white society. Such bashing has been evident even among this nation's elected officials—both Republican and Democrat—who use the immigrant as a "scapegoat" for this nation's myriad ills. This form of degradation has resulted in the deprivation of opportunity the Latino immigrants of SCLA who are at the bottom of the socio-economic and political ladder. These factors explain why Latinos were both protagonists and victims of the eruption.

Unrest Widens Rift among Ethnic Groups

The aftermath of the eruption witnessed a growing rift among the diverse ethnic and racial groups of SCLA. I have accentuated deprivation predicated on economic, political, and racial factors to explain the eruption, rivalry and antagonism among SCLA ethnic and racial groups prior to, during and after the eruption. Prior to the eruption, antagonisms had risen to volatile levels between African Americans and Korean Americans, Latinos and African Americans, Whites and African Americans. Examples of these conflict situations include: 1) the growing tensions between Korean Americans and African Americans as manifested by the shooting of the African American youth Latasha Harlins by a Korean grocery store owner; 2) the escalating conflict between Latino and African Americans over the issue of affirmative action at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Hospital; and 3) the increasing conflict between whites and

African Americans over the issue of police brutality as exemplified by the Rodney King beating.

The aftermath of the eruption has led to an escalation of tensions between African Americans and Latino leaders. With the nation's economic crisis fostering a scarcity of resources, jobs, and other opportunities, the two communities have been on a collision course for years. According to Antonio Rodriguez and Carlos Chavez, who wrote an editorial article in the *Los Angeles Times* entitled "The Rift Is Exposed: Let's Bridge It,"

Acrimonious debate has raged over the county's affirmative action program, the reapportionment plans of the city, the county and board of education, the hiring practices at places like Martin Luther King Hospital and the competition for the position of Los Angeles chief, to name a few.³¹

This fostering of tension was exacerbated during the eruption. The number of Latinos killed, businesses looted, and buildings destroyed suggest that even though the looters were of various ethnic groups, the riots served to accelerate the tensions among these groups, especially between Latinos and African Americans. The precipitant or accelerator to the "open conflict" between the two groups was the post-eruption rebuilding efforts under the aegis of Rebuild L. A., led by co-chairman Peter Ueberroth. Rebuild L.A. was established for the purpose of securing millions of dollars of investments from the private sector to rebuild the shattered areas of SCLA. This entailed convincing corporations to act as catalysts for development. Perceiving opportunities for resources and jobs, the leadership of both communities began openly competing for who was going to control the bigger pieces of the pie.

While noble in its intent, Rebuild L.A. became a political issue between the leadership of both communities. In part this was ascribable to its composition. Joel Kotkin, a contributing editor to *Opinión*, wrote:

The ruling elites seem determined to recreate the failed pattern of the "broker state" through Rebuild L.A. This is evident in Rebuild's core economic leadership—drawn, with few exceptions, from the remnant of the old Anglo downtown Establishment. At the same time, most minorities on the Rebuild board seem out of the 60's central casting: professional applicants, social service providers and politicians.³²

The preceding set the stage for the rhetorical war that ensued between the leadership of both communities. In July 1992, Latino office holders sent Mayor Tom Bradley a letter complaining that Latinos were being excluded from post-eruption rebuilding efforts. Led by Councilman Richard Alatorre and Mike Hernandez, the letter stated:

The changing demographics of the inner city must be recognized. As such, it is only just that both the public and private sectors make every effort to ensure that jobs, funds, and other resources are distributed in a fashion that strives to reach parity with the ethnic composition of the very communities we are attempting to restore.³³

This letter was a product of the war of words that had already begun between Xavier Hermosillo, chairman of N.E.W.S. of America, and Danny Bakewell from the Brotherhood Crusade, with both writing articles critical of the other in the *Los Angeles Times*.³⁴

This verbal contest inevitably spilled over into the communities of SCLA. During the summer months of 1992, Bakewell initiated a highly publicized campaign to close down Los Angeles construction sites that did not employ African Americans. Hermosillo responded by organizing "sting teams" of undercover construction workers with video cameras that monitored work sites that employed Latino workers to record Bakewell's efforts to replace Latino workers with African Americans.³⁵

Such incidents continued to occur to the point that in September 1992 Latino business and social leaders orchestrated a large press conference rally at City Hall at which it was alleged that Latinos had been shortchanged. The newly-formed Latino Coalition for a New Los Angeles, including the city's two Latino council persons, called for Mayor Bradley to release a breakdown of the financial aid administered by the city's various departments. The coalition also requested the same from President Bush and the federal government. In addition, the City Hall demonstration called on business and industry leaders to create more job opportunities for Latinos.³⁶ Coalition spokesperson Fernando Oaxaca acknowledged that part of the problem in the past had been that Latinos had been slow to mobilize in public protest. Joe Sanchez, President of the Mexican American Grocers Association, asserted his conviction that African American organizations had received disproportionate attention and post-eruption aid because they had stronger ties to City Hall and because the news media too often painted the eruption as a Black versus White or Black versus Korean conflict in which Latinos were primarily looters instead of victims.³⁷

The fact was that the interethnic rifts of SCLA also involved Latinos and Asian Americans. This meant that the eruption played itself out along ethnic lines.³⁸ In the Pico-Union as in African American neighborhoods, outsider-owned stores, particularly those owned and run by Korean Americans, were looted and destroyed. Carlos Vaquerano of the Central American Refugee Center, whose offices are located in the Pico-Union area, said, "Some Latinos complain about being treated with a lack of respect by Korean merchants—not all of them, but some." As Ruben

Martinez in his article entitled "This Was about Something to Eat" stated, "Many Latinos use the term *Chino* for Asians regardless of whether they are Japanese, Chinese or Thai, and ethnic jokes abound."³⁹ The reality is that the eruption proved that Latinos were not immune from the vices of prejudice and bigotry.

A Latino Perspective on the Eruption

The eruption was but the calm before the storm. The frustration and anger that exploded on April 29, 1992, remains. Unless major economic and political changes take place and race and ethnic relations improve, Los Angeles will be subject to further "balkanization" that will continue to pit ethnic and racial groups against each other. If the balkanization continues, it could well create a similar scenario of "ethnic cleansing" such as that occurring in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Soviet Union, and other parts of the world. Evidence of this scenario, is a plot unveiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation on July 15, 1993, of an attempt by "skin heads" to precipitate a race war by assassinating certain African-American and Jewish leaders and the bombing of the First African Methodist Church located in SCLA.⁴⁰ This aborted plot by the skin heads also made mention of targeting Latinos, which is indicative of a powerful current of nativism which in 1993 heightened tensions among the nation's diverse populations. Similar hate crimes are becoming increasingly prevalent in other American cities.

The nation and California's economy are plagued by increasing poverty, unemployment, the exodus of industry, and social problems. From the federal to the state to the local level, government is increasingly incapable of fiscally meeting the exigencies of the urban crisis. The inability of these governmental entities to act in bringing about change to areas such as SCLA is heightening the people's level of frustration and discontent. This pervasive economic crisis is fostering conflict and tensions among not only ethnic and racial groups, but among the "have-nots," "have-little-want more," and the "have-it-all-want more" socioeconomic classes. American society today is becoming increasingly class-stratified. This reality is apropos in understanding the socioeconomic make-up of SCLA and other American cities.

The lack of commitment by the federal government is shown by its failure to provide adequate assistance relief via the Federal Emergency Management Agency to victims. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "denial rates for nearly all Federal grant and loan programs are running at fifty percent or higher, leaving many victims and their advocates with a sense that the aid process is not working."⁴¹ At the local level, even the efforts initiated by Rebuild L. A. were being scaled down in

1993.⁴² Jin H. Lee, owner of a Compton store that burned down to the ground, stated "I do not hate the people who burned my store. I hate the government that did not do its job because we are a minority."⁴³ To date, there is no governmental entity at any level that is designed or equipped to effectively deal with the consequences of the such events as the eruption of SCLA.

Without the federal government stepping in and developing a comprehensive "Urban Marshall Plan" that can produce jobs, improve schools, build adequate housing, clean up crime and drugs, provide health care, and involve the people in the reconstruction of their cities, the eruption of SCLA portends worse crises. It is a race against time that will not be won by the power of politicians and activist rhetoric, but rather, through the intervention of governmental and private sectors and their coming together with the people as partners in the rebuilding of America's decaying cities.

The consequences of the eruption for Latinos are even worse. SCLA is becoming heavily Latino. By the twenty-first century, Latinos will be the largest ethnic group in the city and comprise over 50 percent of its population. Peace in Central America will more than likely slow the exodus of immigrants. However, the exodus from Mexico will continue, regardless of the condition of the Mexican economy. The difference is that if the Mexican economy does not improve, the scope and intensity of the exodus will be greater. This translates to the possibility of Latinos in SCLA being relegated to a quasi-"South African syndrome" status, where Latinos will constitute the majority of the population, yet the non-Latino minority will control the economic and political power. This syndrome manifests itself through the denial of economic opportunities for Latino as exemplified in the case of the Latino street vendors who are being run out of business due to insensitive city bureaucratic politics. The immigrant bashing has intensified to a fever pitch where in California, both Republican and Democrat, federal and state officials have proposed scores of restrictive and racist immigration policies directed at the Latino immigrant. One illustration of this is U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein's efforts to curb illegal immigration. She said at a Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing held on May 19, 1993, that "It is up to this government and this (Justice) Department to control the border. . . . Unless we deal with it, there is going to be a terrible backlash. . . a long backlash in the future."⁴⁴ Concurrently, state legislators have become embroiled in the immigrant bashing by the introduction of twenty-one bills, all aimed at curbing immigration and the denial of services and benefits to the undocumented.⁴⁵

In order to avoid this negative scenario, Latinos must put aside their differences and forge powerful alliances among themselves that

are based on popular participation. Politicians need to be held accountable via the power of an organized, politicized, and registered populace. To accomplish this, massive political education efforts must be initiated to convince the thousands of legal immigrants to become naturalized citizens and to vote. The same must be done for the United States native-born Latinos who reside in SCLA.

The most powerful weapon the people have with which to obviate a South African syndrome is the formation of powerful grass-roots organizations led by individuals indigenous to SCLA. These organizations must be supported financially by the people themselves and by the private and public sectors. Latinos in SCLA must work to create an infrastructure similar to the political machines of the past that were able to promote change and opportunity for the immigrant population. Furthermore, with money being the lubricant for change and empowerment, Latinos in SCLA must design economic, political and social developmental plans that will with time empower them and give them control of their own *barrio* economies, political structures, and social institutions. Self-sufficiency and self-reliance in these times of economic crises must guide the actions of these plans.

Concomitantly, if Latinos are to avoid another disruption, they must seek to form coalitions with other ethnic and social groups. Inter-ethnic coalition-building is a must. Latinos must be willing to share economic and political power. Other groups must be willing to do the same. The Latino's growing population has value both politically in the vote and economically in the form of purchasing power. Hence, accords must be reached so that the rifts and conflicts are mitigated and a more united development process is realized that is beneficial to all. As long as ethnic groups are at each other's throats fighting for the meager crumbs of governmental handouts, SCLA as a whole will lose. Every group must realize that other groups are not the enemies; the enemies are the policies of local, state, and federal entities of a society that is in transition from a Cold War to a peace economy.

To date, the nation is plagued by an inability of the capitalist economic system to provide jobs and hope for a better future for the people of America. Without a major change in the policies of the nation's economic system, there is no hope for ethnic majorities who live in places like SCLA. Even if Latinos were to become the political majority on the city council, with a Latino mayor, what difference would it make when elected officials are powerless to act because Los Angeles is financially strapped? Without the resources to provide jobs, social services, viable educational systems, housing, public safety, health, etc., the future of SCLA and other urban areas looks bleak.

Only through the creation of a Latino unified effort will the barrios of SCLA and the rest of Los Angeles be transformed from islands of deprivation to communities of prosperity. Latinos must also participate in the formation of multiethnic/racial coalitions which are predicated on the inclusion of all groups and segments who share a common interest in the rebuilding of SCLA and Los Angeles. However, this will also pose a challenge to all the groups involved, for it means that the coalition must be built on the principal of "power" and "benefit" sharing. All groups must realize that for a community to progress as a whole will require that everyone share in the "power of governing" and "benefits of prosperity".

Notes

1. Any analysis of the eruption of SCLA must take into account the factor of what constitutes SCLA. There is no clear agreement as to what exactly is the geographic make-up of SCLA. The boundary lines selected for SCLA will impact the results of the research—particularly when citing statistics concerning SCLA's racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic characteristics. For purposes of analysis, the author is using the definition of SCLA developed by Claremont McKenna College's Rose Institute of Local and State Government in their book of SCLA entitled *An Atlas of South Central Los Angeles*. Published in 1992 by the Rose Institute, the atlas defines SCLA as "bounded by West Hollywood and Beverly Hills on the Northwest; Culver City, Ladera Heights, Inglewood, Lennox, and Hawthorne on the West; Lawndale, Gardena, and Compton on the South; and Lynwood, South Gate, Huntington Park, and Vernon on the East." Not all of the study area is in Los Angeles. Of the 526 census tracts included, only 346 are in the City of Los Angeles.
2. Stuart Anderson, Adrian Dove, Armando Navarro, Ralph Rossum, Robert S. Walters, et al., *An Atlas of South-Central Los Angeles* (Claremont, California: Rose Institute of Local and State Government, 1992), 8.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 4.
6. *Ibid.*, 1.
7. *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1992.
8. *Newsweek*, May 11, 1992.
9. *Time*, May 11, 1992.
10. *An Atlas of South-Central Los Angeles*, 4.
11. *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 1992.
12. *An Atlas of South-Central Los Angeles*, 4.
13. Manuel Pastor, *Latinos and the Los Angeles Uprising: The Economic Context* (Claremont, California: Tomas Rivera Center, 1993), 1.

14. *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1992.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Press, 1970); James C. Davies, "The J-Curve of Rising and Declining as a Cause of Some Great Revolutions and a Contained Rebellion," in *The History of Violence in America*; Carl Leiden and Karl Schmitt, *The Politics of Violence: Revolution in the Modern World* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968).
18. Chalmers Johnson, *Revolution and the Social System* (Stanford, California: Stanford University, Hoover Institution, 1964).
19. *Why Men Rebel*, 13.
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